

SAMPLE SPORTS ARTICLE

Countdown to Kickoff

The NFL Season Starts on September 7, with exciting new players

© Weekly Reader Publishing, September 22, 2006

Can the Super Bowl champs do it again? The Pittsburgh Steelers sure hope so. The defending champs go head-to-head with the Miami Dolphins in the first game of this year's National Football League (NFL) season. The season opener takes place Thursday, September 7, at 8:00 p.m.

The teams face off at Heinz Field in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, home to the five-time Super Bowl champs. (The only other NFL teams to have won that many Super Bowl titles are the Dallas Cowboys and San Francisco 49ers.)

The Steelers and the Dolphins are just two of the 32 teams that make up the National Football League. The season-opening game typically begins after Labor Day. Each team plays 16 games during the season, which culminates on February 4, with Super Bowl XLI. (XLI is the Roman numeral for 41.)

In the Spotlight

On game night, many eyes will be focused on Steelers star Ben Roethlisberger, the youngest quarterback to lead a team to a Super Bowl victory. The Steelers quarterback seems to have recovered completely from a motorcycle accident earlier this summer.

But it's not just the players drawing the attention. The NFL has a new commissioner. The torch is being passed to Roger Goodell. He is only the fourth person to hold the position since it was first created in 1941. Many consider the job to be among the most powerful in sports. "I spent my life following my passion," Goodell says. "The game of football is the most important thing."

Rising Rookies

Plenty of NFL rookies hope to see some action on the field in the coming weeks. One of those rising stars is New York Jets running back Leon Washington. Weekly Reader caught up with Washington at the Rookie Premiere Weekend in Los Angeles over the summer.

For Washington, the pro season will have a new twist from playing college ball. "In the pros, the mental aspect of the game is at a higher level, so mentally preparing myself for the National Football League is a lot different," he told Weekly Reader.

Also hoping to stay cool under pressure is Arizona Cardinals' quarterback Matt Leinart. "My whole life I've always been not easily rattled," says the former Heisman trophy winner. The Heisman trophy is awarded each year to the best college football player. "I like to be calm out there and just have fun and play. I don't let the pressure affect me," says Leinart.

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