



BLACK & GOLD NEWS

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE STEEL CITY CONNECTION
WEEK 2 of the 2005 STEELERS SEASON

PARKER-ROETHLISBERGER COMBO OVERWHELMING TITANS

"Bridging the Gap Between
Pittsburgh and Richmond"

PITTSBURGH (AP) -- The Tennessee Titans needed a scouting report on Steelers running back Willie Parker, so cornerback Michael Waddell issued this warning: Don't pay attention to his college career, this guy can run. Who knew he could run like this? Parker, a college backup who adds speed to the NFL's most run-heavy offense, had a dazzling first career start with 161 yards rushing and a long reception, and a mistake-free Ben Roethlisberger threw for two scores in Pittsburgh's 34-7 rout of Tennessee on Sunday. "He's got the kind of speed you can't coach," tackle Marvel Smith said. "He's a raw talent, basically, but he's so fast and he's just all over the place. He broke a lot of tackles out there."

For more than 40 years, the Steelers have been all about big, physical backs who run over or elude tacklers: Hall of Famer John Henry Johnson, Franco Harris, Jerome Bettis and, last year, Duce Staley. Parker provides a speed element they've never had, and his yardage was the most for a Steelers back on opening day. "I really didn't take any hits in college, so my career's really just beginning," Parker said. "I had to make a name for myself, open up some eyes that I can play." Parker, playing because of injuries to Bettis and Staley, nearly equaled the 181 yards he had as a non-starting senior at North Carolina, where Waddell was his roommate. He followed up a 102-yard game against Buffalo to end last season. "The game plan is different with him, to take advantage of his speed," center Jeff Hartings said. "I don't know if there's another running back in the league who can get down the sideline as fast as he does." Staley and Bettis likely will be ready next Sunday in Houston, but Cowher -- for now -- isn't going back to the two big backs who ran for more than 1,700 yards last season. "He ran very well, and I see no reason to make a change right now," Cowher said.

Pittsburgh's starting offense didn't score a touchdown during a dreadful preseason that admittedly concerned Cowher, but Roethlisberger said he wasn't worried. And for good reason -- the Steelers scored on their first six possessions, four touchdowns and two field goals, with most of the same starters but a different look offensively from last year's franchise-best 15-1 team. The Steelers won their 15th in a row, four short of breaking the Patriots' NFL regular-season record they stopped last season. Roethlisberger, mixing in more deep balls than he threw as a rookie, improved to 14-0 as an NFL starter, not counting the playoffs. His passer rating was a perfect 158.3; he is the first since Kansas City's Trent Green in 2003 to have a perfect rating. After Tennessee drove 61 yards to score on its opening drive, Roethlisberger went 5-for-5 for 88 yards, and his 48-yard swing pass to Parker set up a 3-yard touchdown pass to first-round draft pick Heath Miller. "I don't think Ben was bothered by all the things that were said and the concerns a lot of people had, myself included," Cowher said. "He'd just say, 'Relax, coach, we'll be OK.'"

The Titans weren't. On their next three possessions, they lost a fumble by new running back Travis Henry, missed a field goal and were intercepted -- probably making new offensive coordinator Norm Chow wish he was back at national champion Southern Cal. The Steelers scored after all three, on Roethlisberger's 63-yard pass to Antwaan Randle El, Jeff Reed's 27-yard field goal and an 11-yard Parker run on which he bounced off two defenders. "We didn't tackle him," linebacker Peter Sirmon said. "Let's not try to make this look like we overlooked the guy and he shocked us." The Titans shed many of their former stars for salary cap reasons after a 5-11 season and looked it, especially on a defense with four new starters. Steve McNair returned after missing half the 2004 season with a sternum injury, going 18-of-26 for 219 yards and a touchdown, and Chris Brown averaged 5.7 yards on his 11 carries. But there wasn't much to go with that. "I think we had a number of younger players welcomed to the NFL today," coach Jeff Fisher said.

Game notes

The Steelers had lost 10 of 12 to Tennessee. ... Pittsburgh has won its last three openers under Cowher after winning only four of its first 11. ... The Steelers must win at Houston to match the Patriots (2003-04), the Bears (1933-34 and 1941-42) and Dolphins (1971-73 and 1983-84) as the only NFL teams to win 16 in a row. ... Reed has made 19 straight field goals, tying Gary Anderson's 1994 team record. ... The 11 passes were Pittsburgh's fewest since throwing nine against Cincinnati in 1977.



STEELERS @ TEXANS IN A NUTSHELL:

PLAYER/PERSONNEL NOTES --RB Duce Staley (knee) practiced for the second straight day and looks as though he will at least be available for Sunday's game. " Duce probably had his best day of work, but he'll still be questionable," coach Bill Cowher said.

--RB Jerome Bettis (calf) did not practice for the second straight day and he won't play this week, although Bill Cowher did say, "Jerome's coming along quite well."

--QB Ben Roethlisberger missed practice Wednesday and Thursday with a bruised bone in his left knee, and was downgraded to questionable.

--RB Jerome Bettis did not practice on Wednesday. He's listed as doubtful with his calf injury.

--RB Willie Parker, who ran for 161 yards in his first NFL start and caught a screen pass for 48 yards, was named AFC offensive player of the week. Parker will make his second start Sunday in Houston.

--CB Willie Williams may have lost his starting job because of a groin injury. Ike Taylor replaced him last Sunday and even though Williams has returned to practice, it appears he won't start Sunday.

GAME PLAN: The Steelers, who sacked Steve McNair three times in the opener, believe they can get more against David Carr and will relentlessly come after him. Carr's not known as a guy who can avoid a rush or make something happen under pressure. They will stick with their plan on offense until someone consistently can prove to them to try otherwise - run, run, run. Get a lead and then it's all downhill in the second half.

MATCHUPS TO WATCH: Texans NT Seth Payne vs. C Jeff Hartings - Two excellent veterans, but the Steelers believe their Pro Bowler center gives them a big advantage and can handle Payne one-on-one, allowing their guards to shoot out on the two inside linebackers.

Texans WR Andre Johnson vs. Steelers CB Ike Taylor - The Titans were able to catch a few deep balls last week and Houston's Pro Bowl receiver certainly will get the chance to try it as well.

Steelers NT Casey Hampton vs. Texans C Steve McKinney - Hampton, a Pro Bowler in 2003, missed half of last season with a torn ACL. If he can dominate in the middle, it will allow the Steelers inside linebackers more freedom to make plays and stop Houston's ground game with Domanick Davis.

INJURY IMPACT: The big injuries are to Roethlisberger, Bettis and Staley. CB Willie Williams, who missed the opener with a groin injury, is probable this week but Ike Taylor may make his second start in his place.

NOTES AND QUOTES : OT Max Starks on what it's like to block for Willie Parker: "Any of our backs, you give them a little space, they'll make something happen. Just with Willie, once you get that little bit of space, he's going to take off 30 yards down field and we're not going to catch him to throw any blocks down field. He definitely has that deceptive speed. If he gets to that corner, it's hard for anybody to take a really good angle on him unless its 30, 35 yards downfield before you get to him."

-Playing wide receiver can be no fun when your team throws only 11 times and that number is spread around to six different players. "It's difficult but we were able to establish the run," said Cedrick Wilson, who joined the Steelers as a UFA from the 49ers this year. "Our offensive line and Willie Parker did a fantastic job of managing the game and Ben did a great job of spreading the ball around. And the defense did a great job of getting us the ball back. We won 34-7 so there's really nothing to complain about."

--Houston's Reliant Stadium's retractable roof will be open on Sunday.

"I would like to have it closed with the air conditioner on," Cowher said. "Somehow, I don't think they will do that."

--The Steelers have won seven straight road games.

--Both teams run a 3-4 defense, Houston coach Dom Capers having been part of Bill Cowher's first staff in Pittsburgh that installed that defense with the Steelers.

"Their defense is a lot like ours, from the standpoint of scheme-wise," Cowher said. "They have good players down there that run it."

BY THE NUMBERS: 31 - Number of receptions Hines Ward needs to break John Stallworth's Steelers career record of 537.

QUOTE TO NOTE: "It's always good when you have a little lead and you're trying to pound away a little bit. That's something that we like to do." - offensive coordinator Ken Whisenhunt on the two passes the Steelers threw in the second half of their 34-7 opening win against Tennessee.



The Steel City Connection

CELEBRATING OUR 17TH ANNIVERSARY

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ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP DUES

\$30 - New Membership (family or single)
\$20 - Family Membership Renewal
\$15 - Single Membership Renewal

LET US HEAR FROM YOU

The Steel City Connection welcomes anyone who wants to write an editorial for the *Black & Gold News* or make an announcement for the general interest of the membership. To do so, mail or email your editorial, announcement to Tom Holton at the above address. And always, we are open to your suggestions/ideas to help better our club.

The Steel City Connection is a non-profit organization of Pittsburgh Steeler, Pirate and Penguin fans living in the Richmond area. We gather for game telecasts and fun and fellowship. In addition, we make annual donations to:

Richmond Children's Hospital
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Contact: Ashley Ermer

2005 Steeler Schedule

REGULAR SEASON

Sunday, Sept. 11	TITANS	W 34-7
Sunday, Sept. 18	@ Texans	1:00 p.m. (CBS)
Sunday, Sept. 25	PATRIOTS	4:15 p.m. (CBS)
Sunday, Oct. 2	BYE WEEK	
Monday, Oct. 10	@ Chargers	9:00 p.m. (ABC)
Sunday, Oct. 16	JAGUARS	1:00 p.m. (CBS)
Sunday, Oct. 23	@ Bengals	1:00 p.m. (CBS)
Monday, Oct. 31	RAVENS	9:00 p.m. (ABC)
Sunday, Nov. 6	@ Packers	4:15 p.m. (CBS)
Sunday, Nov. 13	BROWNS	8:30 p.m. (ESPN)
Sunday, Nov. 20	@ Ravens	4:15 p.m. (CBS)
Monday, Nov. 28	@ Colts	9:00 p.m. (ABC)
Sunday, Dec. 4	BENGALS	1:00 p.m. (CBS)
Sunday Dec. 11	BEARS	1:00 p.m. (FOX)
Sunday, Dec. 18	@ Vikings	1:00 p.m. (CBS)
Saturday, Dec. 24	@ Browns	1:00 p.m. (CBS)
Sunday, Jan. 1	LIONS	1:00 p.m. (FOX)

Puzzle of the Week

Find as many Steeler Players (Past & Present) as possible. First Person to find all 25 (and show me) gets a prize from the Steeler Grab Bag!



