



AFC NEWS 'N' NOTES

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IT'S A SHOWDOWN ON THE OHIO!

Cincinnati gave the world **ROY ROGERS**. Pittsburgh produced **GENE KELLY**. As Rogers lived on an American landscape full of promise and hope, Kelly danced and crooned, catching raindrops with an open ear-to-ear smile.

The 2005 NFL season is lit with similar optimism for the Cincinnati Bengals (5-1) and Pittsburgh Steelers (3-2), division rivals for 36 years separated by 290 miles of highway. However, only one team will have "happy trails" Sunday after meeting each other at Cincinnati's Paul Brown Stadium on the Ohio River.

Both clubs hold high expectations due to the play of their young quarterbacks, who stand Nos. 1-2 in NFL passer rating: Pittsburgh's **BEN ROETHLISBERGER** (123.8) and Cincinnati's **CARSON PALMER** (113.6). Roethlisberger, 23, is in the midst of his second NFL season while Palmer, 25, is a third-year pro and in his second year as Cincinnati's starter.

The game will mark only the second time since 1990 that quarterbacks with passer ratings higher than 113.0 square off as late as a Week 7 (Week 9, 2004: Minnesota's **DAUNTE CULPEPPER**, 114.2, vs. Indianapolis' **PEYTON MANNING**, 117.4).

"The fact that you have two franchise quarterbacks in the game who are both at nearly the same level of development is exciting," says former Steelers tackle **TUNCH ILKIN** (1980-92), who today is a Steelers radio analyst. "It's a beautiful thing. There's a lot to look forward to."

A comparative career view of Roethlisberger and Palmer (who combine for 20 TDs and two interceptions in 2005):

	Starting Record	Comp.	Att.	Pct.	Yards	TD	INT	Passer Rating	Record in Past 6 Starts
Roethlisberger	16-1	248	381	65.1	3,534	24	11	103.9	5-1
Palmer	11-8	406	629	64.5	4,470	31	20	88.7	5-1

Cincinnati has led the AFC North for four weeks – the team's longest first-place stretch since its seven-week tenure at the top in 1990 (Weeks 2-8). The Steelers, meanwhile, have won nine consecutive road games to equal the franchise record, accomplished in 1974-75. The 1974 and '75 seasons saw the Steelers win their first two of four '70s Super Bowls.

Of that era, former Cincinnati tight end **BOB TRUMPY** (1968-77) keenly recalls playing in the early years of the rivalry when the Bengals finished second in the division behind Pittsburgh by one game or less three years in a row (1975-77). Trumpy now calls NFL action on CBS Radio Sports/Westwood One.

"Their front four were extraordinary pass rushers," says Trumpy of a Steelers' "Steel Curtain" defense whose line was anchored by Pro Football Hall of Famer **JOE GREENE** and **L.C. GREENWOOD**. "When they blitzed, it was to kill a drive, change our offensive momentum, disrupt our timing, and it would drive us crazy."

"The Bengals teams of that era were very good. (Quarterback) **KEN ANDERSON** was just beginning to assert himself, **BILL WALSH** and **BILL "TIGER" JOHNSON** were calling the plays. The defense was quick, and tough. Many seasons we thought we were the second-best team in the league, not just the division. The Steelers were the team to beat, and we seldom did." Pittsburgh won 11 of 16 against the Bengals from 1970-77 and were 5-1 against Cincinnati from 1975-77.

"The Cleveland Browns were (head coach) **PAUL BROWN**'s biggest rivalry, but to the players, it was the Steelers that we prepared hardest for," says Trumpy.

Ilkin agrees. "Just being a part of that rivalry was memorable," he says. "There was a real richness to it."

The rivalry continues, with its quarterbacks of the future, Sunday in Cincinnati.