

# Super Bowl teams worthy of playing in it

By Dave Goldberg  
The Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — It's the immovable force vs. the immovable force, defensive powers that started the year as long shots. Yet this Super Bowl between the New York Giants and the Baltimore Ravens is hardly unlikely.

The key is the system that benefited both teams.

The Giants were 7-9 in 1999, 14-4 this season. The Ravens went from 8-8 to 15-4. Last year's contestants were the St. Louis Rams, who improved from 4-12 to 16-3, and the Tennessee Titans, who went from 8-8 to 16-4.

"No, I hardly expected this," says Ernie Accorsi, the Giants' general manager. "I thought we'd contend for a playoff spot. But this is the salary cap."

"There's nothing left of the old system. There's very little distance between the good teams and the average ones. A break one way or the

other and you're up or down."

So, look at this game as a classic defensive struggle, fit for the 1930s, when scoreless ties or finals of 3-0 were not so rare.

The Ravens set a record this season for fewest points allowed, 165 in 16 games, while yielding the fewest yards rushing in the NFL and second-fewest overall. The Giants, who arrived in Tampa on Sunday, were second against the run and fifth overall on defense.

If defense is the overall theme, give the early part of Super Bowl week to Ray Lewis of the Ravens and Kerry Collins of the Giants, two players whose marvelous seasons contrast with troubled pasts.

Lewis' troubles were far more serious: a charge of double murder lodged against him in the stabbing of two men outside an Atlanta night club following last year's Super Bowl. He eventually pleaded guilty to obstruction of justice and re-

ceived probation from the courts and a \$250,000 fine from the NFL.

Lewis said that gave him incentive for this season, when he was voted NFL Defensive Player of the Year, a middle linebacker whose style of play was in the Dick Butkus-Ray Nitschke mold.

"After I fought for my life in Atlanta, everyone said, 'He might not be the same again. He might not get 100 tackles. Ray Lewis will never be the player he was.' Well, they were absolutely correct," Lewis said. "I'm not the same player. I'm better."

While Ravens coach Brian Billick calls the charges "a non-issue," Lewis faces another test on media day on Tuesday. Then, surrounded by hundreds of interrogators, he will be bombarded by questions about the Atlanta case. Even for an athlete who has been well coached and dealing with a far less incendiary topic, these mass-interview sessions can be troubling.

Collins, the Giants' quarterback, led the Carolina Panthers to the NFC championship game in 1996, the second year in the NFL for both player and team. But his career spiraled downward, a trip fueled by alcohol.

He was accused of making a racist remark to a teammate, asked out of Carolina in 1998 and was photographed walking down a New Orleans street puffing on a cigar after being released from jail on a drunk-driving charge.

This was his comeback season — his 3,610 yards passing were the third-best in team history, and he threw for 381 yards and five touchdowns in the 41-0 win over Minnesota in the NFC championship game.

He makes his apologies Monday evening. Then, say Collins and coach Jim Fassel, he will talk only about football.

What about football?  
The Ravens, who moved to Baltimore from Cleveland in 1996, are

here despite a stretch in October when they went five games without scoring a touchdown. Trent Dilfer took over at quarterback for Tony Banks for the ninth game and now has won 10 straight.

Dilfer is returning to Tampa, where he played for six years with the Bucs.

The Giants are returning to the city of their last Super Bowl victory, a 20-19 thriller over Buffalo 10 years ago.

This team probably isn't as good as that one, and certainly not as good as the one that won the Giants' first Super Bowl in 1987.

But nobody is these days. As Wellington Mara, the Giants' 84-year-old owner, put it after the win over Minnesota:

"We were the worst team to get home field in the playoffs. We were the worst team to get to a championship game. Now we'll be the worst team ever to win a Super Bowl."

Another owner might be saying the same thing next season.

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## Horoscope by Linda C. Black

**TODAY'S BIRTHDAY** (Jan. 22). The pressure's on this year, but it's your decision. Push hard to make a fantasy come true in February. Lighten up and get yourself a treat in March. Be solid in May, and earn more respect. Be frivolous in June, and have more fun. Tend to others in July, and to your own health, too. Easily win the debate in August, through verbal skills and planning. Upgrade your environment in September, through a shrewd deal. Choose your words wisely in November, and keep them to a minimum. In December, the secret will be out, and you can then speak freely.

To get the advantage, check the day's rating: 10 is the easiest day, 0 the most challenging.

**ARIES** (March 21-April 19) & #61630; Today is a 7 & #61630; There's a tough assignment. But you have a great team just waiting for your orders. Better think about this carefully, but not for long. If you don't act soon, they may get impatient and head out in the wrong direction!

**TAURUS** (April 20-May 20) & #61630; Today is a 7 & #61630; You want to run wild and free, but that's not what others expect. They may actually think you're going to simply do what you're told, working at a difficult job for not enough pay. If you threaten to do the former, you may see an increase in the latter.

**GEMINI** (May 21-June 21) & #61630; Today is an 8 & #61630; The lure of far distant isles has got you looking at travel videos and saving up your pennies. This could work. Give yourself a juicy enough goal, and you'll be amazed at what you can accomplish. It might even be fun.

**CANCER** (June 22-July 22) & #61630; Today is an 8 & #61630; Sometimes talking about money can be frustrating, but it can also be inspiring. And romantic. There's nothing more romantic than a retirement account in both your names, that's getting fatter. Work on that now.

**LEO** (July 23-Aug. 22) & #61630; Today is a 6 & #61630; A person you admire for good sense may have a wildly impractical streak. That's liable to come out right before your very eyes. So don't just assume somebody you know and trust will make the right decision. Interfere just enough to be sure.

**VIRGO** (Aug. 23-Sept. 22) & #61630; Today is a 7 & #61630; Your day is full of mechanical challenges. To make life easier, ask your sweetheart out to dinner. Not only will that give you a sense of celebration no matter how the day went, but it also means you don't have to cook or clean up.

**LIBRA** (Sept. 23-Oct. 22) & #61630; Today is a 7 & #61630; You could get way off schedule by talking to your sweetheart on the phone. You're fascinated by the intellectual type, but take care. It's not a good idea to get distracted if you should be doing something else.

**SCORPIO** (Oct. 23-Nov. 21) & #61630; Today is a 6 & #61630; You're learning about something you want to do, but you're not learning fast enough. Your problem is you want to know everything right away. Well, don't fret. If you keep at it, you will. It's just a matter of time and persistence.

**SAGITTARIUS** (Nov. 22-Dec. 21) & #61630; Today is a 6 & #61630; Are you working on a big assignment? Are you more interested in daydreaming about something you and your sweetheart want to do together? Oooops. There's time for that later. First, bring in the money to pay for it.

**CAPRICORN** (Dec. 22-Jan. 19) & #61630; Today is a 7 & #61630; Jot down whatever bursts into your brain. This could be the idea of the century. You could be rolling in dough in no time. You'll have to figure out how to build it, of course, and take out a patent. But hey, with talents like yours, that's the easy part.

**AQUARIUS** (Jan. 20-Feb. 18) & #61630; Today is a 7 & #61630; You'd like to do pure research but you have to pay the rent. Don't worry about it, just get back to work. You can do the research simultaneously. When you show the boss what you're up to, you might get a bonus.

**PISCES** (Feb. 19-March 20) & #61630; Today is a 7 & #61630; Don't convince yourself that a story you're making up is true, especially if it's a sad story about yourself. It's not good for you to spend a lot of time in your head. Instead, ask friends for feedback. They'll give you the straight scoop.

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