

The Huffster: The Many Facets of Super Bowl 47

Written by Stacey Hough, Guest Columnist
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There are many reasons each year to get excited for the biggest football game of them all, The Super Bowl, and each one has its unique storylines. This year is no different. There is the brother vs. brother story, the win-one for -the retiring-guy angle, the young qb making his name angle, the veteran qb becoming elite angle, etc. Yes, Super Bowl 47 has its share of intriguing components. Let's take a closer look at some of these facets that add to the interests of America's most-watched game for this season.

The Harbaugh brothers are the first set of brothers to be head coaches in the NFL. Both brothers leading their teams to the big game with the ultimate championship on the line only elevates an already unique distinction. John, the oldest by 15 months, leads his Baltimore Ravens against Jim, and the San Francisco 49ers in a matchup between two teams that have looked like destiny's darlings. The sibling battle has spawned many to call this game the Harbowl, the BroBowl, the HarBrawl, and other clever and not so clever phrases. A consensus seems to be that both teams are well coached and physical, a coaching style that may be traced back to the father of the two, Jack Harbaugh, a football coach himself, who taught the game to his boys. Different paths brought the Harbaugh brothers to this point, the pinnacle of the football coaching profession. Jim, a star player at the University of Michigan, and a former Pro Bowl player, spring boarded his rise in coaching with an eye-opening stint at Stanford which saw him steer that program back to an elite level. He coached briefly prior to that at U of San Diego. But after Stanford Jim got the San Fran gig and has been quickly successful. That is in contrast to the path taken by John Harbaugh, a career assistant for years in college and the pros before landing the Ravens job. In the days leading up to Super Bowl 47, John appears to be the more relaxed of the two.

Another story of high interest during the SB run of the Baltimore Ravens has been the "one last ride" of Middle Linebacker Ray Lewis. The 17-year veteran announced officially, as the season

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wound down, that he would retire at the end of this season, whenever that happened to be. His teammates have seemed to rally behind their vocal leader, winning on the road at Denver, and also on the road at New England, despite being decided underdogs in each game. And though Joe Flacco and the offense were key in those wins, the defense made enough plays to slow down future Hall of Fame qbs in Denver's Peyton Manning, and New England's Tom Brady. Ray Lewis is a future first-ballot Hall of famer himself, so the stage is set for one of the great career cappers of all time. The wily linebacker, now relying on emotion and inspiration more than on his declining legs to get the job done, will be a game within the game that's worth watching.

The San Francisco qb is Colin Kaepernick, a second year player whom took over the team earlier in the season, when prior starter Alex Smith was side-lined with a concussion. The change to the young qb is key because it showed the trust Jim Harbaugh had in Kaepernick, whom Harbaugh had traded up in the draft to acquire. That was a gutsy, tough-minded decision because had the young qb failed, team chemistry would have taken a tremendous hit. Jim Harbaugh, showing the same confidence that he displayed during his 14 year career as an NFL qb, never wavered in his belief that his decision would pay off. And Kaepernick, the supposed running quarterback who has a cannon for an arm, has run and thrown the 49ers to within a game of being world champions. Whether he can continue his befuddling ways running the read option and mixing in laser throws, will be a most key factor in the outcome of SB 47.

And then there is Joe Flacco, the University of Delaware product who happens to have been the winning qb in more road games than any qb in NFL history. He also has the distinction of being the first qb in history to win a playoff game in each of his first five seasons. Flacco has been loved and criticised by his own fans in Baltimore, and seemingly by the media as well. He was criticized by many for describing himself as an "elite" quarterback in an interview last year. On a team of tough guys, Flacco has been looked upon as boring, a 6 foot 6 inch stable-but-plodding qb in an era of more flashy players at the position. He's also been mocked as "Fluke-o" by some. Yet the guy keeps winning, and winning in the postseason, until now he's one more win from becoming that one thing that may make the other slights bearable: Champion. Joe Flacco has outplayed in this year's playoffs, Andrew Luck, Peyton Manning, and Tom Brady. The Ravens won not in spite of, but largely because of, the big arm and big-play ability of Flacco. The deep ball attack of the Ravens, with Flacco to WR Torrey Smith and WR Anquan Boldin on intermediate routes, will be a key factor in whether Ray Lewis wins the last game of his last ride. The play calling of Jim Caldwell has unleashed the best in Flacco, after Caldwell was given the offensive coordinator's job during the season by Coach John Harbaugh. The move paid off. Another gutsy gamble by a Harbaugh. Imagine that.

There's a lot to like about both teams. At the conclusion of Super Bowl 47, I imagine the Harbaugh family will all go to dinner somewhere. They will talk about the great historic season

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the Harbaugh brothers had. They will talk about the great, hard fought game the just watched and took part in. They will talk about Kapernick's arm and great runs. But ultimately they will talk about Ray Lewis, dancing one last time, and overcome with emotion, embracing Joe Flacco, finally elite. John Harbaugh will gladly pick up the check, because he and his Ravens team of destiny, will be champions of Super Bowl 47.

Stacey Hough, co-host "The Zone" weekdays on 1230AM WOIC and heard online at www.woic.com.