

THE LOOK MAN REPORT 2005 WEEK 22 – YEAR OF THE DOG

"By the time we got [to Detroit], it was almost 2 in the morning, because ain't nothing open but hospitals, jails and legs." – NBA star Jalen Rose

The 2005 NFL season culminated in the incredible spectacle known as Super Bowl XL in Detroit. After over twenty weeks of hard fought struggles, the winners of the two conferences finally played for the whole enchilada. Cities spend hundreds of thousands of dollars just for the right to host this event, and they are handsomely rewarded with future tourist and corporate dollars afterward. It has become a secular holiday in this country, and without question the largest sporting event in the world.

Although Detroit (means “nude dancers across the river” in French) hosted the game, The Look Man spent the pre-Super Bowl week in the city of Lost Wages. He found that if you can't actually go to the game, Vegas is not a bad second option. Not only was the buzz for the game spectacular, Super Bowl weekend is the largest single event in the city, adding about 300 thousand tourists to their population. A third of a million folks don't show up for nothing, and legal sports gambling is a great drawing card.

The sports books had proposition bets that went on for four or five pages. If you could predict the first offensive lineman to be called for holding, you stood to win a bundle. Vegas had the spread at Stillers minus four, with the over at 47. There's an old saying that if something sounds too good to be true, it probably is. Well, Super Bowl XL in Detroit fit that bill.

Because this is the Lunar Year of the Dog, the Asian Five Elements Theory was in strong evidence in Vegas. Wood, fire, earth, metal, and water symbolically represent the five qualities of nature, each controlling the other. The absence of NFL erectile dysfunction ads doomed the wood aspect, which represents the health and well being of the game. The players had a figurative fire in their bellies, probably due to the \$75K stipend for each winning player. The winning team receives metal rings to show their luck and prosperity. Water, symbolizing the process of fluidity and its relationship to emotional dynamics and spirituality is dumped on the winning coach, while the losers cry crocodile tears.

These icons create a subliminal network that goes far beyond mere superstition. The Look Man actually saw gamblers rubbing the fugazi gold coins before hitting the tables. It wasn't exactly the Look Man's magic turnover football, but you gotta believe in something, right?

Without further inscrutable philosophy, the Game in Review.

THE GAME IN REVIEW

Super Bowl Extra Large brought to mind the 1982 game in Detroit between NFC West Champs Frisco and AFC North Champs Cincinnati. This year's contest also featured representatives from those two divisions. Super Bowl XVI was preceded by a bad ice storm and the forecast for XL included possible snow accumulation. Still, the City of Detroit put on enough lipstick to make their town more reminiscent of Mariah Carey than Lassie.

The Look Man figured that the game would follow a simple formula. The Stillers had already beaten the first, second and third seeds in the dominant AFC. Even the Bolts and Baby Backs could easily knock off Seattle, so it figured to be a blowout. More importantly, the Blue Man Group played the “no respect” card all week, so you knew it was going to be a high scoring affair. In addition, here are some other reasons why this one was going to be spayshul:

- 1) Ford (stands for “Flip Over / Read Directions) Field is only a bus ride away from Blitzburgh, meaning a home dome advantage for the Babushka Crowd;
- 2) Jerome (Bus) Bettis was back in his home town, and the food would be flowing;
- 3) After the Niners-Bengals SB fiasco in ‘82, cold weather cities had only one more shot to prove they are worthy of the Big Game.

The Five Elements theory added a little to the mix as well. People born in the lunar Year of the Dog possess the best traits of human nature. They have a deep sense of loyalty, are honest, and inspire confidence from others. On the flip side, Dog People are somewhat selfish, terribly stubborn, and eccentric. They care little for wealth, yet somehow always seem to have money. They can find fault with many things and are noted for their sharp tongues. Dog people make good leaders, but often fail when faced with the big stage. They are compatible with those born in the Years of the Horse, Tiger, and Rabbit, but incompatible with Zebras.

The Look Man has to believe that Mike (The Walrus) Holmgren was born in the Year of the Dog. Bill (Iron Chin) Cowher, on the other hand, was obviously born in the Year of the Chin.

Despite being an emotional goof, Matt (Hair Club for Men) Hasselbeck has a big arm, and the Stillers revealed a tendency to give up the deep ball early versus the Colts and Bengals. If HCFM could get behind the Stillers DBs with play action, this one was going to be a barn burner.

Sure enough, the game began with HCFM hooking up early and often with WR Darrell (D-Jack) Jackson. D-Jack torched Stillers CB Ike Taylor for five catches in the first quarter. The Blue Man Group was rolling with their scripted offense, and things looked bad for the Steel City. At least until the Stillers’ physical D began to exercise its will on the undersized BMG.

HCFM suffered from the dropsies as his receivers either couldn’t hang on to the rock, or simply didn’t have the necessary footwork. He wasn’t alone. Ike Taylor and Michael Boulware each dropped first quarter picks that could have turned the game around. HCFM was able to effectively audiblize several times, catching the Tissue Paper Curtain out of position. For the most part, the TPC stretched, but didn’t tear. Luckily, there was no rain inside the dome.

The Stillers moved Taylor around the field, so as not to allow HCFM to focus on him exclusively. As a result, he began to go to his TE Jerramy (Darren) Stevens. Stevens had talked smack prior to game week, causing the Stillers’ Joey Porter (Paints) to peel. Porter Paints went ballistic on Stevens, saying, “He ain’t even got a real role in a show. I heard they replaced him after two years with another guy. Not to mention that his wife is a real witch, baby.”

Stevens was indeed bewitched in Super Bowl XL, dropping several key passes beginning in the first quarter. The BMG was forced to go for a FG to make it 3-0 after one. Although this didn't seem noteworthy at the time, the Blue Man Group let the Stillers hang around instead of giving them the Mike Tyson haymaker early on. After withstanding numerous Shehawk drives, the Stillers D solidified, culminating in a couple of fourth and ones that Seattle declined to try. The resulting momentum shift allowed the Stillers to catch their offensive breath and get back into the game after some ugly three and outs.

For some reason Cowher tightens up in big games, eschewing the philosophy that got him to the game for a more conservative approach. This game was no different. With the Stillers running game getting stuffed by the front seven of Seattle, Cowher finally allowed an errant Big Ben to throw the rock. Big Ben responded with a couple of sweet passes to Hines (57) Ward, who went Darren Stevens on a potential TD pass.

Faced with a goal to go situation, Cowher decided to insert Jerome (Bus) Bettis. Everyone in the world knew that the Bus was scheduled to make an end zone stop in Super Bowl XL, including the SheHawks defense. They loaded the box and stuffed the run. Since Big Ben is still too raw to call audibles, Cowher should have gone play action on first or second down. Instead, he forced Big Ben to bootleg on a controversial TD run.

Whether BB got in on 3rd and goal is immaterial in the Look Man's book. With Bettis and Ben in the backfield, Cowher would have gone for it on fourth down anyway. The problem was that the zebras were so indecisive on the early penalties. It gave the appearance of impropriety when the Head Linesman delayed his TD call.

Regardless of the call, the Stillers were up 7-3, but the SheHawks had the ball with a buck fifty five remaining in the half. That's when the goofiness began in earnest. The Walrus and HCFM failed to effectively manage the clock in the Two Minute Drill, wasting precious seconds with bad route running, dubious play calling and failure to use timeouts appropriately. The most comical play occurred inside of a minute remaining. When HCFM noticed the Stillers had three down linemen with eight in coverage, he tried to audible with about 15 seconds remaining on the clock. Hasselbeck took too long on the call, giving the Stillers time to get out of a defense that would have allowed a draw play to go for six points. The result was a missed 52 yard FG by the Blue Man Group, and a sense of lost opportunities and momentum for the second half.

The Stillers have a tendency to make better halftime adjustments than their opponents. In the late season 41-0 win over the Browns, they opened the third quarter with a sweet trap draw to (Fast) Willie Parker. The play went for 80 yards and a touchdown, blowing the game wide open.

Apparently the SheHawks missed that piece of videotape, because the Stillers ran that same play to open their first second half possession. Fast Willie waited for the Alan Faneca trap block, and then accelerated through the hole for a record setting 75 yard TD sprint. RT Max Starks gets more than honorable mention, as he sealed MLB Lofa (means "sponge" in Ermitano) Tatupu, and picked off DT Rocky Bernard in the process. Fast Willie not only eclipsed the inimitable Marcus Allen in the longest SB run record book, he positioned himself at the MVP table with one play.

The TD put the Stillers up 14-3, and this one looked like a blowout about to happen. When the Shehawks answered with another errant FG, the Stillers marched down the field setting up a goal to go scenario that would make it 21-3. The big play on the drive came when Big Ben ducked under the Grant Wistrom pass rush, scrambled to the line and threw a bomb to Hines 57 at the goal line. Big Ben looked like he had been in the league about 10 years on the play, on which he verified that he hadn't crossed the line of scrimmage and that he had time to deliver a bomb. Sweet.

Like most gunslingers, Big Ben gambled too much on a Z-corner pattern to Cedric Wilson later in the drive. Again, Cowher goofed with no play action on first or second down. He was more concerned with getting Bettis some love than with winning the game. Big Ben was given a goofy empty backfield pass play on 3rd and goal, and the Blue Man Group responded with a 76 yard interception return by Kelly Herndon.

The pick set up a 16-yard TD pass to Jerramy Stevens, who actually caught the rock. D-Jack ran an underneath route to pick All-Pro safety Troy Polamalu and the rest was history. The play not only put Seattle in position to make it 14-10, but the momentum swing was huge. Instead of a 21-3 lead and the elimination of the Seattle running game, the Stillers were now in a dog fight, courtesy of Cowher's stupidity. He had already cost them Super Bowl XXX, and he now threatened to blow it again.

Alas, the SheHawks lost their poise again, largely due to a bad holding call that negated a first and goal at the three. By this time, Polamalu and the Stillers LBs had been blowing Jerramy Stevens and the rest of the receiving corps up after every pass play. For some insane reason, HCFM kept going to Stevens, and the results were four dropped balls in the game. The Look Man believes that once a guy drops two balls, you give him a lecture in the huddle or on the sidelines. If he responds well, he might get a chance to drop a third. After that, all bets are off, because someone else is getting the rock. You don't even get a chance for four drops.

The Shehawks followed up that drive with some sterling defense despite having lost SS Marquand Manuel to an elbow by a Shehawk coach. Manuel was injured while roughing up Hines 57 out of bounds, and caught a bow to the face when he stumbled. The large band-aid on his chin belied the groin injury declared by the coaching staff. The coach in question was given a tackle on the final stat sheet.

The Stillers were unable to capitalize, and the Blue Man Group marched down the field with a chance to take the lead. A holding call on RT Sean Locklear negated a first and goal from the three and HCFM decided to force a throw into coverage. Ike (and Tina) Taylor went Proud Mary on the pick, and his return yardage was boosted by a phantom low block call on HCFM.

Given great field position after dodging this grande decaf latte, Cowher realized they had better open up the playbook. Since Big Ben couldn't hit the broad side of a barn, they instead called a fake reverse pass. Antwaan Randle El (Sid) threw the prettiest pass of the day to Hines 57 to ice the game. El Sid also became the first WR to complete a pass in the Super Bowl, where conservative play calling is king.

The Stillers defense followed with a nifty CB blitz, and DeShea (Pete) Townsend sacked HCFM with six minutes to play. Townsend had been covering WR Bobby Engram, but

Hasselbeck never looked his way. "We just decided we won't be fooled again," said Townsend. "I told him to meet the new boss, same as the old boss. It was kind of like House Speaker John Boehner taking over for Tom DeLay."

Still alive and with only an eleven point deficit, Seattle had the ball and the chance to send the game to overtime courtesy of a FG, a TD and a two point conversion. Of course, bad clock management bit them again as HCFM threw short passes instead of going for the TD. Worse yet, they ignored a 2nd down FG attempt to set up the onside kick. When their fourth down pass skipped off the hands of Jerramy Stevens, the Stillers opened up the crate of World Champion brims.

When it was all over, Super Bowl XL stood for X(tra)L(ame). Hasselbeck played a fantastic game with no supporting cast. If Stevens catches even two more of those passes, the 'hawks may have been the Lords of Dogtown. Bettis played the role of Walter Payton, failing to get a TD on the big stage. Hines Ward got the keys to the Escalade and a trip to Disneyworld, with a fairly pedestrian performance of 5 catches and 123 yards. Bill Cowher got the 100 pound Doberman off his arm after numerous losses in the AFC Championship and the Bowl. The game, however, was still a dog.

ZEBRA OF THE WEEK

The game kicked off a firestorm of controversy from even casual NFL fans. The Look Man thought the game was called poorly, but it was far from the worst officiating of the 2005 season. When it was all over, missed opportunities by the Shehawks were far more devastating than the calls.

Throughout the playoffs, the league has trotted out numerous officials and almost all of them failed miserably. The exception was Ed (Hulk) Hochuli, who despite a tedious pace acquitted himself nicely. The rest of the herd simply looked like scared lion food on the hoof in the Serengeti.

So instead of inserting the Hulk into the biggest game of the year, the league goes with Bill (Done) Leavy, a gangly goof of a zebra, who never saw a replay he could overturn. Leavy is an ex-cop and firefighter, and his stubborn streak is only exceeded by his angular look. Worse yet, if ever a guy was going to hold a grudge after Mike (The Walrus) Holmgren violated the sanctity of the officials by revealing that the Zebras blew calls in a narrow Week 12 win over the Jynts, Leavy is the poster boy.

Most fans focused on the pass interference call that negated a first quarter D-Jack TD, the Big Ben TD run, and a holding call that wiped out a first and goal from the Stillers three. All of these calls went against the Shehawks, but none of them cost them the game. The Stillers could have pointed to a phantom first quarter offensive pass interference on Cedric (The Entertainer) Wilson and a very close illegal procedure call that stifled their early rhythm.

Vegas had the line at Blitzburgh -4, with the over at 47 points. Referee Bill (Done) Leavy took care of both the former and the latter, by calling anything and everything possible. It was impossible to get into a rhythm based on his constant hankies, and Leavy got more face time than Al Michael or John Madden. Further, the game book shows that zero first downs were garnered by penalty for either squad, supporting the theory that Leavy's crew simply wanted to keep the points spread low. Very unusual.

While many of the zebra's calls were legitimate, the lateness of two calls created an environment that affected the entire contest. Between the early game jitters by both teams and the quick whistles by the zebras, this one turned ugly in a hurry.

The vicious Grant Wistrom sack came after a couple of particularly bad illegal procedure and holding calls on both teams. Holding is rarely called in the Super Bowl, so teams instruct O-linemen to protect the passer by any means possible. After the ticky tack fouls, Stillers O-Tackles Marvel Smith and Max (Iron Man) Starks merely allowed guys to get by and blast Big Ben repeatedly. As a result, he suffered the worst QB rating in SB history for a winning QB.

The Look Man noted the following zebra calls:

- 1) A questionable first quarter procedure call on TE Heath (High Life) Miller; High Life leaves on Big Ben's voice, at the same time as the ball;
- 2) A 3rd quarter holding call on Sean Locklear vs. Clark Haggans; Locklear briefly grabbed Haggans, but let go. Haggans would not have had the sack anyway, so it should have been a no-call;
- 3) the resulting play would've put the ball first and goal at the one yard line; instead HCFM threw a pick AND got penalized for a phantom block below the waist. NFL rules stipulate that no player can cut block another player on the change of possession after a fumble or interception. All HCFM did was tackle Ike Taylor;
- 4) The first quarter offensive PI call on D-Jackson was a good call. He stiff armed Chris (Keep) Hope (Alive), giving himself room to catch the rock cleanly. The back judge did make a late call after being unable to get his hanky out cleanly, creating the appearance that Hope's plaintiff wail was the reason for the call.
- 5) A phantom holding call on a Warrick punt return changed field position and forced the SheHawks out of their natural rhythm.
- 6) The late fumble call by HCFM was overturned by replay, but even the Look Man didn't see that one in real time.
- 7) The third and six delay of game, when Big Ben called timeout and the ball was snapped anyway. BB made a nice play to avoid a fumble, and based on the fact that the call mechanic goes from the Head Linesman to the Referee this call was okay.
- 8) Third quarter offensive PI on Hines 57 on the drive that made it 21-10; Ward nearly took Herndon's head off, and the space he created allowed him to convert a first down.

The Shehawks led in Time of Possession, yardage, QB rating, and turnover ratio and still lost 21-10, largely due to the uneven coaching by the Walrus. Afterwards, Holmgren had a bad case of walrus gumboot, as he was unable to get his team to Come Together.

At the post game rally at Quest Field, he said, "I knew we were going to have to face the Stillers, but I didn't know we were going to face the guys in the striped shirts as well."



Did BJ Waggoner have a uniform violation?

The NFL will likely send Mike an invoice for these comments, but it is interesting that Back Judge Bob Waggoner makes his home in suburban Blitzburgh.

LAGNIAPPE:

Coaching Cowardice:

Many would call the coaching battle between the Walrus and the Chin epic. The Look Man thought it was terrible. Instead of maintaining the river boat gambling style that won eight in a row for the Stillers, Cowher went straight conservative. He didn't allow Big Ben to change plays at the line, and Seattle stacked the box with seven and eight. The resulting two yards and a cloud of dust offense was pretty boring to watch.

On the other side, Walrus failed to gamble on two fourth and one calls that would have shown that he had faith in his offense. After the second one, the Stillers gained offensive momentum and marched right down to make it 7-3. Even though his defense had been playing lights out, and his running back was the MVP of the league, the Walrus refused to gamble and it cost him the game.

Together, Walrus and Iron Chin called perhaps the worst play calls in the history of the Super Bowl. No chance these guys will be sitting around drinking tranya together after the Walrus refused to meet him at midfield following the contest.

Hanguk Jeonjaeng:

Hines Ward will get a free visit to his South Korea after his MVP trip to Orlando. It turns out that he is of African American and Korean descent. Ward's performance is even more stunning in light of the fact that he suffered a torn AC joint in his shoulder in the playoffs. He can be excused for missing a first quarter TD that he normally makes in his sleep.

Ward is expected to speak to the plight of Amerasian children during his visit. Most interracial Korean kids drop out of school due to tremendous bigotry. Either that, or the poor quality of kim chee in the public school cafeterias.

Quick Hits:

Former Bengal WR Peter (P-Dub) Warrick looked good on punt returns, and he could've been the MVP had he broken one. Of course, the zebras would never have allowed it.

Still, P-Dub looked good with his lime green gloves. All he needs now are some Chad Johnson Gold Tone dentures.

Randle El (Sid) nearly got vivisected on one of his returns and his return seemed unlikely. The trainers gave him the needle and he returned to throw a TD to Ward.

Stillers CB Ike Taylor and El Sid are both Unrestricted Free Agents in 2006. El Sid is asking for big money from Chicago, and he could be pricing himself out of their plans. Taylor had a decent game, and he would look great in a Browns' uniform. As usual, the Stillers stand to lose solid talent, but Cowher always seems to coach his guys up with outstanding results.

The Greatest MVP (Snub) Ever?

When neither Joe Montana nor Terry Bradshaw appeared in the pre-Super Bowl MVP presentations, it cast a pall on what should have been a super special moment. While it was great to see all of the old timers, these two guys are the greatest of the great.

The beef centered on the honorarium for the event. Each MVP received \$1,000 plus first class airfare, rental car, two game tickets, two tickets to the Friday night commissioner's party, two tickets to a Saturday night party, two tickets to a Sunday tailgate party, and lodging. Joe wanted a guaranteed stipend to make it worth his while to travel to cold weather Detroit. Compared to some MVPs, Joe is doing pretty well, and it seems that just for what the game has given him, he could have shown up.

Bradshaw made his own bed by appearing on the NFL Network the week previous. He did not request permission to do so, and per the terms of his contract with Fox Sports he should have. Still, Fox would have capitulated in this case for sure.

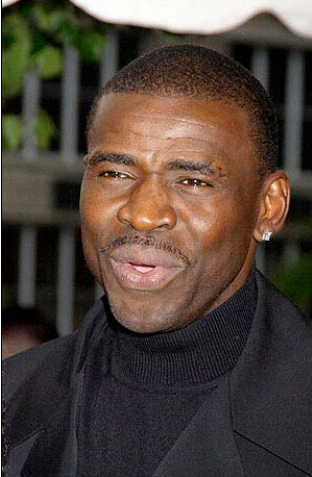
All in all, it was a sad day, and given the shorter lifespans of NFL players, there is no guarantee that this moment will ever be capable of re-creation. More importantly, the Look Man wondered why Neil O'Donnell wasn't representing for his role in Super Bowl XXX. Everyone knows that he and Dallas CB Larry Brown actually shared that MVP award.

Hall of Very Good:

The Look Man was very pleased to see Warren Moon get into the Hall of Fame. Not only are Moon's numbers better than first ballot HOFer Dan Fouts, he won 5 Grey Cups in the CFL after the NFL didn't draft him. It is, after all, the Professional Football Hall of Fame.

Moon threw for over 49,000 yards, including 3 years of over 4,000 passing yards. This last feat was achieved only by the Two Dans - Fouts and Marino, both of whom are in the Hall. Further, Moon did it with less talented receivers AND he took more punishment doing it in the Chuck and Duck offenses at Houston and Minnesota.

While Moon deserves congratulations, the old complaint of anti-Dallas bias has been quashed with the admission of OL Rayfield Wright and QB Troy (Ounce) Aikman. Emmitt (Catch 22) Smith is a lock for 2006, and Michael Irvin's off field issues may affect his induction. But not as much as the likelihood that he would try to re-tailor the already garish yellow jacket at his induction.



The Playmaker is never speechless

"It's not about me. It's about Troy," said the Playmaker afterwards. "I'm so happy because I'm part of that story. Last year this time, I was in my room crying. I couldn't move. Now, I'm out here and I'm going to laugh and enjoy this moment for Troy. "The Look Man thinks if the words "I" and "me" were deleted from the English language, Irvin would be unable to honor his contract with ESPN.

Former teammate Catch 22 was less diplomatic regarding the perceived snub. Smith believes Irvin has been unjustly denied for his off-field legal troubles. "This is the Pro Football Hall of Fame, not the Life Hall of Fame," said Smith. "Mike, pass me that blow when you finish. Oh, are we still on the record here?!"

CELEBRITY OBIT OF THE WEEK

Celebrity deaths typically occur in threes, and this last couple of weeks is no different with the passings of Chris Penn, "Grandpa" Al Lewis and Coretta Scott King. The Look Man won't go into a lot of detail, but it is fitting that Mrs. King passed during the celebration of Black History Month. If nothing else, the eulogies at her funeral served to remind us of important issues in our country.

The Look Man particularly enjoyed the address by the Reverend Joseph Lowery, whose poetic license extended to the War in Iraq. Lowery went Don King with, "We know now there were no weapons of mass destruction over there. But Coretta knew and we knew that there are weapons of misdirection right down here. Millions without health insurance. Poverty abounds. For war, billions more, but no more for the poor."



Behind Every Great Man...

Former President Jimmy Carter made reference to the wiretaps of Dr. Martin Luther King and their relevance to today's NSA scandal. But it was Bill Clinton who stole the show at the six hour event. As the first African American president, he drew thunderous applause with the longest speech of the four presidents, apparently without notes. "I don't want us to forget that there's a woman in there," said Clinton, pointing to King's casket. "Not a symbol, a real woman who lived and breathed and got angry and got hurt and had dreams and disappointments."

Even Republicans had to give it up for Clinton's performance. "Clinton's remarks were moving and strong," said one GOP insider. "Our people were saying, 'My gosh, he's so good.'" The White House was ticked at the biting comments, saying, "It was not an appropriate place for political potshots. We would have rather they made them down in GITMO, where no one could hear them scream."

EPILOGUE

The 2005 NFL season will not go down in history as one of the league's finest. Blitzburgh became the first sixth seed to win it all, defeating the best in the conference to do so. Still, the game was marred by horrible officiating, bad sportsmanship, and quite possibly the worst halftime entertainment in history. The Look Man uncovered rumors that the league is seeking Mick Jagger as a referee in 2006. He passes the age requirement, and is in much better shape than many of the zebras. Not to mention that he would look great in a black and white striped belly shirt.

The off-season poses several challenges for the NFL. First and foremost, they must get a Collective Bargaining Agreement in place. Failure to do so will result in the NFL becoming Major League Baseball.

Secondly, the Competition Committee must rectify some glaring issues with officiating. Low, late hits on QBs is a biggie, but defining what constitutes an NFL reception is even more important. Lastly, instant replay needs to be overhauled, or at a minimum, the Zebras need training in implementing Down by Contact, turnover and pass interference guidelines.

The Look Man does not support the recent move to make zebras full time NFL employees. The NBA and MLB have already done this and it hasn't solved their officiating problems. One need look no further than Dallas Mavericks owner Mark

Cuban's fines to see that questioning the implementation of the rules leads to a healthy dialogue and growth for the sport. Still, after numerous blatantly horrible calls in the regular and post season, something has to give.

So as we head into another off-season, the Look Man wishes each of you a happy 2006. Free agency begins March 1, and the April draft will be a lively time for all true football fans.

Peace,

The Look Man

"Only if you don't count 'Top Gun.'" -- Actor Val Kilmer, when asked if he ever played a gay character before his new movie "Kiss Kiss Bang Bang"