



Peyton Manning threw for an NFL-record 5,477 yards this season along with 55 TDs, also an NFL record.

Super Bowl Preview: Denver Should Roll

By Dave Martin
Epoch Times Staff

If there's been one knock over the years against the nearly flawless Peyton Manning, it's been his playoff resume. The four-time MVP (soon to be the five-time MVP) was largely unsuccessful in each of his first three playoff appearances, all resulting in losses. When he finally broke through after the 2003 season with a pair of emphatic January wins, he was stonewalled by Tom Brady and the Patriots in consecutive post-seasons.

Manning has since broken through for two playoff wins against the Brady/Belichick combo, a Super Bowl victory, and now two more appearances on the NFL's greatest stage.

Even last season's meltdown was more a result of a stunning defensive breakdown against Baltimore. Peyton was solid with 290 yards passing and three scores.

In other words, whatever was holding Manning back in the postseason is no longer there. If anything he should be more motivated to wash out the bad taste in his mouth that last year's debacle left him with.

That said, he'll have his work

cut out for him against Seattle on Super Bowl Sunday.

As everyone knows, the Seahawks' defense is the best in the league—both in yards allowed (273.6) and points given up (14.4).

Seattle's "Legion of Boom" secondary is probably the fiercest in the league with safety Earl Thomas and cornerback Richard Sherman forming the best backfield duo in the business.

But Manning and the Broncos' offense have chewed up nearly every defense they've seen this season. Denver's offense is just as good as Seattle's defense, averaging league-highs of 457.3 yards per game and 37.9 points per game.

So who wins when the best offense plays the best defense?

Good question.

On paper, it would appear the matchup all comes down to Peyton's arm against the speed and coverage ability of Seattle's secondary.

But Peyton's strength is not just in his arm. It's in his head.

Although it's hard to find a statistic to prove it, Manning is the master of audibles.

Being the offensive coordinator of a Manning-led offense must be one of the more comfortable jobs out there. If Manning walks to the line of scrim-

mage and sees something he doesn't like, he simply audibles out of the play. He even throws in a few "Omaha!!" calls while he's at it.

Seems easy enough, but no one is more successful at doing it and the Seahawks are going to have to adjust to it.

If Seattle brings both safeties near the line, Peyton will be making sure it's a pass play. If the safeties are playing deep, he'll be making sure the ball is handed off to either Knowshon Moreno or Montee Ball.

And if Seattle tries to disguise the coverage until the last second, Manning has no problem making a late audible.

Meanwhile, as the "Legion of Boom" is busy playing mind games with Peyton, they'll also be trying to cover 1,000-yard receivers Demaryius Thomas and Eric Decker as well as two-time All-Pro Wes Welker and Pro Bowl tight end Julius Thomas.

Although there is still the matter of Denver's defense against Seattle, and quarterback Russell Wilson, the real battle stars when Peyton takes the field.

When Manning is on, with this many weapons at his disposal, there's no beating him: Broncos 34, Seahawks 21.

NASCAR Creates Winner-Take-All Championship Format

CHARLOTTE, N.C.—Say goodbye to the NASCAR era when a driver, fresh off a satisfying, top-10 finish, climbs from the car and raves about what a good points day it was.

Winning is all that matters under the latest and most radical change to the Chase for the Sprint Cup championship.

NASCAR's overhauled championship format announced Thursday is a 16-driver, winner-take-all elimination system designed to reward "the most worthy, battle-tested" driver at the end of the season.

"Riding around and being pleased because the (previous) format rewards consistency, those days are going to be pretty much over," NASCAR Chairman Brian France said.

The field, expanded from 12 to 16 drivers, will be whittled down to a final four through eliminations after every three races of the 10-race Chase. The

remaining four drivers will go into the season finale with an equal chance to win the championship: The first of the four to cross the finish line will be crowned Sprint Cup champion.

It's the fourth change to either the points or championship format since France created the Chase in 2004. For 28 years prior to the Chase, consistency reigned as the champion was the driver with the most points at the end of the season.

That ended a year after Matt Kenseth won the 2003 title with a single victory, and France began his pursuit of creating "Game 7 moments." Along the way, he has pushed his agenda of wanting aggressive drivers chasing wins.

He'll get that under the new format, which makes settling for points pretty much pointless.

Why? Because a win in the 26-race regular season virtually guarantees a berth in the Chase. Then, eliminations begin, and a driver can guarantee a trip to the next round with a victory.

Last August, Brad Keselowski chased Kyle Busch around Watkins Glen and declined to aggressively move

his rival out of the way. Keselowski settled for second, racing for a good points day and declining to inflame his touchy relationship with Busch. But in doing so, he failed to win a regular-season race and missed the Chase, making him ineligible to defend his title.

Under the new format, a winless Keselowski would have no choice in that same situation but to bang fenders with Busch and go after the win.

That's exactly what France wants to see on the track each week.

"This is pretty clear: You have to win, you have to compete at a higher level, you have to take more chances," France said.

Busch, who won four races and finished fourth in the standings, was cautious about the new setup.

"I don't like to always be the Debbie Downer ... but some of the things they are doing, I'm not in agreement with," Busch said, declining to be specific because he spoke before NASCAR unveiled the format.

He noted that Keselowski would have had incentive to wreck Busch at Watkins Glen, and said there are other scenarios NASCAR must now consider. He referred to last season, when, Kenseth opened

the Chase with a win at Chicago, where Busch followed his teammate across the finish line for a 1-2 finish for Gibbs.

They again went 1-2 at New Hampshire the next week. But in the new format, that's not necessarily good enough. Busch would instead be looking to win in such a scenario to ensure a trip to the next round.

Another twist: In the Kenseth-Busch scenario, it would have been in the best interest of Joe Gibbs Racing for Busch to win and, because the points reset after each round, meaning multiple victories by a driver in the Chase has no benefit—the team would have incentive to orchestrate a Busch victory over Kenseth.

"That would be a NASCAR gray area that they'd have to make a judgment call on," Busch said.

France said extensive research done by NASCAR showed the new format appealed to fans because it eliminates points racing.

"The avid fans like it because they don't particularly care for points racing, even though they understand it," France said.

From The Associated Press



NASCAR CEO Brian France is shaking up NASCAR's championship format.

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