

FOOTBALL EXTRA POINTS

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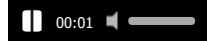
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FOOTBALL EXTRA POINTS - MONDAYS @ 9:00PM EASTERN

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 2014

WAIT, ARE WE PLAYING AMERICAN FOOTBALL? - KEYS TO SEATTLE'S VICTORY OVER DENVER IN SUPER BOWL XLVIII

Did anyone who isn't a Seattle Seahawks fan enjoy Super Bowl XLVIII?



Perhaps those of you who really appreciate defense (which I am one, being a lifelong fan of the dominating 1985 Bears defense) appreciated watching the completely dominant "Legion of Boom", but I suspect most of you who didn't have a dog in the fight turned the channel to "Puppy Bowl X" or "Downton Abbey" immediately after Percy Harvin took the halftime kick off back 88 yards for a touchdown. Well, even though I stayed tuned in the entire game, I don't blame you. Tough to get excited about 36 to 0 blowout in the third quarter no matter what game you're watching. And I know exactly how you Broncos fans feel.



As you well know by now, I'm a huge Notre Dame fan, basically because I was completely brainwashed when I went to school there. So I spent a significant amount of money going out to the 2012 BCS Championship

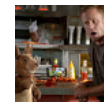
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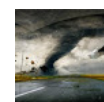


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B4



RTP Richard Thigpen Photography



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Game between Alabama and Notre Dame to cheer the Golden Dome to victory. Unfortunately, the football gods had other plans, and Alabama trounced all over Notre Dame. And Manti Te'o (who, unbeknownst to us, was lamenting the discovery that his long distance girlfriend actually did not die AND was actually a guy – talk about a rough day!), the player we were all counting on to contain Alabama's Eddie Lacy and A.J. McCarron, looked like a 9 year old playing pee wee touch football in molasses with one hand tied behind his back. And I'm not talking about 9 year old Youtube phenom Sam Gordon. She's legit. I'm fairly certain she could have beaten Alabama all by herself, with both hands tied behind her back. But I digress.



The point is that the BCS Championship game I attended was surprisingly similar to Super Bowl XLVIII. Alabama took a 28 to nothing lead to the locker room at the half based on tough defense and a clock controlling offense. The Seahawks took a 22 to nothing lead to the locker room at the half based on about the same thing. At the end of the third quarter of the BCS Championship game, Alabama was up 35 to 7. At the end of the third quarter of the Super Bowl, the Seahawks were up 36 to 8. The Miami Heat was playing in the same town as the BCS Championship game in the same weekend. The Miami Heat was playing in the same town as the Super Bowl in the same weekend. OK, that last bit is a stretch (though true), but my point is that it was a relatively similar experience. But at least I had sunny and warm Miami. All you Broncos fans had cold and rainy New York.



Not that I'm knocking New York as a Super Bowl venue. As you all know, I live in New York, so I really appreciated the neat stuff that a Super Bowl can bring to your town. I dutifully went to all the pre-game events at the "Super Bowl Boulevard" in Times Square, fought crowds for the briefest glimpse of the Lombardi Trophy, laughed at people making crazy "greatest fans" videos who were trying to get free Super Bowl tickets, nodded my head in dismay as thousands of tourists ate the free Papa

an Elite 2013 Fantasy Quarterback?

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I can't watch NFLN because of Irvin and Sapp and I can't watch ESPN a because of Berman, looks like I'm hosed.

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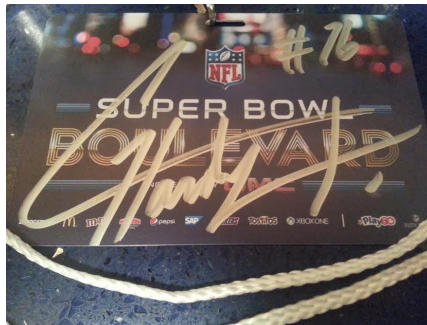
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John's pizza and mistakenly thought that it was "New York pizza" (for shame!), watched in wonderment trying to figure out what a giant toboggan hill has to do with football, bought hundreds of dollars of crummy Super Bowl merchandise at Macy's (not sure why I now own a Super Bowl XLVIII blanket – seemed like a good idea at the time), and waited for almost three hours to get an autograph from Greg Hardy (pro bowl defensive end from the Carolina Panthers). Who, by the way, was awesome for staying 30 extra minutes to make sure a bunch more people got his autograph (I was the second to last person to get in, so you can imagine my trepidation once his time was officially up). And yeah, I froze my freakin' butt off.



But all that aside, this was probably a fun experience for all involved, just not a fun game to watch if you're not a Seahawks fan. So let's take a closer look at the game.

Keys to the Game

In my last article, I noted that one of the keys to the game would be taking advantage of the Broncos' terrible 6th worst pass defense. We all knew that Seattle could run the ball, but could Russell Wilson take advantage of the Broncos by passing the ball accurately downfield? Not only did he take advantage with passes that led to 10 yards or more to 5 different receivers, but he managed to exceed 200 yards passing on a 70% completion percentage with 2 touchdowns and no interceptions. According to ESPN Stats & Information, that puts him in rare company, with only 4 other quarterbacks putting up those type of stats in a Super Bowl – Brees, Aikman, Montana and Simms. Not too shabby for a second year player that everyone has been calling a "game manager".

In addition, I noted that Percy Harvin would be the "X Factor" for the

Seahawks. If he was productive, I thought they had a good chance to win. As it turns out, Percy Harvin's only complete game of the season was probably one of the most memorable of his career. Harvin only had one catch on two targets for 5 yards, but he had two spectacular carries for 45 yards and an unbelievable game sealing 88 yard return for a touchdown right after the Broncos came out from halftime. Talk about deflating. That one play basically decimated the Broncos, and any "pep" the might have gotten from making adjustments during the half were completely wiped out.

On the other side of the ball, I noted that one of the keys to the game for the Broncos was that Peyton Manning had to continue being Peyton Manning. The Broncos had to keep up with their league leading 37.9 points per game average, because if they didn't score, we all knew that the Broncos defense sans Von Miller and Chris Harris weren't going to be able to stop Seattle. Unfortunately, Manning looked like old Manning circa early 2000's with the Colts, just imploding under the post season pressure (as a side note, Mannings 12 postseason losses are the most of any starting quarterback ever to play the game in the NFL). Manning didn't take a single sack, but it was clear that he was under pressure all night, leading to two interceptions (one of which was returned for a touchdown) and a fumble. In fact, Seattle scored 21 points off of 4 turnovers during the Super Bowl and the Broncos were held to a season low 8 points. The Broncos offense apparently never made it to New York.

I also mentioned that I thought Wes Welker would be the "X Factor" for the Broncos. With Demaryius Thomas lined up against Byron Maxwell and Eric Decker smothered by Richard Sherman, softer coverage across the middle with Welker (and perhaps Julius Thomas) sounded like one of the few soft spots Manning could expose in the Seattle defense. Welker did his share, with 85 yards on 8 receptions from 10 targets plus a 2 point conversion. But, unfortunately, you can't be the "X Factor" if the rest of your team doesn't produce. The Broncos ground game was abysmal with only 27 total yards on 14 carries. In fact, 9 of those 27 yards were from C.J. Anderson as the Broncos bled the clock away at the end of the game so they could get out of the stadium and forget it ever happened. So the Broncos really had 18 yards on 12 carries throughout the game, leading to a measly 1.5 yards per carry. Without any threat of a ground game, the Seahawks put pressure on Manning with just their front four and sat back in press coverage all night. Just like they did all year with every other team. And it worked, just like it did all year with every other team.

I won't break down every play of the game as plenty of other have done that already. But I will note that although I can appreciate the tough running and effort put in by Jermaine Kearse and Doug Baldwin, I have to really call out the poor tackling (if that's what you want to call it) displayed by the Broncos defense. At least four different Broncos had an opportunity to tackle Kearse in the third quarter before he scored his touchdown. Maybe it wouldn't have made a difference, but holding the Seahawks to a field goal at that point would have at least been a moral victory. And at least 3 Broncos missed tackles when Baldwin went in during the fourth quarter. Maybe it was frustration, but apparently the Broncos defense never made it to New York either.

And I would be remiss for not mentioning the Seahawks "12th Man". Frankly, I thought it was going to be different in New York, since Seahawk fans didn't have the fancy acoustics engineering of CenturyLink Field to get the decibel level up. Boy was I wrong. Starting from the miscommunication that led to the opening snap safety (which, by the way, was the fastest score to start a Super Bowl in the history of the NFL) and throughout the game, it was clear the "12th Man" was disrupting the Broncos offense. Everyone knows I dislike Pete Carroll from his USC days, but I have to hand it to him on the social media side. He's done a good job keeping the team in touch with its fan base and giving them credit for being so passionate...and so loud. More teams should follow his lead. Fans can make a difference.

As was mentioned on ESPN after the game, if I told you before the game

that Peyton Manning would set a Super Bowl record with 34 completions, that Marshawn Lynch would be held to 39 yards and the final score would be 43 to 8, I'm fairly certain you all (except for my psycho Seattle Seahawk friends John, Joey and Renee) would have placed large bets on the Broncos winning the game. And you would have all lost a lot of money. I'm so glad I don't live in Las Vegas right now because I'd probably be one of you. But, as the old adage goes, that's why they play the game. And that's why we love football.



By Ha Kung Wong (Twitter: @Rhihan)

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Mike Johnson January 7, 2015 at 4:08 PM

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