

MEDIA DAY

Continued From C1

played along.” Bengoa had competition from his very own network, which also sent anchor Mireya Grisales to find her “Dream Team.” Ines Sainz was back for her sixth

Super Bowl for TV Azteca out of Mexico City, measuring players’ biceps then comparing them to her 27-inch waist.

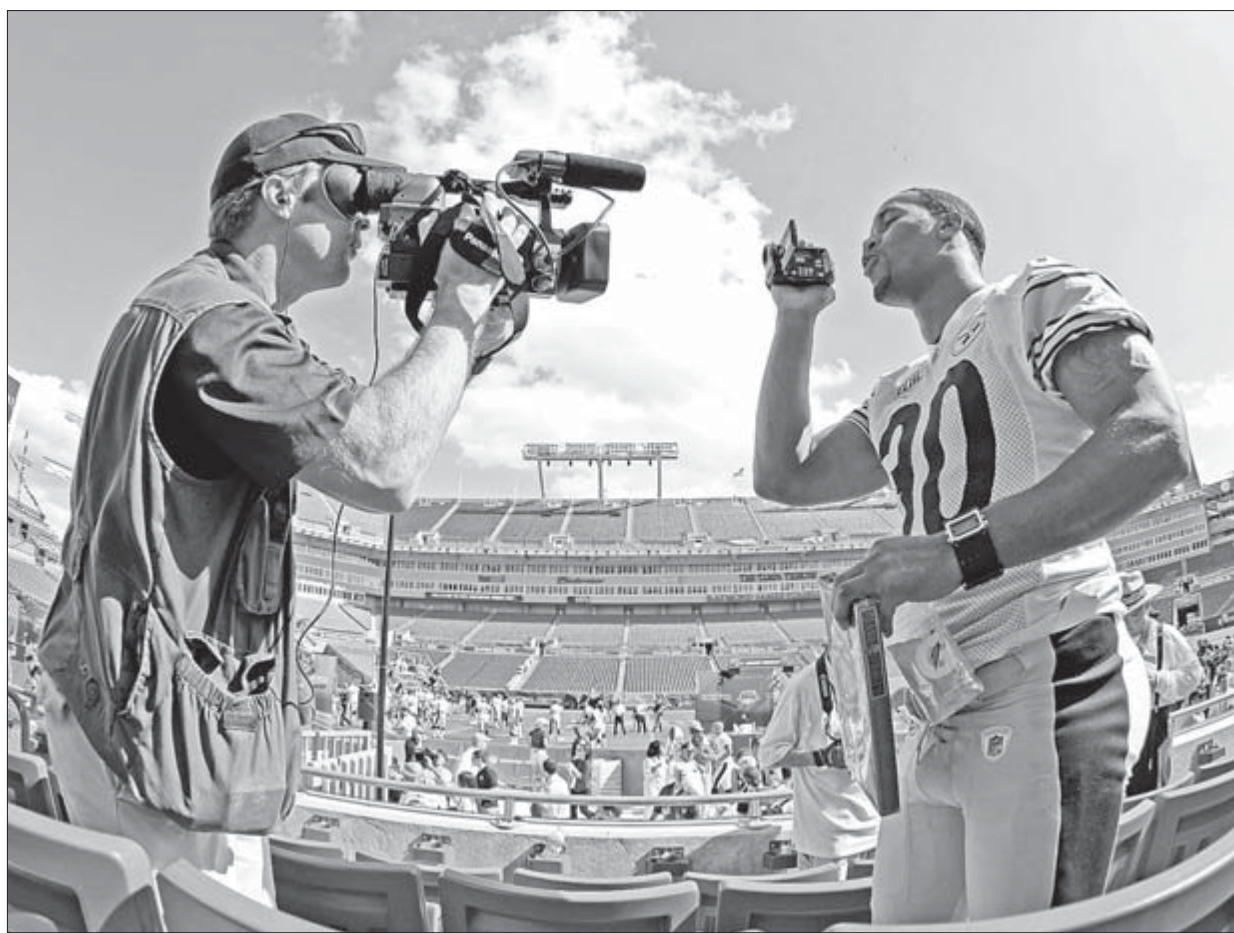
At the other end of the festivities, Entertainment Tonight staged a “Dancing with the Super Bowl Stars” contest between hulking defensive tackles: Arizona’s Alan Branch claimed the disco ball trophy, claimed he’d keep it forever,

then accidentally broke the ball off the base.

It made for an amusing morning, but not everyone loved the attention.

Asked if there was anywhere else he’d rather be, Pittsburgh left guard Jeremy Parquet didn’t miss a beat.

“P.F. Changs,” he quipped, “eating some kung pao shrimp.”



Associated Press

RIGHT BACK AT YOU: Steelers player Roy Lewis (30) films a cameraman while being interviewed Tuesday during the team’s media day for Super Bowl XLIII in Tampa’s Raymond James Stadium.

Roethlisberger ready to make amends for XL

The quarterback didn’t play so well in Pittsburgh’s Super win three years ago.

TAMPA, Fla. (AP) — Ben Roethlisberger was along for the ride, and he knows it.

Some teams win a Super Bowl because of their quarterback, the Pittsburgh Steelers managed not to lose one in Detroit three years ago despite Big Ben’s self-described bad game. Tom Brady, he wasn’t.

As nervous as a teenager taking his driver’s test, Roethlisberger was 9-of-21 with two interceptions and a 22.6 passer rating in Super Bowl XL. He was so ineffective, the Steelers needed a wide receiver, Antwaan Randle El, to throw the pivotal touchdown pass as they beat Seattle 21-10.

Roethlisberger became the youngest quarterback to win a Super Bowl at age 23, but he was as much relieved as he was happy. Not long after, the mood of a player better known for his competitiveness than his perfectly placed spirals began to change.

“I obviously got a little bit upset I didn’t play so well, I let the guys down and I didn’t help the team win the game,” Roethlisberger said Tuesday, a three-deep crowd huddled around his Super Bowl media day podium.

“It fuels the fire that you want to come out and play a better game the next time.

“You have to get over the initial hoopla, the flash, the lights and just

make it a game.”

Just a game. There’s no such thing to Roethlisberger, who is such a competitor that he rarely holds the door open for someone because he doesn’t want anyone — sometimes, even a date — beating him outside.

A friendly game of cards, a swat of the ping-pong paddle, a determined dribble of the basketball — almost anything sets off Big Ben, the man who refuses to lose. So imagine what a football game does.

Imagine what this second Super Bowl in four years is doing, the one he will play Sunday against the Arizona Cardinals and coach Ken Whisenhunt, his offensive coordinator in that Detroit Super Bowl.

Cardinals quarterback Kurt Warner doesn’t need to imagine. To beat the Steelers, he must outplay Roethlisberger, and he knows how difficult that can be. A classic pocket passer, Warner watches on tape how the 6-foot-5 Roethlisberger shakes off 300-pound defensive linemen, escapes a pass rush and creates a big play out of a broken one.

“He’s so much more athletic than me. He’s got a big, strong arm, he has an ability to make plays in and out of the pocket that’s so different from me,” Warner said. “I’m a guy that stays in there and is really built on just staying in there and making the forward pass as opposed to making a whole bunch of plays outside the pocket. He’s got great strengths outside of that part of it, which obviously I don’t.”

Their personalities are similar.

Warner’s career has gone through numerous ups and downs, yet he persevered and now has a chance to win a second Super Bowl. So does Roethlisberger, whose competitiveness drives Pittsburgh’s offense.

“Ben needs to win,” said defensive end Brett Keisel, one of his best friends on the team. “I could be joking around, playing basketball, we could be playing H-O-R-S-E, and all of a sudden he wants to bet. When he bets, he just has this face, this look that comes over him that he’s going to win. Me, being the smart guy I am, I never bet.”

But Roethlisberger does on occasion. He was seen with friends celebrating his birthday last year at some of Las Vegas’ more expensive betting outlets, not long after signing a new contract guaranteeing him \$36 million. Still, he believes in sharing the wealth.

During an off weekend in November, he took his offensive linemen to Chicago for an all-expenses-paid weekend. He treats them to dinner regularly, doing so again Monday night at a Tampa steakhouse — a team-building gesture that ignores the 46 sacks, the shoulder injury and concussion he absorbed this season.

Roethlisberger has led 18 comebacks in the fourth quarter or later that won or tied a game, five this season.

“I hate to lose. I hate being second,” Roethlisberger said. “When it comes down to it, I want the ball in my hands and I want to win the game.”

Kurt Warner’s comeback top theme of Super Bowl

Considered washed up, the QB has resurrected his career with Arizona.

TAMPA, Fla. (AP) — Four years ago, Kurt Warner was having a hard time finding a job.

No matter that he had been to two Super Bowls and won one of them, or that he’d been an NFL and Super Bowl MVP.

The perception was that he was washed up, finished, that his storybook career was approaching an ignominious end.

Then the 37-year-old quarterback wrote the most amazing chapter of all with a season that might cement him a spot on football’s Hall of Fame, especially if he can lead the Arizona Cardinals, of all teams, to a Super Bowl victory Sunday over the Pittsburgh Steelers.

“Hopefully, it would recognize him for exactly what he is — one of the best players to ever play his position,” his coach, Ken Whisenhunt, said.

Warner’s story is rooted in a deep faith and a persistent drive to be the very best he can be as a person and a football player.

“My approach is hoping that every player that I’ve played with, every place that I’ve been, that in some way, shape or form, I leave my stamp on those people and those places,” he said at the Super Bowl media day on Tuesday. “That’s what I want my legacy to be. The

football stuff, that’s all gravy.”

The football stuff impresses his Pittsburgh counterpart, Ben Roethlisberger.

“He’s gone through so much and done so much,” Roethlisberger said. “To me, I love watching him play. He throws an unbelievable pass and — you know what? — I have a lot of respect for him and the way he plays the game.”

Warner’s return to the top is a dominant theme leading up to this Super Bowl, just as it was in his 1999 season.

“Most times when you do something great, it’s not overnight,” he said. “It’s not something that comes easy. It comes with a lot of hard work, a lot of time, a lot of commitment.”

The comment pretty much sums up his life.

Warner played for Northern Iowa, but didn’t start until he was a senior. Then he tried out for the Green Bay Packers, but was quickly released.

So it was back to Cedar Rapids, where he got a job stocking shelves for a supermarket.

His route from there to the NFL included three seasons with the Iowa Barnstormers of the Arena Football League and two years with the Amsterdam Admirals in NFL Europe.

Before the 1999 season, Warner was a backup with the Rams when starter Trent Green was injured. Coach Dick Vermeil turned

to Warner, and the result was one of the most prolific offenses in NFL history.

In the next three years, despite missing five games because of injury, Warner threw for 12,612 yards and 98 touchdowns. There was the Super Bowl championship season and the near-miss against New England in 2001.

But injuries to his finger and hand in 2002 signaled the beginning of the end of his days in St. Louis.

He lost the starting job to Marc Bulger and was released by the Rams after the 2003 season.

“I never felt like the physical part of my game ever disappeared,” Warner said. “I felt like that was always there. The one question I had when I left St. Louis was would I ever get the opportunity to display that again.”

He signed a one-year deal with the New York Giants, but was replaced by rookie Eli Manning 10 games into the season after an awful game against the Cardinals.

At 33, Warner found no serious offers, except from the lowly Cards, perennial doormats in the NFL.

Even in Arizona, success never came easily.

“I worked my butt off this year to try to prove they made the right decision, not only this year but when they signed me four years ago,” Warner said, “to try to pay back as much as I can for what they’ve given me.”

THUNDER

Continued From C1

tant asset of this community.”

Wittman said the board decided “to promote activities that will cultivate [youth] developmental skills; spiritually, emotionally, mentally, intellectually and physically.” But he also said the board wanted to benefit families, so “our first idea to create programs for youth was extended into an all-encompassing goal: to expand these programs, not only to youth, but to make them available to their families and to all the citizens of the Mahoning Valley.”

Wittman announced the Thunder Foundation Mission Statement, which is: “To build better communities in the Mahoning Valley through collaborative activities that promote and encourage

education, physical activity, high moral conduct and development of positive life skills.”

Giles said his flag football league is growing and is a good way to get a lot of kids involved in a positive program.

“We want to get more kids involved with recreational activities and sports from Mahoning, Trumbull and Columbiana counties,” Giles said. “Every kid should have an opportunity to be affected by this program. It is an NFL flag football program.”

“We have 600 kids involved. We believe that we will have 1,000 kids this spring, just by word of mouth. We want to get a start in the inner city and get as many kids involved in this program.”

Othe board members are: Brian Wolf, vice president, retired teacher and executive director of The Marion G. Resch Foundation and an adviser to The Alice R. Powers

Trust; George Morris, treasurer, owner of Morris Financial Group in Salem; Giles, a teacher and president of the YFFA; Scott Kennedy, Y-103 program director; Atty. Mark Fortunato of Poland; Robb Schmidt, assistant athletic director for marketing and promotions at Youngstown State; and Richard Slyk, owner and operator of Dick Slyk Junkets.

“Our board has the time and energy; we are asking for the support of the community,” Wittman said.

Checks should be made payable to the Thunder Foundation and mailed to the Thunder Foundation, Mahoning Valley Thunder Offices, 888 Boardman-Canfield Rd., Suite A, Boardman, Ohio 44512.

Kennedy announced the first fund-raising event will be a beach party on March 14 at Mr. Anthony’s. Tickets cost \$20.

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Thunder brass set precedent

The commissioner hopes his league will capitalize on what Mahoning Valley has set in motion.

By JOHN KOVACH
VINDICATOR SPORTS STAFF

YOUNGSTOWN — Jerry Kurz, president of the af2, said that the Thunder Foundation created by the Mahoning Valley Thunder is a first for the arena football league and should serve as a model for other teams to emulate.

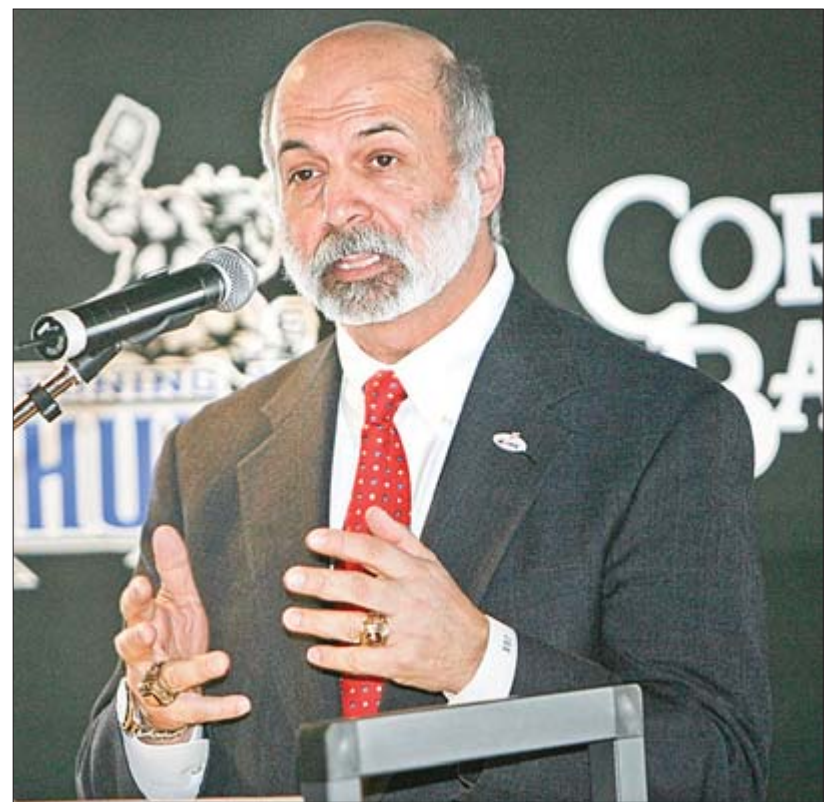
“This exemplifies what we want our team owners to do,” Kurz said Tuesday at the Chevrolet Centre. “This is a precedent in our league and it will become a model for expansion in our league.”

“We want our teams to become an integral part of the community. We want the team owners to live in the community and be people who will give back to the community,” Kurz said.

Kurz said that the 27-team af2 league, based in Chicago, hopes to capitalize on what the Thunder and owners Dr. Michael Slyk, Timothy Chesney and Dr. Jon Saadey are doing.

“This is the first time that a team in our league is doing this. We hope that it will catch on with all owners,” Kurz said. “Each team should have a mission statement: What [projects] can we do that year-round help communities? [This] Foundation is sending a message.”

Kurz said that the af2 world will hear of what the Thunder is doing.



The Vindicator/Robert K. Yosay

EXECUTIVE VISIT: Jerry Kurz, af2 commissioner, was in Youngstown Tuesday to help announce the creation of the Thunder Foundation.

“You don’t know how much this means to the league,” Kurz said. “I’ll brag about what this community is doing. It will be all over our website. We need to give back. This is a tremendous first step.”

Kurz said that the Thunder Foundation will become part of the af2 training manual for new owners.

“We send our owners to school and this will be another page in our manual that we will give to team owners on how they can do [what the Thunder is doing],” said Kurz, emphasizing that programs like the Thunder Foundation develop a “win-win” situation for the community and the team.

“By selecting a flag football program as the [starting point] of the Thunder Trust, the team is building a fan base of youth and families who then will attend Thunder

games and give back to the Thunder,” Kurz said. “It is a two-way street and a win-win situation.”

Kurz said that youth football provides important lessons for life as well as being a fun game.

The sport is a good way to reach a lot of youth, who in turn can influence other youth; and positive values learned from the game can be spread.

Kurz also lauded Thunder coach Michael Hold for becoming the kind of community-involved coach the league strives to produce.

“Coach Hold also is this type of coach. We have some say in who the coaches are in our league, and we want our players and coaches to give back to the community on and off the field,” Kurz said. “Coach Hold knows the game and is part of the community.”

Williams, James are 1-2 punch in win

CLEVELAND (AP) — Mo Williams strengthened his argument to be an All-Star by scoring a career-high 43 points and LeBron James recorded his 20th career triple-double as the Cleveland Cavaliers improved to 21-0 at home, beating the Sacramento Kings 117-110 on Tuesday night.

Williams, who is hoping to join James on the Eastern Conference team at next month’s All-Star game in Phoenix, had his finest game since joining the Cavs. The do-it-all point guard went 15-of-24 from the floor, made a career-best seven 3-pointers and added 11 assists and eight rebounds.

James scored 23 points with 15 rebounds and 11 assists, his third triple-double this season. He picked up assist No. 10 in the third quarter with a pass to Williams, who knocked down three consecutive 3s — all off feeds from James — in a span of 1:05. Williams was so good, James only had to take 10 shots.

Kevin Martin scored 35 points and John Salmons 21 for the Kings, who lost their sixth straight and dropped to 0-19 against the East.

While James was voted an All-Star starter by fans, Williams must wait for a nod from NBA coaches.

They had to submit their All-Star reserve picks — for seven spots —

on Tuesday and the results will be announced Thursday. Williams was expected to get plenty of support after helping the Cavaliers (35-8) get off to the best start in franchise history in his first season with Cleveland.

Williams is vying for a backup spot behind starter Allen Iverson, and his stiffest competition would appear to be Orlando’s Jameer Nelson and New Jersey’s Devin Harris.

Sasha Pavlovic added 12 points and rookie J.J. Hickson 11 for the Cavs, who have been able to maintain their strong play despite being without injured starters Delonte West and Zdrunas Ilgauskas.

Winter Wonderland Snapz photos coming Sunday, February 1

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