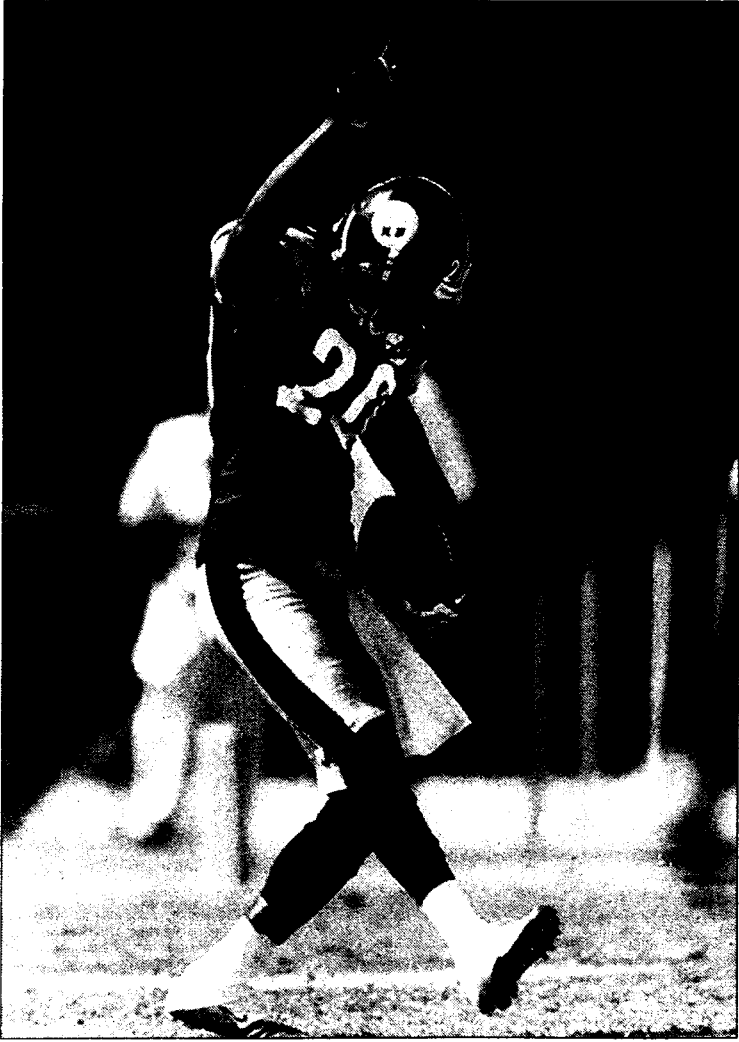


# Steelers winning with defense while offense struggles



John Russell/Associated Press

Bryant McFadden celebrates and interception in Pittsburgh's win.

By Alan Robinson  
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

PITTSBURGH — No, that's not Mean Joe Greene, nasty Jack Lambert or give-not-an-inch Mel Blount out there playing defense for the motivated Pittsburgh Steelers. It only seems like it's 1976 again.

The Steelers needed two quarterbacks to throw for all of 21 yards Sunday at Tennessee, the fewest they've had in a victory since at least 1960, according to STATS LLC. And a third quarterback could be on the way Sunday. Their offense hasn't scored a touchdown in regulation yet this season, and they've been outpassed by nearly 2-to-1 — normally, a scenario that spells defeat in the increasingly pass-driven NFL.

To be more reflective of the way they're scuffling on offense, perhaps the Steelers' statistics should reflect feet-gained passing, not yards gained. Not that it's mattered. With their defense performing like a 21st-century version of the Steel Curtain, the Steelers (2-0) are assured of getting through quarterback Ben Roethlisberger's potentially season-ruining four-game suspension with no worse than a 2-2 record.

Even 4-0 seems possible, with a road game Sunday at Tampa Bay (2-0) that could have the feel of a home game given how many

Steelers fans already have purchased tickets, and the Ravens (1-1) following at home a week later.

Not many in the NFL predicted that, and that seems to anger a team that took umbrage at suggestions its season might be over before its franchise quarterback returned.

"We knew everybody was going to count us out, having Ben out," linebacker James Farrior said. "They think they can't win without Ben, but that just gives us a little more motivation. Mike Tomlin has been (mad) the last couple of weeks, so he's been taking it out on us — and we've been taking it out on other teams."

Obviously, Titans star Chris Johnson ran up against the wrong team as he unsuccessfully tried to extend his streak of consecutive 100-yard games to 13. Johnson had an 85-yard touchdown run called back by a penalty, but otherwise did little. He finished with 34 yards on 16 carries as Pittsburgh won 19-11 by forcing seven turnovers.

Steelers linebacker James Harrison suggested Johnson could have gotten his 100 yards, but only if the Titans had given him 40 carries. Michael Turner was equally unsuccessful the week before, gaining 42 yards on 19 carries as the Steelers held Atlanta without a touchdown while winning in overtime, 15-9.

Now Johnson and Turner know how Archie Griffin, Rickey Young,

Tommy Reamon and a bunch of other running backs felt trying to gain yards against the last Steelers team to weather such adversity without its star quarterback.

The 1976 Steelers started 1-4 after winning the Super Bowl the previous two seasons, and their year seemed to be over as quarterback Terry Bradshaw couldn't start six games due to neck and wrist injuries. They responded by going 6-0 with rookie quarterback Mike Kruczek starting, and they returned to the AFC championship game for the fourth time in five seasons.

Those Steelers accomplished it with the most sustained stretch of defensive excellence by any recent-era NFL team, shutting out five teams — three in a row — while holding three others to a combined four field goals. Only one team scored in double digits against them during their final nine games, and four teams were held to single digits in first downs.

That '76 team was told it couldn't be done, and the defense responded even when the offense couldn't; Kruczek didn't throw a touchdown pass all season. These Steelers are trying to do a similar script, even if they're doing it with more quarterbacks.

With Dennis Dixon (knee) uncertain for Sunday and No. 4 quarterback Charlie Batch ineffective against Tennessee, Byron Leftwich may start.

# Kolb back in, Vick out as Eagles' starting quarterback

By Rob Maaddi  
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

PHILADELPHIA — Michael Vick is more likely to begin the game at wide receiver than quarterback this week.

Eagles coach Andy Reid said Kevin Kolb will be the starting quarterback at Jacksonville on Sunday, despite a pair of impressive performances by Vick.

Kolb has been cleared to practice after missing the second half of a season-opening loss to Green Bay and Sunday's win over Detroit because of a concussion. So he'll start unless he has a setback this week.

Vick still will play in Philadelphia's version of the wildcat offense. In the first play of the season, he lined up as a receiver.

"I think it's a beautiful situation," Reid said Monday. "I look at it a lot differently than other peo-

ple look at it. I've got two quarterbacks that can play at a very important position. I'm a happy guy about it. There are a lot of teams that don't have good quarterbacks, ones that they feel like they can win with, and I feel like we can with both of those guys."

Vick wasn't the only quarterback involved in a reshuffling. But unlike the Eagles, the Carolina Panthers and Buffalo Bills are making changes because their starters played poorly.

Rookie Jimmy Clausen will start over Matt Moore when the Panthers (0-2) play the Cincinnati Bengals on Sunday, and Ryan Fitzpatrick takes over for Trent Edwards when the Bills (0-2) visit the New England Patriots.

On Sunday, Oakland's Jason Campbell was benched in favor of Bruce Gradkowski, who led the Raiders to a 16-14 win over St. Louis, and Sunday's starter

against Arizona has not yet been announced.

Vick threw for 175 yards and one touchdown and ran for 103 in a 27-20 loss to the Packers, nearly rallying the Eagles to victory from a 17-point deficit. He had 284 yards passing and two TDs in a 35-32 win over the Lions in his first start in almost four years.

A three-time Pro Bowl pick during six seasons in Atlanta, Vick missed two seasons while serving an 18-month sentence in federal prison for his role in a dogfighting operation. He signed a two-year contract with the Eagles before last season, then played sparingly behind Donovan McNabb and Kolb.

Vick was in for a handful of plays in the first half against the Packers.

After Kolb went down, he took over under center and was outstanding.



Matt Slocum/Associated Press

Kevin Kolb (4) evades tackle in the Eagles' game against Green Bay

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