

It's all happening in the NFL this year

By JAMES ALEXANDER
Sports Editor

Pro football fans are getting a real treat this season, as the 16 game race for the Super Bowl crown has become a topsy turvy, wild and woolly dog-eat-dog fight.

No more is the time when 2 or 3 teams dominated each conference and one team stood out alone as the most powerful team in the entire league.

This season's surprises have been Green Bay, Atlanta, Seattle, Tampa Bay, the Jets, the Giants, Cleveland and Philadelphia.

These teams have all merged with perennial favorites Pittsburgh, Oakland, Los Angeles, Washington, Denver, Miami, New England and defending champ Dallas to form a serious corps of teams in contention for the NFL title.

Not only has there been surprising teams, but there is some shocking new talent in the league as well.

Such talent as Green Bay's no-name offensive trio of quarterback David Whitehurst, running back Terdell Middleton and receiver James Lofton; Dallas' new premier receiver Tony Hill; Tampa Bay quarterback Doug Williams and Miami's new found hope in runner Delvin Williams, who is now the leading rusher in the NFL.

Add to that list New England's pint-sized running-back Horace Ivory, Baltimore's runner Joe Washington

(who is the replacement for departed Lydell Mitchell), Atlanta kicker (and former bartender) Tom Mazzetti, Houston rookie running back Earl Campbell, Seattle receiver Steve Largent, Philadelphia runningback Wilbert Montgomery, now-injured Jets quarterback Richard Todd, and North Carolina's Dee Hardison, a starting defensive lineman in Buffalo.

At this writing, the Dallas Cowboys and the Washington Redskins (both everybody's favorites) appeared to be coming upon some very hard times in their fight for the NFC East title.

The Cowboys have suffered back-to-back defeats at the hands of Minnesota and Miami, and the Redskins now stand at 8-3 after being upset by the Baltimore Colts. Dallas is 7-4.

Young Green Bay and the experienced loaded Los Angeles Rams remain atop their divisions, with the Atlanta Falcons posing a serious threat to the 9-2 Rams. The Falcs were only 2 games behind and playing better every week. As a matter of fact, the Falcs have just recently come off of a 15-9 upset of the Rams.

The AFC East is still a battling division as powerful New England and the rejuvenated Miami Dolphins fight it out for that crown. In the meantime, Buffalo, New York Jets and the ailing Baltimore Colts have played excellent spoiler roles, making the battle even tougher.

Pittsburgh is kicking everyone in the AFC Central, with the Houston Oilers being the only possible threat

to the Steelers' hopes for another division title.

In addition, the AFC west division has become somewhat like the old west, wild and dangerous, as the faltering Oakland Raiders and the questionable Denver Broncos are having a shootout, with vastly improved Seattle not far behind.

With only 5 games left on the NFL card, the Pittsburgh Steelers, New England Patriots, Los Angeles Rams and the snapped-back Green Bay Pack would have to loom as the top contenders to venture to this year's Super Bowl contest.

The teams having an outside chance of making the prized appearance are Miami in the AFC and the defending champion Dallas Cowboys in the NFC, if they can get their act together before it's too late. The Cowboys can't afford to lose another game unless the Redskins hit a skid.

Washington began the season as the class of the NFC with six opening victories, but 3 losses in their last 5 games have stirred speculation as to how good (if at all) the Skins really are.

Call it a fluke.

Another fluke is the San Francisco 49ers, who were picked by some to steal the NFC west title from the Los Angeles Rams.

With a dismal 1-9 mark and an injured O.J. Simpson (add to that a traded Delvin Williams), the 49ers

are going nowhere, not even in the near future.

In the post-season awards department, Green Bay's Bart Starr and Washington's Jack Pardee are Coach of the Year favorites in the NFC, while Chuck Fairbanks of New England and Don Shula of Miami lead the candidates for the AFC award.

Rookie-of-the-year in the NFC will no doubt be Green Bay's Terdell Middleton, who has maintained high standing among the league's leading rushers and scorers. The AFC's leading candidate would have to come from a handful of which no one stands out.

Another NFL note; former UNC performer James "Boom Boom" Betterson of the Philadelphia Eagles is out for the remainder of the season with a leg injury. At the time he was injured, Betterson was returning kickoffs for the Eagles.

Here are some predictions for this weekend's games: Tampa Bay 6 over Buffalo, Philadelphia 9 over Giants, Washington 10 over St. Louis, New England 10 over Jets, San Diego 7 over Minnesota, Seattle 14 over Kansas City, Dallas 14 over New Orleans, Atlanta 3 over Chicago, Denver 7 over Green Bay, Los Angeles 20 over San Francisco, Oakland 10 over Detroit, Baltimore 10 over Cleveland, Pittsburgh 14 over Cincinnati and in Monday night affair the Miami Dolphins will thump the Houston Oilers by 10.

On the pro scene

By GREGORY CLAY
Sports Writer

Lydell Mitchell, one of the NFL's most versatile running backs, for the San Diego Chargers said of Joe Paterno: "He makes you study—makes you graduate—of 101 players on the squad when I was there, 100 graduated." Mitchell's now planning law school . . .

Two pluses are in Doug Williams' corner. He has one of the fastest releases in the league and he can stand the rush of defensive linemen which is so vital in being with Tampa Bay . . .

Lynn Swann notes that the millionaires in Pittsburgh never drive Rolls-Royces because the guys in the

mills don't dig it—so the Steelers follow the pattern . . .

Says Tampa Bays Dewey Selmon: "Physically I'm no better than I was in college (Oklahoma), but mentally, I'm 10 times better . . .

Tony Dorsett of the Dallas Cowboys accused head coach John McVay of the New Giants of calling him names from the sidelines . . .

Speaking of Tony, he has a TV show one hour before Dallas kickoffs, but his head coach and "henceful watchman" Tom Landry has one 20 minutes before game time. Landry is winning in every phase of the keeping time duel between the two, obviously . . .

Adapted in part from Football News.

Jim Rice wins MVP award, amid controversy

By ARCHIE SHAW
Sports Writer

Recently there was a major occurrence on the national sports scene. Jim Rice, the hard slugging outfielder for the Boston Red Sox, won the American League's Most Valuable Player Award and with it there was much controversy.

This controversy was personified by the fact that Rice (a Black) beat out the New York Yankees Ron Guidry (a white) who also had excellent credentials.

Rice, a player who in the past has bred controversy, surprisingly won the MVP award with ease and this sparked doubts from many across the country.

Guidry himself even went so far as to say that the MVP award should be designated as the MVP award for hitters. Guidry no doubt had an outstanding year and was instrumental in the Yankees' championship season.

However, on a day-to-day basis, there was none better than Rice. If many managers had the choice on whether they could have a player who could win ballgames everyday or on every fifth day, the choice would be simple.

The Rice-Guidry situation is not new to the sports scene. In 1971 when the obvious candidate for college football's Heisman Trophy was Johny Rodgers, the news media pushed every white player with any sort of above average statistic as a possible candidate for the award.

Last season in the National Basketball Association, with such stars as David Thompson, George Gervin, and Elvin Hayes having phenomenal years, Bill Walton was chosen the MVP after having played only a little more than half of the season.

And as we look to the future, another controversy may be on the horizon. Oklahoma's brilliant halfback, Billy Sims, is obviously the most outstanding College football player in the country. You can almost be sure, though, that when the votes for this year's Heisman are counted, there may be a surprise. A white surprise.

I wonder if there's an award for the most valuable every-other-week sports writer.

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