



Sports

by Jerry Keys

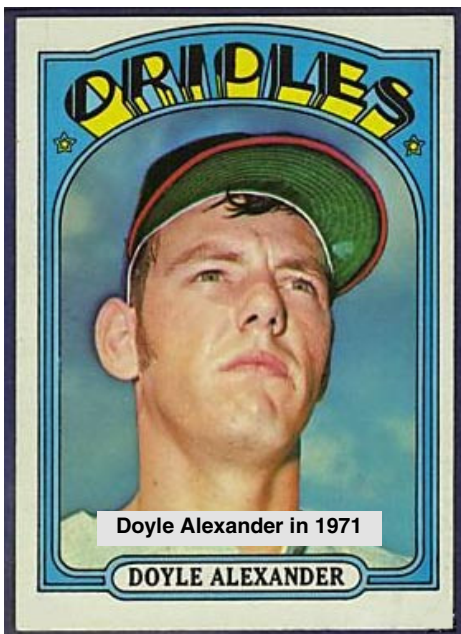
We all remember those days. So young and innocent but gathering the moxy needed for later life. Just like the lyrics from Bob Segar's "Like a Rock", our walk had purpose. Boom-boxes blasted, the sun beat down and convertibles were on the roads.

It was a time of innocence and innocence lost. A "coming of age" we experience several brief times in life yet ponder back to throughout our remaining years. It was late that night. A friend and I were on vacation in Florida. After a night of light mischief, we came back to the room and I turned the television on to ESPN. I caught the last part of a trade the Atlanta Braves made with the Detroit Tigers. I recall telling my friend "I can't believe they traded him. Outside of Rick Mahler, he's the best hurler they have".

The trade worked out quite well for the Braves. Their side of the trade brought John Smoltz. Over the next two decades, Smoltz was a cornerstone of the Braves storied pitching staff. As I mentioned only last month, Smoltz and Tom Glavine are the last two players still

ous career, Smoltz has reportedly earned over \$130 million dollars. He will turn 42 this year and is not expected to pitch until after the All-Star Break.

For obvious reasons, I doubt Smoltz signed with the Red Sox for the money. So my question is very simple. Why leave an organization you have spent 22 years with? It will eventually be known why, but until that time it is just a guessing game. Did Frank Wren (Atlanta's General Manager) urinate in his Cheerios? Was his ego bruised by the amount of guaranteed money Atlanta offered for 2009 (plus numerous incentives)? It is clear he does not have three or four solid years left in his arm (solid years=175-200



innings pitched) and he has pondered retirement after 2009. So again I am left asking why. Irregardless of how his season turns out this year, if he retires after 2009, it will not seem right. Seeing Smoltz in a Red Sox uniform will be similar to seeing long-time Red Sox star Dwight Evans in an Orioles uniform in 1991.

Maybe Smoltz wanted one last run at another World Series ring (already has one from 1995). There was speculation Wren was given a chance to counter-offer what the Red Sox put on the table. In any event,

the Red Sox have a far better chance of seeing post-season action than the Braves. The New York Mets and Philadelphia Phillies ownership are willing to spend a great deal more money to field a winning team.

Atlanta's ownership, Liberty Media, does not wish to do the same. Yet not all the blame of Atlanta's recent failures to garnish post-season action should be thrown at the owners. Liberty Media is in business to make money and turn profits. If Atlanta suddenly became the National League's version of the New York Yankees and spent \$200 million for the 2009 season and claimed a World Series title, would Liberty Media turn a profit? Most likely, the answer would be no. It would be nice to see another championship in Atlanta but the bottom line in business is how much more money will one make compared to how much money one will spend.

Oh...the guy he was traded for was Doyle Alexander. He went on to post a 9-0 mark in 11 starts with a 1.53 ERA and finished fourth in the AL Cy Young race although spending just over six weeks in the AL. Alexander helped the Tigers chase down the Toronto Blue Jays and win the AL East on the last day of the season.

I know there is someone out there wondering...why in the world do you care? Alexander's career began the summer I was born. The trade occurred on one of the best days of my life. One of my current favorite players was traded for one of my soon-to-be favorite players. Maybe Smoltz's departure stings a little bit more because of the connection to the day he was traded. As we age, we all tend to hang on to things that pertain to relics of the past. It is human nature but time marches on.

8-12-87 and XLIII

Super Bowl XLIII should be a very intriguing matchup. Ex-Steeler assistant coaches Ken Whisenhunt and Russ Grimm were the heavy favorites to take over when Coach Bill Cowher stepped down from the Steelers after the 2006 season. Each was passed over

another upset (like the New York Giants last year over the "unbeatable" New England Patriots), they must establish a consistent ground game to keep Pittsburgh's defense honest and beat them deep downfield. If Arizona's defense can contain the Steelers running

cies. Arizona will start the game off with moderate success but Pittsburgh's defense will eventually control the line of scrimmage and force Warner to win it in the air. Warner will throw for over 300 yards and may collect a touchdown or two. But whenever he is flushed in the pocket he also tends to throw several interceptions and has a tendency to fumble the ball in the backfield. After a couple of solid drives, the Steelers defense should reduce Warner's passing attack to short passes and hurried attempts that will fall incomplete.

Pittsburgh's offense will mix up the run and pass at first but will slowly turn to grinding out yardage on the ground. As long as Big Ben doesn't have to drop back and pass more than 22-25 times, Pittsburgh should have the upper hand. The Steelers are well known for turning to a commanding amount of running plays once they have achieved a lead of a couple touchdowns or more. The game will still be close at halftime, 17-10 Pittsburgh.

Pittsburgh will begin to take over the game in the third quarter by scoring first and having Arizona play catch-up the remainder of the game. The Steelers should maintain at least a seven point lead throughout the second half and ice the game early in the fourth quarter. Final score: Pittsburgh 31 Arizona 20.

Key players to watch on each side are WR Steven Breaston of Arizona and RB Mewelde Moore of Pittsburgh. The key players to watch on the Steeler's defense are LB James Harrison, DB Troy Polamalu, DE LaMarr Woodley, and DE Aaron Smith. And for football purists, check out the similarities between these two teams and the 1979 Steelers and Los Angeles Rams.



Took Bill Cowher 14 seasons to win a Super Bowl, may take Mike Tomlin only 2

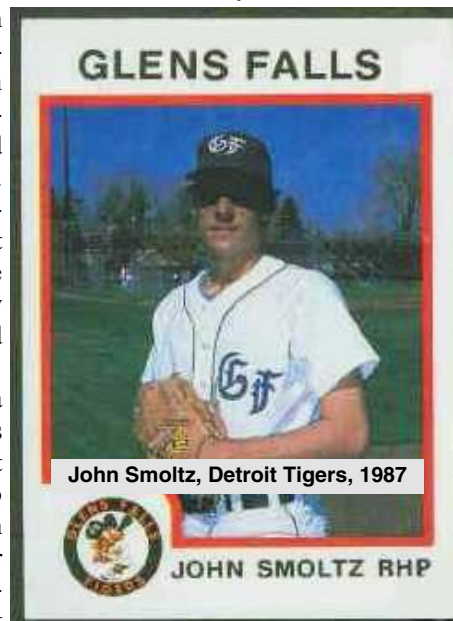
for current Coach Mike Tomlin. Both Ken and Russ went to Arizona. Now they are facing one another in a Super Bowl. Does anyone remember the year after Jon Gruden left Oakland for Tampa Bay and faced his old team in the Super Bowl? Even though the Tampa Bay team was built by the former coach Tony Dungy, Gruden's Tampa team seemed to know exactly what his old team was trying to do. Tampa held a commanding 20-3 lead at halftime and put the game away midway through the third quarter, 34-3.

Will this be a déjà vu for the Steeler's former assistant coaches? It remains to be seen. Will Big Ben have another subpar Super Bowl performance? Will Kurt Warner play as well as he did nine years ago against the Tennessee Titans? And which Willie Parker will show up for the game...the explosive one who can take it to the house if he gets outside or the one who grinds out seven yard gains only to be stuffed for two-yard losses on the next play?

For Arizona to pull off

attack and force Big Ben to win it in the air, he will deliver exciting moments but also make a few key mistakes.

Pittsburgh has a knack for beating teams that are as good as or better than they are. Their Achilles heel has been losing to teams they were heavily favored to



John Smoltz, Detroit Tigers, 1987

JOHN SMOLTZ RHP