

## THE TEN BEST SUPER BOWLS

By Bob Carroll  
Courtesy of Total Sports

It's an article of faith among the jaded that the least interesting football game all season is the Super Bowl. Small wonder. The whole season has pointed toward this single meeting. By kickoff, enough hype has been expended to elect three Presidents, introduce your state's latest Lotto game, and launch a new version of Windows. That the game's actual blocking, tackling, and kicking will prove a letdown is as likely as Liz's next marriage not being her last.

The jaded can cite a goodly number of blow-outs as evidence that the Roman-numeraled game sucks, but blow-outs have occurred in championship games since long before anyone thought of modifying Bowl with the S-word. That 73-0 lesson the Bears taught the Redskins in 1940 -- still the most one-sided NFL score ever -- was for the championship.

In reality, it's probably surprising that so many Super Bowls have been worth watching. How many? Well, certainly one out of three. And with Number XXX in the till, that means at least ten.

Of course, "worth watching" can mean different things to different football aficionados. There are Bears fans who loved every last second of XX when the Bruins dismantled the Pitiful Pats 46-10. In Dallas, they were still tuned in to XXVII long after most of us had started surfing USA and Nick at Night for a good run.

But by Supe Time, most of us have seen our favorite team eliminated in a playoff (or by Week Six if you favor the Jets). All we can root for in the Big Game is a close contest with a fair share of exciting plays. (Some people still root for an AFC victory, but realistic fans just hope a space ship will land at the fifty-yard line.)

So, in picking the ten best Super Bowls, the things we wanted were an outcome in doubt until late, a few superhuman performances, and maybe a touch of historical importance.

Here are our choices in Letterman, 10-down order:

### NUMBER 10: SUPER BOWL XVII - RIGGO AND THE HOGS

January 30, 1983, at Rose Bowl, Pasadena, CA

Attendance: 103,667

Miami Dolphins	.....	7	10	0	0	-	17
Washington Redskins	.....	0	10	3	14	-	27

Mia: Cefelo, 76-yard pass from Woodley. XP: Von Schamann

Was: FG Moseley 31 yards

Mia: FG Von Schamann 20 yards

Was: Garrett, 4-yard pass from Theismann. XP: Moseley

Mia: Walker, 98-yard kickoff return. XP: Von Schamann

Was: FG Moseley 20 yards.

Was: Riggins 43-yard run. XP: Moseley

Was: Brown, 6-yard pass from Theismann. XP: Moseley

Neither the Redskins nor the Dolphins figured to make it to the Super Bowl in most experts' pre-season evaluations. So when Joe Gibbs' 'Skins and Don Shula's Fish surfaced in Pasadena, they were both labled overachievers. Determination can take a team a long way, but, as Washington would show, it never hurts if Determination has a terrific offensive line in front of it.

The Dolphins won the first half on the strength of two spectacular plays by players whose names are most likely to turn up today in trivia contests. David Woodley ("Who was the Dolphins' quarterback before Dan Marino?") completed only four of fourteen passes on the day, but one of them was a 76-yard bomb

## THE COFFIN CORNER: Vol. 18, No. 1 (1996)

---

to Jim Cefalo ("Who caught the pass that accounted for more than three-quarters of the Dolphins' 97 yards passing?") at 6:49 of the first period.

In the second quarter, Washington narrowed the score to 7-3 on a 31-yard field goal by Mark Moseley, but Uwe von Schammann matched him with a 20-yard effort with six minutes left in the half. The Redskins finally pulled even at 10-10 with only 1:51 to go when Joe Theismann capped an 80-yard drive by flipping a four-yard scoring pass to wide receiver Alvin Garrett. The tie barely outlasted the commercial break. On the ensuing kickoff, Miami's Fulton Walker ("Who had his record for longest kickoff return in a Super Bowl tied by Andre Coleman in XXIX?") brought the ball all the way back for a 98-yard touchdown to give the Fish a 17-10 halftime lead.

The only scoring in the third quarter came on Moseley's 20-yard field goal, but the Redskins' crunching ground game began to tell on the Dolphins. Washington runners would eventually notch a new Super Bowl high with 276 rushing yards as the "Hogs," the Redskins' huge offensive line, outmuscled the Dolphins' "Killer Bees" defense.

Chief of the Redskin rushers was big fullback John Riggins, coming off a 140-yard effort in the NFC Championship Game. Five minutes into the final period, a Redskins drive stalled at fourth-and-inches on the Miami 43. Coach Gibbs gutted it up and ordered Riggins to make the yardage off left tackle. In a classic example of overachievement, Riggio rumbled through a hole bigger than the one that sank the Titanic, trampled Miami's Don McNeal into the Pasadena sod, and continued on his way until he crossed the goal line. It was the play of the game and the largest chunk of MVP Riggins' record 166 rushing yards.

Washington's 20-17 lead was its first of the day. Miami's desperate air attempts to come back in the final ten minutes went for nought. Meanwhile, Riggins and the Hogs gave lessons on how to protect a lead by running the ball. A late six-yard touchdown pass from Theismann to Charlie Brown to make the final 27-17 just added peanuts on the sundae.

### NUMBER 9: SUPER BOWL XIV - DAVID FOR THREE-QUARTERS

January 20, 1980, at Rose Bowl, Pasadena, CA

Attendance: 103,985

Los Angeles Rams	.....	7	6	6	0	-	19
Pittsburgh Steelers	.....	3	7	7	14	-	31

Pit : FG Bahr 41 yards

Rams: Bryant, 1-yard run. XP: Corral

Pit : Harris, 1-yard run. XP: Bahr

Rams: FG Corral 31 yards

Rams: FG Corral 45 yards

Pit : Swann, 47-yard pass from Bradshaw. XP: Bahr

Rams: R.Smith, 24-yard pass from McCutcheon.XP:Corral kick failed

Pit : Stallworth, 73-yard pass from Bradshaw. XP: Bahr kick

Pit : Harris, 1-yard run. XP: Bahr

The Los Angeles Rams had won their division with a mediocre 9-7 mark only because no one else in the West could get above .500. Five teams in the other NFC divisions won more regular season games. Then the pesky Rams played the game of their lives to knock off Dallas 21-19 in the first round of playoffs and sneaked through the NFC championship with a boring 9-0 yawner over Tampa Bay. Meanwhile, the AFC was represented by the proud Pittsburgh Steelers, victors in three of the previous five Super Bowls and no more than one win away from consensus choice of "Team of the Decade." Pittsburgh's 12-4 record was as good as it got for the season, and they'd coasted through the playoffs without getting their hair mussed. If ever a Super Bowl looked like a blow-out going in, this was it.

So anyone who tuned in late -- say at the start of the fourth quarter -- would have been nonplussed to see the Rams ahead by two points. Could such things be?

They could. Steelers quarterback Terry Bradshaw threw three drive-stopping interceptions, and the Steel Curtain defense missed injured All-Pro linebacker Jack Ham. But mostly the Rams' courageous showing was based on their own refusal to admit they had no chance.

# THE COFFIN CORNER: Vol. 18, No. 1 (1996)

---

The Steelers got off to a lead on Matt Bahr's 41-yard first quarter field goal, but the Rams drove down the field to Cullen Bryant's one-yard touchdown plunge to take a 7-3 lead before the period ended.

Pittsburgh returned to the anticipated script with an answering drive. Franco Harris capped it to bring the score to 10-7. The Rams defense, led by end Jack Youngblood playing on a leg broken in the playoffs, snuffed the Steelers for the rest of the quarter while Frank Corral gave them field goals of 31 and 45 yards to put the Angelinos in front 13-10 at the half.

Determined to put a stop to the the Rams' pretensions, Pittsburgh zapped them with a Bradshaw-to-Lynn Swann touchdown pass that went for 47 well-chosen yards. Pittsburgh 17-13. "Take THAT!" said Goliath to David. Unruffled, Vince Ferragamo, the Rams' "who's he?" quarterback, connected on a 50-yard bomb to Billy Waddy that moved the ball to the Steeler 24. Then running back Lawrence McCutcheon threw a halfback option pass (no doubt cribbed from Alonzo Stagg's playbook) to Ron Smith for the remaining two dozen yards, and L.A. was back in front 19-17.

Just when L.A. fans were thinking they might see the greatest upset since Marty took best picture, the Steelers became the Steelers again. Three minutes into the final quarter, Bradshaw arched a long pass so high it looked like it might bring rain. What it actually brought was a go-ahead touchdown when John Stallworth sprinted behind the Rams' secondary and took it in stride for a 73-yard back-breaker.

The Rams got as far as the Pittsburgh 32 before Jack Lambert intercepted a Ferragamo pass. Bradshaw moved his team briskly down the field to an icing touchdown on another long pass to Stallworth and a pass interference. Franco Harris did the honors with a one-yard plunge to make the final score 31-19.

Despite his three interceptions, Bradshaw was chosen MVP for the second year in a row. His 309 passing yards on 21 attempts encompassed most of the Steelers' key plays, as he set career Super Bowl records for pass yardage (932) and touchdowns (9). The Rams' gutsy performance earned them more respect than they'd garnered during the season. It was just their misfortune to face a Goliath who kept getting back up.

## **NUMBER 8: SUPER BOWL VII - PERFECT, EXCEPT FOR ....**

January 14, 1973, at Memorial Coliseum, Los Angeles, CA

Attendance: 90,182

Miami Dolphins .....	7	7	0	0	-	14
Washington Redskins .....	0	0	0	7	-	7

Mia: Twilley. 28-yard pass from Griese. XP: Yepremian

Mia: Kiick, 1-yard run. XP: Yepremian

Was: Bass, 49-yard fumble return. XP: Knight

Although the game had arguably the most memorable play in Super Bowl history, many would mark it down as a rather dull affair. But that was only when it's considered in a vacuum. Considering what was happening behind the X's and O's, it was a thriller.

On the NFC side was Coach George Allen's "Over-the-Hill-Gang," sometimes known as the Washington Redskins. Allen had collected a roster of gray-bearded veterans with an aggregate age that looked like a phone number. Despite their proximity to thanks- and-here's-a-gold-watch time, the Gang played with an enthusiasm that would have put an acned teenager to shame, thanks to Allen's weekly fire-and-brimstone harangues. They'd lost a mere three games through the 1972 season, but a glance at the calender suggested that this would be their last chance to write their names in history. They went into Super Bowl VII carrying the hearts and hopes of every football fan old enough to remember Wendell Wilkie.

The AFC presented the cool, collected, precise, workman-like, and -- dammit! -- young (at least by comparison) Miami Dolphins of Don Shula. Their winning persona (again by comparison with the Redskins' frenzy) showed all the fire of an accountant adding up a day's receipts. Starting quarterback Bob Griese even wore glasses on the field! Still, there was no arguing with success, and the Dolphins had been totally successful all season. Sixteen straight wins, counting two in the playoffs. No NFL team had ever gone a whole perfect season. The Fish were one win away.

## THE COFFIN CORNER: Vol. 18, No. 1 (1996)

---

The Dolphins built up a 14-0 lead at the half. Griese hit Howard Twilley for a 28-yard touchdown just before the first quarter ended. Then in the second period, Jim Kiick went over from a yard out to cap a long Miami drive. Meanwhile, the Miami defense, led by tackle Manny Fernandez, held the Redskins' runners in check and treated quarterback Billy Kilmer shabbily. On the day, Billy would throw three interceptions, be sacked twice, and be harried continuously. Miami defensive back Jake Scott who had two of the interceptions was named game MVP.

Although the Dolphins had dominated the first half, Washington was only a break or two away. They started to come on in the second half as Larry Brown began running for consistent gains and Kilmer connected on several passes. Curt Knight didn't help the cause by missing a 32-yard field goal wide right, but hope sprang eternal in pacemakered hearts as the final quarter began. Surely Washington's geriatric Gang would produce one last ounce of what used-to-be and send those upstart kids back to Miami saddened but wiser?

But the kids hung in, and the geezers couldn't quite get into the end zone. Then with barely more than two minutes left, Miami's Cypriot tie-maker and kicker, Garo Yepremian, trotted onto the field to kick a 42-yard field goal that would ice the game once and for all.

Except the kick was blocked. Except Yepremian picked up the rolling ball. Except he decided to throw a pass. Except he hurled the spheroid six inches up and two feet out. Except Redskins' defensive back Mike Bass gathered in the gift and raced 49 yards for a Washington touchdown. Perhaps a worse pass will someday be thrown in a football game, but odds are the thrower will still have his baby teeth. Officially, Garo's "thing" was ruled a fumble.

Down by only a touchdown, the 'Skins had two minutes to produce a whirlwind comeback against what would obviously be a flustered school of Dolphins. Except the Dolphins didn't fluster. They just went back to work like good C.P.A.'s and closed out the first -- and so far -- only seventeen-and-oh season in NFL history.

### NUMBER 7: SUPER BOWL X - LONG GONE SWANN

January 18, 1976, at Orange Bowl, FL

Attendance: 80,187

Dallas Cowboys .....	7	3	0	7	-	17
Pittsburgh Steelers .....	7	0	0	14	-	21

Dal: D.Pearson, 29-yard pass from Staubach. XP: Fritsch

Pit: Grossman, 7-yard pass from Bradshaw. XP: Gerella

Dal: FG Fritsch 36 yards

Pit: Safety, Harrison blocked Hoopes' kick through the end zone

Pit: FG Gerela 36 yards

Pit: FG Gerela 18 yards

Pit: Swann, 64-yard pass from Bradshaw. XP: Gerela kick failed

Dal: P.Howard, 34-yard pass from Staubach. XP: Fritsch

What at the time were the two most popular teams in the NFL met in Super Bowl X, and the contrast between their styles was greater than that of their jerseys. Only four years away from their victory in Super Bowl VI, the glitzy, white-clad Dallas Cowboys -- "America's Team," if you will -- combined a high tech offense and a state-of-the-art flex defense to put on a dazzling show each Sunday. They were easy to like, and for once they even had an underdog aura, having reached the Big Game after starting as a playoff wild card. The Pittsburgh Steelers, wearing bad-guy black to defend their Super Bowl win of the year before, lived by a steel hard defense occasionally spelled by a grind-it-out running attack that would have been at home in the 1930s.

The Cowboys struck first. Roger Staubach zeroed in on Drew Pearson for a 29-yard touchdown pass. Before the first quarter ended, Pittsburgh evened the score on a seven-yard pass from Terry Bradshaw to tight end Randy Grossman. Setting up the score was a 32-yard pass to Steeler receiver Lynn Swann on which he outleaped a Dallas defender and then magically kept both feet inside the sideline to make his catch legal. Going into the game, Swann's status had been questionable because of a concussion he'd suffered in the AFC championship game. In practice, he'd dropped every pass thrown to him.

# THE COFFIN CORNER: Vol. 18, No. 1 (1996)

---

The second quarter was scoreless until Cowboy Toni Fritsch booted a 36-yard field goal with only fifteen seconds left on the clock. Earlier, Pittsburgh's Roy Gerela, playing at less than a hundred percent because of a cracked rib he'd earned with a tackle on the opening kickoff, shanked a field goal try. Dallas safety Cliff Harris mockingly patted him on the helmet only to be unceremoniously dumped on his hip pads by an irate Jack Lambert. Macho displays aside, Dallas went to the locker room with a 10-7 lead.

The defenses continued to dominate in the third quarter which saw three fewer points scored than the second. Pittsburgh sacked Staubach seven times during the game and forced him to scramble on five other occasions. Moreover, they pressured him into three interceptions, and straight arrow Staubach normally threw interceptions about as often as he used gutter language.

The fourth quarter lacked only the kitchen sink. First, Steeler reserve fullback Reggie Harrison blocked Mitch Hoopes' punt. The ball rolled through the end zone for a safety to cut the score to 10-9. Gerela, who'd donned a corset to protect his rib, regained his kicking touch with field goals of 36 and 18 yards to put the Steelers in front 15-10. With 3:02 left, Bradshaw lofted a long pass to game MVP Swann who caught the ball at the five and took it over the goal line to complete a 64-yard lightning strike. Swann finished the day with 161 yards on four catches, a tidy 40.3 average per catch. Bradshaw only saw the TD on film; he'd been knocked loopy by the Dallas pass rush. Gerela missed the extra point.

Now it was Dallas' turn with Captain Comeback Staubach in charge. It took Roger Relentless only 1:14 to get the touchdown back, completing a drive with a 34-yard bullseye to Percy Howard -- exactly one more pass than Howard caught during the regular season.

Terry Hanratty replaced the woozy Bradshaw, but the Steelers were stalled fourth-and-nine at the Dallas 41 with almost a minute and a half to go. Coach Noll feared a blocked kick and called for a Rocky Bleier run that gained only two yards. Noll was gambling that his defense could stop the Cowboys.

Only four points down, 21-17, Staubach had the ball back with more time than he usually needed to negotiate 61 yards. Down the field came the Cowboys, but with no timeouts remaining for Dallas, the clock kept running. With five seconds left, Staubach launched his final pass into the end zone. Steeler Mike Wagner batted the ball but it was caught -- by another Steeler, Glen Edwards. Pittsburgh had its second straight Super Bowl win.

## **NUMBER 6: SUPER BOWL V - "YOU TAKE IT. NO, YOU ...."**

January 17, 1971, at Orange Bowl, Miami, FL

Attendance: 79,204

Baltimore Colts .....	0	6	0	10	-	16
Dallas Cowboys .....	3	10	0	0	-	13

Dal: FG Clark 14 yards

Dal: FG Clark 30 yards

Bal: Mackey, 75-yard from Unitas. XP: O'Brien kick blocked

Dal: Thomas, 7-yard pass from Morton. XP: Clark

Bal: Nowatzke, 2-yard run. XP: O'Brien

Bal: FG O'Brien 32 yards

This was the Super Bowl no one wanted to win. At least, that's how it seemed. Between them, the Baltimore Colts and Dallas Cowboys had fourteen penalties and ten turnovers. Fans all over the country kept asking themselves: "Can these be the two best teams in pro football?"

The offenses were so offensive that the MVP award went to a defensive player on the LOSING side! Cowboy linebacker Chuck Howley intercepted two Baltimore passes, caused a Colts fumble, and made more than his share of tackles.

But if the game was less than artistic, it made up for it by hanging in doubt right up to the last few seconds.

The merger between the NFL and the American Football League had been completed in 1970 with Pittsburgh, Cleveland, and Baltimore moving from their old haunts to the AFC. The Colts promptly took to their new surroundings by winning the conference. Even though the old AFL had two Super Bowl

## THE COFFIN CORNER: Vol. 18, No. 1 (1996)

---

victories in a row, NFL partisans could take consolation in the fact that one of their old teams was bound to win the rubber game.

Defense and mistakes dominated the first quarter, but Dallas managed to put three points on the board with a 14-yard Mike Clark field goal. Early in the second quarter, Clark added a 30-yarder to bring the score to 6-0 Cowboys.

A few moments later came the play that most typified the afternoon. Colts quarterback John Unitas launched a long pass down the center meant for receiver Eddie Hinton. Hinton reached for it and then showed the crowd what could happen if his hands were made of cast iron. Dallas defender Mel Renfro took a turn at the deflected football but only succeeded in changing its direction slightly. Like a fat pigeon coming to roost, the ball fell tenderly into the hands of Colts tight end John Mackey who suppressed his surprise in time to run the remaining distance into the end zone and complete a 75-yard comedy act. The coda came when Jim O'Brien's placekick was blocked to leave the score knotted at six.

The next time Baltimore got the ball, Unitas received a sound thwacking to the ribs from Cowboy George Andrie. The blow was sufficient to separate Johnny U. from the football at the 29-yard line and to send him to the sideline for the remainder of the day. Craig Morton, suffering through a 12-for-26, three interception passing day, moved his team to the seven where, despite a sore arm, he was able to lay a touchdown pass into the hands of Duane Thomas. After the reliable Clark did his duty, the score stood 13-6 at the half.

Those hoping for more stylish play in the second half were abashed to see Baltimore's Jim Duncan fumble away the kickoff. Dallas then drove to the shadow of the goal line where Thomas fumbled the ball back at the one. After that, things settled into a pattern of futility, with neither Morton nor Earl Morrall, subbing for Unitas, able to move his team.

But, with about eight minutes to go, Morton passed to Walt Garrison who batted the ball to Baltimore's Rich Volk at the Dallas twenty. Volk ran it back to the three, from whence Tom Nowatzke bulled his way over for a touchdown. O'Brien's kick tied the game, making the prospect of overtime ineptitude a frightening possibility.

But Morton was up to the challenge. With only 1:09 left he threw a pass to Mike Curtis at the Dallas 41, perhaps not suspecting that Curtis played for the Colts. Curtis waltzed to the 28. Two running plays did nothing but collect seconds from the clock. Then, with five precious ticks remaining, O'Brien kicked a 32-yard field goal to settle the game in favor of the Colts, 16-13.

### **NUMBER 5: SUPER BOWL XVI - Win the Battle, Lose the War**

January 24, 1982, at Pontiac Silverdome, Pontiac, MI

Attendance: 81,270

San Francisco 49ers	.....	7	13	0	6	-	26
Cincinnati Bengals	.....	0	0	7	14	-	21

SF : Montana, 1-yard run. XP: Wersching

SF : Cooper, 11-yard pass from Montana. XP: Wersching

SF : FG Wersching 22 yards

SF : FG Wersching 26 yards

Cin: Anderson, 5-yard run. XP: Breech

Cin: Ross, 4-yard pass from Anderson. XP: Breech

SF : FG Wersching 40 yards

SF : FG Wersching 23 yards

Cin: Ross, 3-yard pass from Anderson. XP: Breech

The first Super Bowl played in the North saw the Cincinnati Bengals win the battle of statistics but lose the game. San Francisco led all the way and won 26-21 primarily because they held onto the ball.

The 49ers started off with butterfingers themselves, as Amos Lawrence fumbled the opening kickoff to the Bengals at San Francisco's 26. But the Bengals returned the favor when Ken Anderson threw an interception. The 49ers then drove 68 yards to a first-quarter touchdown. The key play was a flea flicker with third-and-one at the Cincinnati 47. Joe Montana handed off to Ricky Patton who gave the ball to

## THE COFFIN CORNER: Vol. 18, No. 1 (1996)

---

Freddie Solomon who pitched it back to Montana who passed for 14 yards to tight end Charle Young. Montana ran the last yard of the drive to score.

San Francisco added to its lead in the second quarter by driving 92 yards to score after a Bengal fumble. An 11-yard, Montana-to-Earl Cooper pass brought the score. Then, as the half was ending, the 49ers tagged on two Ray Wersching field goals, both set up by Cincinnati fumbles.

Down 20-0 and on the verge of being blown out, the Bengals came roaring back in the second half. Anderson drove his team 83 yards in nine plays. He scored the touchdown himself on a five-yard run. Later in the quarter, Cincinnati drove from midfield to a first-and-goal at the three. On first down, big Pete Johnson picked up two-thirds of the distance. But that was it. Three more running plays went for naught and San Francisco took over.

The goal line stand should have broken Cincinnati, but a few minutes later, Anderson threw a short pass to Dan Ross for a touchdown to make the score 21-14 with more than ten minutes remaining.

Wersching quickly dashed Cincinnati's hopes by kicking two more field goals, one good for 40 yards.

The Bengals weren't quite dead. With 16 seconds left, Anderson hit Ross with another short touchdown toss. There was just enough time for a successful on-side kick and a Hail-Mary pass. That plan was spoiled when San Francisco recovered the kick and ran out the clock.

Montana, who completed 14 of 22 passes for 157 yards and a touchdown, was named MVP. Anderson had two TD passes on 25 out of 34 and 300 yards, but he also threw two costly interceptions.

### **NUMBER 4: SUPER BOWL III - "I Guarantee It!"**

January 12, 1969, Orange Bowl, Miami, FL

Attendance: 75,377

New York Jets .....	0	7	6	3	-	16
Baltimore Colts .....	0	0	0	7	-	7

NYJ: Snell, 4-yard run. XP: Turner

NYJ: FG Turner 32 yards

NYJ: FG Turner 30 yards

NYJ: FG Turner 9 yards

Bal: Hill, 1-yard run. XP: Michaels

At a Miami Touchdown Club dinner three days before the third Super Bowl, Jets quarterback Joe Namath told the audience: "We're going to win Sunday. I guarantee you." Hischutzpah made national headlines, though most experts passed it off as bluster or self-delusion.

Not only had the NFL won the first two Super Bowls handily, but the 13-1 Baltimore Colts were considered one of the greatest teams in league history. Namath's Jets were generally regarded as only the third-best in the American Football League. One columnist predicted a 55-0 Colts win, and bettors could get 18-to-20 points.

From the opening kickoff, the Jets established a strong ground game, led by 220-pound fullback Matt Snell. Meanwhile, the Colts couldn't get untracked; quarterback Earl Morrall, the NFL's regular-season MVP, had one of the worst games of his career. For the day, he was 6 for 17 for 71 yards and three interceptions. By the third quarter, he was replaced by Johnny Unitas who'd missed most of the season with an elbow injury.

In the second quarter, Snell's 35 yards on six carries and Namath's four completions for 43 more made up most of an 80-yard drive that culminated in Snell's four-yard plunge for a touchdown. The 7-0 lead stood to halftime. Not only had the Jets' notoriously porous pass defense held the high-flying Colts in check, but the AFL team had actually out-muscled the NFL bullies. Could it continue for two more quarters?

Yes! The Jets continued to build their lead in three-point increments. Jim Turner kicked field goals of 32, 30, and nine yards to make it 16-0 in the fourth quarter.

## THE COFFIN CORNER: Vol. 18, No. 1 (1996)

---

The Colts finally got on the scoreboard with 3:19 left. Jerry Hill cracked over from the one-yard-line to complete an 80-yard drive. A successful on-side kick gave the ball back to Baltimore, but they couldn't capitalize.

Namath, who completed 17 of 28 for 206 yards, was voted the MVP, but equally deserving was Snell who rushed for 121 yards on 30 carries and caught four passes for 40 more.

The suspense of an upset-in-the-making overshadowed the actual play on the field, but the most significant thing about Super Bowl III was that it established the AFL as a worthy partner of the NFL in the merger that would be finalized in 1970.

### NUMBER 3: SUPER BOWL XXIII - Comeback!

January 22, 1989, Joe Robbie Stadium, Miami, FL

Attendance: 75,129

Cincinnati Bengals	.....	0	3	10	3	-	16
San Francisco 49ers	.....	3	0	3	14	-	20

SF : FG Cofer 41 yards

Cin: FG Breech 34 yards

Cin: FG Breech 43 yards

SF : FG Cofer 32 yards

Cin: Jennings, 93-yard kickoff return. XP: Breech

SF : Rice, 14-yard pass from Montana. XP: Cofer

Cin: FG Breech 40 yards

SF : Taylor, 10-yard pass from Montana. XP: Cofer

After five blow-outs in a row, the last Super Bowl played in the eighties was refreshingly suspenseful and exciting. The San Francisco 49ers had two Super Bowl victories under their belts -- XVI and XIX -- and hoped to become the first NFC team to win three. The Cincinnati Bengals were going for their first Roman numerated win, having been previously frustrated in Number XVI by these same 49ers.

The first half was a defensive battle punctuated by two key injuries. San Francisco had barely settled in after receiving the opening kickoff when it lost one of the NFL's top offensive tackles, Steve Wallace, to a broken ankle. A few minutes later, after the teams had exchanged punts, Cincinnati's All-Pro nose tackle Tim Krumrie broke his leg in a freak accident. He planted his left foot, swung his right leg around, and it snapped in two places. The sight of Krumrie's leg bent like an L at the shin was shown several times in slow-motion on television while fans all over the country felt their stomach's churn.

All the scoring in the first half was done with field goals. The 49ers' Mike Cofer hit from 41 yards out in the first quarter, and the Bengals' Jim Breech connected for 34 yards in the second period. The 3-3 count at intermission was the first time a Super Bowl had been tied at the half.

Cincinnati took the lead early in the third quarter. They drove 61 yards paced two by Boomer Esiason-to-Cris Collinsworth passes. When the San Francisco defense stiffened, Breech delivered a 43-yard field goal. With a couple minutes left in the period, 49ers linebacker Bill Romanowski intercepted an Esiason pass. Cofer tied the score again with three points from the 32.

San Francisco kicked off, and Cincinnati's Stanford Jennings electrified the crowd with a 93-yard return for a touchdown. Although San Francisco had the best of the offensive statistics, they found themselves trailing 13-7 as the fourth quarter began.

Montana took his team on an 85-yard drive that featured a 31-yard pass to Jerry Rice and a 40-yarder to Roger Craig. From the Cincinnati 14, Montana floated a perfect pass to Bengals cornerback Lewis Billups. He dropped it! On the next play, Montana hit Rice for the touchdown.

After Cofer missed a field goal that would have given San Francisco the lead, Cincinnati marched into position for Breech. His 40-yard bullseye, his third field goal of the day, put the Bengals back in front with only 3:20 remaining.

## THE COFFIN CORNER: Vol. 18, No. 1 (1996)

---

That was more than enough for Montana, who methodically drove his team 92 yards to victory. The key play was a toss to Rice with second-and-20 that took the ball to the Cincinnati 18. After another flip to Craig, Montana threw to John Taylor for the winning touchdown with only 34 seconds left.

Montana was outstanding, completing 23 of 36 passes for 357 yards and two touchdowns, but Rice was deemed even more sensational. He was voted the MVP on the strength of 11 receptions for 215 yards.

### NUMBER 2: SUPER BOWL XIII - Black (and Gold) Sunday

January 21, 1979, Orange Bowl, Miami, FL

Attendance: 79,484

Pittsburgh Steelers	.....	7	14	0	14	-	35
Dallas Cowboys	.....	7	7	3	14	-	31

Pit: Stallworth, 28-yard pass from Bradshaw. XP: Gerela

Dal: Hill, 39-yard pass from Staubach. XP: Septien

Dal: Hegman, 37-yard fumble return. XP: Septien

Pit: Stallworth, 75-yard pass from Bradshaw. XP: Gerela

Pit: Bleier, 7-yard pass from Bradshaw. XP: Gerela

Dal: FG Septien 27 yards

Pit: Harris, 22-yard run. XP: Gerela

Pit: Swann, 18-yard pass from Bradshaw. XP: Gerela

Dal: Dupree, 7-yard pass from Staubach. XP: Septien

Dal: B.Johnson, 4-yard pass from Staubach. XP: Septien

This may have been the most-seen Super Bowl of all -- though all of the viewers were not necessarily football fans. While Pittsburgh and Dallas fought it out on the Orange Bowl field, actor Robert Shaw was filmed walking around the stadium with the game in the background. Snippets of the Steelers and Cowboys later were integrated into Black Sunday, a film in which terrorists attempt to use the Goodyear Blimp to explode a bomb at the Super Bowl. Adding all those who saw Black Sunday in theaters and on the late TV movie to those who actually watched the game in person and on television would produce quite an audience.

Fans at the Orange Bowl paid little mind to the movie-makers; there was too much happening on the field to occupy their attention. The thirteenth Super Bowl was easily the most exciting up to that time, and many would still call it the most thrilling ever.

The first time Pittsburgh got the ball, it drove 53 yards to a touchdown. John Stallworth scored on a 28-yard pass Terry Bradshaw. As first quarter was over, Dallas tied the score on a 39-yard Roger Staubach-to-Tony Hill TD pass.

Early in the second quarter, Dallas linebacker Mike Hegman wrestled the ball away from Bradshaw and ran 37 yards for a touchdown that gave Dallas its only lead of the day. It took Pittsburgh three plays to go back in front. The third play was a long pass from Bradshaw that John Stallworth took at the Dallas 35 and motored into the end zone to complete a 75-yard TD. As the clock ran down on the half, Mel Blount intercepted a Staubach pass at the Pittsburgh 29. A personal foul penalty and two completions to Lynn Swann moved the ball to the Dallas seven. Then Bradshaw threw to Rocky Bleier for the touchdown to make the score 21-14 at the break.

Dallas missed a chance to tie the score in the third quarter. A poor punt and good return put the Cowboys in business at the Steelers' 42. With third down at the Pittsburgh ten, Staubach threw to tight end Jackie Smith standing alone in the end zone. But the veteran tight end who had successfully caught nearly 500 passes during his career dropped this one. Dallas settled for a field goal and still trailed.

Pittsburgh extended its lead to eighteen points in the fourth quarter. A controversial interference call gave the Steelers the ball at the Dallas 23. Moments later, Franco Harris bolted the last 22 yards for a touchdown. Then, when Dallas fumbled the kickoff, Bradshaw threw 18 yards to Swann for Pittsburgh's second TD in 19 seconds.

With Dallas needing three touchdowns to gain the lead, Pittsburgh went into a prevent-defense. As it turned out, they almost prevented themselves from winning. Staubach took the Cowboys 89 yards in

## THE COFFIN CORNER: Vol. 18, No. 1 (1996)

---

eight plays for a touchdown, throwing to Billy Joe Dupree for the score. That left only 2:23 on the clock. However, Dallas upset the Pittsburgh strategy by recovering an on-side kick at their own 48. Nine plays later, Staubach threw to Butch Johnson and the score closed to 35-31 with 22 seconds still remaining. Fortunately for Pittsburgh, Bleier recovered the ensuing on-side kick, allowing the Steelers to run out the clock.

Dallas fans were quick to insist that the final Dallas touchdown would have tied the score had Smith held that third-quarter pass. Pittsburgh fans countered that their heroes would hardly have gone into the nearly disastrous prevent-defense so soon had the score been closer. Neither theory changed the final score.

Bradshaw was chosen MVP. He completed 17 of 30 pass attempts for 318 yards and four touchdowns.

### **NUMBER 1: SUPER BOWL XXV - WIDE RIGHT!**

January 17, 1991, Tampa Stadium, Tampa, FL

Attendance: 73,813

Buffalo Bills .....	3	9	0	7	-	19
New York Giants .....	3	7	7	3	-	20

NYG: FG Bahr 28 yards

Buf: FG Norwood 23 yards

Buf: D.Smith, 1-yard run. XP: Norwood

Buf: Safety, B.Smith tackled Hostetler in endzone

NYG: Baker, 14-yard pass from Hostetler. XP: Bahr

NYG: Anderson, 1-run. XP: Bahr

Buf: Thomas, 31-yard run. XP: Norwood

NYG: FG Bahr 21 yards

The image remains frozen in the minds of so many. Chip Norwood's kick spinning toward the uprights. Spinning end-over-end toward the first AFC Super Bowl win in seven years. Spinning wonderfully toward the Buffalo Bill's greatest victory, their first NFL championship. Spinning gracefully high over the Tampa Stadium field. Spinning ... spinning ... spinning ... wide right!

Norwood's miss left victory in the hands of the New York Giants. It was a deserved victory, but, had the kick been true, Buffalo's win would have been equally deserved. The Silver Anniversary Super Bowl produced a whale of a game.

Both teams showed strong defenses in the first half, with Buffalo having perhaps a slight advantage. The Giants drew first blood on Matt Bahr's 28-yard field goal, but Norwood matched that with a successful 23-yarder. The quarter ended knotted at 3-3, but the personalities of both teams had been exposed. In driving 58 yards to set up Bahr's field goal, the Giants took eleven, time-consuming plays. The Bills moved into place for Norwood's effort on a single, 61-yard, Jim Kelly to James Lofton pass. The plot line was in place. Could the slow-and-steady Giants keep the flashy Bills' quick-strike offense on the sideline? Did anyone remember the story of the tortoise and the hare?

Before the first quarter ended, the Bills had begun a drive at their own 20. Although it took twelve plays, it paid off 80 yards later in Don Smith's one-yard plunge for a touchdown. Several minutes later, New York's Dave Meggett put his team in a hole by fair-catching a punt at his own seven. Seconds later, Jeff Hostetler tripped over O.J. Anderson's foot in the end zone. He struggled to his feet but Buffalo's Bruce Smith was on him for a safety. The Bills had a 12-3 lead and were looking for more.

New York held them off and then controlled the ball themselves for most of the last four minutes on an 87-yard drive that culminated in a 14-yard scoring pass from Hostetler to Stephen Baker. That left them only two points behind.

New York opened the second half with a successful 75-yard drive that took 14 plays and 9:29 off the clock. Hostetler's clutch third-down pass to Meggett and Anderson's 24-yard run on third-and-one kept the drive alive. Anderson scored on a one-yard plunge.

## **THE COFFIN CORNER: Vol. 18, No. 1 (1996)**

---

The Bills hadn't run a real play in more than an hour, and it took them a while to warm up. By the end of the third quarter, they were moving again. Thurman Thomas' 31-yard burst for a touchdown on the opening play of the final period completed a 63-yard drive.

Down 19-17, the Giants produced their third long, time-eating drive. They took 14 plays to negotiate 74 yards. Again Hosteler's passes kept the drive going. His efforts would win him MVP honors. At the end of the drive, Bahr cashed his second field goal to put New York back in front by a paper-thin 20-19.

The Bills fought back desperately. In the final two minutes, they drove from their own ten to New York's 29. With time running out, Norwood set up for his ill-fated, 47-yard field goal attempt.

The Giants controlled the ball for a Super Bowl record 40 minutes and 33 seconds. In the football game between the tortoises from New York and the hares from Buffalo, slow and steady took the prize. Of course, had that rabbit had a luckier foot ....