

Lewis' book is closed but Super Bowl just heating up

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

TAMPA, Fla. — A year ago, Ray Lewis was wearing handcuffs and an orange prison jumpsuit. Tuesday, he wore a diamond-encrusted watch and a white Baltimore Ravens jersey.

Other than the change of outfits, Lewis kept insisting he was the same man.

A midday sun hovered over his left shoulder as he took a seat in front of several hundred reporters. He put an expensive pair of sunglasses down in front of him, folded his hands and for an hour, calmly deflected every question that wasn't about football.

"I'm not here to justify what went on," Lewis said. "That's a story in my book that's closed."

Tuesday was media day at the Super Bowl. It's the day the National Football League normally revels in, but officials have dreaded since it became apparent Lewis was talented and determined enough to get the Ravens to the championship game.

It's a day set aside for uncovering the personal stories of triumph and tribulation that converge in the finale. Lewis' journey from last January to this one featured more adversity, more twists, turns and tragedy than all the other players' stories laid end to end.

But he wasn't going to talk about it. It's easy to understand why.

In the early-morning hours after last season's Super Bowl in Atlanta, two young men were stabbed to death outside a nightclub just miles from the stadium. As chaos reigned, Lewis, several friends and a half-dozen hangers-on piled into a limousine Lewis had chartered and fled.

Long considered one of pro football's best players, he was charged in the murders, then exonerated several weeks later. Under an agreement with prosecutors, Lewis pleaded guilty to misdemeanor obstruction of justice and testified against his two former co-defendants.

He recalled on the witness stand how one, Joseph Sweeting, brandished a knife as they sped away in the limo and made punching motions with it. "Every time they hit me," Lewis quoted Sweeting as saying, "I hit them."

Even so, Sweeting and the other co-defendant, Reginald Oakley, were acquitted of all charges in June. Lewis got a year's probation. No one was convicted in the deaths of Jacinth Baker and Richard Lollar.

Even now, Lewis remains unrepentant. He is convinced prosecutors dragged him into the case because of his high profile and that the NFL tried to make an example of him because several other players were facing felony trials alleging



News-makers

Ravens middle linebacker Ray Lewis refused to talk to reporters Tuesday about the unsolved double murder after last year's Super Bowl, which left Lewis guilty of obstruction of justice.

murder and sexual assaults.

"It was never about those two kids lying dead in the street," Lewis said. "It was about Ray Lewis, and that's not right. Don't be mad at me because I'm at center stage."

He has occupied center stage now for the better part of a month. Lewis gave a lengthy interview and appeared on the cover of ESPN's magazine several weeks ago just as the Ravens began their improbable run through the playoffs.

In the story, he talked about days spent weeping in his cell, struggling to explain to his young son why he always showed up on TV wearing the jumpsuit and handcuffs. Every night, he did 1,500 push-ups and 500 sit-ups in his cell to get ready for this season.

The panther engraved the length of Lewis' left biceps, its long claws colored blood red, attested to that dedication. The defensive player of the year award he picked up earlier this season confirmed his status as the leader of a defense that ranks among the NFL's best of all time.

"The guys in the white jerseys out here," Lewis said, talking about his teammates scattered around the field, "look to me for passion, for a sense of respect."

But the surviving family members of the two young men murdered that night in Atlanta look at Lewis and want to see other things — mostly, a sense of regret.

As Lewis held court inside

Raymond James Stadium in Tampa, 41-year-old Cindy Lollar-Owens, the aunt who raised Richard Lollar from a 2-day-old baby, was visiting his grave site.

"I didn't get a chance to watch him on TV," she said. "But somebody is going to call us and tell us what he said. I would have given anything to be there."

And yet, Lollar-Owens would have been more disappointed than anything. In the last few days, relatives of both of the victims have appeared in news stories and television interviews. They have pleaded for help in bringing the killers to justice, in some cases cried out for revenge.

Lewis heard the pleas. He insisted one more time what he told prosecutors months ago was still true. He doesn't know who stabbed Baker or Lollar.

"If I knew, I would have told them," Lewis said.

There were another half-dozen questions about forgiveness, regret, about contacting the families of the two young men, about whether he'd trade all the successes of this season to erase what happened in those few terrifying moments outside an Atlanta nightclub.

"Football, football, football," Lewis would chide reporters every time he didn't want to answer.

"What I went through, you can't get me to talk about it," he said. "Yeah, we're all human, so I think about it some. But that's on my time."

Historic defenses hard to find

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

TAMPA, Fla. — Dominating NFL defenses often attract catchy nicknames — Steel Curtain, No Name, Doomsday, Fearsome Foursome.

No one has figured out what to call the Baltimore Ravens' record-breaking unit, although Coach Brian Billick said he thinks "best ever" might fit.

After all, the Ravens rode it right into the Super Bowl.

"Call us the Swarming Bees, the Killer Bees," defensive end Michael McCrary said. "We're like something you could put together on PlayStation. Like when you were a kid growing up and you got all the best kids together and dominated other neighborhoods. Our defense is awesome. It's hard to believe the talent and speed and camaraderie."

The Giants believe they have the same elements on the defensive side of the ball. Certainly Michael Strahan thinks so.

"We've got 11 guys that play very well together," the defensive end said. "The confidence level is no one can score on us. That's the way we feel."

Both teams are equipped with impressive credentials. The Ravens have allowed 16 points in three playoff games, and the Giants are coming off a shutout of Minnesota in the NFC championship game.

Both are big, fast and very good, and they follow formulas common to other great defenses.

Nick Buoniconti, a finalist for election to the Hall of Fame and longtime broadcaster for HBO's "Inside the NFL," played for Miami's No Name squad, a team that sailed through the only undefeated season in history.

"The first thing it takes is teamwork," he said. "The line-

backers, the defensive backs, the defensive linemen all knew each other's assignment. Everybody knew what everyone else was doing. There were no surprises. That makes a solid defense. Breakdowns are mental mistakes. That was the way our team was."

Buoniconti said the Dolphins were close, but not perfect.

After the Super Bowl, Defensive Coordinator Bill Arnsparger looked at film of the 17-0 season.

"He said we made 13 mental mistakes the entire year," Buoniconti said. "If we were beaten, we were beaten physically. That means volumes. You've got to be unselfish and disciplined. We set a record with 147 points against in 1972."

"It takes great players to execute. You can't have freelancers. You have to eliminate mental mistakes."

Dallas Coach Tom Landry christened the Dolphins' defense No Name, and Buoniconti still bristles at it.

"We were not No Names," he said. "We were a cerebral team."

Perhaps the most dominating defensive player in NFL history was Hall of Famer Dick Butkus, now the director of football operations for the XFL, which begins play next month.

Butkus said nothing was complicated about his approach.

"It takes desire to make the play within the context of the defense," he said. "It depends on the desire to get it done."

If you apply that to offense, you could say the same thing.

"It's the desire to make two blocks instead of one. You tell yourself 'don't get blocked, no matter what.' You need the desire to do your assignment and then you move out to help.

"Call us the Swarming Bees, the Killer Bees. We're like something you could put together on PlayStation. Like when you were a kid growing up and you got all the best kids together and dominated other neighborhoods."

Michael McCrary
defensive end

They'll never have enough blockers that way."

Defense requires an aggressive mindset, Butkus said.

"It's me against you," he said. "I don't care if you're bigger. There's no zipper on your chest to measure your heart."

"Ray Nitschke, Tommy Nobis, Deacon Jones and Alex Karras had that desire. All the great ones have it. They're the ones that rise above. Maybe they're not the physical specimens, but they have the heart for it."

"Everybody takes care of their assignments. That's no big deal. But if I just take care of mine and I'm satisfied, what if another guy lets up? If you come to block me, if I defeat you, there's no one else left. Once I get by, I'm free to make the tackle."

"The mental part is when you line up. I'd say, 'I've got to make the tackle. I can't rely on someone else.' Never be complacent. If everybody blocks their man, it will be a standoff. The trick is to get two blocks."

Hidden talent found in tryouts

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"I was offered scholarships from other schools, but I've always wanted to play here, and I knew I could make the team if I tried out."

Coming out of high school, Biodrowski had scholarship offers from Northwest Missouri State, the University of Nebraska at Omaha, Nebraska Wesleyan, Peru State and Midland Lutheran College.

Jerry Green, his former coach, said he always knew Biodrowski had the ability to play Division I football, but playing in Class C-1 probably hurt him in getting a fair look.

After his senior season playing mostly tight end and free safety, Biodrowski led his team with 14

catches for 500 yards and four touchdowns — numbers that Green said would've been a lot higher if not for Fort Calhoun's run-first offense.

"He turned down some Division II offers with the stipulation that he would get an opportunity to work out in the winter," Green said. "That's where he wanted to be, and that's where he wanted to work."

"He's probably just a recruit that slipped through the cracks for Nebraska."

After testing was finished last Wednesday, Biodrowski said the feeling running inside of him was indescribable.

Biodrowski said Boyd Epley, NU director of athletic performance, had some pretty kind words when everything was over.

"He said that all the coaches were talking about me and wondering why I wasn't on the team already," Biodrowski said. "I was really excited."

"I can't stop thinking about football and how I'm going to do. Right now, I'm smiling about all this. I had no idea that all of this was going to happen to me."

When asked about Biodrowski's chances of making an impact, all Green could do was think about the past.

"He had been at the Nebraska football camp for the last three years, so they knew who he was," Green said. "But I don't think they were willing to take a chance on him because he didn't put up the big numbers in high school."

"Now they're finding out what a tremendous athlete he really is."

Dayne basks in Super Bowl media day hype

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

TAMPA, Fla. — Ron Dayne couldn't remember reading or hearing anything that could have prepared him for the enormity of Super Bowl media day.

The rookie running back for the New York Giants sat in the stands at Raymond James Stadium on Tuesday, surveying the scene below and slowly

shaking his head in amazement.

"You can't really compare this to nothing else," said the 1999 Heisman Trophy winner, who just as well could have been talking about his transition to the NFL after a record-breaking career at Wisconsin.

"I'm just up here trying to

blend in," he said. "That's what I've done all season."

Dayne rushed for 770 yards and five touchdowns, the second-highest rushing total for a first-year player in Giants history, although it's been difficult adjusting to a role of sharing playing time with Tiki Barber.

Women must nix CU jinx for chance at win

BUFFS from page 10

counter NU's athleticism as 11 players average more than 10 minutes per game.

At some point, the Huskers need to win a game they aren't supposed to, Sanderford said. This game is good opportunity to do so.

"We just have to gut one out somewhere," he said, "and Boulder would be a nice place to start."

Sanderford will also try to avoid several milestones with the game tonight. In his four years at Nebraska, he has never lost four straight games and his teams have never dipped below the .500 mark.

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