



MONDAY NIGHT NOTES

FOR USE AS DESIRED
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FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION,
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COLTS GO FOR 11-0 IN MNF DIVISION-LEADER SHOWDOWN

Ah, Thanksgiving weekend!

Family and friends cross state lines for long-awaited get-togethers, plump turkeys are reduced to skeletons, and a 15-game-course of NFL action is served from Thanksgiving through Sunday evening.

And like that last piece of pumpkin pie you can't turn down, there will be one more helping of pigskin excitement on the table this Monday night (ABC, 9:00 PM ET). Grab an empty plate and your favorite chair when the undefeated Indianapolis Colts (10-0) seek to extend their perfect record to 11-0 when hosting the Pittsburgh Steelers (7-3).

"It's another opportunity," says Colts head coach **TONY DUNGY**, who Monday can guide the franchise to its 400th win. "We're playing a division leader, trying to stay ahead of Denver in the race for first position in the conference and to stay ahead of Jacksonville. It's one big game, a lot of ramifications, an AFC game. That's what it is for us right now.

"On Monday night, obviously, everyone wants to play well. You've got an extra day of preparation. When you're playing division leaders and top teams, you look at the tape and you're going to get yourself ready."

After dropping a 16-13 overtime decision at division rival Baltimore last week, the Steelers must win to maintain stride with Cincinnati (7-3) atop the AFC North. Horseshoes on helmets have brought good fortune for Pittsburgh head coach **BILL COWHER**. A former fellow assistant coach with Dungy at Kansas City (1989-91), Cowher is 6-0 against Indianapolis, including playoffs – the only team he has defeated as many as six times without a loss.

"Right now, it's a six-game season," says Cowher. "That's how we have to look at it." Looking ahead to their next three games, the Steelers face Indy (10-0), Cincinnati (7-3) and Chicago (7-3) – teams whose combined record stands at a towering 24-6 (.800).

Second-year **QB BEN ROETHLISBERGER** is expected to play his first game for the Steelers Monday night in three weeks, coming off a knee injury. Roethlisberger is 18-1 (.947) as a starter. Likewise, the Colts have 18 victories in their past 19 games.

Pressuring the Pittsburgh QB will be defensive ends **ROBERT MATHIS** (10.0) and **DWIGHT FREENEY** (7.0) – the NFL's leading sack tandem. And should Pittsburgh get the pass away, it will have to get by linebacker **CATO JUNE**, who is tied for third in the NFL with five interceptions – the most by a linebacker.

Spoiling perfect records is a Pittsburgh specialty of late. Dating back to last season, the Steelers have defeated the last two teams they have encountered with at least 6-0 records:

STEELERS' OPPONENT	OPPONENTS' RECORD	FINAL SCORE
New England (10/31/04)	6-0	Steelers, 34-20
Philadelphia (11/7/04)	7-0	Steelers, 27-3
Indianapolis (11/28/05)	10-0	???

One reason why the Colts (3) and Steelers (2) have combined for five playoff berths in the past three seasons is their ability to seize a lead and keep it. Both coaches reside on the NFL's top three list of winning games in which their teams hold a 14-point lead (since 1970, minimum 50 games):

HEAD COACH	RECORD WITH 14-POINT LEAD	PCT.
Tony Dungy	53-0	1.000
Bill Belichick	54-1	.982
Bill Cowher	76-1-1	.981

MONDAY NIGHT MUSINGS – PITTSBURGH STEELERS AT INDIANAPOLIS COLTS

JINX? WHAT JINX?

- Steelers safety **TROY POLAMALU**, who is nearly as renowned for his flowing curly hair as he is for his Pro Bowl-caliber talents in the defensive backfield, recently graced the cover of a *Sports Illustrated* issue that featured an NFL midseason report.

Though Polamalu had never heard of the infamous *SI* cover jinx, he coincidentally covered his bases with a good deed the week after the issue hit newsstands. After he returned a **BRETT FAVRE** fumble for a 77-yard touchdown in the Steelers' win over Green Bay on November 6, Polamalu gave the ball to cornerback **BRYANT MC FADDEN**, who caused the fumble.

"That was a shocker," McFadden said. "I didn't expect him to do that, and I'm going to get it painted and put the date of the game and what happened. I appreciate what he did."

As far as the jinx, Polamalu's good deed is holding up: he has registered six tackles in each of his last two games.

PURSUIT OF PERFECTION

- Rumor has it that former Dolphins linebacker **NICK BUONICONTI** and the rest of the famed 1972 squad that went undefeated (17-0) crack open a bottle of champagne every year once the NFL's last undefeated falls. This year, the Colts (10-0) have forced Buoniconti and friends to keep that champagne on ice for more than half a season.

Though there might be some truth to the rumor, Pro Football Hall of Famer **DON SHULA**, who coached the '72 Dolphins, cautions that people should not believe all they hear.

"We've got a few players that live close to each other," says Shula. "Buoniconti, **DICK ANDERSON** and **BOB GRIESE** all live in the Coral Gables area, and they have been accused of opening a bottle of champagne when that final undefeated team gets beaten. The truth is that maybe that does happen with those three, but we've never gotten together and had a team celebration."

Though Shula says he would be the first to congratulate Colts head coach **TONY DUNGY** if his squad can run the table, he enjoys it each year when people remember the '72 Dolphins' magical run to 17-0.

"Every year when people get to 6-0, 7-0, 8-0, 9-0, they start resurrecting the '72 Dolphins, and that's always nice to be resurrected and talked about."

A SPECIAL SPOT FOR INDIANAPOLIS YOUTH

- The Colts have teamed up with an Indiana furniture outlet named "Rent-A-Center" to build "RAC Rooms" at three Boys and Girls Clubs in Indianapolis.

Linebacker **CATO JUNE** and defensive tackle **LARRY TRIPPLETT** recently attended a ceremony to unveil a RAC Room at the Wheeler-Dowe Boys and Girls Club in Indianapolis. The room, which is the first of the three to open its doors, is designed to provide a safe and enjoyable environment for Indianapolis youth.

Each room will be tastefully furnished with items from the Colts and Rent-A-Center, complete with computers, sofas, big-screen televisions, stereos, and Colts memorabilia.

RANDLE EL GETS TAKEN TO SCHOOL

- Steelers wide receiver **ANTWAAN RANDLE EL** accompanied **ROBERT SCHWARTZ**, a fourth-grade student at Jefferson Elementary School in Pennsylvania, to school last week as part of the NFL's "Take a Player to School" program.

Randle El teamed with Schwartz, who wore a Randle El No. 82 Steelers jersey, and helped out with morning announcements and fielding questions from eager fourth- and fifth-grade students.

"I've been cheered before, but this is more on a personal level than running out onto Heinz Field," said Randle El.

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