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SPORTS

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SECTION B

ROAD TO THE SUPER BOWL

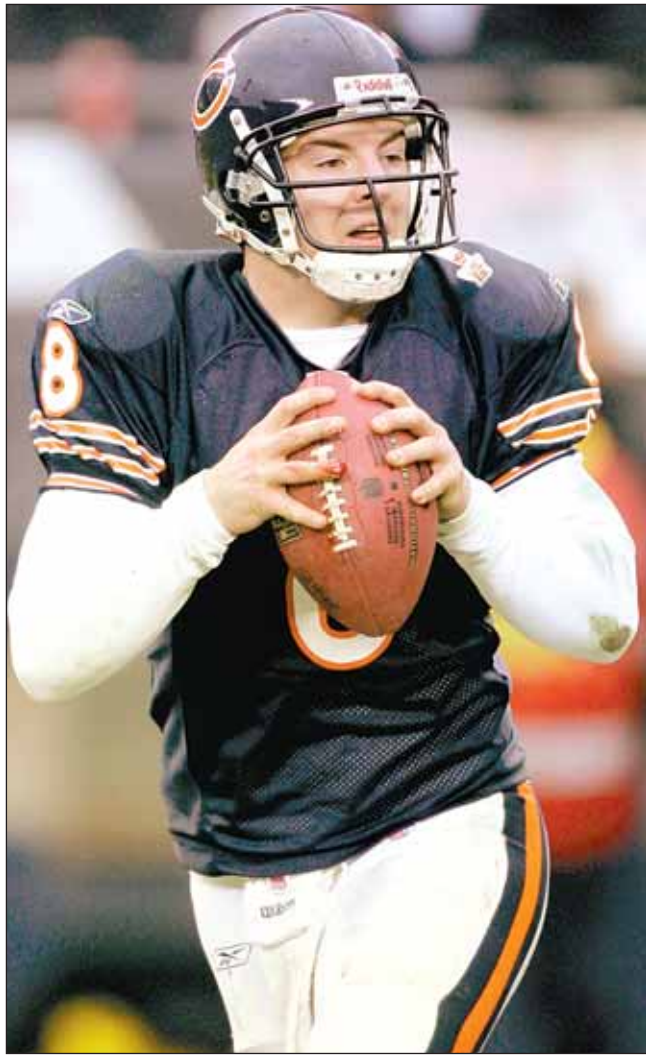


Super Bowl XLI: Indianapolis Colts vs. Chicago Bears

Time: 6 p.m. Sunday TV: WISH-Channel 8 Radio: WFBO-94.7 FM



QBs: Advantage, Colts?



Chicago Bears quarterback Rex Grossman, left, has had a season marked by ups and downs.



Manning, right, had another stellar regular season, struggled in the team's first two playoff games but led a rally in the AFC title game.

BREAKING IT DOWN

A head-to-head comparison of the Colts' Peyton Manning and the Bears' Rex Grossman:

NFL experience

Grossman is in his fourth NFL season and first as a starter. Manning is in his ninth season, all as a starter.

Advantage, Manning

Record

Grossman was 13-3 as a starter during the regular season. Manning was 12-4.

Advantage, Grossman

High school career

Grossman led Bloomington South to a Class 5A IHSA state title and earned national player of the year honors. Manning led Isidore Newman High School in New Orleans to a 34-5 record and earned national player of the year honors.

Advantage, even

NCAA career

Grossman led Florida to a 23-8 record and was a Heisman runner-up and MVP of the SEC Championship Game. Manning led Tennessee to a 39-6 record and was a Heisman runner-up and MVP of the SEC Championship Game.

Advantage, even

2006 statistics

Grossman threw for 3,193 yards, 23 touchdowns and 20 interceptions and had a quarterback rating of 73.9. Manning threw for 4,397 yards, 31 touchdowns and nine interceptions and a QB rating of 101.0.

Advantage, Manning

Postgame persona

Grossman is known for fending off questions about his own poor play. Manning is known for droning on and on about Xs and Os.

Advantage, even

Endorsement deals

Grossman recently filmed a "Got Milk?" ad. Manning is known for saying, "Rub some dirt on it!" in MasterCard commercials.

Advantage, Manning

Super Bowl appearances
Both quarterbacks are making their first Super Bowl trip.

Advantage, even

Bears have faith in much-maligned Grossman

By Rick Morwick
DAILY JOURNAL SPORTS EDITOR
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MIAMI

For Peyton Manning, there's adulation, commercials, superstardom and a certain trip to Canton, Ohio. For Rex Grossman, there's none of the above.

He had no guarantee he'd even start in the playoffs.

Yet for all the trials and tribulations the embattled Chicago Bears quarterback endured during the regular season, he has the same opportunity that Manning, the Indianapolis Colts superstar, has Sunday evening: He can lead his team to a Super Bowl championship.

MORWICK IN MIAMI



Daily Journal sports editor Rick Morwick is in Miami this week. He'll bring you all the hoopla that is Super Bowl XLI and will be there when the Colts and Bears square off.

For Grossman, the undisputed ugly duckling of the quarterback beauty pageant, that's all that matters. He still can be a swan.

"I want to win this Super Bowl for my teammates and coach (Lovie) Smith and the fans and for myself," said Grossman.

the center of blistering criticism for his season-long erratic play. "I feel a lot of pressure in that. I'm sure it's the same way for Peyton.

"He wants to win it for his teammates, coaches and things like that. We are all in the same boat."

But the quarterbacks couldn't be more different.

Manning is a seven-time Pro Bowler who is already regarded by some as the best ever in the NFL. A Super Bowl victory might ensure that legacy.

Grossman, meanwhile, struggled mightily at times during his first full season as a starter and nearly lost his job to backup Brian Griese.

(SEE QBs, PAGE B3)

"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."

Peyton Manning

Colts quarterback on frequent criticism of Bears QB Rex Grossman

Sleight of hand part of Peyton's game

By Barry Wilner
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

MIAMI

He points, he pivots, he barks out more orders than a coffee shop waiter at lunchtime.

When Peyton Manning is running the show for the Indianapolis Colts, it's difficult to decipher if he is performing magic or just blowing smoke.

"That would be impossible to answer without giving away secrets," Manning said with a smile.

When Manning brings his offense to the line against the Chicago Bears in Sunday's Super Bowl, at times he will resemble a maestro conducting a finely tuned orchestra. Other times, he'll look like a disoriented traveler seeking directions.

"To me, our offense, like any offense, is about execution," said the NFL's leading passer. "We do call certain beauty plays at the line of scrimmage; that's no secret there."

"I think you have to be confident in your offense. That's part of playing in the NFL, and the reason you have confidence is because of how hard you worked and how hard you prepared. I've used this quote before, but my dad gave it to me when I was a kid. It was by Chuck Noll, which said,

(SEE SLEIGHT, PAGE B3)



Colts quarterback Peyton Manning calls an audible, or perhaps is bluffing, during an AFC divisional playoff game at Baltimore on Jan. 17.

HE'S SEEN IT ALL Greenwood man stays busy when Colts move the chains

STORY BY MATTHEW GLENESK

A Greenwood man has possibly the best view of Colts games in the RCA Dome.

Bob Klein doesn't have Indianapolis Colts season tickets, but for the past 23 years has been a member of the Colts' first-down chain crew. At every home game, he holds the bright orange sideline down marker.

"I like my seat for the game," he said. "I see literally everything and hear everything that goes on. It's a lot better than sitting in the stands."

Klein, 66, is responsible for the marker with the down box at the top, which means he changes the down indicator after each play.

Before every set of downs, he lines up his

marker with the nose of the football.

While being so close to the action has its advantages, it also can prove prickly at times.

With plays sometimes spilling across the sidelines, members of the chain crew have sometimes taken physical punishment from fast-moving players.

"You just have to keep your eyes open all the time and be aware of what's going on," Klein said. "You never know when they are going to come at you, and you have to be able to get out of the way."

Klein never has been run over by a player. But during the AFC Championship Game against New England, he had to dodge some action.

With his eyes focused on the field, he was unaware of a television crew member holding a parabolic microphone dish standing behind him.

"That thud you heard on TV was probably me," Klein joked.

Klein said the biggest challenge is keeping up with a no-huddle, hurry-up offense.

"They want to move quickly a lot of times, and we have to be on our toes," he said. "If it's after an extremely long run and we don't make it down the field in time for the next play, one of the officials will throw down a bean bag so we

(SEE CHAIN, PAGE B3)



Bob Klein of Greenwood holds the down marker during an Indianapolis Colts game at the RCA Dome. SUBMITTED PHOTO

Dirty little secret NFL tries to distance itself from gambling

By Jim Alexander
THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE (RIVERSIDE, CALIF.)

MIAMI

The NFL has always been disingenuous when it comes to gambling.

The game is paramount, so the theory goes, and the integrity of the game cannot be risked by any exposure to wagering, whether legal or illegal.

These are, after all, the people who not only refused to accept Super Bowl ads from the Las Vegas Visitors and Convention Authority but also warned NBC against including promos for the TV show "Las Vegas" during Sunday Night Football telecasts.

After all, one glimpse of Nikki Cox is all it takes to send us streaming to the casinos, right?

"Our policies are designed to ensure the integrity of our game by maintaining a clear separation between our game and the potentially corrosive impact of sports gambling," NFL spokesman Greg Aiello wrote in an e-mail.

Yet the point spread, set in Vegas,

(SEE SECRET, PAGE B3)



BENSON

JONES

Sharing load works for Bears' backs

By Rick Morwick
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MIAMI

Schematically and aesthetically, the Colts and Bears have little in common on offense.

But they do have a common approach to running the football. They divvy the carries between two backs.

As with the Colts, it allows the Bears to exploit the strengths of a veteran and a youngster.

"It is something that has been good for our team this year," said Thomas Jones, the elder statesman of Chicago's rotating backfield.

A seventh-year player, Jones is the starter and leading rusher. He topped 1,000 yards for the second straight season and is the Bears' chief ground threat.

But second-year pro Cedric Benson lends plenty of support.

Chicago's first-round pick last season, Benson saw little action early in the season but has seen his workload increase steadily as the year progressed.

The one-two punch, much like the Colts' combination of veteran Dominic Rhodes and rookie Joseph

(SEE BACKS, PAGE B3)