

NFL

Mebane, Rubin big keys in Seattle's top run defense

By **TIM BOOTH**
AP Sports Writer

RENTON, Wash. — From afar, Brandon Mebane would look at film of other defensive tackles around the NFL and what Ahtyba Rubin was doing in Cleveland jumped off the screen.

What he saw on the screen became even more impressive when Rubin decided to sign with Seattle last offseason and play alongside Mebane on the Seahawks defensive line.

"He runs down the field like I never seen no big dude run down the field," Mebane said. "He can run like deer. Like a big deer. He's a great player."

On a defense with stars like Richard Sherman, Bobby Wagner, Michael Bennett and Earl Thomas — just to name a few — players like Mebane and Rubin can get easily overlooked. It's understandable because their positions on the interior of Seattle's defensive line make it difficult to stand out.

But ask around about why the Seahawks had the best run defense in the NFL this season giving up just 81.5 yards per game and were successful twice in

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— **Brandon Mebane, Seattle defensive tackle on line mate Ahtyba Rubin**

shutting down Minnesota's Adrian Peterson and the reasons point back directly to Mebane and Rubin as the instigators of that success.

"They make plays and they make sure that me and K.J. (Wright) never really get touched," middle linebacker Bobby Wagner said. "They've done a great job with that. I don't know if you guys have noticed it on film, but sometimes (Mebane) calls out the plays before it happens and (Rubin) does a great job of two-gapping and keeping the double teams. They're very crucial to what we do as a team."

The task before Mebane and Rubin this week is



AP Photo/Rick Scuteri

In this Jan. 3, 2016 file photo, Arizona Cardinals running back David Johnson (31) is stopped by Seattle Seahawks outside linebacker K.J. Wright (50), free safety Earl Thomas (29), defensive tackle Ahtyba Rubin (77), defensive tackle Brandon Mebane (92) and middle linebacker Bobby Wagner (54) during the first half of an NFL football game in Glendale, Ariz.

among the most difficult they have faced all season, trying to shut down Carolina in the NFC divisional playoff game

on Sunday. There may not be a more challenging or diverse run game in the NFL to try and slow down. Whether it's

Jonathan Stewart carrying the ball, Mike Tolbert bullying his way through the line or the times quarterback Cam Newton keeps the ball in his own hands, there is not a more unique running attack in the league according to the Seahawks.

"It is a really diverse run game. It is the most that we will see in the NFL," Seattle coach Pete Carroll said. "There is nobody that does more stuff and it's basically because the quarterback is such a dynamic part of it. ... This is the most difficult offense that we face and it really is because Cam is such an adept player and they rely on him."

Both Rubin and Mebane entered this season with questions about how they could be effective for Seattle.

Mebane was coming back from a serious hamstring injury that cost him the latter half of last season and the playoffs. He was also trying to come back from a significant injury at age 30 and playing a position where strength and explosiveness with his legs is a priority.

"Can you imagine how big his hammy is? That's a major surgery, a major injury to come back from," Carroll said. "As we watched him

in the offseason, through the summer time, he worked so hard to get back. I've said that he had one of his best off-seasons ever. He had to, to get back. That usually pays you back, and he's had a really good year for us."

Rubin was a bit of an unknown because of the lack of attention defensive tackles receive, but Seattle was confident in his ability to play the "three-technique" defensive tackle position and be able to cover two gaps of the offensive line. What caught them a bit by surprise was Rubin's speed chasing the play downfield. He recovered Adrian Peterson's key fourth-quarter fumble last week 13 yards beyond the line of scrimmage.

"It was really clear the first time we'd sat down and really talked about it. I asked him to try to be really stout as a three-technique at the line of scrimmage, and then we've seen you running the football, be great at doing that for us and show us that you're a big guy that can chase," Carroll said. "I wasn't asking him something that he wasn't ready to do, but we just kind of solidified what our expectations were. He's done that all year long."

Lynch full participant in practice

Associated Press

RENTON, Wash. — Seattle Seahawks running back Marshawn Lynch was a full participant in practice on Wednesday, but coach Pete Carroll cautioned that was no indication whether he would play in the NFC divisional playoff game at Carolina on Sunday.

Carroll said during his news conference that Lynch would be evaluated daily going forward to determine his availability for Sunday's game. Lynch hasn't played since Week 10 because of an abdominal injury.

Carroll said he can feel that Lynch is "encouraged" to go for it this week. After practice concluded, Seattle offensive coordinator Darrell Bevell said Lynch looked a little quicker than he did last week.

"He had a little bit more



AP Photo/Ted S. Warren

In this Jan. 6, 2016 file photo, Seattle Seahawks running back Marshawn Lynch holds a candy cane in his mouth as he warms up before NFL football practice in Renton, Wash. Lynch has been recovering since having abdominal surgery last November.

pace, a little bit more tempo to him even than he did at the end of last week," Bevell said.

Seattle was expecting Lynch to play last week

against Minnesota before he made the late decision not to travel with the team to Minneapolis. Carroll said Lynch did not have a setback and just believed he wasn't ready to go. Lynch has not played since Week 10 against Arizona, missing the past eight games.

"I can tell he's encouraged to go forward again and see if we can get it done," Carroll said.

Seattle also got tight end Luke Willson back at practice Wednesday. Willson suffered a concussion in Week 16 against St. Louis, missing the regular-season finale at Arizona, and suffered a setback last week when he attempted to return to practice. Willson was a full participant and would be an important addition with the success Seattle's tight ends have had against Carolina the past two seasons.



This is a Dec. 31, 2015, aerial photo showing the Edward Jones Dome in St. Louis.

AP Photo/Jeff Roberson, File

St. Louis mayor: No interest in trying again on NFL

By **JIM SALTER**
Associated Press

ST. LOUIS — The NFL is abandoning St. Louis again, and this time, the mayor has no interest in trying to bring pro football back.

League owners voted Tuesday to allow the Rams to move to Los Angeles starting next season. It means that St. Louis is losing a team for the second time in three decades. The Cardinals left for Arizona in 1987, and St. Louis was without football until the Rams arrived from Los Angeles in 1995.

The decision stunned some in St. Louis who thought plans for a \$1 billion riverfront stadium would persuade the NFL to let the Rams stay. The stadium plan was deemed inadequate, opening the way for Tuesday's decision that also gives the Chargers the first option at sharing a new \$1.86 billion stadium planned by Rams owner Stan Kroenke in Inglewood, California.

St. Louis Mayor Francis Slay has had enough, saying the NFL strung St. Louis advocates along while never intending to block Kroenke's move. The decision "sent a loud and clear message."

"Their home cities and hometown fans are commodities to be abandoned once they no longer suit the league's purposes," Slay said Wednesday.

Asked if he believes the city should pursue another team, Slay gave a definitive no.

"At this point I'm so frustrated and disappointed with the NFL," Slay said. "Why would anybody want to, in any way, even entertain any suggestions from the NFL after the way they dealt with St. Louis here? I mean, it was dishonest. They were not being truthful with us. There's no appetite that I have to take another run at an NFL team."

Dave Peacock, co-chairman of the St. Louis stadium task force, wasn't as adamant, but seemed resigned to life without the

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— **Francis Slay, St. Louis mayor**

NFL. He said he believes St. Louis has the fan support, but "it would need to be a fully committed effort by the league and the owner." Besides, he said, the league is not planning to expand, and no teams seem poised to move.

Peacock called the interactions with NFL leadership "a head-scratcher." He said NFL executives initially expressed support and optimism about the stadium project. In the end, he said, he realized the deck was stacked against St. Louis, perhaps the whole time.

"Having been through this process I'd say there was probably more of this that was contemplated and contrived than I realized," said Peacock, a former Anheuser-Busch executive.

With the Rams leaving, the stadium plan appears all but dead.

The plan was contentious because it would have required about \$400 million in public money (with the rest coming from the league and the owner), just a little over two decades after the Edward Jones Dome was built completely with taxpayer funds. City aldermen had already approved about \$150 million, but some Republican legislative leaders were pushing for a public vote on state funding. A legislative hearing scheduled for Wednesday was called off.

Slay was clearly ready to let go of the stadium plan, which would have revitalized an area of mostly vacant buildings just north of the Gateway Arch. He said land acquisition efforts at the riverfront site should continue toward "a different kind of development,"

though he said there are no specific alternative plans.

Across the St. Louis region, the mood was melancholy, with more than a hint of anger.

"Money walks," read a banner sports page headline in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch. "Kroenke turns his back on St. Louis."

On social media, many fans fondly remembered the "Greatest Show on Turf" Rams who were dominant from 1999 through 2003, winning one Super Bowl and losing another, before going on a 12-season run of non-winning seasons that included a 7-9 finish in 2015. Many expressed anger with Kroenke.

The loss of football will hurt the region economically. Team jobs will move to Los Angeles. The stadium project would have created hundreds of jobs in construction, design and other fields.

The city, St. Louis County and the state are still paying off bonds that built the dome through 2021. Slay said the city's annual \$5 million bond payment had been offset by revenue generated by the team. Not anymore.

The dome is part of the city's convention center, so there are no plans to alter it — except for the removal of Rams memorabilia and property. By Wednesday, large banners featuring Rams players were still up outside dome and on the interior rafters.

Slay said the loss of the Rams is a "short-term blow" to the city's ego, but St. Louis will survive.

"We're going to move forward," Slay said. "We're going to do very well without NFL football in St. Louis."

Browns, Giants fill head coach slots

By **TOM WITHERS**
Associated Press

CLEVELAND — Hue Jackson has experience as a head coach, knows the AFC North and has fixed quarterbacks.

Just want the Browns were looking for.

The Bengals offensive coordinator, who waited four years for his second crack at leading an NFL team, has been hired as Cleveland's next coach — the struggling franchise's eighth since 1999 and sixth since 2008.

The 50-year-old Jackson finalized his deal on Wednesday, swiftly ending the Browns' search which began on Jan. 3 when owner Jimmy Haslam fired Mike Pettine after two losing seasons.

Jackson had also interviewed with the San Francisco 49ers and was scheduled to meet later this week with the New York Giants, but Haslam was not going to be outbid for a coach he coveted.

Haslam said Jackson has all the qualities that will provide strong leadership for the team.

"He is highly experienced, deeply passionate about winning, and relentless in trying to find ways to put his players in the best position to succeed," he said. "He possesses that unique ability to reach the entire locker room in a way that demands accountability while getting the buy-in and team-first mentality that leads to positive results. I think our players will love playing for him."

It remains to be seen what plans Jackson might have for Johnny Manziel, the troubled QB whose two seasons in Cleveland have been filled with controversy and more



(AP Photo/Tony Dejak)

Cleveland Browns head coach Hue Jackson answers questions during a news conference, Wednesday, Jan. 13, 2016, in Berea, Ohio.

chaos than the Browns needed. Manziel's recently ended his second season by missing a scheduled medical treatment amid reports he was spotted in Las Vegas.

Jackson spent the past two seasons overseeing Cincinnati's offense. A former college quarterback at Pacific, Jackson pushed Dalton to his best statistical season and was known for his creative flair with unbalanced lines and unorthodox formations.

Jackson's challenge in Cleveland will be turning around a team that can't seem to get out of its own way. Pettine had the Browns off to a 7-4 start in 2014, but he lost 18 of his last 21 games.

Giants hire Ben McAdoo

EAST RUTHERFORD, N.J. (AP) — A person familiar with the decision tells The Associated Press the New York Giants are hiring offensive coordinator Ben McAdoo as their next head coach.

The 38-year-old McAdoo is being given the job a little

more than a week after Tom Coughlin stepped down after 12 seasons, the person spoke Wednesday on condition of anonymity because the team has not officially announced the hiring.

The Giants have liked what McAdoo has done with the offense the past two years, helping quarterback Eli Manning get back on track.

It didn't hurt that Manning voiced support for his coach after the season. This would be McAdoo's first head coaching job.

McAdoo joined the NFL in 2004 as an offensive quality control assistant with the New Orleans Saints, spent a year with the 49ers the following year and then joined the Green Bay Packers for the next eight seasons, working with the tight ends and the final two years as Aaron Rodgers' quarterback coach.

The Giants hired him in 2014 to replace Kevin Gilbride and his version of the West Coast offense — and the addition of Odell Beckham Jr. — has helped revive the offense.