



THE CATCH: Antonio Holmes keeps his feet in bounds to make the game-winning reception. KEVIN C. COX/GETTY IMAGES

Steelers-Cardinals Super Bowl another NFL classic

Unexpected twists and turns make for remarkable storyline

By RAHUL VAIDYANATH
Epoch Times Staff

TAMPA, Fla.—A jam-packed Raymond James stadium witnessed an NFL classic as the Pittsburgh Steelers won their league-high sixth Super Bowl in a roller-coaster battle against the Arizona Cardinals 27-23.

As a football fan taking in my first Super Bowl, I couldn't have asked for a better show. The paid attendance of 70,774 and millions of television viewers will probably be talking about this game for some time to come.

I had a sense we might be in for something special when Arizona won the opening coin toss and elected to play defense first. Why not unleash Kurt Warner, Larry Fitzgerald, and the second best passing attack in the NFL right off the bat?

Initially, it looked like Arizona had made the wrong decision, as Ben Roethlisberger promptly drove the Steelers down to the Arizona one-yard line.

From here we got a taste for what this game was going to be all about. This was a game where you had to expect the unexpected.

Roethlisberger scrambled in for the touchdown—but wait! Arizona coach Ken Whisenhunt challenged the touchdown call and was proven right. Arizona's defense had held the Steelers to a field goal and had a moral victory.

Arizona struggled on offense in the first quarter as the Steelers

dominated, possessing the ball for 11:28 of 15 minutes.

Pittsburgh opened up a 10-point lead early in the second half with a Gary Russell one-yard TD run.

That would be the only rushing touchdown of a Super Bowl in which a record for fewest combined rushing yards and attempts was set (91 and 33 respectively). So if you like watching the offenses air it out, like I do, this was your kind of Super Bowl.

Warner had a terrific game. He completed 72 percent of his passes for 377 yards and a 112.3 rating. Roethlisberger threw for 256 yards and a 93.2 rating.

Fast forward to the end of the second quarter with Pittsburgh up 10-7 and Arizona on the Steelers' one-yard line. Expect the unexpected.

Steelers linebacker James Harrison intercepted Warner and sprinted 100 yards for a touchdown, setting a Super Bowl record for the longest play. For the 242-pound Harrison to go 100 yards at the end of a half through an obstacle course is a testament to his athleticism.

Just when the whole world was expecting the half-time score to be 10-10 or 14-10 Arizona, it wound up being 17-7 Pittsburgh.

"The turnover right before the half hurt," Whisenhunt said when talking about things the game came down to.

The crowd then picked their jaws off the floor as Springsteen put on the half-time show.

The Steelers tacked on three

more points in the third quarter but what's noteworthy is how they did it. In a drive lasting 8:39, the Steelers were the beneficiaries of three Arizona penalties, two of which were for personal fouls.

In fact, the Steelers set a Super Bowl record with four first downs by penalties.

"Obviously the penalties were things that we allowed to extend their drives, things that hurt us, so it was unfortunate that there were that many penalties called," said Whisenhunt. He definitely has a point here.

Wild finish

Warner went to the no-huddle offense with much success. He took the Cardinals 87 yards in eight plays, capping it all off with a one-yard pass to Larry Fitzgerald.

With the Steelers up 20-14 and three minutes to go, facing third and 10 from their own one-yard line, Roethlisberger completed a 19-yard pass to wide-out Antonio Holmes. With a new set of downs, the Steelers looked to be in excellent shape.

But a killer offensive holding penalty negated the first down, gave Arizona two points for the safety, and eventually the ball back in great field position. This game was far from over, I thought.

Two plays after the safety, Kurt Warner connected with Larry Fitzgerald for a 64-yard TD, putting the Cards up 23-20.

Steelers DE Brett Keisel was amazed at how the Cardinals fought back. "All of a sudden, they got a lead," he said referring to Larry Fitzgerald's 64-yard TD catch. "How does this happen?"

Mike Tomlin, the youngest coach to win a Super Bowl at 36, talked

about his thought process late in the game after Fitzgerald put the Cards ahead for the first time.

"I actually was thinking that if they're going to score, that's how you want them to score: extremely quickly as opposed to just milking it."

On the Steelers' next drive, Roethlisberger connected with the game's MVP Antonio Holmes four times for 73 yards ending with a six-yard you-had-to-see-it-to-believe-it TD pass to win the game.

Whisenhunt was also worried that there was too much time left on the clock. "I felt that maybe we could at least hold them to a field goal and we have a chance to go to overtime, but they made the play."

Santonio Holmes described the game-winning touchdown that will become a legendary highlight: "I knew my toes were on the ground the whole time. Once I extended my arms and my body, everything just flowed right together."

"I knew it was a touchdown 100 percent...All I did was stood up on my toes and extended my hands."

The MVP receiver led all receivers with nine catches for 131 yards. Coincidentally, the last receiver to be named Super Bowl MVP was Hines Ward after the 2005 season.

Steelers safety Troy Polamalu described the gut-wrenching final five minutes of play, "Oh my God, I don't know. You can't explain it. You are seconds away from me crying in the locker room, and then being out here."

"That's how amazing this game is."

Polamalu couldn't have said it any better. The NFL's premier event once again delivered the goods for the world's audience.

David Beckham wants permanent Milan move

Lawyers to work with Galaxy on agreement



DAVID BECKHAM
ANDREW YATES/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

GLASGOW (Reuters)—David Beckham said for the first time on Wednesday that he would like to quit L.A. Galaxy in the United States and make a permanent move to AC Milan.

The former Manchester United and Real Madrid midfielder added that he might want to end his career at Milan and that playing for them would enhance his chances of another World Cup with England in South Africa next year.

"I have expressed my desire now to stay in Milan and hopefully the clubs can come to some agreement," Beckham, who is on loan with the Italian club, told reporters.

"I expected to enjoy it [in Milan], but I didn't expect to enjoy it this much and play in every game like I have," said Beckham, who has made a significant impact in Serie A.

"I have said that my intentions are to stay here. Now it is out of my hands so I have to wait and see," he added after playing for the first half of Milan's friendly against Rangers at Ibrox.

"My main objective is to stay at this club and I enjoy playing here and at the highest level and it would give me more of a chance [of playing in the World Cup]," the former 33-year-old England captain said.

"I have not spoken to Galaxy, but someone has from my side, and it is literally down to them to come to some sort of agreement and hopefully they will."

Asked if he would like to finish his career at AC Milan Beckham replied, "Yes, possibly."

Knicks and cuts are healing

Mike D'Antoni has done well but still has a long way to go

By KARL YU
Epoch Times Staff

The New York Knicks have been the ugly middle child of the Big Apple sports scene over the past few years.

The New York Yankees are moving into a new ballpark and have added the likes of CC Sabathia, A.J. Burnett, and Mark Teixeira.

The Giants are a year removed from a Super Bowl victory over the New England Patriots.

The Rangers are looking good in the NHL's Atlantic Division and in the Eastern Conference, which leaves us with the Blue-shirts' Madison Square Garden roommate, the Knicks.

There hasn't been much to cheer about if you're a Knicks fan recently as the limelight has moved away from them.

The team is suffering from a four-season-long playoff drought and has missed the postseason six out of the last seven years.

The Knicks have averaged 28 wins and 54 losses over the past four seasons and have been, as Peter Stein of the Pro Basketball News described, "putrid."

But lush foliage can blossom out of manure and the Knicks have a shot to make the playoffs if they get their act together.

The Knicks are not quite at .500—but certainly in touch with a playoff birth as the All-Star break looms. To put things in perspective, the Knicks won a total of 23 games last year.

New York's NBA team is by no means amongst the Eastern Conference's elite, or the Atlantic Division's elite for that matter, but they are challenging for a playoff spot and that in itself is progress.

With Isiah Thomas behind the bench from 2006-2008 and with the Knicks sporting an anemic winning percentage of .341, it was clearly time to go in a

different direction in the coaching department. Former Phoenix bench boss Mike D'Antoni fit the bill.

Not only was the Suns former coach the 2004-05 NBA coach of the year, he also led Phoenix to four straight seasons with at least 54 wins.

D'Antoni doesn't have the horses like he did in Phoenix but seeing as the Knicks are close to equaling their win total from last year with about 30 games left, it looks like he hasn't lost his touch.

It doesn't hurt that locker room cancer Stephon Marbury isn't around either.

"Starbury" publicly feuded with two out of the past three New York coaches, Larry Brown and the aforementioned Thomas, but hasn't played a minute this season after losing the battle for point guard at training camp.

Rumors have circulated about possible Marbury trades but as of yet, none have come to fruition. Chris Duhon, who beat out Marbury at point guard, is averaging 12.7 points per game and 8.0 assists per game. He gets along just fine with the coach.

According to John Hollinger's ESPN.com playoff odds, the Knicks have a 30.6 percent chance of making the playoffs.

New York needs to improve on the road and within the division records. Their road record stands at 7-16 and their divisional record stands at 2-5 at the start of the week.

And with the trade deadline set for Feb. 19, the team could add a shot blocking presence as it ranks dead last in the league in shot-blocking.

Following a 126-117 home loss to the L.A. Lakers on Monday, a game which saw Kobe Bryant net 61 points, D'Antoni gave us a status update on his team.

"We're not there yet," the coach said at the postgame press conference.

"We're going to learn [from the loss] and we're going to be better; we've got another two months to correct a lot of things that we didn't do, we'll get there."

"We saw what it's going to take to be one of the better teams."

Federer left with more questions than answers

'He needs a coach' says Patrick McEnroe

LONDON (Reuters)—The tears streaming down Roger Federer's face during the Australian Open presentation ceremony told their own story. How does the Swiss recover after losing another epic final encounter to his nemesis Rafael Nadal?

Losing one classic match is bad enough but to lose two in less than seven months was simply too much.

After his dreams of winning a record-equaling 14th grand slam title were ruined by Nadal in five sets last Sunday, the time has come for Federer to take action—and he might start by seeking a full-time coach.

With the ability to conjure magical shots at will, the Swiss master is probably the most gifted player the sport has ever seen. Winning 13 grand slam titles in just over five years bears testimony to his talent.

But since Nadal has now beaten him in five of their seven grand slam final meetings, Federer needs to explore new avenues.

Whereas most top players have a small army of people to turn to when the going gets tough, Federer travels with a tiny support group led by girlfriend Mirka Vavrinec, whose many roles include media manager, business adviser, and occasional hitting partner.

Since parting ways with Swede Peter Lundgren in December 2003, Federer has opted not to work with a full-time trainer.

He hired Tony Roche and Jose Higuera on a part-time basis, mainly to draw on their clay court expertise, but those relationships fizzled out when Federer failed to capture the French Open trophy.

Higher level

He now needs the guidance of a mentor who can not only push his game to a higher level but also help find and exploit weaknesses in world number one Nadal's game.

"He needs a coach," U.S. Davis Cup captain Patrick McEnroe said. "He's never had to adjust to something because he's been so talented he could go out there and figure it out."

"All of sudden he's playing a guy he can't do it against. He's so stubborn."

The Swiss, trailing Nadal 13-6 in career meetings, could also take a page out of Andy Murray's training manual and use the services of a sports psychologist to overcome the mental hold the Spaniard has over him.

"God, it's killing me," sobbed an

anguished Federer, who also lost a five-set thriller against the Spaniard in last July's Wimbledon final.

"I love this game. It means the world to me, so it hurts when you lose. They hurt even more so like if you're that close, like at Wimbledon or like here at the Australian Open."

At the end of last Sunday's 4-1/2 hour final, seven-time grand slam champion Mats Wilander observed: "The ramifications for Federer are huge. Is he ever going to beat Rafael Nadal again in a big match?"

Tortured mind
It is a question that must have also flashed through Federer's tortured mind.

When Nadal held aloft the Norman Brookes Cup last Sunday, a red-eyed Federer gazed away and perhaps pondered the what-ifs.

"I wish I was a lefty too, playing him break points on the ad side [of the court], not on the deuce side. Sure, it's a great advantage for him," Federer said.

While it may be too late for Federer to take such drastic action, the only reason Nadal, a natural right-hander, plays left-handed is because of his uncle and coach Toni's foresight.

Toni Nadal encouraged his nephew to switch hands when he was still honing his skills back in Mallorca and the move has turned out



TOUGH LOSS: Roger Federer wipes a tear after his five-set loss to Rafa Nadal in the Australian Open final. GREG WOOD/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

to be a masterstroke as Rafael Nadal now holds three of the four grand slam titles.

It is that kind of intuitive advice that U.S. Open champion Federer needs as he chases Pete Sampras's record of 14 grand slam crowns, especially since the chances are that he will have to beat Nadal to achieve the landmark.

TENNIS RANKINGS			
Men			
Player	Points	Player	Points
1. (1) Rafael Nadal (Spain)	14,260	1. (2) Serena Williams (U.S.)	9,432
2. (2) Roger Federer (Switzerland)	11,000	2. (3) Dinara Safina (Russia)	9,150
3. (3) Novak Djokovic (Serbia)	9,010	3. (1) Jelena Jankovic (Serbia)	8,580
4. (4) Andy Murray (Britain)	7,360	4. (4) Elena Dementieva (Russia)	8,216
5. (5) Nikolay Davydenko (Russia)	5,030	5. (7) Vera Zvonareva (Russia)	6,640
6. (9) Andy Roddick (U.S.)	4,510	6. (6) Venus Williams (U.S.)	6,144
7. (6) Juan Martin del Potro (Argentina)	4,350	7. (8) Svetlana Kuznetsova (Russia)	5,510
8. (8) Gilles Simon (France)	4,170	8. (5) Ana Ivanovic (Serbia)	5,492
9. (15) Fernando Verdasco (Spain)	3,480	9. (10) Agnieszka Radwanska (Poland)	3,977
10. (11) David Nalbandian (Argentina)	3,395	10. (11) Nadia Petrova (Russia)	3,882
11. (10) James Blake (U.S.)	3,230	11. (17) Marion Bartoli (France)	3,316
12. (13) Gael Monfils (France)	3,190	12. (13) Flavia Pennetta (Italy)	3,280
13. (12) David Ferrer (Spain)	2,980	13. (12) Caroline Wozniacki (Denmark)	3,230
14. (7) Jo-Wilfried Tsonga (France)	2,955	14. (16) Alize Cornet (France)	3,192
15. (17) Robin Soderling (Sweden)	2,695	15. (14) Victoria Azarenka (Belarus)	3,166
16. (16) Stanislas Wawrinka (Switzerland)	2,690	16. (15) Patty Schnyder (Switzerland)	3,030
17. (18) Nicolas Pietrangeli (Spain)	2,620	16. (9) Maria Sharapova (Russia)	3,030
18. (14) Fernando Gonzalez (Chile)	2,600	18. (19) Dominika Cibulkova (Slovakia)	2,880
19. (22) Tommy Robredo (Spain)	2,500	19. (18) Anna Chakvetadze (Russia)	2,644
20. (23) Radek Stepanek (Czech Republic)	2,440	20. (24) Zheng Jie (China)	2,386

Rankings as of Feb. 2, previous week's rankings in parentheses