



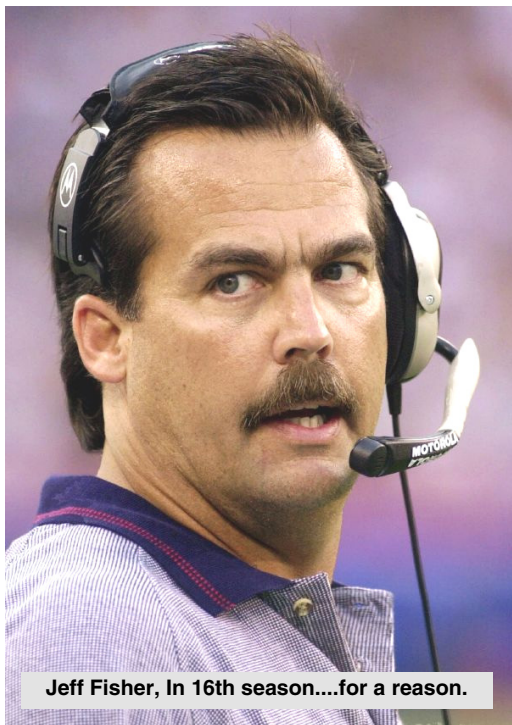
Sports

by Jerry Keys

Open Letter to Tennessee Titan Fans:

I would first wish to admit, I have never been a Titan / Oilers fan. In the late 1970's and early 1980's the old Houston Oilers were the main competition to my favorite team, the Pittsburgh Steelers. Until 2001 the Titans remained in the "old AFC Central" with my team. These two teams faced off twice a year and it was always a slugfest. Not to mention the rare times they faced off in the playoffs, namely the 2002 playoffs, where Joe Nedney did a wonderful acting job to get a second chance at a game winning field goal.

on the playoffs but just to win their first game, the Titans either need to start Young or Collins and allow them to participate for the entire game.



Jeff Fisher, In 16th season...for a reason.

Fast forward to 2009: The Titans are 0-6 and have all but surrendered any hopes of a playoff appearance. All the writers have said how horrible the Titans are. Fans have worried they will be 0-16. Does Nashville harvest fair-weather fans? If you are a true fan you cheer through thick and thin. What is the deal with people in Davidson County? The NFL strives for parity. Did Pete Rozelle not teach fans anything?

In the Titan's first three games, they had numerous chances of pulling out a win. All you need to do is examine the turnover ratio. A fumbled punt can easily turn a game around and I believe it did with the game against the New York Jets. Every loss brought about more pressure. Switching quarterbacks late in the game is not a wise decision. Vince Young was once considered "The One" in Nashville. He was benched early last year due to a mental meltdown and Kerry Collins steered the Titans to a 10-0 start. Now that the focus is no longer

Jeff Fisher is now being second-guessed in all aspects of his game (play calling, defensive formations, etc...). Fisher is not the longest-serving coach with one team in the NFL by luck. Fisher came aboard in



The Consummate Warrior Chris Johnson

1994 when the team was still in Houston. He inherited a team that just lost future Hall of Fame QB Warren Moon, a paltry run-

ning attack and an inept defense. In his first two drafts he selected stalwarts Steve McNair and Eddie George and the rest was history.

Fisher's first four years as coach allotted one 7-9 and three 8-8 finishes. He lost four of his first five contests against Pittsburgh. As a person who viewed these games I can guarantee the Oilers / Titans was by no means "an easy game". He enjoyed playoff success in four of the next five years (1999-2003), appearing in one Super Bowl (1999) and two AFC Championship Games (1999, 2002). Fisher has directed the Titans to the playoffs the previous two years. His career winning percentage is not too far off from Steeler legend Bill Cowher's.

Parity is why many fans follow the NFL. Note the turnaround of the Miami Dolphins from 2007 (1-15) to 2008 (11-5). Last year my Super Bowl picks were

Jacksonville and Seattle. These teams finished 5-11 and 4-12 respectively. The only time I have picked the correct Super Bowl winner

was in 2000 (Baltimore Ravens) and 2005 (Pittsburgh-yet I admit it was a very biased pick). The pre-season predictions from the "supposed prognosticators" are rarely correct as well. In major league baseball you can select most of the eight playoff teams quite easily. The World Series winners have recently come down to just a handful of teams which are perennial playoff teams (Yankees, Red Sox, Angels, Cardinals).

Has anyone checked out the injured reserve list for Tennessee? Quite a few names you notice there? Anyone who follows the NFL closely can admit, key injuries can devastate a season. Had Big Ben gotten injured late last year, could Pittsburgh have made it to the Super Bowl? Good question since former star-QB Byron Leftwich was the back-up. But what about the previous two Super Bowl champions, the New York Giants and Indianapolis Colts...who were the back-ups for Peyton and Eli Manning? If you can answer that question you definitely need to get out of the house more often.

A number of fans in this area are Atlanta Falcon fans. Does anyone remember the 2003 season? Not many, because it was the year Michael Vick was injured in a pre-season game and did not return until Atlanta's playoff hopes were long gone. The 2002 Falcons walked into Lambeau Field in January and defeated the Packers, an extreme rarity. The 2003 Falcons were 2-10 before Vick started a game. The four he started, produced three wins. Do you think Atlanta's first twelve games may have turned out differently had Vick not been injured? Was

it a shock Atlanta finished the 2004 season 11-5 and went all the way to the NFC Championship Game with a healthy Vick? Was it a



Young awaits patiently...without controversy.

shock legendary coach Dan Reeves lost his job in 2003 over the injury?

A QB is very critical in the success of a team. Also is a key running back, or an All-Pro defensive lineman. The loss of Albert Haynesworth via free agency was devastating. How important was he? As a Steeler fan I will give a



Steve McNair...you had a knack for beating my team....but you will be greatly missed.

current example: Pittsburgh lost back-to-back road games (Chicago Bears and Cincinnati Bengals) after having commanding leads of 14-7 late in the fourth quarter and leads of 13-0 and 20-9 (fourth quarter). Had All-Pro Troy Polamalu been active, would Pittsburgh have lost both games? Personally, I strongly do not think so.

Fair-weather Titan fans please put a cap on it. The Titans are a much storied franchise and employ one of the best coaches in the league. As for 2009, all I can say is "doody happens". Will Tennessee have a winning record in the next ten games? I think they will. Will they contend for a playoff berth in 2010? I strongly think so. This is merely a bump in the road, just like the 2003 Pittsburgh team. They

lost several close games that could have situated them in the playoffs yet again. The same could be said for the 2006 Steelers.

Growing up, I despised the Dallas Cowboys. They were the complete opposite of Pittsburgh, finesse and flair vs. grit and blood. But I highly respected Tom Landry as one of the best coaches ever. The same can be said for Fisher. Tennessee is more grit and blood than Dallas was of the 1970's and played a similar style of football as Pittsburgh. They had marked success against Pittsburgh; therefore I hated the Titans even more. But the bottom line is...the Titans are an excellent football team and I hold

the utmost respect for Fisher. He is a winner as Landry was.

If the Titans had never beaten Pittsburgh as often as they had, would I have the same respect for him...No! Getting rid of Fisher would be the worst mistake the organization could ever make. And this is coming from a person who detests them.