

ROAD TO THE SUPER BOWL

Dungy missed chance to be Super Bowl hero

The Associated Press

MIAMI

Tony Dungy fumbled his chance to be a hero in the 1979 Super Bowl.

Dungy, who makes his Super Bowl coaching debut Sunday with the Indianapolis Colts, played in the title game 28 years ago as a backup safety for the Pittsburgh Steelers. He ruefully remembers his team nursing a late 35-24 lead when the Dallas Cowboys tried an onside kick.

"They kicked the ball right to me, and I said, 'I'm going to be the hero. I'm going to close this game out,'" Dungy said. "It bounced off my shoulder pad, and they got it."

The Cowboys took advantage, scoring a touchdown to cut the deficit to 35-31 with 22 seconds left, then lined up for another onside kick.

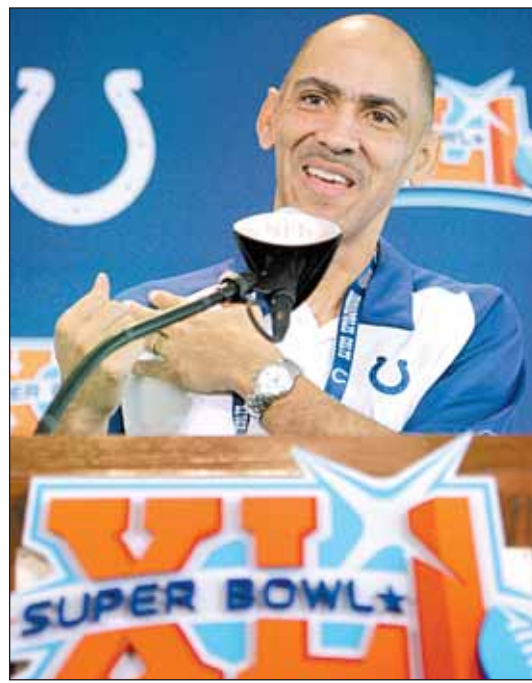
"I didn't want to be the hero then," Dungy said. "I said, 'I hope they kick it to someone else.'"

Teammate Rocky Bleier recovered to seal the Steelers' win.

Dungy also remembers teasing Cowboys quarterback Roger Staubach in pregame warmups.

"Every other time we played them, he always threw me an interception," Dungy said. "I went up to him and said, 'Make me a hero, throw me a ball today.' He didn't do it."

NOTEBOOK



Colts coach Tony Dungy recalls his first Super Bowl, as a player for the Pittsburgh Steelers in 1979, during a news conference in Miami on Thursday.

that if he got the job he'd want Rivera as his defensive coordinator.

Giants, Dolphins going to London

The Miami Dolphins will host the New York Giants in a regular-season game in London later this year.

A person familiar with the NFL's decision told The Associated Press on Thursday that the Dolphins will move a home game overseas. The source spoke on condition of anonymity because the announcement will not be made until after commissioner Roger Goodell's Super Bowl news conference today.

The Dolphins and Giants will play in September or October, and the game will be scheduled around a bye week for both teams.

Harper read to get going

Colts cornerback Nick Harper, who has a sprained left ankle, again worked out inside the team's practice complex Thursday.

Harper said earlier in the day, with the foot still in a walking boot, that he intended to run.

Dungy said earlier in the week that a best-case scenario for Harper was to practice today.

"I'm very confident of it," Harper said. "I was very confident running on it last week, after a couple days of rest, and I'm confident I can make plays on it."

Harper and safety Bob Sanders are both listed as questionable for the game. But Sanders has played in all three postseason games.

The Colts spent much of their time working on coverage units as preparation to face Chicago's dangerous Devin Hester.

Dungy acknowledged Thursday's workout was not quite as sharp as Wednesday's practice.

• QBs

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE B1)

A flop in the Super Bowl could doom his career in Chicago.

But Bears coach Lovie Smith doesn't anticipate that happening.

Despite excoriating criticism of Grossman from fans and the media, Smith still stands firmly behind the former Bloomington South High School star and doesn't apologize for doing so.

"He gives us the best opportunity to win," Smith said. "The same reason your employer has stuck with you: He has faith in you. I have faith in Rex."

So do his teammates, who don't understand why he gets so much heat after the Bears finished the regular season 13-3, one win better than the Colts.

"We lost three games during the regular season, and I thought for a young guy that Rex performed well," veteran wide receiver Muhsin Muhammad said of the third-year player. "For a guy that played in his first (full) season, historically throughout the NFL there have been very few quarterbacks that have played their first season and gone to the Super Bowl."

"There has to be something there."

At least one other player agrees: Peyton Manning.

He, too, looks at the Bears' record and Super Bowl berth and wonders why the quarterback who ran the offense is the center of so much negative attention.

"I really can't explain it," Manning said. "Rex has done an outstanding job. If you are a quarterback in the NFL, and I am biased, I think it's the hardest job in sports."

"If you lead your team to a Super Bowl berth, you are doing an outstanding job."

But there's the rub.

Grossman's critics contend Chicago reached the Super Bowl despite him. He was, at times, awful, as evidenced by his zero quarterback rating in a regular-season loss against Green Bay.

He didn't start in the second half after throwing three interceptions, which fueled speculation he wouldn't start in the playoffs.

But Grossman did start and, two postseason wins later, enters the Super Bowl with a higher quarterback playoff rating (75.4) than Manning (66.8).

Yet he harbors no illusions about who the real star is, not just in the Super Bowl, but on the entire NFL stage.

"I've always admired Peyton, what he does," Grossman said. "He's definitely going to go down as one of the best to ever play the game. To play against that type of guy in the Super Bowl is great. It makes it that much bigger."

The Super Bowl also magnifies the striking differences and disparities between Manning and Grossman, a fact that makes comparisons somewhat unfair.

Manning is inarguably the Colts' centerpiece, the chief reason they're playing for a title. For the Bears, it's their defense.

Yet Grossman can't avoid comparisons to Manning, a fact the Bears coach braced his quarterback for before the team arrived in Miami to face a national media that ripped the player much of the season.

"We've had a chance to prepare for this. He has had to deal with this just about every week," Smith said. "He's a professional. He knows that most of you have certain questions that you want to ask him, that most of you would like to let him know exactly just how bad he is and things like that, but he's not going to buy into it."

"We don't buy into it. We're here at the Super Bowl. Rex Grossman is here at the Super Bowl. The reason for that is he is a good player."

"As far as comparing him to Peyton Manning," Smith continued, "you can compare very few players with Peyton Manning. But Rex and Peyton are not the only two guys playing. We like him leading our team, which he has done very well all year."

"Again, we like having him being on our side."

Brian Urlacher, the Bears' physical and emotional leader, echoes the sentiment.

"Rex is our guy; 13-3 speaks for itself as a starter this year," the Pro Bowl linebacker said. "He wins. He's had some bad games, we all have had bad games. It's magnified because he is our quarterback."

"We're behind him, our coaching staff has been behind him all year long. Coach Smith says he's our guy and stuck with him, (and) our team says the same thing."

Grossman admits the criticism sometimes bothers him, but most often he tunes it out. This week it's easy to, because he finds solace in a reality his critics overlook. He's playing for a championship.

"The previous two seasons I had some season-ending injuries and some bad injuries," Grossman said. "I was finally able to put together a full season, and I'm in the Super Bowl. That's a pretty good achievement. I'm proud of it."

• Backs

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE B1)

Adai, has paid dividends for the Bears, whose offensive strength is pounding it on the ground.

"You need at least two good running backs to make it through a season, especially if you call yourself a running football team," Bears coach Lovie Smith said. "We are a running football team."

"We get off the plane running the ball. It's a lot of punishment the players will take over the course of the season."

That's why Jones doesn't mind splitting time with Benson, who was expected to compete for the starting job when the season began.

Jones, who ran for 1,210 yards and six touchdowns during the regular season, has simply been too productive to yield the starting role. No longer fearing losing it, he welcomes the occasional relief because it benefits his body and his team.

"It has kept me fresh and has given us a nice one-two punch," said Jones, who had 1,335 yards and nine touchdowns last season. "I think that we complement each other well, the way that we run."

"We have different running styles. ... I like to accelerate through the holes. He is more of a downhill guy, a bruiser back. He likes to go head-first, and that is kind of intimidating for defensive backs."

Benson, who was used sparingly last season and complained about it often, is OK with splitting carries now that he's more involved.

"It's been going well," said Benson, who had 647 yards and six touchdowns in the regular season. "I have been getting a little more in the games. I still never really got into a groove. I've had to learn how to play in and out, in and out."

"It was a challenge, but it was fun. It was interesting. I love to be challenged."

The Colts' resurgent run defense will be challenged yet again by an opponent that doesn't mask its offensive intentions. Colts linebacker Cato June insists they're ready.

"Defense is an attitude," June said. "When you handle yourself personally first and get everybody going together and playing with energy that's unmatched, it's tough to run and make plays on a defense with (the) speed that we have."

No doubt, the Bears will try.

"That is the philosophy in Chicago, to run the football," Jones said. "We have done a very good job of running the football the last few years. We can throw the ball, too. (Quarterback) Rex (Grossman) had over 3,000 passing yards."

"The ball has been moved around and spread around a lot, but at the end of the day, we know that we are going to run the football."

• Chain

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know where to spot the chains. It doesn't happen often, maybe once."

Klein works on the Colts' sideline during the first half and switches to the visiting side in the second.

At the end of the AFC title game, he was a few feet from Patriots coach Bill Belichick when Colts defensive back Marlin Jackson intercepted a Tom Brady pass and fell to the turf, securing the Colts' win and a trip to the Super Bowl.

"People want to know what Belichick was like when they finally lost," Klein said. "When Jack-

THE KLEIN FILE

Name: Bob Klein
Age: 66
Resides: Greenwood
Family: Wife, Barbara; daughter, Michelle Griffin, 43
Occupation: Sales representative for American Business Machines
Hobby: Playing softball
Of note: Klein has been a high school football referee since 1969 and has worked as a member of the Indianapolis Colts' first-down chain crew since the team relocated to Indianapolis in 1984.

son intercepted the pass, Belichick grabbed his sweat shirt and pulled it straight down, and his head fell about 2 feet down."

During games, Klein has a handheld radio to keep in contact with the NFL officials sitting in the press box. He serves as the

backup in case the field umpire's radio malfunctions. In the AFC Championship game, Klein couldn't hear anything on the radio because of the crowd noise.

"In 23 years, I've heard a lot of crowds, but I never heard anything that loud from the start of the game to the end of the game," Klein said. "It was deafening. I'm just fortunate I didn't have to use (the radio). It was that noisy."

Klein and the six other chain crew members arrive at the RCA Dome two hours before kickoff. They make sure all the equipment is in the proper condition and set up.

They return to their locker room an hour before kickoff, and the head linesman pays them a visit for some last-minute instructions. Then the crew heads out to the field with 30 minutes to spare.

longer because of the point spread, and the league and its teams are getting more (TV) contract money because the ratings are higher, doesn't that mean the league is actually benefiting from gambling?" Schwartz asked.

The league, of course, is quick to point out that much of that interest comes from fantasy players. There is, of course, a thin line between out-and-out wagering on football and the money and bragging rights at stake in fantasy football. The NFL has given tacit approval to the latter while decrying the former; in fact, since its lobbyists played a significant role in getting fantasy sports exempted from legislation to ban Internet gambling.

The NFL's public hypersensitivity to wagering goes back to former commissioner Pete Rozelle, who had concerns that any link to sports gambling would leave the league susceptible to the influence of organized crime.

But the landscape has changed. Sports books now are corporate, regulated and have just as much to lose as the leagues do if the games are perceived to be shady.

I guess I'd just feel better if NFL people would end their heads-in-the-sand approach. Fans bet on football, and their game is immeasurably popular as a result.

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• Sleight

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE B1)

"Pressure is something that you feel only when you don't know what you are doing."

Do his teammates and coaches know exactly what Manning is doing when he gestures toward the defense? Or when Manning backs away from center Jeff Saturday as if he can't remember what he's supposed to do?

"We work together so often, when you come to the line of scrimmage, I have a pretty good feel for what he likes, what he sees and if he is going to check (off) or not," said Saturday, who must be in tune with whatever concerto Manning is leading on each play. "He sees things that I would not see because of my position."

No other quarterback performs all those machinations. Few — Brett Favre, Tom Brady on occasion — call or change plays at the line as much as Manning.

In offensive coordinator Tom Moore's system, which Manning has played under since he was the No. 1 overall draft choice in 1998, most of the decision-making is left in the quarterback's hands.

But don't watch the hands if you're playing defense against him.

"You can't get caught up in all of that," Bears defensive end Adewale Ogunleye said. "We're not going to worry about the audibles, we're not going to worry about what he's doing at the line of scrimmage. At the end of the day, he's going to have to call a play and snap the ball."

But before the ball is snapped, Manning has chosen what he believes is the proper play for the defensive alignment he sees. He has all kinds of options, both for passes and runs.

Sometimes, the call he has gotten from the sideline is perfect, and all Manning does is, well, nothing. He's like a third-base coach sending false signals to the batter.

In other instances, he is changing the play, the blocking assignment, the formation, everything but his uniform, it seems.

Manning has not been nearly as prolific in the playoffs as he was during his Pro Bowl season. That hasn't changed his approach or eliminated his gesticulations.

Maybe Bears middle linebacker Brian Urlacher — Chicago's Manning, if you will — might come up with some arm-waving and foot-stomping of his own Sunday. Perhaps Urlacher can distract the distractor.

"I'm not going to try and change our defenses for what he does because I don't know what they're doing," Urlacher said.

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