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Manning and Manning—Can Either Brother Win the Big One?

By Paul Mrocza

It was just over a year ago, after the Colts lost to the Pats in their post-season contest, that Boomer

Esiason said on national television, "I think maybe Peyton (Manning) is this generation's Dan Marino." Esiason went on to state that Manning "is a great football player, but he's not going to get to the Super Bowl, I'm telling you, not with that defense."

Marino, who was on the set, took umbrage at the reference and shot back, "Oh, wait a minute. I got to a Super Bowl." Marino made a good point, but still, Esiason seemed to be on target by not blaming either quarterback for their failings but, rather, the guys on the other side of the ball—their weak defenses.

Fast forward to January 15, 2006, almost exactly a year to the date that Esiason made his comments. What was different this time for Peyton Manning and the Colts? The Colts seemed to have the full package—a great running and passing attack, a solid offensive line, and a fine defense. Everything was aligned for Manning—Mania to take full effect, especially after such a spectacular regular season.

But once again, under the glare of the national spotlight, in a huge playoff game, and under the kind of pressure he had rarely seen all season, Peyton Manning crumbled. This latest derailment of the Colt's Super Bowl Express drew a barrage of disparaging comments from many writers and commentators, including the NY Times' William C. Rhoden. Two days after the loss, Rhoden dubbed Manning "the king of statistics but the prince of NFL quarterbacks" in that although he can generate statistics, he may be incapable of closing the deal and ever bringing a championship to Indianapolis.

No matter how much you respect Peyton Manning and his amazing regular season performances, it's difficult to argue with the facts. In eight seasons the Colt QB has led his team to the playoffs six times where he is 3–6. In those nine games he's hit for 15 TDs, while throwing 8 INTs and being sacked 13 times. There are quarterbacks, most recently Tom Brady, who usually manage to rise to the occasion in the big game, ably dealing with a panoply of adversity. And then there are those like Manning, usually able to run like finely tuned, precision machines, which means when everything is copacetic they hum along but let something like a blitz throw off their rhythm and they breakdown.

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Some people point out that maybe he has too much control over the offense, constantly changing and adjusting plays at the line of scrimmage, and when things go awry it's almost impossible for Manning to adapt. Others claim that he simply can't handle the pressure of a big game situation. Some blame others on the team. After losing to the Steelers this post-season, Peyton Manning did something he's never done before; point the finger at his teammates.

Then there's Peyton's younger brother Eli, who just finished his second NFL season and his first professional post-season. Against the Carolina Panthers Eli Manning completed 10 of 18 passes, threw three interceptions, was sacked four times and lost one fumble as the Giants were humbled by their opponents 23 to zip. At one point in the game it seemed as if Eli Manning thought his job was to get the ball to the Panthers as boos echoed throughout Giants Stadium and fans hustled for the exits.

Coolness under pressure—is this a Manning characteristic? Or do Peyton and Eli share some sort of panic gene? For Eli it's simply too early to tell and with Peyton, there's still time left to turn the tide.

Perhaps one should ask, "What would dad and former NFL QB Archie Manning do?" There's no answer to that question—in 15 NFL seasons Archie never came close to making it to the playoffs.

Time will tell what the true legacy of the Manning brothers will be. Dan Marino—Move over?

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Peyton Manning

By Bob Johnson

Born in New Orleans on March 24, 1976, Peyton Manning is the son of legendary New Orleans quarterback Archie Manning and Olivia Manning. While Peyton attended high school, Archie was the color commentator for the New Orleans Saints radio station. As a youngster, Peyton would occasionally visit off-season practices with his dad. On one occasion, then Saints coach Jim Mora, allowed Peyton to work out and toss some passes to the Saints receivers. Even more unbelievable than a high school student practicing with NFL receivers is the fact that he fit in perfectly at such a

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young age. While attending Isidore Newman High School, Manning served as quarterback during all 3 years. At the end of his senior season, Peyton Manning was the top recruited quarterback in the nation and was named as the Gatorade Circle of Champions National Player of the Year.

Following high school graduation, Manning decided to attend the University of Tennessee where he, once again, became a star quarterback for the team. While proving his skills on the field, Peyton Manning proved that he had equal skills in the classroom. Earning a BA in speech communication and graduating with honors was important to Manning, which is why he decided to put his football career on hold until he earned his degree.

As 1998 rolled around, Manning became a candidate for the NFL draft. The Indianapolis Colts welcomed Peyton Manning as their first pick in the draft and, as they say, the rest is history. Today, Peyton Manning is the quarterback for the Indianapolis Colts where he has remained since his rookie season in the NFL.

On October 29, 2005, Manning's #16 University of Tennessee player number was retired as he, his mom, dad and wife were on hand along with a capacity crowd prior to the University of Tennessee Volunteers game against the South Carolina Gamecocks. Everyone at Neyland Stadium watched as Manning's number was unveiled in the endzone. From 1994 to 1997, Peyton Manning played at the University of Tennessee where he broke nearly every passing record and led the team to 39 victories. Prior to the game, Peyton's PeyBack Foundation held a fundraiser, which raised over \$12,000.00 to be used for funding grants and events involving disadvantaged youth in Knoxville.

On Friday, February 3, 2006, Peyton Manning was recognized as the Walter Payton NFL Man of the Year. This award was named in recognition of the legendary Chicago Bears running back, Walter Payton, who passed away in 1999. This award is the only one in the league to recognize a player's off-the-field community service in addition to his playing excellence. Connie Payton, the wife of Walter Payton, proudly presented the award. Fans around the nation celebrate Manning's accomplishments and achievements in football and in life.

Bob writes for

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