

# Superbowl Preview

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The scenario is one that is repeated every year. Christmas passes by like a high speed train, New Year's Day comes and goes as quickly as the fruitcake gets thrown out and then we are all catapulted into the inevitable season that is called winter. It is the season when nature decides to hide its beautiful green colors for a few months and, instead, greets us everyday with an almost endless barrage of gray skies and short days. But out of the darkness that is the winter season comes an event that, for many around the country, brings great joy or great gloom. The road to Superbowl XXXIX has begun.

This year's playoffs are the potential key to a celebration that has been building for many years. It does not take a NASA physicist to realize that many fans in Pennsylvania are either Pittsburgh fans or Philadelphia fans. With this comes the unfortunate responsibility to take heartbreak every single year.

But the New Year is a time for hope and new beginnings. Just like the birth of a child or a new tree being planted, the playoffs are a new beginning: a second season. Both the Steelers and Eagles are really good teams.

Pittsburgh comes into the playoffs with a 15-1 record and a rookie quarterback that appears will never lose a game in his entire NFL career. Ben Roethlisberger is leading his team as an undefeated starter at quarterback. It also helps when great players like Jerome Bettis, Duce Staley and the top ranked defense in the league are also present. The crowd at Heinz

Field, home of the Steelers, will be a wild group to observe throughout the playoffs. The Steelers have secured homefield advantage in the AFC playoffs and are the favorite to represent the AFC in the Superbowl.

The Eagles find themselves in a familiar position. They are the top seed in the NFC, have homefield advantage throughout the playoffs and are probably the favorites to represent the NFC in Superbowl XXXIX. This is what was also said about the team in 2002 and 2003. The end result in those years was two losses: both at home. This team, however, appears to be better than the previous two teams that made it to the conference championship game. Not only was their regular season better, 13-3, a franchise record, but some dynamic players have joined the cast for this years run, too.

Both teams are favored to go to the Superbowl; there will be a Keystone State championship and that's the end of the story right! Do not kid yourself.

It would be no surprise if either the "Burg" or "Philly" does not make it to the Superbowl. The NFL playoffs, if anything, are as unpredictable as a box of chocolates. Remember what Forrest Gump said, "you never know what you're gonna get."

The NFC is definitely like a box of chocolates. Besides the Eagles, the rest of the conference is a smorgasbord of mediocrity. Not only are there three teams with 10 or more wins, two teams are 8-8 and one is a 9-7 division champion. Anybody want to throw up yet? The deficiencies on some of these teams are so glaring, too.

In order to win in the NFL, there has been a recipe for success that goes back generations. It's

just like the brownie recipe that goes back to great-great-great-grandma. The team has to have a running game and a good defense. Minnesota, Green Bay, Seattle and St. Louis have a running game. What else do those four teams have in common? Their defense stinks!

The class of the NFC clearly lies in the corners of Atlanta and Philadelphia. As mentioned, the Eagles have the best record and are a very good team. But Atlanta has a lot in common with them. The Falcons have a good defense, a dangerous quarterback, and some outstanding players on offense: Alge Crumpler, Warrick Dunn just to name a few.

On paper, the NFC championship will probably come down to a match up between the birds and the birds in Philly. As this article is being written, however, both Green Bay and Seattle have been eliminated. They were eliminated by the two 8-8 teams St. Louis and Minnesota. If anything has been learned from those two teams winning their first games, it is that anything can happen.

For fans craving the old style of smash mouth, trash talking football, the AFC is for you. Pittsburgh, as previously mentioned, is the top team in the AFC. Returning to the playoffs are New England, Indianapolis, Denver, San Diego and the New York Jets. The AFC was a combined 73-23. The NFC was 59-37. What conference is better?

The Patriots are once again in the thick of it all: hungry for yet another championship and the likely team to legitimately challenge the Steelers for a Superbowl berth. But let us not forget the other teams, especial-

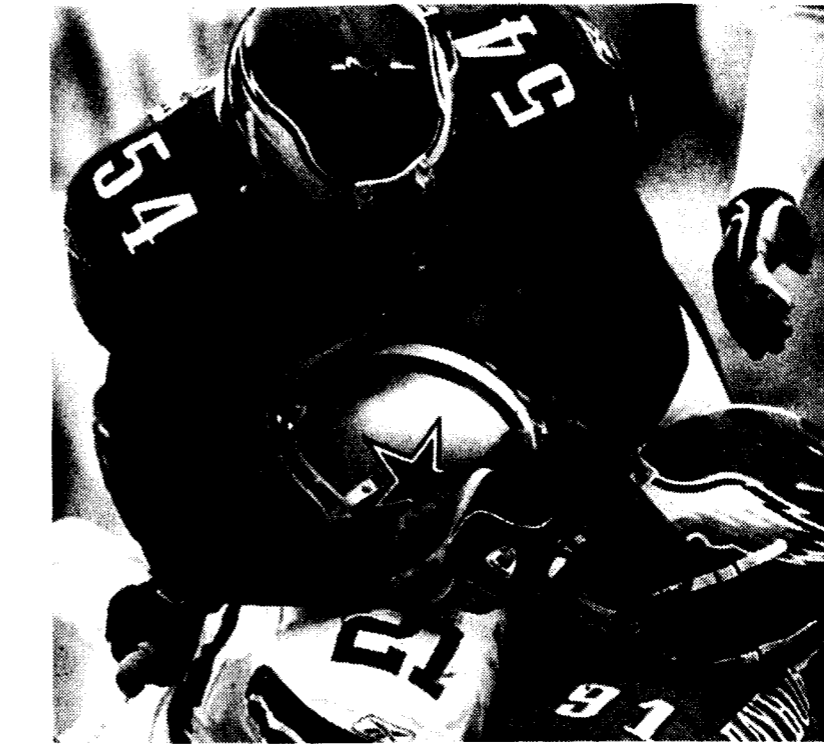


Photo courtesy of Philadelphia Eagles Web site

**The Eagles' Jeremiah Trotter brings down the Cowboys' Julius Jones.**

ly the Indianapolis Colts. Even though the Colts defense is clearly not at the caliber of a Pittsburgh or New England, they have a history making, gun slinging quarterback that is quickly becoming among the best of all time.

Peyton Manning has been on fire. That's a nice way to put it. He now holds the single season touchdown record with 49 touchdowns this year. The players that play alongside Manning are lethal as well: Marvin Harrison, Brandon Stokley, Dallas Clark and Edgerrin James just to name a few. The main point of rambling on about Indianapolis is that this is probably the most dangerous team in not only the AFC, but the entire NFL. If the Colts are representing the AFC in Superbowl XXXIX, it will be hard to find a team in the NFC that can stop them and that includes the Eagles.

So the journey of the Eagles and Steelers has begun and it will be a heck of a ride. Just think of it, the two teams that clearly

dominate the pro-football world in Central Pennsylvania could meet in the ultimate game.

What will that mean for fans? For Eagles and Philadelphia sports fans overall, this could be the year when their team finally wins. This could be the year when people forget about the Flyers in the late 80's, the 1993 Phillies, the 2000 Sixers, and the 2001, 2002, and 2003 Eagles. This could be the year when the city that is home to Rocky, soft pretzels and cheesesteaks finally wins its first championship in more than 20 years.

For Pittsburgh, a Superbowl victory could mean a return to the glory days of the 1970's, when the Steelers won four titles. The names are hard to forget: Swann, Harris, Greene, Bradshaw. Could this be the year when players like Randle El, Burress, Bettis, and Roethlisberger join those old teams of the 70's, forever remembered for giving their fans the ride of their life and the joy of a championship?

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ball clearly gets the most headlines. Some recruits would probably salivate at the chance of getting attention from so much press and Penn State does get a lot of press.

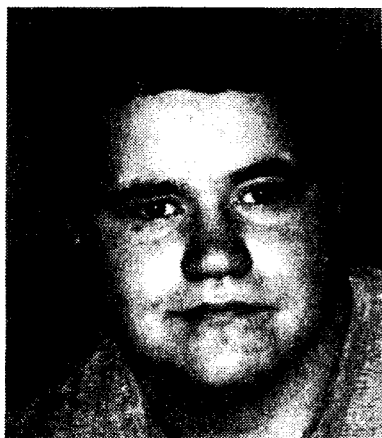
The formula worked for Paterno when recruiting Derrick Williams. Williams is not the only player that Penn State has courted recently. Willie Harriott, a wide receiver/cornerback from Connecticut has verbally committed to play for the lions and so has James McDonald of Dunbar High School in Washington, D.C. Both players are highly regarded and should contribute almost immediately.

So for everyone shouting that Joe Paterno should be fired or should retire, hold on one second. If anything the recruits that have joined "happy valley", and remember nothing is guaranteed, have bought Paterno some time to turn it around. It will not be an overnight success. It will take and patience to see some real results show up on the field. Remember, Penn State may have a brand new quarterback starting behind center next year as well.

For fans of the lions that have been starving for a championship hope seems to be on the horizon. Even though nothing is guaranteed when it comes to recruiting, Penn State does have one of the best recruiting classes of any college in the nation. This past season, the lions struggled once again to a 4-7 record. After the season ended, many were wondering if Joe Paterno had seen his final days. For the ageless JoePA, he may have quieted his critics if just for the moment. Now it's time to produce the results on the field and start winning.

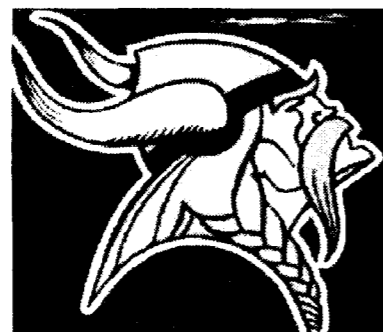
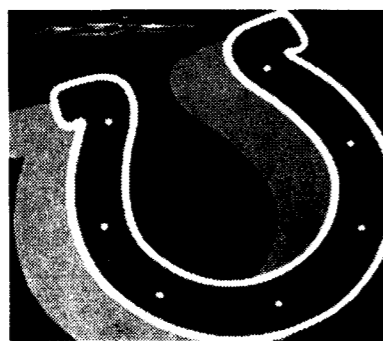
## Capital Times staff picks Superbowl winners

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Indianapolis vs. Minnesota - Indianapolis wins 37-21

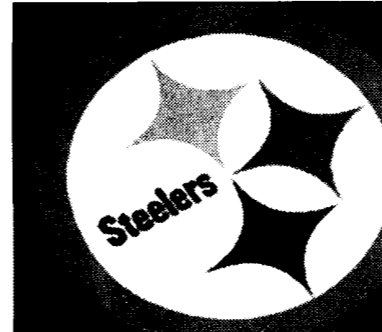


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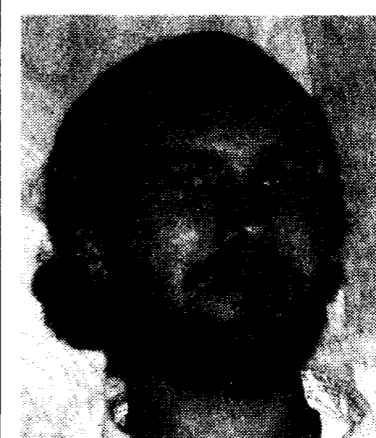


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Philadelphia vs. Pittsburgh - w/T.O. Philly wins 20-17 w/o/T.O. Pitt wins 23-17

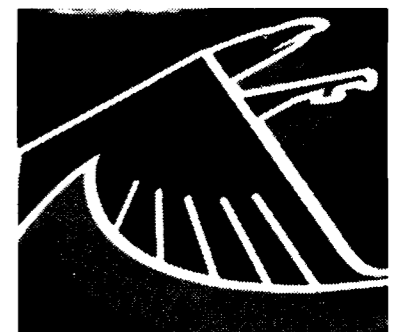
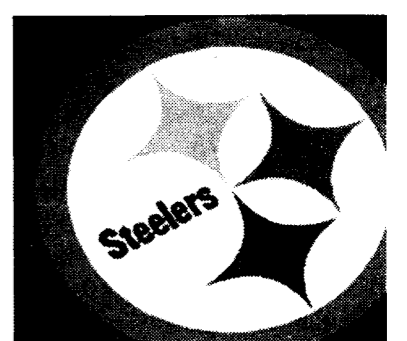


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Pittsburgh vs. Atlanta - Pittsburgh wins 35-13

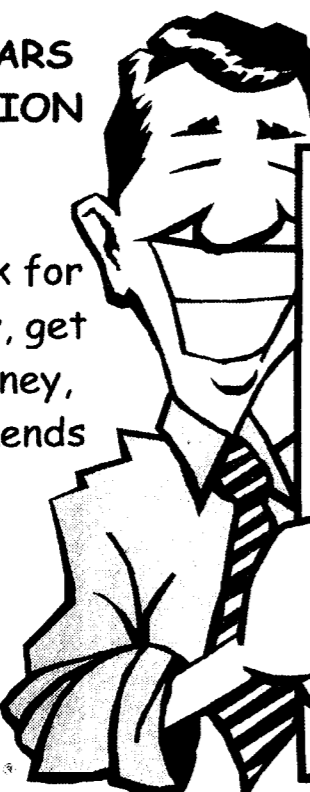


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