

Super Bowl XLVII is about more than just the Ravens' Ray Lewis

Written by Sean Green

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The U.S.'s unofficial holiday arrives Sunday with Super Bowl XLVII.

The San Francisco 49ers, led by their defense and surprise star Quarterback Colin Kapernick, will face off against the Baltimore Ravens and their suddenly mortal Linebacker Ray Lewis in the New Orleans Superdome.

And while we're at it, let's get this out of the way — Ray Lewis, either because of a guilty conscience or because he was caught in a compromising situation, has more than tried to make amends for his unidentified role involving a fatal stabbing outside an Atlanta, Ga., nightclub in 2000. I understand that you can't downplay such an ugly incident when assessing Lewis' legacy, but it's been deciphered, questioned, and criticized a million different ways. We may never know what happened that night and why Lewis took a plea bargain.

So if you believe he is guilty, then Sunday will be a bitter day for you. If you feel that he is innocent, then Lewis' last game of professional football could be his crowning achievement. Except, even that has been marred by allegations he used deer antler spray containing a banned substance.

Lewis missed more than half the season with a torn triceps and made a miraculous come back to help inspire his inconsistent team to the big game. Now, just as when he overcame the distractions of testifying in court on a murder charge to make (and win) his first Super Bowl, if he goes out on top Sunday, this feel-good story about overcoming injury to ride off into the sunset with the Lombardi Trophy in tow will forever be under a black cloud of suspicion and hurt.

All of this has also served to overshadow the real sports story of SB XLVII — two quarterbacks who raised their game to overcome underperforming defenses and lead previously unheralded offenses to the promised land.

Coming into the season, Joe Flacco was facing the "elite quarterback" tag discussion having shown flashes of brilliance since being drafted in 2008 out of Delaware, and consistently leading the Ravens into the NFL playoffs. This year, his clutch performances in the postseason — 853 yards, 8 touchdowns, and 0 interceptions — especially the big comeback win against the No. 1 seed in Denver, has seen him start to shake the uncertainty over his ability. With a win Sunday, Flacco could become recognized as one of the best still under center.

Meanwhile, Colin Kapernick was a clipboard holder in San Francisco until Week 10 when he came in for starter Alex Smith after he was knocked out with a concussion. While his first major action of his career ended in the rare tie against the St. Louis Rams, his first start was his coming out party, throwing for 246 yards and 2 TDs against a highly ranked Chicago Bears defense. Still, questions remained over his ability, due to his status as a running quarterback. Those critics were answered with his Herculean performance against the Green Bay Packers in the NFL divisional round of the playoffs (credit where credit is due to 49ers Coach Jim Harbaugh for figuring out a scheme of how to use his QB's speed and elusiveness to keep opposing defenses off balance).

But instead of hearing about the best story, all the way up to kickoff and probably during the game, all we will hear about is Lewis, his legacy, impending retirement, and maybe the two most ill-timed controversies ever for one NFL player.

Do yourself a favor, don't watch number 52 in white and purple. Watch No. 5 and No. 7 in red and white.

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