

The Road To Super Bowl XXX

NFC Championship

Packers' defense will need to step up again to stop Dallas

The Green Bay Packers will have to play their best defensive game of this long season against the Dallas Cowboys this Sunday to make it back to the Super Bowl for the first time since Vince Lombardi led them there in 1967. After all, it was their defense that shut down the San Francisco 49ers 27-17 last weekend in San Francisco.

Led by their inspirational leader, Defensive End Reggie White, the Packers are hungry, and are looking forward to a trip to Arizona for Super Bowl XXX.

No doubt about it, if there were any doubts about the Green Bay Packers being among the league's elite, their defense has removed them.

You can't count out Green Bay's offense either. Packer quarterback and this season's MVP, Brett Favre, played a near perfect game against the 49ers, throwing for 299 yards (222 in the first half) on 21-28 passing, no interceptions, and two touchdowns.

Dallas, on the other hand, is coming off a strong performance against an overmatched Philadelphia Eagle team as they attempt to make their third trip to the Super Bowl in four years. Their 30-11 victory over the Eagles even saw the return of "Neon" Deion Sanders to "Prime Time" as he took a reverse back across field for a 21-yard score, in addition to catching a pass, defending one, intercepting another, nearly breaking a punt return and making three tackles.

"It's why I have the nickname," Sanders said of his performance. "The playoffs is when the big names have to come out. That's why they pay us like they do."

And aside from Sanders, you know you can't leave out the consistent play of veterans Michael Irvin, Emmitt Smith and quarterback Troy Aikman.

Yes, Sunday's NFC championship game should be something to see. Two menacing defenses and two very capable offenses. Will Green Bay continue



Looks like Deion and Dallas are ready for "Prime Time."

their inspired play en route to their first Super Bowl appearance in nearly 30 years, or will it be Dallas' experience that makes the difference?

Perhaps Sanders summed it up best when he said, "This is it. Big players have to step up for the big games. If you don't believe me, ask San Francisco."

AFC Championship

Colts hope Cinderella season won't end in Pittsburgh

The Indianapolis Colts, one of the biggest surprises in recent NFL playoff history, became the first visitor this season to win at Arrowhead Stadium as they upset the Kansas City Chiefs 10-7 last weekend. In doing so, they eliminated the Chiefs, who had the NFL's best record this season (13-3), and will travel to Pittsburgh to take on the Steelers Sunday for the AFC title and a possible trip to Super Bowl XXX.

Undermanned, in hostile territory, and playing in horrendous weather conditions, the Colts never backed down, forcing four turnovers by a team that has protected the ball better than any other season.

If anything, the Chiefs' quarterback, Steve Bono, picked the worst possible time to have his

worst outing of the season. After throwing three interceptions and hitting only 11 of 25 passes for 122 yards, he was replaced by back-up QB Rich Gannon. And as if that weren't enough to do the Chiefs in, kicker Lin Elliott missed three field goals — from 35, 39 and 42 yards.

The Colts' play has been nothing short of inspirational during the playoffs; they even managed to eliminate the San Diego Chargers 35-20 in a Wild Card game two week ago. But that inspiration will need to shine through more than ever this weekend as they make that trip to Pittsburgh to take on the Steelers, who return for their second consecutive AFC title game.

Pittsburgh, who seemed to be plagued by infighting, and a

second-half slowdown, still managed to earn a shot at the AFC championship with a 40-21 playoff win over the Buffalo Bills last Saturday. The loss sent Buffalo home, again, as they are the only team in NFL history to lose four consecutive Super Bowls.

The win, on the other hand, now leaves Pittsburgh with a new problem — what to do with the inspired Colts and their elusive quarterback Jim Harbaugh. The NFL's No. 1 passer has only seven interceptions on 368 passes this season.

Nonetheless, the Colts, who will again have to play without running back Marshall Faulk, is on a roll, and according to receiver Floyd Turner, "It doesn't matter. We're the Indianapolis Colts, and we're going to Pittsburgh."

National Sports Briefs

Tyson vs. Foreman in the works?

Negotiations began late last week for a possible summer fight between former heavyweight champions Mike Tyson and George Foreman.

This puts into question the on-again/off-again heavyweight title fight between former champion George Foreman and Michael Moorer, set for February 29 at New York City's Madison Square Garden, according to *New York Newsday*. The remarks made Time Warner, which owns the pay-per-view service showing the fight, think the Moorer fight would lose its appeal.

Rival promoters Don King and Bob Arum met in Florida and discussed the proposed pay-per-view TV blockbuster, a Foreman spokesman said. Foreman previously had stated he would not fight Tyson if King were involved.

NCAA clears Texas of wrongdoing

The NCAA said it is convinced that Texas officials had no idea a 30-year-old football player had changed his identity to extend his college eligibility.

David Berst, director of enforcement at the NCAA, said there were no plans to investigate how Ron Weaver managed to enroll at Texas as 23-year-old Joel Ron McKelvey and play a limited role as a backup cornerback for the Longhorns

this season.

Weaver had exhausted his eligibility at Sacramento State. He used the Social Security of a Salinas, Calif. man named Joel McKelvey to change his identity and enter a Los Angeles junior college as a freshman before transferring to Texas last year.

Coach advises Phillips to leave

Nebraska coach Tom Osborne said last week he has advised tailback Lawrence Phillips to declare for the NFL draft.

Phillips was suspended from the Cornhuskers for six weeks after he pledged no contest to a charge of beating a former girlfriend. He was restored to the team late in the season and ran for 165 yards and three touchdowns in Nebraska's 62-24 victory over Florida in the Fiesta Bowl national championship game last week.

Osborne said the scrutiny of the junior running back was behind his decision to tell Phillips to enter this spring's professional draft.

Walker pleads guilty to lesser charge

Less than a week after being charged with assaulting his wife, former University of Kentucky basketball star Kenny Walker pleaded guilty to a lesser charge of menacing and will undergo counseling.

Walker, 31, entered the plea as part of a deal with the county

attorney's office that will leave him with a clear record after completing a domestic-violence diversion program.

Walker was charged last week with fourth-degree assault after his wife told authorities she had been choked and threatened by her husband at their home.

NCAA to tackle sports agent problem

Reacting to the scandal that rocked several schools this fall, NCAA Executive Director Cedric Dempsey said Sunday, it is time to tackle head on the issue of sports agents.

Speaking in his state of the association address to open the 90th NCAA convention in Dallas, Dempsey announced that the NCAA Council has formed a special committee to study agent and professionalism problems and recommend solutions this year.

Although the problems with agents in college athletics is an old one, it became one of the most discussed topics of college sports last year.

Ex-champ Holmes scores early knockout

Former heavyweight champ Larry Holmes continued his comeback to the ring with a 4th round KO of Curtis Shephard Tuesday.

Holmes (63-5-0) scored the 41st knockout of his career with a short right to the head at 2:41 of the 4th. The knockdown was the third of the fight for Holmes

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