

Ranking the Super Bowls, Part One

by Joe Mulder

In the wake of the Steelers' win over the Cardinals on Sunday, there's been some talk as to whether XLIII is, in fact, the greatest Super Bowl of all time. Such is the state of modern sports media; the most recent Super Bowl was not the best ever, and the very idea of applying the phrase "of all time" to an even that's been going on only since 1967 should strike a reasonable person as overly hyperbolic.

But it begs the question: what *was* the greatest Super Bowl of all time?

Luckily, I'm here to settle the issue. I'll rank them all, 1 to 43 (or, I should say, 43 to 1). If you take issue with my list, please feel free to leave a note in the comments section. Oh, that's right; we don't have a comments section. So, I guess my rankings will have to stand as the ultimate and final word on the subject. So be it.

43. V - Baltimore Colts 16, Dallas Cowboys 13 (January 17, 1971; Miami, FL) Often called the "Blunder Bowl" or "Stupor Bowl," this game featured 11 turnovers, seven of which were committed by the victorious Colts. The winning team played so badly, in fact, that Colts defensive end Bubba Smith refuses to wear his Super Bowl ring (much like he also refuses to display the Best Supporting Actor Oscar he won for his portrayal of Hightower in *Police Academy 4: Citizens on Patrol*).

(okay, fine; I made that *Police Academy* part up. But, according to some sources, it's true that he's said he doesn't wear the Super Bowl ring because the game was so bad)

Also, the game's MVP came from the losing team in the person of Dallas linebacker Chuck Howley, who apparently refused to accept the award, deeming it meaningless in the wake of his team's defeat.

So, one of the winning players won't wear his Super Bowl ring, and the Super Bowl MVP could give a rat's ass about being Super Bowl MVP; that, my friends, is a bad Super Bowl.

MEMORABLE MOMENTS/PLAYS: Baltimore's John Mackey goes 75 yards for a touchdown after a Johnny Unitas pass ricochets off of the Colts' Eddie Hinton *and* the Cowboys' Mel Renfro; Jim O'Brien wins the game on a last-second field goal.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE: Next to none.

42. XXVIII - Dallas Cowboys 30, Buffalo Bills 13 (January 30, 1994; Atlanta, GA) Woof. I'm not sure even the players themselves remember anything from this game. It was a rematch of the previous year's Super Bowl, so there was nothing compelling whatsoever about seeing the Cowboys

play the Bills, and this was the fourth straight Super Bowl appearance for a Buffalo team that had lost their previous three, so the outcome of the game was all but a foregone conclusion.

MEMORABLE MOMENTS/PLAYS: None to speak of.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE: The Cowboys repeat as champs, which is notable. The Bills become the first team ever to lose four straight Super Bowls, which isn't all that much of an interesting "first" because just a year earlier they had become the first ever team to lose *three* straight Super Bowls. The Cowboys join the Steelers and 49ers as the only teams to win four; the Bills join the Vikings and Broncos as the only teams to lose four.

41. XII - Dallas Cowboys 27, Denver Broncos 10 (January 15, 1978; New Orleans, LA) The Broncos committed eight turnovers and still only lost by 17. The Cowboys defense carried the day, but other than them, nobody had a lot to be proud of here.

MEMORABLE MOMENTS/PLAYS: None to speak of.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE: Dallas defensive tackle Randy White and defensive end Harvey Martin win MVP honors, the first and only time the award has been shared.

40. II - Green Bay Packers 33, Oakland Raiders 14 (January 14, 1968; Miami, FL) Um...

MEMORABLE MOMENTS/PLAYS: None to speak of.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE: The Packers become the first team to repeat as Super Bowl champs, which is notable.

39. XXXVI - Tampa Bay Buccaneers 48, Oakland Raiders 21 (January 26, 2003; San Diego, CA) Buccaneers coach John Gruden had coached the Raiders for a few years before moving to Tampa, and apparently knew exactly what the Raiders would do. Raiders coach Bill Callahan, meanwhile, after losing the Super Bowl in embarrassing fashion, went on to preside over the downfall of the Nebraska football program, once one of the mightiest in the nation.

MEMORABLE MOMENTS/PLAYS: None to speak of.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE: The NFL's top-ranked defense (Tampa Bay) and the NFL's top-ranked offense (Oakland) meet in the Super Bowl for the first time. Dwight Smith becomes the first and only player to return two interceptions for touchdowns in one Super Bowl. Derek Brooks also returns an interception for a touchdown as the Bucs set a Super Bowl record with three such scores. Raiders center Barret Robbins disappears for most of Super Bowl week and misses the game after turning up in Tijuana, making him the third prominent player to get in major

trouble right before a Super Bowl.

38. XXXIII - Denver Broncos 34, Atlanta Falcons 19 (January 31, 1999; Miami, FL) The Broncos dodge a bullet when the Falcons knock off the 15-1 Vikings and their record-setting offense in the NFC title game. Sorry; I thought I was ready to talk about this, because it's been ten years, but... let's just move on.

MEMORABLE MOMENTS/PLAYS: FOX screws up and, after a second quarter commercial break, returns the viewer to game action after play has already started. TV audiences miss the start of an 80-yard John Elway touchdown pass to Rod Smith.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE: The Broncos repeat as champs, which is notable. Falcons safety Eugene Robinson is arrested for solicitation of prostitution on the night before the game, making him the second prominent player to get in major trouble right before a Super Bowl. Robinson plays in the game, but is beaten badly by Rod Smith on the aforementioned 80-yard touchdown pass.

37. VI - Dallas Cowboys 24, Miami Dolphins 3 (January 16, 1972; New Orleans, LA) The Cowboys dominated the game like few teams have dominated a Super Bowl since, finally winning a title after falling short so many times, both in Super Bowl V and in the NFL's pre-Super Bowl days.

MEMORABLE MOMENTS/PLAYS: None to speak of.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE: The Cowboys become the first and only Super Bowl team not to give up a touchdown, holding the Dolphins to a Super Bowl record low three points.

36. XIX - San Francisco 49ers 38, Miami Dolphins 16 (January 20, 1985; Palo Alto, CA) The 49ers won the franchise's second Super Bowl in a lopsided affair, winning what amounted to a home game played in their own Bay Area backyard.

MEMORABLE MOMENTS/PLAYS: None to speak of.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE: The 49ers set some Super Bowl records on offense, none of which will stand for long.

35. XL - Pittsburgh Steelers 21, Seattle Seahawks 10 (February 5, 2006; Detroit, MI) The prevailing myth about this game is that the referees handed the Super Bowl to Pittsburgh. In fact it wasn't particularly close, and Seattle fans can blame tight end Jerramy Stevens and his butterfingers right along with the officials if they're looking for scapegoats. Also, Steelers second-year quarterback Ben Roethlisberger, who made plenty of big plays to get the Steelers into the game, delivered one of the worst-ever performances by a winning Super Bowl QB.

MEMORABLE MOMENTS/PLAYS: Pittsburgh's Willie Parker sets a Super Bowl record with a 75-yard touchdown run; Pittsburgh wide receiver – and college quarterback – Antwaan Randle El throws a touchdown pass to Super Bowl MVP Hines Ward.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE: The Steelers join the 49ers and Cowboys as the only teams with five Super Bowl titles. The Steelers, the six seed in the AFC, become the first team to win three playoff games on the road on their way to a Super Bowl title.

34. XV - Oakland Raiders 27, Philadelphia Eagles 10 (January 25, 1981; New Orleans, LA) Nuthin'.

MEMORABLE MOMENTS/PLAYS: None to speak of.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE: The Raiders become the first Wild Card team to win the Super Bowl. Raiders owner Al Davis, embroiled in a lawsuit with the NFL over his attempt to move the team to Los Angeles, is presented the Lombardi Trophy by bitter rival and NFL commissioner Pete Rozelle; the trophy presentation is completed without incident.

33. XXXV - Baltimore Ravens 34, New York Giants 7 (January 28, 2001; Tampa, FL) Notable only for the fact that I predicted the final score almost exactly. I am no football prognosticating expert (as anyone who has read my NFL picks column this season can certainly attest), but, for some reason, I saw this outcome coming clear as a bell. Those Giants beat an uninspired, unprepared Vikings team 41-0 in the NFC title game and fooled some people into thinking they had a chance to win, but they didn't fool me.

MEMORABLE MOMENTS/PLAYS: Three touchdowns on three consecutive plays in just 36 seconds. In the third quarter the Ravens' Duane Starks picks off a Kerry Collins pass and returns it for a touchdown. Ron Dixon of the Giants returns the ensuing kickoff for a touchdown, and the Giants' kickoff is promptly returned for a touchdown by Jermaine Lewis.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE: Ravens linebacker (and eventual Super Bowl XXXV MVP) Ray Lewis unleashes a pre-game dance that many a dorky white kid will attempt to memorize and duplicate, often to hilarious effect.

32. XIV - Pittsburgh Steelers 31, Los Angeles Rams 19 (January 20, 1980; Pasadena, CA) The overmatched Rams came in at 9-7, having finished the season with their backup quarterback and having beaten the Buccaneers 9-0 in the NFC title game without scoring a touchdown, but hung with the heavily favored Steelers, even leading the game 19-17 heading into the fourth quarter.

MEMORABLE MOMENTS/PLAYS: Rams running back Lawrence McCutcheon throws a touchdown pass to Ron

POOP READING

Smith, giving the Rams a surprise third-quarter lead; Pittsburgh quarterback Terry Brandshaw connects with John Stallworth on a 73-yard touchdown pass for the go-ahead fourth quarter score.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE: The Steelers become the first team to win four Super Bowls, one year after becoming the first team to win three Super Bowls. Rams defensive end Jack Youngblood played the game with a broken leg, which should make you feel like a first-class puss the next time you complain about having to do something unpleasant.

31. XXVI - Washington Redskins 37, Buffalo Bills 24 (January 26, 1992; Minneapolis, MN) The Bills, eager to avenge their crushing loss in Super Bowl XXV the year before, went ahead and fell behind 24-0. That's pretty much the Bills for you, unfortunately.

MEMORABLE MOMENTS/PLAYS: The opening kickoff of the game has to be redone, as Buffalo kicker Brad Daluiso jumps the gun and kicks off before being signaled by the referee to do so. Then, once the Bills get the ball, running back Thurman Thomas misses the first couple of plays because he can't find his helmet. Seriously.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE: Not much.

30. VIII - Miami Dolphins 24, Minnesota Vikings 7 (January 13, 1974; Houston, TX) I'm not going to spend much time on the Super Bowls that the Vikings lost. I'm just not.

MEMORABLE MOMENTS/PLAYS: None to speak of.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE: The Dolphins become the first team to play in three straight Super Bowls. The Dolphins repeat as champs, which is notable.

29. XXI - New York Giants 39, Denver Broncos 20 (January 25, 1987; Pasadena, CA) These Giants may be most remembered, for better or for worse, as the team that started the postgame "Gatorade bath" tradition. Not much else to say about this game, really.

MEMORABLE MOMENTS/PLAYS: A Phil Simms fourth-quarter touchdown pass bounces off the hands of Giants tight end Mark Bavaro and into those of receiver Phil McConkey.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE: Pretty much just the Gatorade thing.

28. XI - Raiders 32, Vikings 14 (January 9, 1977; Pasadena, CA) This was the last Super Bowl played before I was born, and the last Super Bowl the Minnesota Vikings were a part of. And that, right there, is my life as a football fan.

MEMORABLE MOMENTS: Willie Brown and his ill-fitting helmet pick off a Fran Tarkenton pass and return it a

then-Super-Bowl-record 75 yards in dramatic, slow-motion NFL films fashion. Or maybe that's just how the footage I've seen makes it look; I suppose the chances are good that he would have run at full speed, now that I think about it.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE: Raiders coach John Madden is unleashed on the American consciousness.

And with that, let's break up the list. Look for Part 2 later in the week. Until then...
