

Jaguars win lackluster 17-3 decision over Steelers

by T.J. Simers
Los Angeles Times

PITTSBURGH - There was a TV report this weekend that Houston is so confident of landing an expansion team at this week's meetings in Atlanta that an Oct. 14th, city-wide celebration has been scheduled.

Premature as that may be, this is no time to expand in a league where interest could shrink if the decline in competent quarterbacks continues.

Someone looking at the final score here, for example, might have considered Jacksonville's 17-3 win over the Steelers on Sunday a defensive tussle. But these two teams, two of the best in the NFL by most standards, performed as if unaware they could use the forward pass.

Pittsburgh quarterback Kordell Stewart, like Arizona's Jake Plummer featured in national TV commercials and representing the NFL's electrifying future, hasn't led his team to a touchdown in two games. In his last eight starts, "Slash" has been nothing but a parenthetical afterthought, meaningless to the Steelers' cause, throwing for one touchdown with 11 interceptions.

The hometown fans were booing him on the team's second drive, and by the time he surrendered the ball for back-to-back safeties in the fourth quarter, Three Rivers Stadium was nearly empty.

Stewart and Plummer, billed as two of the game's most daring competitors, have combined to throw three touchdown passes this season - with 16 interceptions. And as badly as Stewart played, the guy on the other side of the field is supposed to lead his team to the Super Bowl, and yet Mark Brunell managed to complete only 10 of 25 passes for 85 yards with one touchdown and one interception. And he won.

Give Houston the expansion team and let's see if they are still celebrating once they find who is going to play quarterback.

On the bright side, someone might point out, St. Louis quarterback Kurt Warner became the first quarterback in at least 50 years - back to the time when they kept track of such stats - to begin his career with three touchdown passes in each of his first three games. And Washington looks like the Don Coryell Chargers with Brad Johnson making like Dan Fouts - the perfect capper to this millennium.

Warner taking on Johnson in a shootout for the NFC Championship.

But remember when everyone could tell you what number the great quarterbacks were wearing, while doing their damage? How many know what number Warner or Johnson wear?

Five of the Johnny-come-latelys who started Sunday in the NFL played previously in the World League, including Warner, who also played in the Arena League. Two others who started Sunday were exiled earlier to the Canadian League. One more began his NFL career as a seventh-round draft pick. Throw in Rick Mirer, Billy Joe Hobert, Shane Matthews and Kent Graham and on a given Sunday it might be more advisable to run the ball and wait for the other team to turn it over.

Adding to this litany of misery - someone else's idea of entertaining parity - is Trent Dilfer, Steve Beuerlein, Jim Harbaugh, Neil O'Donnell, Rich Gannon and Jeff Blake.

"Kordell's our quarterback," said Pittsburgh Coach Bill Cowher, and what else is he going to say after being asked if there might be a change at quarterback?

Mike Tomczak? The Steelers gave Stewart a signing bonus of \$8.1 million before this season began, because they took a look around, and that was as good as they could have hoped for, even though Stewart was coming off a 7-9 campaign with 11 touchdown passes and 18 interceptions.

Go ahead, try and ask for a raise after a year like that.

The Steelers (2-2) have now lost four consecutive home games with Stewart in command - something never experienced here in the 29-year history of Three Rivers Stadium. Stewart completed 15 of 32 passes for 126 yards against a Jacksonville (3-1) defense that also sacked him four times.

"I think it's obvious now we're not a very good offensive team," Cowher said.

Poor coaching added to Stewart's woes. Confronted twice with fourth-and-one predicaments, instead of handing the ball to Jerome Bettis, the Steelers called for trick plays. The first resulted in Stewart being sacked for a four-yard loss, the second in Stewart throwing an incomplete pass.

Jacksonville, meanwhile, most everyone's pick to represent the AFC

in the Super Bowl, has been exposed as a fraud. The Jaguars barely beat Carolina, lost to Tennessee at home and left here fortunate to play a team lacking any kind of offensive punch.

After exploding for 41 points against the defenseless 49ers in the opener, the Jaguars have averaged 19 points a game in their last three games. Now there are reports that Coach Tom Coughlin and Brunell are at odds, because Coughlin has assumed play-calling responsibility. Brunell's tentative performance spoke eloquently to the friction between the two. Beyond a well-aimed seven-yard pass to Keenan McCardell for Jacksonville's only touchdown at the start of the second quarter, Brunell looked nothing like the projected next Steve Young.

There just aren't that many good quarterbacks in the game anymore. A week ago 16 of the 28 teams in competition failed to score at least 21 points. "You can sit there and say, hell, we should run it every snap," said Cowher. "You can't do that in this business."

However, that may be where the game's headed - something for the folks in Houston to consider when it's time to buy a personal seat license.

NFL SCHEDULE

Week 5

Sunday, October 10

Cincinnati @ Cleveland	1:00
Chicago @ Minnesota	1:00
Atlanta @ New Orleans	1:00
New England @ Kansas City	1:00
Dallas @ Philadelphia	1:00
Pittsburgh @ Buffalo	1:00
San Diego @ Detroit	1:00
San Fran @ St. Louis	1:00
N.Y. Giants @ Arizona	4:05
Miami @ Indianapolis	4:15
Denver @ Oakland	4:15
Baltim @ Tennessee	4:15
Tampa Bay @ Green Bay	8:20

Monday, October 11

Jacksonville @ N.Y. Jets	9:00
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Bye Week: Carolina, Seattle, Washington

GAME OF THE WEEK

"BATTLE OF THE BAYS" TAMPA BAY VS. GREEN BAY

CRAIG HAZELWOOD TAMPA BAY	24-17
JASON SNYDER GREEN BAY	28-20
MATT WIERTEL GREEN BAY	27-20

Here's hope for more playoff follies from Sox

by Sam Donnellon
October 05, 1999
Knight Ridder Newspapers

PHILADELPHIA - The Boston Red Sox return to the playoffs, where their fortunes have always gone amiss.

I loved it when Bucky Dent hit that fly ball into the leftfield net in '78. I loved it when Bill Buckner muffed that ground ball in '86.

I loved it when Roger Clemens went ballistic in that playoff game, getting tossed in the second inning against Oakland, giving his team a real good chance to win. Even though he's been with two teams since, I love it that Clemens's ERA is around 4.00 in the postseason.

Can't wait for them to recite that stat at his Hall of Fame induction ceremony.

I love it when the Red Sox are in a pennant race, am absolutely ecstatic to see them in the postseason again, facing the Indians for the third season in a row. I think of all those people I know up there, all those middle-aged cousins and their kids, all my college friends and their kids, and I know just what they're thinking:

This is the year.

They can't help themselves. The difference between Boston fans and Philadelphia fans is this: Boston fans really believe the Easter Bunny brings them eggs. Philly fans not only don't believe in the bunny, they suspect immediately that the eggs are rotten.

We would never allow ourselves to be tortured the way those people do every year. We would look at a play-off pitching rotation that includes rehabbing Ramon Martinez, ancient Bret Saberhagen, St. Louis castoff Kent Mercker, and think, P.U.

They look at that slop and see the best pitching staff in the American League. They've even got stats to prove it. The Red Sox ranked first in

earned run average, shutouts, saves and strikeouts, and allowed the fewest walks.

Here's why: Pedro Martinez, the best pitcher in baseball. When he sat out a few weeks with a sore biceps after the All-Star break, the Red Sox quickly started looking like the Phillies. They've got one everyday starter, Nomar Garciaparra, who hit over .300 this season. They had 18 pitchers starting games, seven saving them.

Red Sox fans say none of that matters if Pedro pitches twice against the Indians this week.

Maybe he will and maybe it won't. It's not that Boston is devoid of postseason heroics, it's just that they have always been followed by emotional holocausts. Carlton Fisk's dramatic Game 6 home run against the Red Sox in 1975 was followed by a Game 7 loss. Back in '86, they rallied from a 3-1 deficit in games against the Angels, winning Game 5 on an extra-inning home run from Dave Henderson, blasting Gene Mauch's last hope in the next two games at Fenway.

I was there. It was exciting. I even found myself rooting for Boston against the Mets in the World Series that followed.

I won't make that mistake again. I don't want to get that high and end up that low. They haven't won the World Series since 1918. They have lost four consecutive World Series seventh games, dating back to 1946. The obituary page today, yesterday and tomorrow is filled with the names of men and women who lived their whole lives since the last Red Sox world championship.

They blew a 14-game lead over the Yankees in 1978. They blew that World Series against the Mets in 1986, needing just one more strike with a two-run lead in Game 6, coughing up a 3-0 lead in Game 7. There were

people in Lord Bunberry's at Boston's Faneuil Hall who had popped champagne bottles and toasted a championship after Keith Hernandez made the second out to start the Mets' 10th in Game 6.

Given their history, that's almost as incredible as Game 6 itself.

There is so much bad karma around this team that books have been dedicated to the subject. Yet almost every fall their fans get their little hearts pumping like pistons. And almost every fall they end up whining like a rich kid who can't find the Jaguar keys.

I love when this happens. At least I used to. I tell people this and they look at me as you would a child who has just dissected a live insect with his hands.

But they don't understand. Red Sox fans are so full of their team all summer, so oblivious to their own history, they invite my joy. They celebrate first place in July as if that's the ultimate goal. They treat their rickety park, with its 32-inch wide seats that aim away from home plate, as if it's the Louvre. They say things like, "At least we're there every year" or "I don't see your team doing any better" or something like that, and I want to put my own hex on them as quickly as possible.

They also have this annoying tendency to attract every wannabe intellectual you have ever run into. Maybe it's the 300-odd colleges lining Boston's Mass Avenue, or maybe it's each egghead's unique understanding of the human condition that attracts them to this team.

I don't know. I never studied.

But it's annoying.

Only old Brooklyn Dodgers fans have as many bittersweet memories, and they're starting to die off. But the Red Sox fans? If procreation was a sport, they would have more titles

than the Yankees and Montreal Canadiens combined. They seem to multiply with every incredible choke, like the Whos in Whoville who celebrated Christmas even after the Grinch stole all their toys.

But it's not the same anymore. I haven't lived among them for years, and I guess I am softening with age. I think they are too. When these people were in their 20s, they were bolder and brasher, convinced of the imminence of a World Championship. They took the hits in '78 and '86, and kept coming. They had energy. They had juice. They had youth.

It was fun to taunt them.

Now? Now they have that beaten-down middle-aged look. Now they are as uncertain of seeing the Sox win the World Series as they are of ever seeing God. Doubt has crept in. Fear too.

I see a lot of myself in them these days. Which makes it hard to want to see them get whacked again. I've taken some hits over the years too. I don't know how much longer I can hold my disdain, or my perverse joy at their mythic misfortune.

The good thing is that I know I don't have to. Right now, as I write this, there is some poor college student from out of state listening to some Boston blowhard go on and on about the sure-thing Red Sox. Pedro's the greatest pitcher ever, the Red Sox have the Indians' number this year, the Yankees, and yada, yada, yada.

Right now, as I write this, there is another anti-fan being nurtured, eager to enjoy another one of their famous flops.

Who will be the goat? How will it happen? How much suffering will be involved? When I was younger, I could hardly wait.

Now? I'm too old. I may even pull for them a little this year.

These days, I leave the insects alone.

MLB PLAYOFF PREDICTIONS

National League Championship Series

Wiertel: Houston vs. Diamondbacks
Hazelwood: Houston vs. N.Y. Mets
Snyder: Atlanta vs. N.Y. Mets

American League Championship Series

Wiertel: Cleveland vs. N.Y. Yankees
Hazelwood: Boston vs. N.Y. Yankees
Snyder: Cleveland vs. N.Y. Yankees

World Series

Wiertel: Houston vs. N.Y. Yankees
Hazelwood: Houston vs. Boston
Snyder: Cleveland vs. Atlanta

World Champs

Wiertel: Houston Astros
Hazelwood: Houston Astros
Snyder: Cleveland Indians

Taking a rest in campaign against using Indians as sports mascots

by Tim Giago
September 28, 1999
Knight-Ridder

When the footballs of the National Football League fill the autumn air, I usually write a column about using Indian as mascots. This became an annual event with me. I only wanted America to grow up.

The annual column even made Newsweek magazine and the New York Times sports pages one year. After nearly 15 years of covering this touchy topic, I believe I'll give it a rest for a while.

Over the years I have tried to explain, from an Indian point of view, why the use of Indians as mascots was repugnant to most Indians. I wrote about the time the Washington Redskin fans painted a pig red, placed a feathered headdress on its head and chased it around the football field at halftime. I used the analogy of painting a pig black, placing an Afro wig

on its head and doing likewise. There would be one humorous uproar in the black community should this happen.

My point was that no one seems to give a damn if American Indians are publicly ridiculed in the name of sporting events, but do the very same thing to another ethnic minority and all hell would break loose.

Those fans (short for fanatics) who paint their faces with Day-Glo paint and stick feathers in their hair and the marching bands that support this idiosyncrasy with supposed Indian music straight out of a Hollywood "B" movie, would not dare to use these juvenile tactics in the name of any other race of people. They would not dare show up at a professional football game wearing blackface and sporting Afro wigs. Then why do it to a race of people without the numerical or financial clout to stop this nonsense?

This has been the point I have tried

to get across to the general American public for many years. If you wouldn't do these things to any other race, why

the sake of football game? I mean, grow up America.

When I saw phrases from some of

We are human beings, not mascots for America's fun and games

- banner at a recent Indians game

do it to American Indians? Do you really consider it an honor for Indians to be mimicked and ridiculed for

my columns printed on banners by American Indians at parades and protests of the use of Indians as mascots,

I knew that I had succeeded in getting my point across, at least to most Indians. I recall a banner reading, "We are human beings, not mascots for America's fun and games" at one protest in Minneapolis, Minn., I said "Yeah," because that is the very wording I used to end my column a few weeks prior to this protest.

I decided to stop writing about it because all that can be said has been said. Many schools and colleges across America have ceased using Indians as mascots. Some major newspapers have stopped printing words like "redskin" on their sports pages. And towns like Champagne-Urbana, Ill., the home of the Fighting Illiniwek, have stopped turning the city into a giant poster advocating racism.

These changes didn't happen because I wrote about it. They happened because people went into the street to protest. A valiant lady, Charlene

Teters, a Spokane Indian woman, who was a graduate student at the University of Illinois, was one of the first to take the protest to the homecoming games. It was because of her that the city of Champagne-Urbana, took down the sign portraying Indians with big noses and the other racist depictions in their grocery stores, banks and restaurants.

The fight is continuing. You will hear from Charlene, Michael Haney, Venon Bellecourt, Phil St. John and many other Indians who are sick and tired of America's ignorance.

I am sure many white and black people know that using another race of people as sports mascots is wrong. Deep down in their hearts they know it is wrong. I appreciate the major television networks for not focusing on the fanatical fans painted up as Indians in the stands each week.

Slowly but surely the message is getting across. Perhaps America will grow up someday.