Turning points: Steelers win in OT, 23-20
Holmes' 38-yard TD reception, a fumble returned by Woodley for a score 15 seconds later spark Steelers to OT victory

Tuesday, September 30, 2008
By Ed Bouchette, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

A burst of anger at halftime from quarterback Ben Roethlisberger at his teammates was followed by a burst of scoring late in the third quarter that boosted the Steelers from behind, and they beat the surprising Baltimore Ravens, 23-20, on Jeff Reed's third field goal of the game, from 46 yards in overtime last night.

Baltimore players celebrated because they thought Reed's field goal went wide, but it hooked just inside the left upright for the seventh winning field goal of his career.

"Oh, yeah, there was doubt," Reed said as he watched the ball hook to the left.

The Ravens had tied the score with four minutes left when Le'Ron McClain ran 2 yards for their only score in the second half that sent it into overtime.

The Steelers were left with one running back, Mewelde Moore, for most of the fourth quarter and overtime after Rashard Mendenhall fractured his shoulder and Carey Davis sprained his ankle. Mendenhall, making his first pro start, will miss the rest of the season.

Moore did not let them down. He turned a short pass into a 24-yard gain to Baltimore's 31 on third down, keeping their winning drive alive. He then caught a crucial 7-yard pass on third down to put Reed in better range from 46 yards.

"To make a play to help my team out ... I can't explain it," Moore said. "That [24-yarder] was the biggest play in my life."

The victory boosted the Steelers back atop the AFC North Division at 3-1. Baltimore fell to 2-1.

"We're never going to quit," Roethlisberger said after the game.

He said something entirely different at halftime. The Steelers trailed, 13-3, and they were booed as they left the field.

Roethlisberger shouted at his offensive teammates in the locker room.

"I was tired of being booed," he said. "I was tired of being embarrassed."

Tackle Willie Colon said: "He's just being a leader. He said you either step up or die, and everyone got it in their minds they were going to fight."
Whether it was those fighting words or something else, the Steelers stunning turnaround late in the third quarter occurred within 15 seconds when it appeared nothing could go right for their offense.

Then something did go right.

"We knew we had to get jump-started with a big play or a turnover," linebacker Larry Foote said.

They got both. On third down, Roethlisberger threw a pass over the middle to Santonio Holmes for a 38-yard touchdown. On the next play, James Harrison sacked Ravens rookie quarterback Joe Flacco, who fumbled. Linebacker LaMarr Woodley recovered and took it 7 yards for a touchdown.

"I'd rather take the sack-fumble all day," Harrison said about Woodley's touchdown off his effort. "He can score all he wants."

Those two scores not only breathed life into the Steelers, but they also gave them a 17-13 lead in a game in which they looked ripe for an upset loss to their bitter rivals from Baltimore.

Roethlisberger had a rough time of it until then. He was sacked three times in the first half and threw an interception that helped the Ravens turn an early tide and their first score, the ball slipping out of his hand.

Reed kicked his second field goal of the game, from 19 yards, with 9:19 left for the 20-13 Steelers advantage, but the Ravens drove 76 yards to tie the score with 4:02 left.

The Steelers got to Flacco for five sacks with Harrison leading the way with 2 1/2.

The Steelers grabbed a 3-0 lead on Reed's 49-yard field goal to end their first drive of the game.

Halotti Ngata's interception of Roethlisberger on the Steelers' second possession of the game changed its complexion. Instead of the Steelers having the lead and the ball near midfield, the Ravens took over at the Steelers' 48 and tied the score on Matt Stover's 33-yard field goal.

Stover put the Ravens in front, 6-3, when he kicked a 20-yard field goal with 3:48 left in the half. The Ravens took over at the 50 after a poor punt, and the Steelers defense made them pay for their three points by driving 48 yards on 11 plays.

Roethlisberger then had a Philadelphia moment -- he was sacked twice on three plays and fumbled on the final one. Colon recovered the fumble at the 9, but Mitch Berger managed to punt only 35 yards and the Ravens took over at the Steelers' 44 with 1:52 left in the first half.

The Ravens seemed content to settle for a field goal and a 9-3 halftime lead when Flacco dumped a short pass over the middle on third down to McClain. The fullback eluded a few defenders, most notably James Farrior and Ryan Clark, and made it 25 yards to the 3.

A few plays later, Flacco threw a fade in the left rear corner of the end zone, where tight end Daniel Wilcox caught it for a 4-yard score and a 13-3 Baltimore halftime lead that left Heinz Field in stunned silence.

It did not silence Roethlisberger, though, either in the locker room at halftime or back out on the field. He was not sacked in the second half and, using the no-huddle, found Holmes streaking across the middle on third down. He caught it behind diving cornerback Fabian Washington, then cornerback Chris McAlister missed a tackle and Holmes completed a 38-yard touchdown.

The Steelers trailed, 13-10, with 4:09 left in the third quarter.

One play and 15 seconds later, they took the lead at 17-13.

On first down, Harrison hit Flacco from behind and fumbled. Woodley fell on it at the 7, got up and ran into the end zone for a touchdown with 3:54 to go.

Their next drive came up 1 yard short for a touchdown, Reed instead kicking from 19 yards for a 20-13 lead. One play put them in scoring position. The Ravens blitzed six men on second down and Roethlisberger escaped it, shaking off linebacker Bart Scott to throw deep to Hines Ward, who was wide open for a 49-yard gain to the 10.

Baltimore, though, tied it, 20-20, when McClain ran 2 yards for a touchdown with 4:02 left. Regulation ended, and then Baltimore won the coin toss and elected to receive. A holding penalty on the kickoff gave Baltimore the ball on its 15.
Lawrence Timmons ended that series with a sack of Flacco back to the 12.

The Steelers took over after the punt at their 43 to open the winning drive. They moved 29 yards on seven plays to set up Reed's winner.

"I knew we were going to get in my range," Reed said.

Ed Bouchette can be reached at ebouchette@post-gazette.com.
Woodley, Harrison seal the deal

The record must show that in this particular edition of Monday Night Into Tuesday Morning Football, Jeff Reed ended it mercifully, which means before anybody got killed.

All you need to know might be that Reed ended it at a quarter past midnight with a 46-yard field goal that beat Baltimore and hoisted the Steelers back to the top of the AFC North, but the larger perspective must include what was essentially just another long night of gratuitous violence on the North Shore.

Steelers-Ravens prime time was four seconds old when somebody left on a cart. That was reliable special teams agent Andre Frazier, who injured his spine covering the opening kickoff that Lawrence Timmons punctuated with the kind of bone-rattling tackle that would typify the totality of these 66 NFL minutes.

Before LaMarr Woodley and James Harrison made just enough dominating defensive plays to overcome a still-skittish Steelers offense, Rashard Mendenhall and Kendall Simmons sustained season-ending injuries. Carey Davis, the backup to the backup running back, wound up on crutches, and starting running back Willis McGahee went doubled over to the sideline among several staggered Ravens.

"It was brutal out there," said Steelers linebacker Larry Foote, "a lot of injuries, a lot of injury time outs. We're always trying to create a turnover, but tonight especially, especially the way the offense was struggling. We needed something big just to get some field position."

The open week couldn't come at a better time for these Steelers; unfortunately, this isn't it.

No, this is instead a desperately short week with Jacksonville lurking at its far end in still another prime time appointment in which the Steelers will foist their version of offense on an unsuspecting nation.

Can the Steelers become the first prime-time show to be cancelled this fall?

I mean if not due to its weak narrative, just for the shrinking cast of starters.

Hines Ward spend part of the week explaining that the offense's startling failure last week in Philadelphia was not the physical mismatch the Eagles had made it appear, but rather a breakdown in communication.

But last night, Roethlisberger was communicating with perfect, high-decibel clarity. He way saying, "AAAAAAHHHHH!"

That's the general auditory response of a human dancing in traffic, scrambling for his life, wondering if the best option regarding the football is to whip it, eat it or roll over and wait for the nightmare to end.

All that saved the Steelers in this increasingly vicious AFC North tangle with the was that the relentless pressure on Roethlisberger was matched by their own front seven, which tortured a third-quarter lead away from rookie Joe Flacco by attacking him from every angle available, including from behind.

That's where Harrison arrived from, completing a typically menacing loop just as the moment Flacco was winding up for something hard down the middle. The Harrison collision knocked the ball free and off the leg of Woodley, approaching from the front, of all directions.

The next handful of seconds constituted the single most necessary, most combustible element in the curious formula that somehow put the Steelers back in charge of the AFC North: a score from someone not associated with Bruce Arians' embattled offense.

Woodley watched the football roll down his left leg, kicked it toward the open lawn at the open end of Heinz Field, flopped on it, rolled with it, got to his feet and turned into a touchdown.
"Give James all the credit on that one," said Woodley, who with Harrison accounted for four of the Steelers' five sacks. "I mean that guy works so hard, every play; it's that kind of hustle that eventually breaks a big play. He gave us the opportunity we needed right there."

But it was Woodley whose constant pressure turned things inalterably the Steelers' way in the overtime. Woodley forced Ravens running back Le'Ron McClain into a desperate chop block on the first possession of sudden death. The flag put the Ravens back at their 8. One play later, Timmons, with the evening's fifth Pittsburgh sack, gave the Steelers only offensive opportunity they'd need in the overtime. Busting through on Flacco on third-and-10 from the 15, last year's top draft pick showed again he's more than ready to play like it.

"It's always our mentality that we have to come up with some big plays on defense," said Bryant McFadden, who played a third consecutive superb game at the left corner. "We're always pressing for a sack or a turnover or a score. That's what made Woodley's the big play. We got all those things on one play."

What they got as well is a better sense of what it's going to take to win this division. The Ravens are a much more painful proposition that they might have seemed a few weeks back, and the Steelers grow more depleted with every quarter.

Gene Collier can be reached at gcollier@post-gazette.com or 412-263-1283.

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Stars step up and save the game for Steelers

Tuesday, September 30, 2008
By Ron Cook, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Steelers linebackers James Harrison and LaMarr Woodley surely will get AFC defensive player of the week consideration for their marvelous play in the 23-20 overtime win against the Baltimore Ravens last night. It almost seemed unfair to turn them loose on Ravens rookie quarterback Joe Flacco. They combined for 18 tackles, 4 sacks, 4 quarterback hurries and 2 forced Flacco fumbles. As a topper, Woodley picked up the fumble caused by Harrison and ran it 7 yards for a touchdown that put the Steelers ahead late in the third quarter.

Marvelous, indeed.

But Harrison and Woodley weren't the brightest Steelers stars on this fascinating Monday night-turned-Tuesday morning at Heinz Field. Those would be wide receiver Santonio Holmes and quarterback Ben Roethlisberger.

Holmes for making the spectacular play that saved the game when all appeared lost for the home team.

Roethlisberger for doing what the truly great ones do, hanging in on a bad night and fairly willing his team to victory.

"We'll take it no matter how ugly it is," Big Ben said when the 3 1/2 hours of brutality finally ended. "[A] 3-1 [record] sounds a lot better than 2-2."

Who saw this win coming?

You would have bet the mortgage that the Steelers wouldn't come back from ...

Sorry.

That's a bad choice of words these days.

You would have bet just about anything that the Steelers wouldn't climb out of a 13-3 hole late in the third quarter. To say Roethlisberger and his offense were lame to that point would be generous. Roethlisberger threw a terrible interception -- to 345-pound defensive end Haloti Ngata, of all people -- when the ball slipped out of his hand in the first quarter, a play that seemed to swing the game the Ravens' way. The next four Steelers' possessions ended in punts. They went from the seven-minute mark of the first quarter to the nine-minute mark of the third quarter without so much as a first down.

Remember, this was the same Steelers' offense that didn't score a touchdown in a 15-6 loss to the Philadelphia Eagles last weekend and was lucky to get one in a 10-6 win in Cleveland the weekend before.

Lame, indeed.

"I was probably more vocal at halftime than I've ever been," Roethlisberger said. "We were terrible in that first half ...

"I was tired of being boosed and tired of being embarrassed on offense. I told our guys there was no need for it. I'm proud of the way they bounced back in the second half."

What made that more impressive was that it came against the NFL's No. 1 defense. Maybe the Ravens didn't brutalize Roethlisberger the way the Eagles did, but they looked awfully impenetrable.

Roethlisberger lobbied for coach Mike Tomlin and offensive coordinator Bruce Arians to try the no-huddle on the Steelers' pivotal third-quarter drive. They obliged. "We get a rhythm going," Roethlisberger said. "I like it because it's going off what I see, not necessarily what the coaches see."

Holmes, meanwhile, lobbied for the ball.

"I told our guys walking out at halftime that I was going to make the play to spark us. 'I'll be the difference-maker,' " he said.

"I told the coaches, 'I'm ready to make a play.'"

Say this about Holmes: He's a man of his word.

On a third-and-4 play from the Baltimore 38, Roethlisberger, under tremendous pressure again, stepped up in the pocket and somehow found Holmes in the middle of the field. Cornerback Fabian Washington made a diving try to break up the pass -- instead of making the tackle for a short gain -- and paid a terrible price when he missed. Defensive back Chris McAlister and All-Pro safety Ed Reed had shots at Holmes, but he eluded them.

The next thing you knew, the Steelers were very much alive.

Down 13-10, but very much alive, thanks to that improbable 38-yard touchdown.

"Sometimes," Steelers wide receiver Hines Ward said, "all it takes is one play."

Harrison and Woodley took over from there with Harrison sacking Flacco on the next play and Woodley picking up the loose ball for his touchdown and a 17-13 lead.

Two touchdowns in 15 seconds had the big stadium rocking.

It would rock again in overtime when Roethlisberger made two more plays against that proud Baltimore defense. He stepped up to avoid the pressure and found running back Mewelde Moore for 24 yards on third-and-8, then stood tall in the pocket to find Moore again for 7 yards to get kicker Jeff Reed just close enough for his 46-yard winning field goal.

"I wasn't sure what to do there -- run or not," Roethlisberger said of that second pass to Moore, an unlikely hero who was in the game only because of injuries to starter Rashard Mendenhall and backup Carey Davis.

"But I knew we needed a chunk of yards on that play. Not a lot, just a chunk."

It was some finish.

But it wouldn't have been possible if not for Holmes' big-play heroics against a star-studded secondary and Roethlisberger's persistence in the face of that ferocious Ravens' pass rush.

Ron Cook can be reached at rcook@post-gazette.com.

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Cool Flacco had good, bad times in OT loss

Tuesday, September 30, 2008
By Robert Dvorchak, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

It was very much a mixed bag for Baltimore Ravens rookie quarterback Joe Flacco on the Monday night stage.

On one hand, he threw his first touchdown pass as a pro and extended the Steelers into overtime in his first road game. But then again, he fumbled away the ball while being sacked on a key play of the game, and he couldn't move the Ravens when they received the ball in overtime before eventually losing, 23-20.

"I was trying to get out of the pocket and throw the ball away. If we take care of the ball there, it's a different story," said Flacco, a former Pitt quarterback who was Baltimore's No. 1 draft pick with the 18th overall selection. "I understand I have to protect the ball."

Flacco, who transferred to Delaware to play for the Fightin' Blue Hens, temporarily quieted a throng of 64,038 by leading the Ravens to a 13-3 halftime lead. The previous time he played at Heinz Field was Sept. 18, 2004, in a brief appearance against the Nebraska Cornhuskers, and he never completed a pass at home while playing for the Panthers.

He overcame an inauspicious start against the Steelers when he fumbled his first snap, was tackled for a 1-yard loss and failed to complete a pass as the Ravens went three and out. The Ravens couldn't pick up a first down on their second possession either, but down, 3-0, they put up 13 unanswered points as Flacco settled in.

His first completion was an 18-yard strike to Derrick Mason in a drive that led to a tying field goal. Flacco then led the Ravens on an 11-play, 48-yard drive in the second quarter for a go-ahead field goal. And with 17 seconds remaining in the half, Flacco connected with tight end Daniel Wilcox for a 4-yard completion and his first touchdown pass as a pro.

"It was huge for us at the time," he said.

The Steelers' run of 13 consecutive wins on Monday night appeared in jeopardy, and Flacco had the home team off balance in the third quarter. On a third-down play with 11 yards to go, he scrambled to his left and then reversed field before hitting Mason again on a 26-yard gain. It didn't lead to a score, though.

"I just kept my eyes downfield," said Flacco, who called his introduction to the Ravens-Steelers rivalry as "pretty crazy."

Then calamity struck for the Ravens. Fifteen seconds after the Steelers scored their first touchdown, Flacco was sacked by James Harrison and the ball came out. Linebacker LaMarr Woodley scooped up the ball at the 7 and ran it in for a go-ahead touchdown.

But even when the Steelers went up by seven points, Flacco engineered a nine-play, 76-yard tying touchdown that ultimately led to overtime.

"Joe does not get flustered, and he takes responsibility," rookie coach John Harbaugh said. "He's a very accountable guy. His performance speaks for itself. The way we played, the way we competed and fought, is something to build on."
A key play on that drive was a 35-yard pass on third down to Mason that put the Ravens on the 5. From a Baltimore point of view, it was a magic moment.

"He didn't get rattled. He showed the poise of a veteran. That's all you can ask a young quarterback to do," Mason said. "Certain quarterbacks tend to fold, to get rattled. Joe's not that guy. I think he thrives on being in situations like that, and he pulled a rabbit out of a hat."

In the Super Bowl era, the only rookie who started out with three consecutive wins was Cincinnati's Greg Cook in 1969. Flacco and Ravens got the ball first in overtime, but they failed to pick up a first down, and the Steelers finally put them away on Jeff Reed's winning field goal.

For the game, Flacco completed 16 of 31 passes for 192 yards. He was sacked five times for 52 yards, and his quarterback rating of 81.7 was slightly better than Ben Roethlisberger's 80.4.

"I'm not big into moral victories. You either win or you lose," said Mason, who had eight catches for 137 yards. "We had it. We let it go. We have to put it behind us. We have a lot of football left. We'll see [the Steelers] again."

And the Steelers can bank on seeing a lot more of Flacco in the future.

Bob Dvorchak can be reached at rdvorchak@post-gazette.com.
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Steelers Report Card: Game Four vs. Ravens
Gerry Dulac grades the Steelers' effort in a 23-20 overtime win against the Ravens last night
Tuesday, September 30, 2008
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Quarterback


Running backs

Mewelde Moore turned out to be one of the heroes after injuries to Rashard Mendenhall and Carey Davis left him as the only healthy running halfback. Moore, who did not have a catch in the first three games, had three catches for 30 yards, including a 24-yarder on third down in overtime to set up the winning field goal. Mendenhall had 30 yards on nine carries in his first start.

 Receivers

It's never a good sign when one of the biggest contributions by Hines Ward was a block on Ed Reed on Mendenhall's 12-yard run. The exception: Santonio Holmes made a great play on a 38-yard touchdown pass, shaking CB Chris McAlister and S Ed Reed miss tackles. Also, Ward got free for a 49-yard catch to the Ravens 10 in the fourth quarter to set up Jeff Reed's second field goal.

Offensive line

It wasn't a lot better than the debacle in Philadelphia. Roethlisberger was sacked three times and the running game managed only 26 yards on nine attempts in the first half, and that includes Mendenhall's 12-yard run. But they tightened up in the second half and didn't allow a sack. Kendall Simmons had two penalties on the opening drive before departing with a right ankle injury.

Defensive line

The Ravens showed what happens when Casey Hampton doesn't play: They kept pounding the ball off tackle, particularly at the right side, and rushed for 46 yards on 15 attempts in the first half. They finished with 105 yards on 30 carries and managed to grind out yards on the tying touchdown drive. Aaron Smith was his usual stellar self, which is why the Ravens ran to the other side.

Linebackers

James Harrison and LaMarr Woodley combined to make the big play -- a 7-yard fumble return for touchdown by Woodley that was forced when Harrison sacked Joe Flacco for the second time. Otherwise, Flacco did a great job managing the blitz and exploiting the linebackers with passes over the middle on third down, including a 25-yard pass to Le'Ron McClain near the end of the first half.

Defensive backs

Give Flacco credit for keeping the defense off-balance with throws to Derrick Mason, who had eight catches for 137 yards. But shame on Deshea Townsend for not wrapping up Mason on a 35-yard pass to the Steelers 5, setting up the tying touchdown. Troy Polamalu made a nice play to break up a deep pass for Mason, but he let Daniel Wilcox get behind him on a 4-yard TD pass.

Special teams
Jeff Reed remained perfect with three more field goals, including the winning 46-yarder in overtime. The coverage units were more than solid for the fourth game in a row. Lawrence Timmons and Patrick Bailey set the tone early with a couple big hits on kick returns by Yamon Figurs. Mitch Berger had some punts in the first half, including a 35-yarder to the Steelers 44.

Coaching

Mike Tomlin said he wanted to limit the offense, and it was limited to 46 yards and three points in the first half. But, in a game in which they lost Rashard Mendenhall, Kendall Simmons and Carey Davis, among others, the offense managed to scrape out some points in the second half and help win a game it appeared it would lose. That is the most important thing in a divisional matchup.

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Note: Steelers' cumulative grade point average through Week 4 is graded on a 4.0 scale

Gerry Dulac can be reached at gdulac@post-gazette.com.

First published on September 30, 2008 at 2:16 am
It was a tough night at Heinz Field for the Steelers in many ways against the Baltimore Ravens.

Four players left the game with injuries, and two of them are done for the season.

Rookie halfback Rashard Mendenhall and right guard Kendall Simmons will be placed on injured reserve today. Mendenhall made his first start and he left in the third quarter with a fractured shoulder. Simmons has a torn Achilles tendon.

Backup linebacker Andre Frazier was carried off the field on a stretcher when he was injured on the opening kickoff, but he was judged to be OK and was in the locker room after the game after the Steelers announced he had a spine injury.

Running back Carey Davis left the game early in the fourth quarter with a sprained ankle.

Darnell Stapleton replaced Simmons, playing with the first-team offense for the first time in his two years.

The injuries to the running backs left the Steelers with one healthy back, Mewelde Moore. They went into the game with three. Gary Russell was on the roster until he was released the day before they played Philadelphia and re-signed to the practice squad.

They likely will add Russell to their 53-man roster this week and may have to sign another running back because starter Willie Parker is expected to miss the game Sunday in Jacksonville, Fla., with a sprained knee.

Toss deferred

The Steelers won the coin toss and coach Mike Tomlin chose to defer his choice to the second half. Baltimore chose to receive. Tomlin said earlier he probably would take the ball unless there were weather issues. But last night he likely preferred to have his defense on the field first.

Alumni outing

A large group of former Steelers from the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s, attended the game last night wearing throwback jerseys with their old numbers on them. They all walked to the middle of the field for the coin toss.

Among those in attendance were Bryan Hinkle, Weegie Thompson, Gary Dunn, Dirt Winston, Craig Bingham, Carnell Lake, Delton Hall, Mike Merriweather, Tunch Ilkin, Craig Wolfley, Louis Lipps, Myron Bell, Dwayne Woodruff, Jason Gildon, Kevin Greene, Calvin Sweeney, Robin Cole, Yancey Thigpen, Mike Logan and Hall of Fame running back Bill Dudley, who played in the 1940s.

Quick hits
Santonio Holmes returned punts last night and Moore replaced Mendenhall as the deep man on kickoff returns. ... Baltimore coach John Harbaugh successfully challenged a call late in the first half to give Derrick Mason a 13-yard catch to the Steelers' 31 after officials ruled he did not have possession. ... Davis replaced Moore as the third-down back for the Steelers before he was injured.

Inactives


Baltimore Ravens -- CB Samari Rolle, CB Evan Oglesby, S Dawan Landry, LB Nick Greisen, OT Oniel Cousins, OL David Hale, NT Kelly Gregg, QB Troy Smith.
The Steelers' 23-20 overtime victory over the Ravens Monday night did not come without serious cost.

A handful of players were lost to injury. Starting guard Kendall Simmons (foot) and running back Rashard Mendenhall (shoulder) are out for the season.

The victory, which came after the Steelers scored 17 unanswered points and squandered a late lead, wasn't sealed until Jeff Reed snuck a 46-yard field goal attempt just inside the left goal post at 8:55 of overtime.

It gave the Steelers a 3-1 record as well as first place in the AFC North. It may also have represented another stage in the maturation of quarterback Ben Roethlisberger.

Roethlisberger threw for 191 yards and the touchdown that jump-started the Steelers' offense in the third quarter. In truth, he may have provided the jolt his team needed earlier.

So frustrated by the Steelers play through the first two quarters Roethlisberger said he "screamed" at his teammates at halftime.

"Very unusual," wide receiver Santonio Holmes said of Roethlisberger's outburst, "but being a captain, that's what we expect from him." He came in and stated his claim."

"I was tired of being booed," Roethlisberger said, "I was tired of being embarrassed on offense. I told the guys that. I said, 'There's no need for it.'"

The Steelers had gone eight consecutive quarters without a touchdown before Roethlisberger and Holmes hooked up on a 38-yard scoring strike late in the third quarter.

On the Ravens' next play from scrimmage, James Harrison sacked quarterback Joe Flacco. That caused a fumble that LaMarr Woodley scooped up and returned 7 yards for a touchdown.

Just like that, a 13-3 deficit turned into a 17-13 Steelers lead.

The Steelers added a field goal in the fourth quarter to extend their lead but
they needed one more Reed kick to finish the Ravens, who marched 76 yards late in regulation to tie the score.

It came less than four minutes into overtime and was set up by two Roethlisberger completions to third-down back Mewelde Moore.

The two hooked up for a 24-yard gain on third-and-8 from the Steelers’ 45-yard line. Moore scampered 7 more yards on another pass reception to set up Reed's game-winning field goal.

In Moore, who hadn't played much before Monday night, the Steelers were down to their final running back.

Mendenhall will be put on injured reserve today and Carey Davis left the game with a sprained ankle. Willie Parker, who missed the Ravens game with a sprained knee, said he does not know if he will play Sunday when the Steelers visit the Jaguars.

Tomlin said the injuries the Steelers sustained -- linebacker Andre Frazier and Keyaron Fox also left the contest -- did not put a damper on the victory. He said the Steelers would look at options outside the organization at running back.

On a positive note, Frazier, who was taken off the field in a headboard after the first play of the game, did not suffer a serious spinal injury, Tomlin said. In fact, he had returned to the Steelers' sideline before the end of the game.

Of how beat up the Steelers are Tomlin said, "It's only devastating if you allow it to be. We are not concerned with our problems. They are probably happy we have them. We will address them and we will get ready to play."

The Steelers put forth another inspired defensive effort. Harrison led the way with 2 1/2 sacks.

Scott Brown can be reached at sbrown@tribweb.com or 412-481-5432.
Why does it seem like the Steelers' new-look offense is always a work in progress?

A big run here. A key interception there.

A first down here. A false start there.

Where's the consistency? Where's the rhythm?

Most of all, where are the points?

Give me the Steelers' old offense any day.

Instead of three-receiver sets, how about three extra blockers to cover Ben Roethlisberger's blind side, front side and backside?

The Steelers went eight consecutive quarters - the equivalent of two games - without a touchdown before Roethlisberger's 38-yard scoring toss to Santonio Holmes in the third quarter of Monday night's game against the Baltimore Ravens.

In spite of their continued offensive struggles, the Steelers hung around long enough to give their offense a chance to win a game in overtime they couldn't afford to lose.

Steelers 23, Ravens 20.

Fourteen quick third-quarter points wiped out a 10-point deficit and gave the Steelers a 17-13 lead. However, a surprisingly wobbly defense at key points in the game needed heroics from a once-struggling Roethlisberger to send the contest into overtime.

With an embarrassing loss at Philadelphia in the rear-view mirror and Sunday night's game at Jacksonville looming, the Steelers still came out flat against Baltimore.

The Ravens actually had control of the game - and a 10-point lead - until the Steelers' finally offense awoke from its season-long hibernation.
Roethlisberger's quick strike to Holmes was not only Holmes' first touchdown catch of the season, it was Roethlisberger's first touchdown pass since the opener.

If ever there was a moment that the Steelers needed Roethlisberger to lead the offense out of the darkness, this was it.

Booed in the first half, Roethlisberger heard cheers following the touchdown pass to Holmes, who cut across the middle and sidestepped potential tacklers in a spectacular highlight-film sequence.

Given a second chance, along with a chance to catch its collective breath, the Steelers defense created some more offense.

Right outside linebacker James Harrison, as annoying as a pebble in a shoe to the Ravens, sacked rookie quarterback Joe Flacco from behind, forcing a fumble.

Left outside linebacker LaMarr Woodley recovered the fumble and stumbled his way into the end zone for the go-ahead score.

Last year, the Steelers offense put constant pressure on the defense with inconsistency play. Time after time, the defense, ranked No. 1 in the NFL, bailed out the offense.

In a classic case of role reversal, the Steelers defense yielded a fourth-quarter touchdown making the score 20-20 after Roethisberger guided the offense to a Jeff Reed field goal following a 49-yard bomb to Hines Ward.

The question was did Roethlisberger have any magic left in his right arm to pull a victry out of thin air? They pay Big Ben the big bucks for a reason, and he delivered as needed.

John Harris can be reached at jharris@tribweb.com or 412-481-5432.
Flacco enters the fire

By Joe Starkey
TRIBUNE-REVIEW
Tuesday, September 30, 2008

Back in training camp, Baltimore Ravens rookie quarterback Joe Flacco figured to open the season with a clipboard in his hands and a ball cap on his head.

Didn't like the idea, either.

"I feel like if I'm sitting on the bench, all I'm doing is getting worse each day," Flacco said then. "I just think the best way to get better is to get in there and be thrown into the fire and see how you do."

Circumstance forced Flacco to open the season as Baltimore's starter -- but he didn't truly enter the fire until Monday night at Heinz Field.

It was his first road start, and it proved to be an eventful one in a 23-20 overtime loss to the Steelers.

A former Pitt backup who transferred to Delaware and became a first-round draft pick, Flacco gave the Steelers a touchdown on a third-quarter fumble, but he also led a late-game scoring drive to force overtime.

"He grew up on a big stage," Ravens linebacker Bart Scott said.

With the Ravens trailing, 20-13, Flacco engineered a 76-yard drive to tie the score with 4:07 left. He found Derrick Mason, his favorite receiver, three times on the drive -- including a perfect throw on third-and-12 from the Steelers' 40, one that Mason turned into a 35-yard gain.

The Ravens, who've gone through quarterbacks like socks over the past decade, might have finally found a keeper.

"Certain situations in a game, certain quarterbacks can fold -- and we've all seen it, where quarterbacks get kind of rattled," Mason said. "Things happen out there, and everyone looks at the quarterback, trying to figure out what's going on.

"Joe's not that guy. I think he thrives on (pressure), honestly. I think he thrives in being in a situation like that and pulling a rabbit out of the hat."

Unfortunately for the Ravens, Flacco ran out of rabbits in overtime. He took his fifth sack of the game, at Baltimore's 12, to help put the Steelers in good field
position, which they converted into the winning points.

Flacco finished 16 of 31 for 192 yards, a touchdown and no interceptions.

"It was pretty crazy," Flacco said of his long-awaited first start at Heinz Field, one he hoped would occur during his college years. "It was a lot of fun to go out there and deal with all the boos and everything."

After running the ball a total of 90 times in home victories over the Cincinnati Bengals and the Cleveland Browns, the Ravens figured to be ultra-conservative with Flacco.

Instead, they turned him loose.

Flacco attempted more passes (21) in the first half then he did in the entire previous week's game against the Browns. The last of those was a perfect 4-yard touchdown lob to tight end Daniel Wilcox in the corner of the end zone to give the Ravens a 13-3 lead with 17 seconds left in the half.

Through most of three quarters, everything went well. Flacco was playing efficient, mistake-free football.

Then along came James Harrison.

The Ravens were leading, 13-10, when Flacco dropped back on first down at the Ravens' 29. He held the ball a split-second too long and never saw Harrison -- a fifth-year linebacker who morphs into Hannibal Lecter against Baltimore.

Harrison knocked the ball loose with a jarring hit from behind. Teammate LaMarr Woodley scooped it up and returned it for a touchdown to give the Steelers a 17-13 lead.

"I understand I have to protect the ball," Flacco said. "That's a huge part to the game."

Earlier in the game -- on Baltimore's third snap of the second half -- Flacco showed off his athleticism, making like Fran Tarkenton on a wild scramble that ended with a 26-yard completion to Mason.

Flacco raced away from Steelers defenders to left sideline, then turned and sprinted all the way back across the field before firing a strike to Mason along the right sideline. He covered about 80 yards on the scramble.

Only two other rookie quarterbacks had started a season 2-0 -- Ryan Leaf with the San Diego Chargers in 1998 and John Elway with the Denver Broncos in 1983.

The first 3-0 start will have to wait.

Joe Starkey can be reached at jstarkey@tribweb.com or 412-320-7810.
Notebook: Steelers injuries mount up against Ravens

By Mike Prisuta
TRIBUNE-REVIEW
Tuesday, September 30, 2008

- Steelers right guard Kendall Simmons had to be helped off the field and eventually carted to the locker room late in the second quarter of Monday night's game against the Ravens at Heinz Field. The Steelers announced Simmons' return as doubtful due to a right ankle injury. When the Steelers took possession to start the third quarter, second-year pro Darnell Stapleton made his NFL debut in place of Simmons. The Steelers also announced LB Keyaron Fox as doubtful to return in the second half because of a back injury.

- Ravens running back Willis McGahee had to be helped to the locker room late in the second quarter. No announcement was immediately forthcoming about McGahee's condition. McGahee carried 12 times for 41 yards in the first two quarters, which concluded with the Ravens ahead, 13-3.

- Steelers linebacker Andre Frazier was injured while covering the opening kickoff. Frazier was blocked to the ground and stayed on the ground for several minutes until he was eventually immobilized on a stretcher and carted off the field. The Steelers announced that Frazier had sustained a spinal injury and that he would not return. Linebacker James Harrison replaced Frazier on the kickoff team.

- The Steelers scratched wide receiver Limas Sweed, running back Willie Parker (knee), tackle Tony Hills, tackle Trai Essex, linebacker Donovan Woods (hamstring), nose tackle Casey Hampton (groin) and defensive end Brett Keisel (calf). Dennis Dixon was designated as the No. 3 quarterback. Third-round pick Bruce Davis, a LB from UCLA, dressed for the first time for the Steelers.

- The Ravens didn't dress cornerback Samari Rolle (shoulder, neck), cornerback Evan Oglesby, safety Dawan Landry (neck), linebacker Nick Greisen (thigh), tackle Oniel Cousins, guard-tackle David Hale and nose tackle Kelly Gregg (knee). Troy Smith was designated as the No. 3 quarterback.

- Running back Rashard Mendenhall made his first start for the Steelers in place of Parker. Nose tackle Chris Hoke started for Hampton and defensive end Travis Kirschke started for Keisel. Cornerback Bryant McFadden started for the third consecutive game, even though Deshea Townsend returned to active duty after a two-game absence (heel). Townsend entered the game as an extra defensive back in passing situations, the role occupied by McFadden while Townsend started the first two games this season. Nose tackle Justin Bannan started for the Ravens in place of Gregg; cornerback Fabian Washington started for Rolle and strong safety Jim Leonhard started for Landry.
• With Mendenhall starting for Parker, running back Mewelde Moore took over as the primary kickoff return man. Moore was replaced as the third-down back by running back Carey Davis and as the punt returner by wide receiver Santonio Holmes in the first two quarters.

• Linebacker Patrick Bailey wore No. 55. Bailey, signed off the practice squad Sept. 20, wore No. 46 for his NFL debut Sept. 21 in Philadelphia.


Mike Prisuta can be reached at mprisuta@tribweb.com or 412-320-7923.
Simmons, Mendenhall lost for the season

By Chris Harlan, Times Sports Staff

PITTSBURGH --- Kendall Simmons limped from the field with an Achilles injury. Rashard Mendenhall left with a fractured shoulder. Carey Davis sprained an ankle. Keyaron Fox hurt his back. Andre Frazier was taken off on a stretcher.

This was a painful game for the Steelers, who beat the Ravens, 23-20, in overtime at Heinz Field on Monday night, a game they were already playing without would-be starters Willie Parker, Casey Hampton and Brett Keisel.

Simmons and Mendenhall suffered season-ending injuries and will be placed on the team’s injured reserve list, Steelers coach Mike Tomlin said, and Frazier will be fine despite an unsettling exit.

“That is football,” Tomlin said of the injuries. "What we will do is put some men out there (in their place) and the standard of expectation will not change.”

Simmons, the team’s starting right guard, limped to the sideline with an ankle injury and was later carted to the locker room. The 29-year-old has been sideline before by injuries, having missed the entire 2004 season with a torn anterior cruciate ligament. Simmons, who was diagnosed as diabetic in 2003, also missed two games in 2006 with a foot injury.

Former undrafted free agent Darnell Stapleton replaced Simmons.

Mendenhall, making his first career start, left with a left shoulder injury after being tackled by Ravens linebacker Ray Lewis on the first play of the second half. The rookie rushed for 30 yards on nine carries. He was replaced by Davis and Mewelde Moore before Davis left with an ankle injury.

The team finished the game with Moore as the only healthy running back. The Steelers are expected to sign another running back before Sunday’s game in Jacksonville.

Frazier’s injury appeared the most serious but he was back on the sideline for the game’s conclusion. The team at first said the backup linebacker suffered a spine injury on the opening kickoff but Tomlin later said tests came back negative. Frazier was hit in the head by a blocker while trying to make a tackle and fell to the turf. Frazier was moving his arms and legs before being strapped to a stretcher and carted from the field.

“Probably the best image I saw tonight after that game was when I saw him walking up that tunnel with the rest of the men,” Tomlin said. “That is great. He is going to be fine.”

When Fox left with a back injury, the Steelers became thin at linebacker and especially thin on special teams. The team relied more than expected on linebacker Patrick Bailey, who was signed from the practice squad before last week’s game in Philadelphia.

Chris Harlan can be reached at charlan@timesonline.com
Bires: Steelers still have Monday magic

Mike Bires, Times Sports Staff

PITTSBURGH — There’s nothing like a Monday night home game to erase those ugly memories from the debacle in Philadelphia.

OK, so the Steelers’ win over the Baltimore Ravens wasn’t a masterpiece. Some of the problems from that embarrassing loss to the Eagles resurfaced. But the bottom line is that the Steelers found a way to win.

Considering the stage, the Steelers beating the Ravens was predictable. The last time the Steelers lost a Monday Night Football game on the North Shore, Chuck Noll was their coach and George H.W. Bush was the president.

Whether the venue is Three Rivers Stadium or Heinz Field, the Steelers just don’t lose when the MNF cameras are in town.

That’s 14 straight Monday night home wins, an NFL record.

They also improved their record to a perfect 3-0 when wearing their throwback uniforms.

Most importantly, the Steelers (3-1) reclaimed first place in the AFC North with a hard-fought win over the rival Ravens (2-1).

On the scoreboard, the latest MNF victory wasn’t as impressive as the 38-7 rout of the Ravens last year. But it sure meant a lot to offensive coordinator Bruce Arians and the Steelers’ offensive line.

After the 15-6 loss in Philadelphia, the Steelers’ offensive line received nationwide criticism for its role in allowing nine sacks.

After the game, several Steelers admitted that the offense was confused and had no answers for the Eagles’ blitz package.

Against the Ravens, the Steelers still had some problems protecting Ben Roethlisberger.

But for the most part, the blocking was much better.

Of course, playing at home helped.

Especially when it was a Monday Night Football home game.

On Monday nights in Pittsburgh, the Steelers are always ready for some football.

Mike Bires can be reached online at mbires@timesonline.com
If it's Steelers-Ravens, there's lots of flags

By Chris Harlan, Times Sports Staff

PITTSBURGH — Ravens linebacker Antwan Barnes slapped Santonio Holmes in the helmet, so Holmes turned and jabbed him back. Lamar Woodley had a similar tussle with Ravens guard Marshal Yanda.

The bitterness remains.

Six penalties for unnecessary roughness or personal fouls were called during Monday night’s tussle between the Steelers and Baltimore Ravens at Heinz Field, the latest installment in a bitter AFC North rivalry that has drawn its share of yellow flags.

No opponent brings out the chippiness in the Steelers quite like the Ravens.

Barnes and Holmes drew off-setting personal fouls in the first quarter. Woodley and Yanda drew them in the second quarter. And there were dozens of other skirmishes that didn’t draw the referees’ ire.

Steelers receiver Hines Ward, a marked man when facing the Ravens, was at the receiving end of a late hit from Ravens linebacker Jarret Johnson that drew a 15-yard penalty. The play was well over before Johnson shoved Ward along the Baltimore sideline.

And Ward never had the ball.

This was the first time these Ravens had seen Ward since he laid rattling hits on Ravens Bart Scott and Ed Reed during a Nov. 5, 2007, game in Baltimore. Ward sat out the Dec. 30 regular-season finale in Pittsburgh when the two teams met again and the Steelers had nothing left to gain.

Obviously, they hadn’t forgotten him.
Steelers notes: Holmes returns punts

By Chris Harlan, Times Sports Staff

PITTSBURGH — Santonio Holmes got his wish, at least for one game.

The Steelers receiver was returning all of the punts during Monday night’s game against the Ravens, a role he wasn’t allowed to fill last season despite his success as a rookie. Holmes replaced Mewelde Moore, who had been handling the punts.

The move was likely because Moore is the team’s backup running back while would-be starter Willie Parker is sidelined with a knee injury. Holmes had wanted to return punts last season, but coach Mike Tomlin wanted him to focus solely on playing wide receiver.

Tomlin relented some this season and Holmes shared duties with Moore during last week’s game in Philadelphia, where Holmes returned one punt for five yards. In the first two weeks, though, Moore had been handling them alone.

Holmes returned three punts during the first half against Baltimore, with his longest being five yards.

CHANGE OF MIND

Should the Steelers win the coin flip, Mike Tomlin said before the season, he didn’t see himself choosing to kick. Apparently, he’s had a change of mind. The Steelers won the flip against the Ravens and chose to kickoff.

The strategy worked.

Rookie quarterback Joe Flacco and his Ravens lost two yards on three plays before punting.

This was the second time Tomlin has made this decision, though, having chosen to kickoff to start the Steelers’ victory over Cleveland in Week 2.

That time he credited the decision on the 40-mph winds from the remnants of Hurricane Ike.

Before this season, NFL coaches didn’t have this option. The league adopted a rule that allows teams to win the coin flip and take the football to start the second half.

ALUMNI WEEKEND

Hall of Fame member “Bullet” Bill Dudley, a former halfback and defensive back, was among 20 former Steelers honored before the game as part of the team’s first alumni weekend. Dudley (1942, 1945-46) led the league in rushing in 1946.
Reed's field goal in OT gives Steelers win

By F. Dale Lolley, Staff writer

dolley@observer-reporter.com

PITTSBURGH - As is usually the case when the Steelers and Baltimore Ravens play, there was plenty of drama and hard hits in Monday night's meeting at Heinz Field.

And the teams took such a liking to the beating they were putting on each other, they continued it in overtime.

Jeff Reed's 46-yard field goal with 9:01 remaining in the extra period gave the Steelers a hard-fought 23-20 victory over the Ravens in one of the most memorable games between the two AFC North rivals.

Reed's game-winner - the seventh of his career - was set up by a 21-yard catch-and-run by reserve running back Mewelde Moore on third down from midfield.

Baltimore won the coin toss to open the overtime, but second-year linebacker Lawrence Timmons' first career sack on third down forced the Ravens to punt from their 12-yard line.

Pittsburgh took over from its 43 following the punt and Moore's catch set up the game-winner.

The victory moves the Steelers (3-1) into first place in the AFC North Division, a half-game ahead of the Ravens (2-1).

Baltimore outgained the Steelers 146-46 in total yards in the first half when the Ravens built a 13-3 lead on a pair of Matt Stover field goals and a four-yard touchdown pass by rookie quarterback Joe Flacco to tight end Daniel Wilcox late in the second quarter.

The Steelers opened with a strong drive on their first possession, taking over at their 24 and moving to the Baltimore 20 before settling for a 49-yard Reed field goal and a 3-0 lead.

Baltimore scored 13 unanswered points to take the 13-3 lead into the half and maintained it throughout much of the third quarter as the Steelers failed to get a first down after their opening possession.

Things didn't get any better in the second half until a costly personal foul by Baltimore linebacker Jarrett Johnson after an end-around by Nate Washington ignited the Pittsburgh offense. The 15-yard penalty gave the Steelers only their second first down after their opening possession. It also moved the ball into Baltimore territory and Pittsburgh went to a no-huddle offense.

Three plays later, Roethlisberger, who was 14 of 24 for 191 yards, one touchdown and one interception, recognized a Baltimore blitz and threw to wide receiver Santonio Holmes on a slant route. Holmes caught the ball 15 yards downfield and made defensive backs Chris McAlister and Ed Reed miss en route to a 38-yard touchdown.

James Harrison then sacked Flacco on the first play of Baltimore's ensuing possession - Harrison's second sack of the game - and LaMarr Woodley scooped up a fumble at the Baltimore 5 and rambled into the end zone. The score gave the Steelers 14 points in 15 seconds and a 17-13 lead.
The Steelers added Reed field goal, this one from 19 yards, with 9:19 remaining to take a 20-13 lead. Pittsburgh got the ball to the Baltimore 1 - with Hines Ward picking up 49 yards on a reception - but Mewelde Moore was stopped on a third-down run, forcing the field-goal attempt.

Failing to get into the end zone would prove costly. Baltimore tied the game with 4:02 remaining on a two-yard touchdown run by fullback Le'Ron McClain to tie the score at 20-20.

Steelers linebacker Andre Frazier was injured covering the game's opening kickoff. He was hit by Baltimore's Haruki Nakamura in what appeared to be helmet-to-helmet contact. Frazier suffered what was called a spinal injury and was taken off the field on a backboard. He appeared to have movement of his extremities.

Odds and end zones

Washington's Gene Steratore was the referee for the game. Peters Township's Tony Steratore was the back judge. ... Guard Kendall Simmons suffered a right ankle injury late in the second quarter and did not return. He was replaced at right guard by Darnell Stapleton. ... Steelers linebacker Keyaron Fox suffered a back injury in the first half and did not return. ... Rookie running back Rashard Mendenhall, making his first career start, left in the third quarter with a shoulder injury. He finished with nine carries for 30 yards, 23 of which came on the Steelers opening drive. ... Running back Carey Davis, who had replaced Mendenhall, left in the fourth quarter with a left ankle injury. ... Baltimore lost McGahee (chest) at the end of the first half.

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Reed’s FG gives Steelers OT win over Ravens

By ALAN ROBINSON
Associated Press

PITTSBURGH September 30, 2008 12:54 am

— Jeff Reed kicked a 46-yard field goal in overtime and the Pittsburgh Steelers overcame a 10-point deficit, numerous injuries and a late Baltimore comeback to outlast the Ravens 23-20 on Monday night.

Reed’s third field goal ended a back-and-forth game in which the Steelers (3-1) were down by 10 late in the third quarter, rallied, couldn’t hold a seven-point lead, then found a way to win despite being without their top three running backs.

The Ravens (2-1), losing their seventh in their last eight games in Pittsburgh, won the important overtime coin toss but were backed up by two penalties and a sack and Sam Koch had to punt out of the end zone.

Then, on third-and-8, Ben Roethlisberger found fourth-string running back Mewelde Moore — playing in that situation only because of the injuries — on a key 24-yard swing pass for a first down at the Ravens’ 31. On third-and-14, Moore made a 7-yard catch to the 28 to give Reed the extra yardage he needed to make it.

The Steelers turned the 10-point deficit into a 17-13 lead in a 15-second span in the third quarter, only to have rookie quarterback Joe Flacco of the Ravens hit Derrick Mason for 35 yards ahead of Le’Ron McClain’s 2-yard TD run that tied it at 20 with 4:02 remaining.

Before then, Pittsburgh appeared to have overcome three mostly dreadful quarters in a momentum-turning span of three plays, and Reed added a 19-yard field goal to make it 20-13.

The Steelers, booed by their own fans while held without a touchdown for eight quarters since the second period of a 10-6 win in Cleveland on Sept. 14, finally awoke late in the third by going to a no-huddle offense with Roethlisberger lined up in a shotgun formation.

They resorted to the no-huddle almost by necessity, with rookie running back Rashard Mendenhall out with a shoulder injury and starter Willie Parker (knee) not in uniform.

With only one first down since the first quarter, the Steelers got a second when Baltimore’s Jarret Johnson unwisely drew a personal foul penalty for an out-of-bounds hit following Nate Washington’s 8-yard run. With his best field position since the first quarter, Roethlisberger — sacked and harassed by Baltimore’s defense most of the game — found Santonio Holmes for a 38-yard touchdown pass three plays later on a third-and-4.

On Baltimore’s next play after the kickoff, Flacco — who had impeccably managed the game until then in only his third career start — fumbled while being sacked by James Harrison, Woodley scooped up the ball and scored from the 7.

Until that turnaround sequence, the Steelers’ offensive malaise carried over from a dreary 15-6 loss in Philadelphia in which Roethlisberger was sacked eight times, threw an interception, lost a fumble and was dropped for a safety.

This time, the Steelers drove for Reed’s 49-yard field goal on their opening possession, then could barely gain a yard until late in the third. Baltimore, beaten 38-7 in Pittsburgh last season, answered with field goals by Matt Stover of 33 and 20 yards before making it 13-3 on Flacco’s first career TD pass, a 4-yarder to Daniel Wilcox with 17 seconds left before halftime.

Flacco, outplaying Roethlisberger for much of the game, set up the score with completions of 13 yards to Mason and 25 to McClain, who was in the game because starter Willis McGahee hurt his chest earlier in the 56-yard drive.

In a game filled with injuries, the Steelers lost backup running backs Mendenhall and Carey Davis (ankle), starting right guard Kendall Simmons (ankle) and backup linebacker Andre Frazier, who was carted off the field on a stretcher with a spinal injury after being blocked by Haruki Nakamura during the opening kickoff. Frazier was immobilized before leaving the field, but was moving his legs and arms.
Pittsburgh Steelers receiver Nate Washington (85) hauls in a first-quarter pass from quarterback Ben Roethlisberger for a first down before being hauled down by Baltimore Ravens' Corey Ivy (35) during an NFL football game in Pittsburgh, Monday, Sept. 29, 2008. (AP Photo/Keith B. Srakocic) The Tribune-Democrat
Black and Gold notebook: Injuries plague Steelers

By ERIC KNOPSNYDER
The Tribune-Democrat

PITTSBURGH September 30, 2008 12:51 am

— The first half of the Pittsburgh Steelers’ 23-20 over the Baltimore Ravens on Monday night might have been hard for Pittsburgh Steelers’ fans to watch, but it was even more painful for the players themselves. Steelers linebacker Andre Frazier was injured on the opening kickoff and had to be taken off the field on a backboard. Early word from the Steelers was that it was a spine injury and that he would not return to the game. Frazier, a fourth-year left outside linebacker, was running downfield on the kickoff coverage unit when he was hit by Haruki Nakamura, a rookie safety and former teammate at the University of Cincinnati. Frazier didn’t appear to see the block coming. He briefly moved his legs, but was mostly motionless as he lay on the field for about 15 minutes before being loaded on a cart and taken from the field. Frazier, who was a senior while Nakamura was a freshman in college, raised his hands to the Steelers faithful just before he was taken into the tunnel at Heinz Field. The 6-foot-5, 255-pound Frazier plays mostly on special teams. The Steelers had two other first-half injuries, though they weren’t as serious. Right guard Kendall Simmons injured his ankle in the second quarter and was replaced by Darnell Stapleton in the second half. Keyaron Fox, a left inside linebacker who plays mostly on special teams, suffered a back injury and was doubtful to return. It got worse in the third quarter as running back Rashard Mendenhall – who was filling in for injured starter Willie Parker – suffered a left shoulder injury. That forced coach Mike Tomlin to turn to Carey Davis as his main ballcarrier. The defense was also without a pair of starters, as nose tackle Casey Hampton and defensive end Brett Keisel were inactive because of injuries. Just like old times: The Steelers honored former players from the 1980s, 90s and 2000s. Twenty former Steelers wore black-and-gold throwback jerseys, with all but Bill Dudley (1942) having played in the past three decades. Others on hand to serve as honorary captains were: Myron Bell, Craig Bingham, Robin Cole, Gary Dunn, Jason Gildon, Kevin Greene, Delton Hall, Bryan Hinkle, Tunch Ilkin, Carnell Lake, Louis Lipps, Mike Logan, Mike Merriweather, Calvin Sweeney, Yancey Thigpen, Weegie Thompson, Dennis Winston, Craig Wolfley and Dwayne Woodruff. Former Steelers Brentson Buckner and Tim Lester were scheduled to appear but did not. Home-field advantage: The Steelers made use of Pitt’s long stretch between home games by painting a Steelers logo on the midfield grass at Heinz Field. The teams share the stadium, so there is usually nothing at midfield, while one end zone says PITTSBURGH and the other has diagonal white stripes. Pitt won’t be back at Heinz Field until Oct. 25. Notes: The Steelers’ last home loss on a Monday night was a 23-20 setback to the New York Giants on Oct. 14 1991. … In addition to Hampton, Keisel and Parker, Steelers inactive for the game were WR Limas Sweed, T Tony Hills, T Trai Essex, LB Donovan Woods and QB Dennis Dixon.
PITTSBURGH — Jeff Reed's 46-yard field goal in overtime gave the Pittsburgh Steelers a 23-20 victory against the Baltimore Ravens on Monday night and boosted the Steelers into first place in the AFC North Division.

Pittsburgh (3-1) also won its 14th consecutive home game on Monday Night Football going back to 1992 and beat division rival Baltimore for the seventh time in the last eight games at home. The Ravens fell to 2-1.

GAME REPORT: Steelers 23, Ravens 20 (OT)

Baltimore won the overtime coin toss, but two penalties and a sack forced it to punt from its end zone.

Steelers quarterback Ben Roethlisberger sparked the winning drive with a 24-yard pass to backup running back Mewelde Moore, pressed into service on a hard-hitting night when the Steelers started without injured rushing leader Willie Parker and lost two running backs to injuries.

"I'm just glad we won," said Roethlisberger, who rallied his team from a 13-3 halftime deficit. "The guys never backed down. We played terrible offensively in the first half, but they fought through it and we came out offensively and did well. You got to give a lot of kudos to our defense."

In a 15-second span of the third quarter, Roethlisberger, who said he called the plays when the Steelers went to a no-huddle offense in the second half, threw a touchdown pass and Pittsburgh's defense added another to give the Steelers a 17-13 lead.

Roethlisberger connected with Santonio Holmes on a 38-yard touchdown pass with 4:09 left in the third.

On Baltimore's next play from scrimmage, Steelers linebacker LaMarr Woodley returned a fumble by sacked Ravens rookie quarterback Joe Flacco 7 yards for a touchdown that gave Pittsburgh a 17-13 lead.

Pittsburgh added a fourth-quarter field goal, but Flacco, who earlier had thrown his first NFL TD pass, led the Ravens on a game-tying drive. He connected with wide receiver Derrick Mason on a 35-yard pass on third down to set up the tying score by Le'Ron McClain with 4:02 left.

Pittsburgh lost running back Rashard Mendenhall (fractured shoulder) and guard Kendall Simmons (torn Achilles tendon). Both were put on injured reserve and are lost for the year.

"What a tough, hard-fought battle," Steelers coach Mike Tomlin said. "One that we were fortunate to come out on top. The team hung together. We aren't perfect, but we are together."

Until the turnaround sequence, the Steelers' offensive malaise carried over from a dreary 15-6 loss in Philadelphia in which Roethlisberger was sacked eight times, threw an interception, lost a fumble and was dropped for a safety.

Flacco, outplaying Roethlisberger for much of the game, set up the score with completions of 13 yards to Mason and 25 to McClain, who was in the game because starter Willis McGahee hurt his chest earlier in a 56-yard drive.
Flacco finished 16-of-31 for 192 yards.

The Steelers drove for Reed's 49-yard field goal on their opening possession, then could barely gain a yard until late in the third. Baltimore, beaten 38-7 in Pittsburgh last season, answered with field goals by Matt Stover of 33 and 20 yards before making it 13-3 on Flacco's first career TD pass, a 4-yarder to Daniel Wilcox with 17 seconds left before halftime.

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Contributing: The Associated Press

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Big Ben yells, then wills his team to victory
September 30, 2008 2:36 AM

Posted by ESPN.com's James Walker

PITTSBURGH --
Through one half of football, it was difficult to tell which team had the rookie quarterback and which signal-caller owns a Super Bowl ring.

At that point, last year's 10-win team looked like last year's five-win team, and the former five-win team played like the reigning AFC North champs.

So an angry Ben Roethlisberger went inside the Pittsburgh Steelers' locker room at halftime and screamed at his offensive teammates of how tired he was of getting his tail kicked.

By intermission, Pittsburgh went 11 straight quarters without a touchdown, and Roethlisberger was sacked 12 times in the past six quarters. Roethlisberger, somewhat out of character, gave a very loud wakeup call for struggling unit and said he was as emotional and vocal as he's ever been.

The Steelers (3-1) and the offense responded by overcoming a 10-point deficit in the second half to earn a 23-20 overtime win over the Baltimore Ravens (2-1) to take sole possession of first place in the division. Pittsburgh scored 20 points in the second half and overtime.

"I was tired of being booed and I was tired of being embarrassed on offense," Roethlisberger said of his halftime outburst. "I told the guys that. There's no need for it. I had to make a statement."

It was a classic battle between these bitter rivals that included a lot of
jawing an even more hitting.

There were blows thrown, several penalties for both teams, and two banged-up starting tailbacks.

In fact, Steelers rookie tailback Rashard Mendenhall (fractured shoulder) is now out for the season after taking a hard shot in the third quarter. Ravens starter Willis McGahee (unspecified) was injured in the second quarter. He returned in the second half but played sparingly and was a non-factor.

It took a 46-yard field goal from Pittsburgh kicker Jeff Reed to settle this slugfest in the extra period.

Behind a fierce defense and a poised rookie quarterback in Joe Flacco, the Ravens were game. Baltimore took a 13-3 lead after tight end Daniel Wilcox caught a 4-yard touchdown reception.

Flacco tried to his best to outduel Roethlisberger to become the first rookie quarterback to win his team's first three games since Greg Cook did it in 1969. The first-round pick completed 16 of 31 passes for 192 yards and one touchdown. His numbers were identical to Roethlisberger's, who had 191 yards, one touchdown, one interception.

But the difference was Roethlisberger did his damage when the game was hanging in the balance. His 21-yard pass to backup tailback Mewelde Moore on a scramble play set up Pittsburgh's game-winning kick in overtime.

"It doesn't always have to be the prettiest," Roethlisberger said.

Flacco made a rookie mistake during a sack and fumble in the third quarter that helped lead to Pittsburgh's comeback. Pittsburgh linebacker James Harrison collapsed the pocket and knocked the ball loose for teammate LaMarr Woodley to pick up and return 7 yards for a score.

"I just have to take care of the ball," Flacco said afterward. "If we can take care of the ball there, it's a different story but it happens.

Both the Ravens and Steelers are battered and beaten after this game but have to quickly turn around with big road games next week against the Tennessee Titans (4-0) and Jacksonville Jaguars (2-2), respectively.

Yet, it was the Steelers who had more smiles in the locker room after a
bruising game.

"It's great," Roethlisberger said. "3-1 sounds a lot better than 2-2. And it's a divisional. That matters to us. We'll take it no matter how ugly it is.

Or how loud he has to scream
PITTSBURGH -- The Pittsburgh Steelers lost starting right guard Kendall Simmons and first-round draft pick Rashard Mendenhall to season-ending injuries during their 23-20 overtime victory over Baltimore on Monday night.

The Steelers (3-1) now face a short week before playing Sunday night at Jacksonville (2-2), a game in which fourth-string running back Mewelde Moore may have to start if Pro Bowl runner Willie Parker misses a second successive game with a sprained knee.

Simmons (torn right Achilles) and Mendenhall (fractured left shoulder) will be placed on injured reserve, coach Mike Tomlin said, and thus cannot return this season. A torn Achilles can be an especially difficult injury for a lineman to overcome because he pushes off his heel on every play.

"Our competitors, it has been well documented, a lot of those guys have suffered devastating injuries," Tomlin said. "It is only devastating if you allow it to be. People are not concerned with our problems, they are probably happy that we have them. We will address them and get ready to play."

Simmons was replaced by former undrafted free agent Darnell Stapleton on Monday, though it would seem likely that fourth-year lineman Trai Essex, who was not in uniform against Baltimore, would start Sunday.

The Steelers also lost running back Carey Davis (ankle) and backup linebacker Andre Frazier, who was carted off the field on a stretcher with a spine injury after the opening kickoff. Frazier initially appeared to be the most seriously injured, but he was walking freely and joking with teammates after the game. Tomlin said his tests proved negative.

Mendenhall's loss is a big one for Pittsburgh, and it came in his first NFL career start on a hard hit by Ravens linebacker Ray Lewis. He was drafted to give the Steelers a power back to go with Parker's speed, but Mendenhall's first season ended after only 19 carries. He had nine carries for 30 yards against Baltimore.

"We have some injuries that we need to deal with, that is part of football and we will [deal with it]," Tomlin said. "Our standard of expectation will not change. We have to go to Jacksonville on a short week, such is life in the National Football League."
Ben Roethlisberger
Pittsburgh Steelers quarterback

(What you won’t tell on Facebook … even if you are appeared as a friend?)

- Born: March 2, 1982, in Lima, Ohio
- Status: Single
- Residence: Middletown (Ohio)
- What’s on TV: House, Law & Order SVU, The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air, NCIS, Parks
- Jerry Ido; Jay-Z, Johnny Cash, Kanye West, Chris Brown, Rihanna
- What’s driving: Black Ford F450 Black with white interior, 1990 old Pontiac GTO white interior
- Favorite Music: And then there’s El Gladiador, Happy Gilmour, GQ
- What I’m reading: My playbook by Bruce Arians
- Roommate: Mr. Sunday Night
- Work habits: Rushing … not talking much
- Any off-field roles: Super Bowl MVP, a poem by Coach Bill Belichick’s coach, Terry Bradshaw
- Love to trade places for a day with: Peter, so I could walk next to Jesus and ask him questions and work on his job. My first job was CFI for the Steelers
- Favorite city to visit: Los Angeles, CA
- Favorite team is: Chicago Bears
- Favorite athlete to watch in another sport: Tiger Woods
- Favorite color is: Red
- For dinner: My dad’s fish, steak, mom’s cheesy potatoes and grandmas chocolate
- Talent I’d most like to have: Anything

Mainly:
- Dream Line: Cindy Crawford, my first crush
- Physical attributes I love most about myself: My right arm
- And last … my feet
- My hero: My dad
- My greatest love: My family
- My bucket list: This list is too long, but I’d love to play the top 100 golf courses in the world.
- My mentor: Work hard, respect others

BenRoethlisberger.INFO/SportingNews.com/Print

- Print Pages
Franco Harris to Attend Clarion's ALF Parade

CLARION - Former Pittsburgh Steeler and NFL Hall of Fame running back Franco Harris and his wife Dana Harris are coming to the 55th Annual Autumn Leaf Festival parade on Saturday, Oct. 4.

Harris, who is backing Democratic Presidential Candidate Barack Obama, has announced he will ride on the Clarion County Democratic Party Float with his wife Dana.

"We are very excited that Franco is coming to Clarion to take part in the 55th ALF Parade and also to support Senator Obama's campaign," said Clarion County Democratic Party Chairman Bill Miller.

"Not only is Franco known in the area as an outstanding football player and NFL Hall of Famer, but he is also known as a great humanitarian who has worked very hard to support important causes and community action for the people of Pittsburgh and the entire region. Franco is a humble man who has always believed in giving back to the people and that's why we're so happy to have him here for ALF," added Miller.

Harris, who was born in Fort Dix, New Jersey, had a very good career at Penn State and then was drafted in the first round by the Pittsburgh Steelers in 1972. He played 12 years for the Steelers and helped them win four Super Bowls including Super Bowl IX, X, XIII, XIV. He was selected to 9 Pro Bowls, was MVP of Super Bowl IX running for 158 yards and 1 td against Minnesota.

In 1972 Franco was the Sporting News and UPI "Rookie of the Year" rushing for 1,055 yards and 10 TDs, but mostly that year was remembered by the "Immaculate Reception" he made during the AFC Division Playoff game at Three Rivers Stadium between the Steelers and the Oakland Raiders. The last second td gave the Steelers their first playoff win in franchise history.

Harris finished his career with 12,120 rushing yards and 91 rushing TDs, along with 307 catches for 2,287 yards and 9 TDs. He played 12 years for the Steelers (1972-83), and 1 with the Seattle Seahawks (1984). At the time of his retirement, his combined net yardage total of 14,622 yards was the third best ever in the NFL. He was inducted into the NFL Hall of Fame in 1990.

Clarion's Autumn Leaf Festival is in its 55th year. The festival starts Saturday and continues through Sunday Oct. 5. Featuring Day and Night Activities throughout the festival, a few highlights include the "Autorama" Antique Car Show on Sunday, Farmers & Crafters Day on Friday, Oct. 3 and the ALF Parade, which starts at Noon and is known to draw over 100,000 people along its route and can last from two to two-and-a-half hours.
Jaguars Tackle Is Paralyzed

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (AP) — Jacksonville Jaguars offensive tackle Richard Collier, shot while sitting in a car outside an apartment complex earlier this month, is paralyzed below the waist and his left leg was amputated, his doctor said Monday.

Collier, 26, was on a ventilator for about three weeks and had no memory of the shooting, said Dr. Andy Kerwin, a surgeon for the University of Florida at Shands Jacksonville hospital.

Kerwin said Collier sustained 14 bullet wounds to the back, left groin muscle, left legs and right buttock. A bullet severed his spinal cord, causing the paralysis. The amputation was the result of damage to his left leg and groin muscle, where blood clots formed. He also had bouts of pneumonia, infections and renal failure. His condition has been upgraded to good from critical.

Collier will undergo physical therapy to learn to move from his bed to a wheelchair. He will never walk again, Kerwin said.
Haslett takes Rams' reins after Linehan ousted

ST. LOUIS (AP) — After experiencing the wild highs and lows of the Mike Martz years, the winless St. Louis Rams opted for cool, calm, reserved Scott Linehan as their next coach.

On Monday, they admitted their mistake and fired Linehan after four consecutive lopsided losses to open the season. Defensive coordinator Jim Haslett, a fiery type and polar opposite in terms of demeanor, was hired as interim coach, given the unenviable task of trying to revive a franchise that has become an NFL doormat.

THE HUDDLE BLOG: Will Rams turn back to Marc Bulger?

The Rams have lost 17 of their last 20 games, most of them routs. But no matter how dire the situation appears, Haslett said it'll never be as bad as in his final season as head coach of the New Orleans Saints in 2005 in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

"This is nothing," Haslett said, "compared to that."

Linehan, 45, was 11-25 in the third season of a four-year contract that paid him about $8 million. The Rams have been outscored 147-43 this season, and have allowed at least 30 points in seven straight games dating back to last year.

The move was made heading into the Rams' bye week and in the early morning hours Monday, several hours after the Buffalo Bills outscored them 25-0 in the second half of a 31-14 victory.

The Rams were 3-13 in 2007 and have lost eight in a row dating to last season. Dissension had been building after unsuccessful stabs by Linehan at a makeover: several new assistants; a remote training camp site; a higher-energy, upbeat delivery by the coach to project confidence and enthusiasm.

Linehan turned to desperation after the Rams were outscored 116-29 the first three games. Quarterback Marc Bulger, the highest-paid player in franchise history, was benched in favor of 38-year-old Trent Green. Starting cornerback Fakhir Brown, a Haslett favorite, was released and there were four other lineup changes.

Running back Steven Jackson ripped Linehan on his weekly radio show for benching Bulger, and there were reports Bulger no longer wanted to play for Linehan. Bulger has not spoken to media since the benching.

"He took 100% responsibility for the failures of this organization, but we're all culpable," owner Chip Rosenbloom said. "We all share in the responsibilities of losing games. That includes the coaches, it includes the players, it includes the administration, it includes the ownership."

That hints at more changes coming down the line. Jay Zygmunt, president of football operations and in his 27th year with the team, is drawing heat for poor draft-day performances. President John Shaw, who spends much of his time on the West Coast, is contemplating retirement after the season.

A sign at Sunday's home game read: "Congress. Now bail out the Rams."

Linehan briefly addressed players for about 10 minutes Monday morning before driving away from Rams Park without speaking to reporters or even making eye contact.
"He just told us that we're winners," said rookie defensive end Chris Long, Linehan's last first-round pick. "We're not winning right now, but there's winners in the room.

"He's going to do well, he's going to find a place where it's going right."

Given the Rams' weak play on defense, the 52-year-old Haslett is an unusual choice on the surface. He has head coaching experience, winning 45 games in six seasons for the Saints from 2000-05, but the defense is ranked 31st out of 32 teams despite a pair of young first-rounders, Long and Adam Carriker, on the line.

Typically blunt, the former NFL linebacker is far from pleased.

"Come on, the first three games we played poorly," Haslett said. "I thought we played pretty good yesterday. It's something we can build on."

Haslett was in bed when Rosenbloom telephoned at 1:15 a.m. Monday to offer the job, including a say in personnel matters. He expects to do a much better job in his second head coaching stint, and will be less secretive, too, opening practices to media. Rick Venturi, assistant head coach and linebackers coach, was elevated to defensive coordinator.

Haslett will convene his first team meeting Tuesday. He wants to discuss matters with the coaching staff before choosing a quarterback for the Rams' next game, Oct. 12 at Washington, and would like to re-sign Brown.

Haslett said the Rams' talent is comparable to that of the Bills, who are 4-0.

"They have a couple of things we don't have right now," Haslett said. "They've got great confidence, they've got great swagger, they've got poise and they think they can win. Right now we're not at that level."

The Linehan era will be remembered as a mostly dreary time for the franchise. Martz helped the Rams win their only Super Bowl after the 1999 season and then led them to a second Super Bowl as coach in the 2001 season with an offense known as the "Greatest Show on Turf."

The Rams were 8-8 in 2006, Linehan's first season, rallying to win four of their last six games after Linehan turned over play-calling duties to offensive coordinator Greg Olson. Numerous offensive line injuries, beginning with seven-time Pro Bowl tackle Orlando Pace's season-ending shoulder injury in the opener, paved the way for the 2007 disaster. Linehan again relinquished the play-calling before this season, replacing Olson with Al Saunders.

He knew his job was in jeopardy Sunday, having been put on notice by Rosenbloom. So he emptied the playbook, going for first downs twice on fourth down and using a handful of trick plays, energizing the team, but only for one half, when it led 14-6.

The firing was the second in-season coaching change by the Rams this decade. Martz was replaced by interim coach Joe Vitt after five games in 2005 due to medical reasons, and then was fired the day after the season.

The last Rams coach removed during the season for non-medical reasons was Bob Waterfield, replaced by Harland Svare after eight games in 1962 when the franchise was in Los Angeles.

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By John Clayton
ESPN.com

Even though Lane Kiffin remained head coach of the Oakland Raiders long enough to meet with the Bay Area media Monday, the process of replacing him has begun.

According to a source, Raiders owner Al Davis scheduled one-hour meetings Monday evening with three members of the coaching staff -- offensive coordinator Greg Knapp, offensive line coach Tom Cable and longtime NFL offensive coordinator and current Raiders consultant Paul Hackett. The meetings, according to the source, were to discuss the possibility of replacing Kiffin, who has yet to be informed of any potential change.

Kiffin declined comment Monday evening when contacted. During his Monday news conference, he told the local press he was no longer going to discuss any of his conversations or meetings with Davis. It is believed Davis has not talked to him about a possible change.

"I just feel we're going to open up too many things, and those are conversations that I do or do not have with him that should stay between him and I," Kiffin said in his news conference.

The Raiders, off to a 1-3 start, have had leads of 12, 13 and 9 points over the past three games, but have won only one of those games. The Raiders are in a bye week, which is a natural time for a potential coaching change. In 1989, Davis fired Mike Shanahan during a bye week after a 1-3 start and Art Shell finished what turned out to be an 8-8 season.

"At times we're playing as well as anybody in the league. I know that sounds strange for you guys to hear, but look at the numbers," Kiffin said in his news conference. "Look at the way we're playing in the first three quarters of the last three weeks in a row; we're playing good enough to be on a three-game winning streak. All that being said, we're 1-3."

The 33-year-old Kiffin is in only his second season as head coach of the Raiders. His record is 5-15, but the team improved its offensive scoring by a touchdown last season, going from a little more than 10 points a game to 17. The Raiders have been using a run-oriented offense for first-year starter JaMarcus Russell, and so far he has thrown only one interception in four games, that interception coming off a deflected pass.

Davis has told Bay Area reporters he may speak to them at some point this week. Once he settles on a possible replacement, Davis could then inform Kiffin and make a change during the bye week.

John Clayton, a member of the Pro Football Hall of Fame writers' wing, is a senior writer for ESPN.com. Information from The Associated Press contributed to this report.