

SUPER BOWL 2000

Rams, Titans fate comes down to simple execution

by Jason Snyder
editor-in-chief

Although football analysts across the nation insist that Super Bowl XXXIV will be a match-up between an explosive offensive team and a hard-nosed defensive team, once again this year's big game will come down to execution.

In last week's NFC Championship game, the St. Louis Rams showed how vulnerable they can be when facing a hard-nosed defense that pressures the quarterback and slows down the effectiveness of Marshall Faulk. The Rams could only muster up 11 points, putting the game in the hands of their defense with only a five-point lead in the closing minutes.

All season, the Rams proved that if Kurt Warner was given time to find his quick receivers, the Rams couldn't be beat. But against Tampa Bay, Warner was pressured, taking away the long threat that St. Louis has come to rely on. It wasn't until late in the fourth quarter that Warner's receivers were able to get free and a long pass to Ricky Proehl in the endzone put the Rams on top for good.

The Tennessee Titans don't have as strong of a defensive unit as the Buccaneers proved

to have last week, but have shut down two of the league's top quarterbacks in the Colts' Peyton Manning and the Jaguars' Mark Brunell in the past two weeks. Up next is the league's Most Valuable Player, Warner, who just had the second best season as a quarterback in NFL history.

During the regular season, the Titans' defense was ranked 25th against the pass and allowed quarterbacks to complete 56% of their passes. In the playoffs, the Titans' secondary has only given up 47% of opposing quarterbacks' passes and allowed 51 less passing yards per game than in the regular season.

Cornerback Denard Walker said, "our front guys — and I don't say this to be bragging — but Jevon (Kearse), Jason Fisk and Josh Evans are going to get the job done. They have shut down some of the best running backs in the league. We figure if that's going to happen up front, what's going to happen in the back half? As the back half, we have to pick it up."

The corners of the Titans are quick and could match up with the speedy Rams' receivers with the help of active safeties in Blaine Bishop and Anthony Dorsett.

The last time that the Titans faced a team that used the long pass, the Baltimore Ravens scored 41 points, resulting in the Titans biggest loss of the season.

"We like challenges. We feel like if we go down, we're going to go down challenging and fighting, and that's our whole motto," said Bishop.

In the Titans last meeting with the Rams earlier this season, which resulted in St. Louis' first loss, Kearse was able to extend the Rams' offensive line, allowing the Titans to sack Warner six times. The Rams neutralized Kearse with two or three blockers which freed up Fisk and Evans to rush Warner. If the Rams focus so much on Kearse, Faulk and the Rams' running game could be less effective.

Faulk, however, is coming off his most successful regular season and the most productive season in NFL history, going for 2,429 all-purpose yards, putting him above players like Barry Sanders, Marcus Allen, and Eric Dickerson. On a team known for the long ball, Faulk still leads the Rams with 87 receptions.

Faulk knows the importance of this weekend's game, stressing throughout the

season that his only goal is winning. "There are a lot of things you can do throughout your professional career, but when you get the opportunity to compete and be the best in the business, there's nothing better than this."

Faulk was held to only 90 yards rushing against the Titans earlier this year, but showed his ability to catch the ball also, going for 96 yards on six catches. If the secondary of the Titans can slow down the passing game of the Rams, Faulk will be the main factor.

Tennessee coach Jeff Fisher commented on the task at hand calling this game "our biggest defensive challenge of the year, trying to corral the weapons they have on offense."

On offense for the Titans, they will have to rely on the agility of quarterback Steve McNair who is only the second black quarterback to start in the Super Bowl. The last time that happened, the Redskins' Doug Williams scorched the Broncos for 35 points in the second quarter alone.

The Titans' offense, which is similar to the offensive style of the Buccaneers, but with a more versatile quarterback, is led by the power running of Eddie George, who arguably gains the ugliest four yards in the NFL. The four-

yard runs of George do set up a sometimes dangerous passing attack, where McNair hits receivers for 20-yard passes or runs upfield for first-down yardage.

If the Rams are able to put points on the board with ease, the Titans aren't the type of team that can keep up with the high-scoring pace, winning games by short margins throughout the playoffs. No team has scored more than 20 points on the Titans in this year's playoffs while the Titans have only eclipsed 25 points once, due to the good field position they had throughout the AFC Championship game against Jacksonville.

The game will ultimately come down to the battle in the trenches and how each team executes the game plans that got them to the show. The Rams have to get back to their "impatient" style of football, where Faulk's big plays set up even bigger plays to the speedy Isaac Bruce and Az-Zahir Hakim. The Titans will rely on their defensive line and getting pressure on Warner, not allowing Bruce and Az-Zahir to get downfield. The game will come down to the execution of that game plan.

You execute, you win. Simple as that.

HOW THEY MATCH UP...

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Kurt Warner

Had second most successful season in NFL history, and passed for 41 touchdowns. Due to this Warner won the league's MVP.

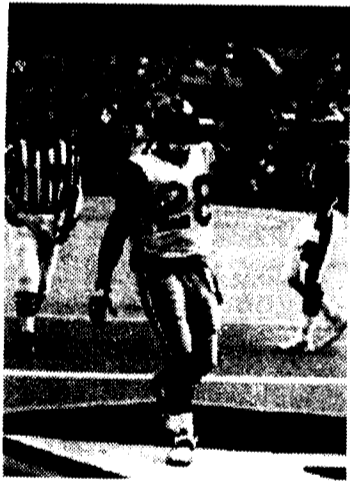
QUARTERBACK

Steve McNair

McNair leads underdog Titans to their first Super Bowl in franchise history. The Titans are one of a handful of wild card teams to reach the Super Bowl.



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Marshall Faulk

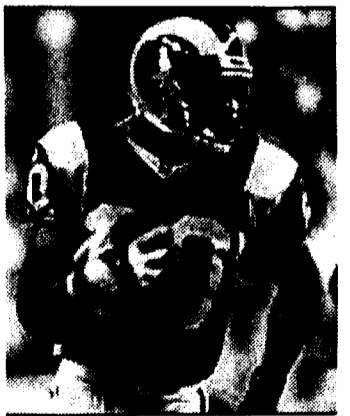
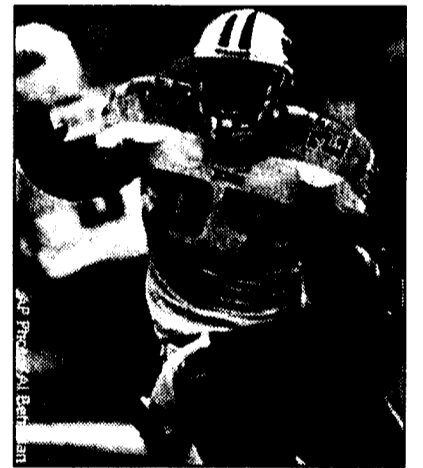
Second NFL player to be a 1000/1000 rusher/receiver, and gained the most yards from scrimmage in NFL history.

RUNNING BACK



Eddie George

George leads the Titans' potent running attack, and was a 1000 yard rusher this season.



Isaac Bruce

Bruce was the third leg of the the Rams massive offensive attack.

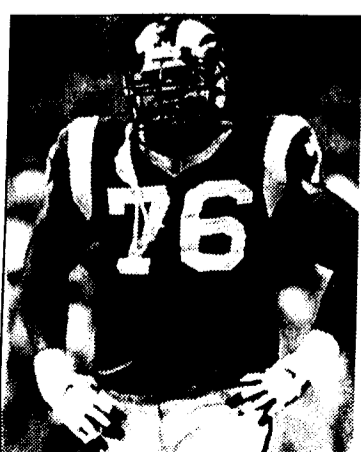
Yancy Thigpen

Injuries might keep the Titans' number one receiver on the sidelines.



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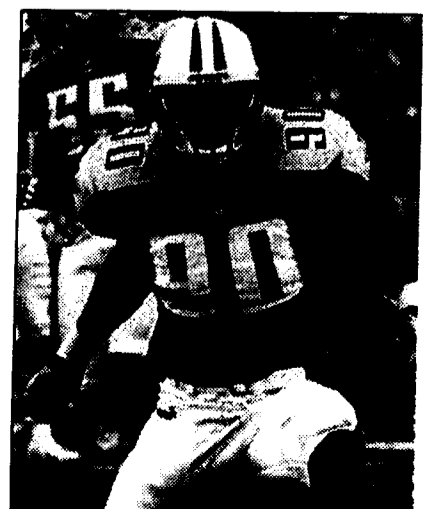
Offensive Line



The Rams' offensive line, including Orlando Pace, has the skill to handle the Titans' defensive line.

IN THE TRENCHES

Defensive Line



Jevon Kearse helped lead the Titans to six sacks on Kurt Warner this season.

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