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Pro Football WEEKLY

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XI SUPER BOWL

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Matt Snell
SUPER BOWL III**Duane Thomas**
SUPER BOWL VI**James Washington**
SUPER BOWL XXV

Let's get it right

Sometimes the Super Bowl's Most Valuable Player award is handed to the wrong player for the wrong reasons. A careful review of each game aims to revise history.

by **MIKE BEACON**

Awards are, and always have been, political. Think John Wayne truly deserved to win a Best Actor Oscar for 1969's "True Grit"? Probably not, but he was a sentimental favorite whom The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences had failed to recognize so many times before. Award panels often ignore the most worthy choice in order to reward a soccer or more well-known candidate.

In the Super Bowl, such has been the case since the game's inception in 1967. We've found that in roughly one-third of the 39 Super Bowls played, the most deserving player failed to win the game's Most Valuable Player award.

Want further proof about the politics involved?

In January 1972, Paul Zimmerman sat on the selection committee that was to announce the winner of Super Bowl VI's MVP. Much to his surprise, the panel's vote didn't count for much — or anything at all, for that matter.

A representative from *Sport* magazine, which gave out the award back then along with a new car, asked Zimmerman if the committee had made up its mind. "I told (him), 'Well, I guess it's unanimous for (Duane) Thomas,'" he said, "I don't think so. We're not going to do it that way.'" Apparently the Dallas running back wasn't

talking to the media at the time. "Sport was afraid he wasn't going to show up for the ceremony to collect the car, so they went with Roger Staubach instead," said Zimmerman.

Years later, Zimmerman said he was kicked off the selection committee for good when he raised a stink about the winner of the Super Bowl XXV MVP award. The *Sports Illustrated* writer had argued for Bills RB Thurman Thomas, whose team had narrowly lost. The rest of the panel voted for Giants RB Otis Anderson.

According to NFL Films president Steve Sabol, one of only a few people to have taken in every Super Bowl, the right person wins most of the time, but sometimes numbers overshadow the player who made the biggest difference in the game's outcome.

"A lot of times it's a statistical thing," said Sabol.

Much of the problem with the award today, said Zimmerman, is the urgency with which the final ballot is needed. "The league wants the vote ahead of time so it can announce the winner on TV. It's all messed up. The whole process is fallible."

Politics.

Well, we've tried to correct those wrongs and place the MVP trophy into the appropriate person's hands. Here is a breakdown from each Super Bowl with a brief explanation for who won, who would have made a good alternative choice, and ultimately which player(s) deserved the award.

SUPER BOWL I

WINNER: BART STARR

The unsung leader of the greatest team of his (and perhaps any) era, Starr was magnificent. He completed 65.6 percent of his passes and converted just about every third-down situation he faced.

ALTERNATIVE CHOICE: MIKE MCGEE

In 1956, an aging McGee caught just four passes. Against Kansas City he caught seven for 136 yards, including two touchdowns. He wasn't even supposed to play (Bryce Dawkins sprained his shoulder early in the first quarter), and it's an oft-told story that McGee spent the night before the game downing cocktails. On the first score of the game, a 35-yard pass play, McGee reached back behind his body to haul in a poorly thrown pass and then roared for the endzone. McGee also laid a key block to help spring Jim Taylor during a 14-yard touchdown run.

OUR CHOICE: MCGEE

Other than it being the very first Super Bowl, what we remember about this game is McGee's bangover-laden performance. Starr was every bit an MVP in this game as he was in every other pressure situation, but McGee played the game of his life. "He made all of these big receptions," said longtime New York Times columnist Drew Anderson. "Starr got the award, as the quarterback always does."

SUPER BOWL II

WINNER: BART STARR

Starr's numbers weren't overly impressive (13 of 24 for 202 yards, one touchdown and no interceptions), but then again, so Green Bay player put up MVP-caliber numbers. Royce Dawkins caught a 62-yard touchdown but did little else, and the Packers' leading rusher, PH Ben Wilson, gained less than four yards per carry.

ALTERNATIVE CHOICE: WILHEM DAVIS

The Packers' front four controlled the sides attack, and Davis finished the game with seven unassisted tackles, including a "Stag Outland" DT Henry Schell after the game. "He taught me a few lessons today that I won't forget."

OUR CHOICE: STARR

Even though his numbers were not as good as the ones he posted in Super Bowl I, Starr is most deserving of this award because he refused to allow Oakland's intimidating front four to face him throughout the course of this game.

SUPER BOWL III

WINNER: JOE MONTANA

Namath was so more proficient in the title game (17 of 28 passing for 206 yards, no touchdowns or interceptions) as he had been during the 1968 season (492 completion percentage, 15 touchdowns as compared to 17 interceptions). Against Baltimore, the strong-running quarterback completed just one pass for more than 20 yards.

ALTERNATIVE CHOICE: BART STARR

"If you took Namath's personality and the guarantee out of it, to me, Matt Stuelz could very well have been the MVP of that game," said Sabot. In addition to scoring the A's' only touchdown, Stuelz was magnificent throughout. Stuelz's 20 carries for 121 yards was a big season for the Jets, controlled the ball for nearly 13 minutes more than Baltimore. And Stuelz's ability to catch the football (four receptions for 40 yards) helped Namath to manage the passing game. Said Anderson, "The Jets beat reporters have always felt Stuelz was the most valuable in that game."

OUR CHOICE: STUELZ

Stuelz's guarantee of a win for the Stauder Jets is to football legend what The Babe's called shot in the 1932 World Series is to that of baseball. For that — and for his part in helping to legitimize the AFL, —

Namath's "brevado," as Sabot called it, is why Super Bowl III is a memorable title game. But Sabot's contributions outweigh Namath's considerably.

SUPER BOWL IV

WINNER: LEN DAWSON

Dawson orchestrated a beautiful short-passing attack. On one such pass in the third quarter, Otto Taylor took the blitz, spun the Minnesota cornerback around and galloped 46 yards for the game's final score. The short-passing game helped Dawson to complete 70.6 percent of his passes.

ALTERNATIVE CHOICE: JOHNNY BODDINGER

Curly Culp, or another Charley Johnson, might make a better alternative choice, as the defending low-held Minnesota to only 67 rushing yards and forced Joe Kapp into throwing two interceptions and hurrying several other throws. But to win the MVP you need something tangible, and Robinson, a safety, recovered one fumble and was the recipient of one of Kapp's interceptions.

OUR CHOICE: DAWSON

This one is easy. Dawson did throw an interception, but other than that one Month he was magnificent against a young "Purple People Eaters" defense.

SUPER BOWL V

WINNER: CHRIS BOWEN

The only MVP in Super Bowl history to have played on a losing team, Howley's two interceptions didn't help Dallas to score any of its 13 points, although one did come inside the endzone to deny Baltimore points.

ALTERNATIVE CHOICE: MIKE MACKAY

Mackay scored on a 75-yard touchdown early in the second quarter that was the result of a double-dipped pass; a fortunate find for the Hall of Fame tight end. Other than that fluke play, Mackay had one catch for five yards, so he's not much of an alternative choice. He is, however, the best alternative choice. Jon O'Brien, who made the game-winning field goal, had an extra point blocked and missed a field goal. The duo of Johnny Unitas and Earl Morrill completed just 10 of 24 passes and there were three interceptions for the Colts.

OUR CHOICE: NONE OF THE ABOVE

No player was outstanding, no player worthy of being named the Most Valuable Player in this turnover-laden affair. This was a Super Bowl to be forgotten. Said Anderson, "It was a goofy game."

SUPER BOWL VI

WINNER: BOBEN STANBACH

Unlike his predecessor, Craig Morton, Stanbach made plays with his feet, and against Miami he had an outstanding day with his arm (12-of-19, with two touchdowns and six interceptions).

ALTERNATIVE CHOICE: DUANE THOMAS

Thomas gained 95 yards and scored a touchdown. Thomas's backfield mate, Walt Garrison, also deserves some credit, as he averaged better than five yards on his 14 attempts. But Thomas was the better (and more important) of the two on this day.

OUR CHOICE: THOMAS

As Zimmerman put it: "Duane Thomas was the man in this corner game." His Vikings helped set up the clock — Dallas controlled the football for nearly twice as long as Miami did — and his score put the game out of reach.

SUPER BOWL VII

WINNER: JAKE GIBBY

In a tight ballgame, Scott intercepted two of Billy Kilmer's passes, one of which he returned 55 yards, the other a tipped, unassisted game-tying score. The first interception helped Miami control the field position in the first half. The second came in the endzone in the final quarter when Washington was trying to



More deserving, DT Mike Fernandez helped Miami again Washington's rushing game in Super Bowl VII.

climb back into the game.

ALTERNATIVE CHOICE: MIKE FERNANDEZ

By way of the "5-3" defense, DT Fernandez pressured Kilmer and limited Larry Brown and the Redskins' rushing game (3.5-yard average). Two other possible choices are Larry Coakle (112 rushing yards) or MLR Nick Buonincontri, the leader of the defense, who grabbed a first-half interception. But, no, we prefer Fernandez in this game.

OUR CHOICE: FERNANDEZ

Credit Scott for his two plays, neither of which yielded points consequently, but credit Fernandez as the key reason why Washington's offense came away with no points in this game.

SUPER BOWL VIII

WINNER: GARY CACKLE

Coakle carried 33 times for a then-Super Bowl-record 145 yards and two touchdowns. To put it in perspective how impressive Cackle's day was, despite his heavy workload, he gained 4.4 yards per carry. By comparison, his well-performed backfield mates, Jim Kick and Mercury Morris, averaged only 2.8 yards on their 18 combined carries against the Minnesota defense.

ALTERNATIVE CHOICE: BOB BOWEN

On a 46-and-short just before halftime, Minnesota RB Oscar Ross was on his way to a first down when Buonincontri leveled a blow and popped the ball loose. The Vikings' drive ended there, and for all practical purposes so did the game. It's worth noting that Anderson prefers Miami OG Bob Karchenburg. "The look (Vikings DT Alan) Page out of the

game."

OUR CHOICE: COAKLE

No stat book room for debate here. Coakle was the Dolphins in this game — pure and simple.

SUPER BOWL IX

WINNER: FRANK ROSTER

A year after Larry Coakle ran wild on the Vikings, Harris upped him one, setting a record for most rushing yards with 136. It's Steeler missed up the running game with a passing attack that stalled early but persevered late. Harris was magnificent, although his fourth-quarter fumble could have proven costly.

ALTERNATIVE CHOICE: JOE GREENE

DT Greene ravaged the Minnesota front line, which was only able to help the running game muster 17 rushing yards on 21 attempts. What's more, Greene caught an interception off a Dwight White-deflected pass, and he recovered a fumble when the Steelers were pinned up against their goal line.

OUR CHOICE: HARRIS

Greene was not the only Steeler's defender worthy of praise (White was another), but Harris was the clear leader of the Pittsburgh offense.

SUPER BOWL X

WINNER: ERIC STROM

Strom made two catches in this game that rank among the greatest in Super Bowl history. The first was a high-reaching shot, after which he delicately tipped his two feet down.

Alternative Super Bowl MVPs

(Continued from Page 11)

along the sideline. The second, a 53-yard delight, forced a leaping down to catch a tipped pass with supreme concentration. But as great as those two plays were, it was his 66-yard touchdown that put the finishing touches on this game. Swann accounted for 141 of the Raiders' 190 passing yards.

ALTERNATIVE CHOICE, DICK GARIBOLDI

Roaming the field like a madman, Lambert racked up 14 tackles. His efforts helped control the Dallas running game, which averaged less than 3.5 yards on 31 attempts.

OUR CHOICE, SWANN

Has there been a better performance by a wide receiver in a Super Bowl? OK, we'll give the nod to Jerry Rice in Super Bowl XXIII, but other than that, Swann's performance tops the rest.

SUPER BOWL XL

WINNER, TROY BROWN

The man shut on WR Ed McCaffrey following this game: Four catches for 70 yards (it's only fair to point out that three of those receptions brought the Raiders within a few feet of the endzone).

ALTERNATIVE CHOICE, KEIT SHELL

All afternoon, Shell cut his left-side accomplice, OG Gene Upshaw's help to spring free the Oakland rushing attack. "Shell, (Dave) Dalry, Upshaw — those guys dominated the game," said Sabot. So dominant was Shell that the Raiders openly ran to the left side of the field and Minnesota could do nothing to stop it. Considering that two defensive superstars — Alan Page and Jim Marshall — named that side of the line for Minnesota, Oakland's rushing statistics that day seemed all the more impressive. But of Shell and Upshaw, Zimmerman says Shell's performance is worth standing on its own, that's confidence the two. One guy (Shell) is a greatest power blocker the game has ever known. The other was a good guard with a few tricks."

OUR CHOICE, SHELL

Some might want to give the award to RB Clarence Davis, who gained 137 yards on just 16 carries. But 105 of those yards came from his running to the left side, where Shell was so dominant.

SUPER BOWL XL

WINNER, HENRY MORTON AND GARY WHITE

Broncos QB Craig Morton threw four interceptions in this game, the cause of which was the heavy pressure he faced from Dallas' front four. In addition to White and Martin, Ed "Too Tall" Jones also writhed havoc in the Denver backfield and, like White, had a QB pressure that resulted in an interception. "The Doomsday Defense" was in full force.

ALTERNATIVE CHOICE, HONG

Other than the front four, no Dallas player is worthy of this award. Tony Stewart gained more than four yards per carry and scored the first half's only touchdowns, but his performance was cancelled out by teammate Robert Newhouse, who posted nearly identical stats. Roger Staubach did not throw interceptions, as he had in Super Bowl X, but he also didn't post numbers worthy of an MVP. And as well as Denver's defense played, especially DE Lyle Alzado, no such player is worthy enough to receive from a losing team.

OUR CHOICE, DALLAS DEFENSE LINE

Instead of two, why not just give the award to the entire Dallas front line? After all, in a game in which Denver trailed throughout, the Cowboys allowed just 61 passing yards (8 of 25 passing).

SUPER BOWL XL

WINNER, TERRY BRADSHAW

Bradshaw won his first of two Super Bowl



Overlooked, Rod Martin celebrates after one of his record five interceptions in Oakland's Super Bowl XL IV

MVPs with a 318-yard, four-TD passing effort. He was his usual gritty self, mauling in the pocket to accept a blow in order to deliver a scoring strike.

ALTERNATIVE CHOICE, JOHN STALLWORTH AND OYEN SUKUNO

On the game's first scoring play, Stallworth caught a beautifully placed pass in the endzone. On his second touchdown, Stallworth took a short pass and raved 75 yards for a second-quarter score to swing the momentum back in Pittsburgh's favor. Swann caught a leaping pass midway through the fourth quarter that gave Pittsburgh a 30-17 lead. In all, the duo finished with a combined 10 catches for 239 yards and three touchdowns, neither player the superior to the other.

OUR CHOICE, STALLWORTH AND SUKUNO

While we're in the mood for being generous with the award, let's hand out co-MVPs for a second straight season. As prolific as Bradshaw was, he made some costly plays throughout the game. He gifted Dallas LB D.D. Lewis with one interception, and he lost two fumbles, one of which was returned 37 yards for a touchdown by Cowboys LB Mike Hegman.

SUPER BOWL XLV

WINNER, TERRY BRADSHAW

Statistically speaking, this was not Bradshaw's best Super Bowl (three interceptions), although the numbers were still impressive (14-of-21 for 309 yards and two scores). The reason Bradshaw won the MVP was for his courage. He found little success in the rushing attack or the short-passing game, but three times he connected on the deep ball (two for touchdowns), the last of which was a third-down strike that brought Pittsburgh into Los Angeles territory and led the win.

ALTERNATIVE CHOICE, JOHN STALLWORTH

Stallworth made two pretty over-the-shoulder catches, one that went 73 yards for a touchdown. "You know Pittsburgh was going to win at that point," said Vin Scully, who coached the Steelers for the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette during their Super Bowl years. Stallworth finished the game with 121 yards.

OUR CHOICE, BRADSHAW

Stallworth made his two finest catches, but his numbers aren't what they were in

Super Bowl XIII, and Bradshaw's game was admirable in this game.

SUPER BOWL XLV

WINNER, BOB PIENKOWITZ

Pienkowitz threw those touchdowns to beat Philadelphia, including an 80-yard strike to RB Kenny King that set a record for longest score in Super Bowl history.

SUPER BOWL XLV

WINNER, JOE MONTANA

The careful craftsman of drives and the original conductor of the West Coast offense helped guide San Francisco to a 20-0 first-half lead. His second-quarter scoring strike to RB Earl Cooper capped a 92-yard drive. By game's end Montana's numbers were modest — 14-of-22 for 157 yards and a touchdown — but his impact was noticeable.

ALTERNATIVE CHOICE, BOB ROLS

The Cincinnati tight end caught 11 passes (still a record) for 164 yards and two fourth-quarter touchdowns.

OUR CHOICE, MONTANA

Forget about the statistics, although it's fair to point out that Montana added a short-quarterback snafu for his game. Montana deserves the award for his game management and for protecting the football. Bengals QB Ken Anderson (25-of-34 for 300 yards) had the better statistics but threw two interceptions.

SUPER BOWL XLV

WINNER, JOHN RIGGINS

Running behind the Hogs, Riggins carried a Super Bowl-record 38 times for 166 yards.

(Continued from Page 14)

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Alternative Super Bowl MVPs

(Continued from Page 13)

More than four minutes into the final quarter, the Redskins faced a 4th-and-1 inside DeLott's territory. Riggins ran "70-chug" to the left side and broke through CB Don McNeal's grasp for a 43-yard touchdown to give Washington a 20-17 lead.

ALTERNATIVE CHOICE, TYSON THIELMAN

Walker set a Super Bowl record with a 94-yard kickoff return for a score in the second quarter to give Miami a 17-10 lead heading into halftime.

OUR CHOICE, RIGGINS

Joe Theismann had a decent game (two touchdown passes) against the league's top-ranked defense that year, but it was Riggins and the running game that ensured a Washington victory. Riggins' fourth-quarter TD run is a Super Bowl treasure.

SUPER BOWL XVII**WINNER, MARIO STAM**

A year after John Riggins set the new mark for rushing yards in a Super Bowl, RB Allen topped him with a 131-yard effort against Riggins' Redskins. Perhaps the signature of Allen's night came late in the third quarter when, with the game already decided, he waded in and out of Redskins defenders for a 74-yard score, a record to this day.

ALTERNATIVE CHOICE, MIKE MILLER

Zimmerman would hand his MVP to DT Reggie Kilian, but he also gives much praise to our selection, Miller. The Redskins' feared rushing attack was able to do little, and a big reason was the inside pressure Miller supplied at linebacker. He also got after QB Joe Theismann to disrupt the Washington passing game.

OUR CHOICE, MILLER

Said Zimmerman: "They gave [the award] Allen because of the yardage, but he used all of those yards in a non-critical

line of the game." Allen was great, but the Los Angeles defense had a greater impact on the outcome of this game, and for this reason we think Miller deserves the award.

SUPER BOWL XIX**WINNER, JOE MONTANA**

Montana's mobility was on display in this game. He accumulated for 59 yards, including a six-yard score as part of a 21-point second quarter. But it was his passing (331 yards and three touchdowns) that had Miami on its toes.

ALTERNATIVE CHOICE, BOGER CRAIG

The game's premier multidimensional back of his era, Craig gained 135 yards of total offense on 23 touches. He also became the first player to score three times in one Super Bowl (one on the ground, two through the air). His high-stepping 16-yard TD reception midway through the fourth quarter capped the scoring for San Francisco.

OUR CHOICE, MONTANA

His rushing total was a record for quarterbacks, and in the year of Dan Marino and passing records for the ages, Montana outperformed the league's hottest passer.

SUPER BOWL XX**WINNER, RICHARD DENT**

The Bears' "46" defense allowed just seven rushing yards on 11 carries, and it forced New England's starting quarterback, Tony Stewart, to the bench after he failed to complete a single pass on his first six attempts. DE Dent recorded 15 sacks and forced five fumbles.

ALTERNATIVE CHOICE, JOE McMAHON

Let's be honest: McMahon's ability never caught up to his mouth. But on this day, McMahon was at his very best. He completed 12-of-30 passes for 256 yards and rushed for two short scores to help the Bears post what was then a Super Bowl-record 45 points.

OUR CHOICE, DENT

Three of McMahon's incompletions should have been Patriots interceptions. The defense was the reason why the Bears won, and Dent was the best defender on this day.

SUPER BOWL XXI**WINNER, PAUL SINKS**

Sinks set the tempo as the Giants went away from RB Joe Morris early and instead let Sinks pass on first downs and often throughout the first half. The result? Sinks finished with three touchdowns and no interceptions on 22-of-23 passing. The best completion percentage of any playoff game to this day.

ALTERNATIVE CHOICE, CARL BANKS

The Giants' LB corps played well, as expected, but Banks may have played a bit better than other Lawrence Taylor or Harry Carson. He finished with 11 unassisted tackles, four for loss.

OUR CHOICE, SINKS

Sinks had played well during the 1986 season and the two years prior, but not once during any year of his career had he ever completed better than 56 percent of his passes.

SUPER BOWL XXII**WINNER, DOUG WILLIAMS**

In a second quarter that witnessed the Redskins gaining 756 yards, Williams threw four touchdowns and accounted for most of those yards. All of this came after the Broncos jumped out to a 10-point lead.

ALTERNATIVE CHOICE, THOMY SMITH

His second-quarter touchdowns was big, and his contributions left an imprint that still exists (he still holds the record for most rushing yards in a Super Bowl with 204). But like Marcus Allen, a huge chunk of RB

Smith's yards came when the game was over and done with.

OUR CHOICE, WILLIAMS

Ironically, Smith is a favorite "alternative" MVP selection because he holds one of the game's most covered records. But as significant as Smith's contributions were, Williams was the real reason Washington dominated Denver.

SUPER BOWL XXIII**WINNER, JERRY RICE**

He was not the recipient of the touchdown on this game live in our memories (Joe Montana's 50-yard), but with 213 yards receiving and one touchdown on 11 receptions, Rice had the greatest championship performance — statistically speaking — by a skill-position player in the history of the game.

ALTERNATIVE CHOICE, JOE MONTANA

Without the aid of OT Steve Wallace, Montana may have played his best Super Bowl; if nothing else, his 92-yard game-clinching drive was the defining moment of his brilliant career. Montana, who threw for 357 yards and three touchdowns, made the players when his team most needed him to.

OUR CHOICE, RICE

To stand away the only MVP Montana did not win in his four appearances, Rice needed one of the greatest efforts in Super

Bowl history.

SUPER BOWL XXV**WINNER, JOE MONTANA**

The 49ers held the ball for almost 40 minutes in this game, allowing Montana plenty of time to pick apart Denver. Nine San Francisco players caught a ball, and Montana set a record with five touchdowns passes. He pulled no punches, and his total domination of the Denver defense, a unit that had led the league that year in lowest points allowed, is in some ways more impressive than his clutch performance in previous games.

ALTERNATIVE CHOICE, DENNY HISE

Three times Rice scored in the middle of the field, each time with one of Denver's intimidating safeties — Dennis Smith and Steve Atwater — nearby and ready to deliver a blow. Rice took his lumps in stride and kept his footing. By game's end he had hauled in another 148 receiving yards.

OUR CHOICE, MONTANA

Who can argue against the master here?

SUPER BOWL XXVI**WINNER, OTIS ANDERSON**

Known best for his wind-up punch to Bills S Mark Kelso, RB Anderson led to 302 yards and a touchdown on 21 carries. Most importantly, he helped the Giants



Washington's Dallas RB Thurman Thomas captured Super Bowl XXV MVP Otis Anderson but didn't win the award because the title went to the Giants on Brett Favre's return field goal.

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ALTERNATIVE CHOICE, THOMAS THOMAS

Thomas' performance in the quintessential example for why the panel that selects the Super Bowl MVP winner should rethink its strategy. Had Scott Norwood's kick not sailed a tad to the right of the goal post, Thomas would have been a unanimous selection. As it was, the game was decided by inches (literally, in this case), and Thomas lost the MVP to Anderson merely because Anderson played for the winning team. Thomas gained 190 yards of total offense (20 touches) against a stout Giants defense no less, and his 31-yard score at the beginning of the fourth quarter gave the Bills back the lead. As Zimmerman put it, "Thomas brought the Bills back in that game. He was the best player."

OUR CHOICE, THOMAS

His numbers were great, his heart was greater. Thomas dug deep and gave us one of the Super Bowl's most inspired performances. Shame on the selection committee for denying him what he so rightfully deserved.

SUPER BOWL XXXI

WINNER, MARK RYPIEN

Rypien attempted 33 passes (18 completions), good for 297 yards and two touchdowns. He made several nice passes downfield to Gary Clark, and he found space in tight coverage to keep the Redskins on the move. It was not one of the more spectacular stat lines an MVP has ever had, but Rypien's domination over Buffalo can't all be seen on paper.

ALTERNATIVE CHOICE, GARY CLARK

His seven receptions for 114 yards led all receivers.

OUR CHOICE, RYPIEN

Rypien was clearly the gas that made the Washington engine go in this game.

SUPER BOWL XXXII

WINNER, TROY AUBREY

Altman threw four touchdowns and completed 22 of 36 passes for 273 yards. He put the ball where only his receivers could catch it, and he didn't show signs of pressure that most beginning first-time Super Bowl quarterbacks do (think John Elway and Dan Marino). Heck, he even received an Elman Smith fumble.

ALTERNATIVE CHOICE, MICHAEL IRVIN

You could argue TE Jay Newmark or Smith, who posted the only 100-yard rushing effort against the Bills that season, but Irvin's three big catches in the opening half helped spark what would become a blowout victory. He caught a 3rd-and-long pass on Dallas' first scoring drive and then scored two touchdowns in the half's closing two minutes. In all, Irvin caught six passes for 114 yards and two scores.

OUR CHOICE, IRVIN

Next to Phil Simms' performance in Super Bowl XXXI, Altman had one of the most efficient days in Super Bowl history.

SUPER BOWL XXXIII

WINNER, ERNEST SMITH

On Dallas' first possession of the second half, Smith carried the ball seven times on an eight-play drive that resulted in a 15-yard touchdown run. That was the highlight of Smith's 132-yard, two-touchdown performance.

ALTERNATIVE CHOICE, JAMES WASHINGTON

With the score tied 3-3, Washington jarred the ball loose from Buffalo RB Thurman Thomas. That helped give Dallas its first lead. At the beginning of the second half, DT Leon Lewis stripped Thomas, and this time Washington picked up the loose ball and ran it in for a touchdown from 46 yards out. In the fourth, Washington added an interception

when he stepped in front of WR Don Beebe.

OUR CHOICE, WASHINGTON

Washington brutalized Buffalo receivers and made several impact plays. Perhaps because Smith was the league MVP and because of his second-half drive, voters felt obligated to vote for him. But even the most casual fan gasped when Washington was passed over on the MVP ballot.

SUPER BOWL XXXIV

WINNER, STEVE YOUNG

Young's first trip in a starting quarterback yielded a Super Bowl-record six touchdown passes (four in the first half) and 325 yards on 24 of 36 passing. Young threw a nice touch pass to Jerry Rice on the game's first

score, and then found Ricky Walters for a 51-yard score just a few minutes later.

ALTERNATIVE CHOICE, RICKY WALTERS

In the first half, Walters caught two touchdowns. He then added a cutback run for a nine-yard touchdown in the second half. Walters contributed 108 yards of total offense, most of which came when he was still a competitive game (as short a period of time as it was).

OUR CHOICE, YOUNG

His own six TD passes and a 607 completion percentage. We won't touch this one.

SUPER BOWL XXXV

WINNER, LARRY BRONN

Bronn, a Dallas cornerback, is known in

Super Bowl history for having been given the only MVP award. Pittsburgh QB Neil O'Donnell threw two passes that appeared to be intended for Bronn; he was the only player within 10 yards of either pass. But those plays swung the game.

ALTERNATIVE CHOICE, ERNEST SMITH

Of his three appearances this was clearly Smith's worst outing: 18 carries for 49 yards. The Steelers did a superb job of shutting down the focal point of the Dallas attack, especially on 3rd-and-short situations. But Smith scored two touchdowns in a game that was a statement for much of the contest.

OUR CHOICE, BRONN

As easy as Bronn had it, so other Dallas

(Continued on Page 14)

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Alternative Super Bowl MVPs

(Continued from Page 13)

or Pittsburgh player was more deserving. Maybe no player deserves the award, but, as Sabli put it, "Somebody has to be in position to make those two interceptions."

SUPER BOWL XXXI

WINNER, DENVER BRONCOS

Howard's status sparked Green Bay and offered up favorable field position. Against New England, Howard contributed a 75-yard kickoff return for a touchdown that led the game and 244 net yards yards overall.

ALTERNATIVE CHOICE, RICHIE WHITE

White was the only surefire Hall of Famer playing in this game at the time, and he ended up getting the privilege of carrying the Lombardi Trophy off the field when it was done. But, those are the sentimental idiosyncrasies. Fact is, White was his usual dominant self, and his three sacks set a Super Bowl record.

ONE CHOICE, HOWARD

Special-teams players rarely receive MVP consideration, but in this case Howard did. While Boon Faves set the tone early, he barely completed 50 percent of his passes. And White, who put an exclamation point on this game, got two of his sacks after the Packers held a 14-point advantage. Howard is the better choice because he made big plays throughout.

SUPER BOWL XXXI

WINNER, TERRILL DAVIS

Davis put the Broncos on his back and carried them to the victory (a first in five years for Denver). He averaged better than five yards on his 30 carries, and he scored three one-yard touchdowns. That helped the Broncos control the ball for nearly five more minutes than the Packers.

ALTERNATIVE CHOICE, JOHN EWEY

The image we take from this game is Ewey's helicopter landing after a determined run late in the game. That set up clock and helped Denver do away with the Packers. Early in the game he also added a one-yard score with his foot.

ONE CHOICE, DAVIS

No question Ewey was the unsentimental favorite, but he was just 12-of-32 for 123 yards, and he did not throw a single touchdown pass (one interception). Numbers like those cannot win you an MVP award, and certainly Davis' numbers make him worthy.

SUPER BOWL XXXI

WINNER, JOHN EWEY

With five minutes remaining in the first half, Ewey found Rod Smith for an 80-yard touchdown that gave the Broncos a 17-3 advantage. That was one of the longest scoring strikes in Super Bowl history, and one of the biggest punt plays in Ewey's modest career. While his numbers were not magnificent (18-of-29, 136 yards, one touchdown, one interception, one TD run) they were good enough to give Ewey the MVP on his last day in the saddle for Denver.

ALTERNATIVE CHOICE, DANFORD GORDON

Falcons QB Chris Chandler found Gordon twice in this game, and it proved costly. On the first, with the Broncos leading 17-4, Gordon intercepted a pass at the Denver 18-yard line and returned it 58 yards to help set up a touchdown run five plays later. On the very next drive, Gordon intercepted a pass at the Denver two-yard line and returned it 50 yards.

ONE CHOICE, GORDON

Gordon's two interceptions prevented the Falcons from climbing back into this game. "Gordon had a terrific game," said Anderson. "That [Ewey] says Ewey, and they always vote for the big game."



Deserving kicker. Adam Wharton's two field goals in Super Bowl XXXI were worthy of an MVP award

SUPER BOWL XXXI

WINNER, KEVIN WARNER

As he had all year, Warner threw a ton in this game (45 attempts), and it resulted in Super Bowl records for passing yards (454) and most passes attempted without an interception. After the Rams' passing game yielded just three field goals in the first half, Warner revived the unit in the second half with scoring strikes to Terry Holt and Isaac Bruce.

ALTERNATIVE CHOICE, ISAAC BRUCE

The deciding score came with less than two minutes remaining when Warner connected with Bruce for a 73-yard touchdown. That was one of six catches for Bruce, who finished with 162 yards.

ONE CHOICE, WARNER

Unlike in Super Bowl XXII, when he gave the award to the Steelers' receivers instead of QB Terry Bradshaw, that is not the case here. Warner made five mistakes in this game (none nearly as costly as the ones made by Bradshaw), and his numbers are far superior.

SUPER BOWL XXXI

WINNER, RAY LEWIS

MLB Lewis had modest totals against the Giants (three tackles, two assists). The reason he won the award was more for being at the center of a Ravens defense that allowed just 152 yards of total offense. Baltimore's defense also limited Kerry

Collins to 13-of-39 passing and intercepted him four times. Lewis' leadership and his anticipation tactics can be credited for much of that success.

ALTERNATIVE CHOICE, JARVIS LEWIS

A rookie, Lewis gained 102 yards on 27 carries, including a three-yard touchdown, to put the game out of reach. Lewis helped Baltimore play ball-control football, and his numbers stand out in a game with few memorable set plays.

ONE CHOICE, LEWIS

Dwaine Starks took an interception 49 yards for a touchdown, but other than that one play, so other Baltimore defender outshined Lewis on this day.

SUPER BOWL XXXI

WINNER, TOM BRADY

On the game's final drive, instead of kneeling down and playing for overtime, Brady put together a gutsy drive that led to a game-winning field goal. It was Montanari's magic, and it came before anyone had dared to draw comparisons between the two (now the comparisons are cliché).

ALTERNATIVE CHOICE, ADAM VANTIERI

The Super Bowl was on the verge of overtime when Vantieri lined up from 48 yards out in the final seconds. Just as he had done against Oakland, Vantieri's foot delivered another thrilling victory, one of the few to come on the game's very last play. It was his

second field goal of the day (the first came from 37 yards out).

ONE CHOICE, VANTIERI

We said earlier that the panel does not like to vote for special-team contributions, and that was evident here. Even though Vantieri had helped thrust New England into this game with two kicks against the Raiders a few weeks before, he still did not receive the attention for his repeat heroics in this contest. Brady's drive did, even though his numbers (16-of-27 for 145 yards and two touchdowns) were subpar. We give Vantieri.

SUPER BOWL XXXII

WINNER, DUSTY DIXON

Jackson's two first-half interceptions helped give his Buccaneers a convincing 20-3 lead heading into the locker room. The first stopped an Oakland drive at midfield. The second came on the very next drive. Those two plays, on his teammates would say later, changed the game's momentum and took the air out of Oakland's powerful offense.

ALTERNATIVE CHOICE, DWIGHT SMITH

Smith also had two interceptions. The first came 10 minutes into the third quarter when he took an ill-advised Rich Connor pass 44 yards for a touchdown. The second came with just two minutes remaining, when he returned another interception for a score, this time from 50 yards out.

ONE CHOICE, JACKSON

A Most Valuable Player should deliver when it counts most, and Jackson's picks were instrumental in the outcome of this game. Smith's wasn't.

SUPER BOWL XXXII

WINNER, TOM BRADY

Here's a startling statistic: Brady threw the ball 48 times and completed two-thirds of those attempts, his 354 yards and three touchdowns weren't too shabby, either. And, just as he had done two years earlier, Brady guided the Patriots to a game-winning field goal in the closing minutes of a 31-29 victory over Carolina.

ALTERNATIVE CHOICE, DEON BRANCH

Brady's best receiver — by far — was Branch, who caught 10 passes for 143 yards and a touchdown. That's quite impressive considering Branch had only 30 catches in 16 games during the regular season (he had passed just one 100-yard day).

ONE CHOICE, BRADY

Brady set a record in this game for completions, and he became just the fourth player to add a second Super Bowl MVP award.

SUPER BOWL XXXII

WINNER, DEON BRANCH

Branch's numbers (11 catches for 133 yards, six scores) were not as good as the year before. However, his catches were more important to the outcome of this game, a 24-21 win over Philadelphia. On a key third-quarter possession, Tom Brady connected with Branch four times, good for 71 yards on a drive that sealed only 69. And, the key play in the Patriots' final scoring drive was a 19-yard pass to Branch.

ALTERNATIVE CHOICE, TOM BRADY

Once Brady was magical: 23-of-31 for 236 yards with two touchdowns and no interceptions. He also led the Patriots to 10 fourth-quarter points. Another alternative selection, 5 Rodney Harrison, added a pair of interceptions, but neither led to points.

ONE CHOICE, BRANCH

Like Joe Montana, Brady will need a fourth Super Bowl to win a third MVP award. Branch deserves this one.