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Peter King > MONDAY MORNING QB



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It's time for the NFL to get serious after weekend of vicious hits

Story Highlights

- Several players were injured in violent collisions on Sunday
- Deion Branch, Ben Roethlisberger had big days in returns to teams
- The Fine 15, the MVP Watch, the weekly awards and 10 Things I Think

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NEW YORK -- "This is crazy!" **Rodney Harrison** said as we tried to process the sixth or seventh vicious NFL hit of the day in the NBC viewing room Sunday afternoon.

Then, almost under his breath, Harrison said quietly, "Thank God I retired."

The games we watched Sunday seemed as violent a collection as I've seen. Judging from the tweets and e-mails I got as the day went on, the public was astonished too. The **Dunta Robinson** collision with **DeSean Jackson** in Philadelphia, concussing both the Atlanta corner and Eagles receiver and probably kayoing the invaluable Jackson for Sunday's game at Tennessee. Several shots in Pittsburgh, two vicious ones by **James Harrison** of the Steelers; his helmet-to-helmet shot against Browns receiver **Mohamed Massaquoi** will certainly draw a heavy fine, and it's incredible to me no official flagged what could be the textbook definition of hitting a defenseless receiver. In New England, **Brandon Meriweather** lighting up Baltimore's **Todd Heap** with a hit to the head so vicious that either a mouthguard or something flew high into the air at the moment of impact. And so on -- six or eight shots where you wondered, "Is that guy getting up?"

So many thoughts. One: It's time to start ejecting and suspending players for flagrant hits, which I thought the Meriweather one was, and perhaps also the shot of Harrison on Massaquoi. Two: the league had better train its officials better considering there was no penalty on the Harrison hit on Massaquoi. The league had as a point of emphasis to officials this year that launching into a defenseless receiver would be a penalty and subject to discipline. So emphasize it.

Three: Eighteen games? Are you serious? Tell the six Eagles who've suffered concussions this year -- we're six weeks into the season -- that adding two games is no big hazard to your health. Right. And four: Don't tell me this is the culture we want. It might be the culture kids are used to in video games, but the NFL has to draw a line in the sand right here, right now, and insist that the forearm shivers and leading with the helmet and launching into unprotected receivers will be dealt with severely. Six-figure fines. Suspensions. Ejections.

I will hand it to Rodney Harrison. In the year-and-a-half I've worked with him, he's become more thoughtful about the game than I remember from his playing days, when his life was a seek-and-destroy mission. And Sunday, after watching a day of the viciousness, he laid it on the line on our *Football Night in*



Browns wideout Mohamed Massaquoi did not return to the game after this helmet-to-helmet hit by the Steelers' James Harrison. Getty Images

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America show.

"You didn't get my attention when you fined me five grand, 10 grand, 15 grand," Harrison said. "You got my attention when I got suspended ... You have to suspend these guys. These guys are making millions of dollars. The NFL [has to say], 'We're going to really protect our players. We're going to suspend these guys, not one game, but possibly two or more games.' "

If the NFL's serious about its rules, and is giving more than lip service about concussions, it's essential the league acts now to reinforce the rules on the books.

Now for the other headlines on a typically unpredictable weekend in the life of the NFL:

- **Kevin Kolb**, apparently, is really good.
- They love them some **Ben Roethlisberger** in Pittsburgh, and he repaid his fans and his team with a game he thought was a "B-minus, C-plus."
- The Vikings are more than alive. They might be a **Brett Favre**/Green Bay melodrama-away from becoming the favorites in the NFC North.
- There's been a **Tim Tebow** sighting. Came in the end zone.
- In three hours, **Deion Branch**, still trying to get caught up on his sleep, gave the Patriots the production **Randy Moss** had in five weeks.
- Officials don't know how to call pass interference still ... and can we end the madness and please, please, please make pass interference a 15-yard penalty and not a spot foul?
- Dallas is 1-4. San Diego is 2-4. There's a new standard for despair, and those two teams are setting it.

"The Eagle Quarterback Story." Coming to a theater near you.

In the last two weeks, Kolb, kicked somewhat ruthlessly to the curb by the Eagles a month ago, has played out of his mind. That is to say, exactly how **Andy Reid** thought he'd play when the Eagles traded **Donovan McNabb** on Easter Sunday. Kolb's passing line in the two starts while **Mike Vick** recuperates from his chest injury:

Comp.-Att.	Pct.	Yards	Yds.per-att	TD-Int.	Rating
44-60	.733	579	9.65	4-1	118.7

Right. We all saw this coming.

Kolb completed 79 percent of his throws in the surprisingly easy 31-17 win over the Falcons on Sunday, throwing two touchdown passes to **Jeremy Maclin** and another to **DeSean Jackson** before Jackson temporarily lost memory after the monster hit by Robinson. The eight-yard TD throw to Maclin midway through the second quarter was one of the beautiful throws of this season, I thought.

With a rush beginning to get in his face, Kolb lowered his arm slot to near-sidearm and pea-shot a perfect pass to a diving Maclin in the corner of the end zone, near the pylon. "You're not gonna be able to throw the ball from the arm slot you want to all the time," he told me later. "You see the same kind of throws from Mike [Vick]. It's just playing football. I'll see that on film and I'll say, 'Hmmm. I didn't even know I did that. But I didn't want to get it batted down, and I knew I had to put it where only Maclin could catch it.'"

He got emotional after the game when **Asante Samuel** -- not a coach -- gave him the game ball in the locker room. "I'm tearing up just telling you about it," he said. "But that's what you play for -- the respect of the guys you share the locker room with. That meant a lot to me, obviously."

I said this on NBC last night, but it bears repeating: Vick and Kolb like each other. When Vick hugged Kolb after the game, he said to him, "I'm proud of you." They're in a tough spot. Both want the starting job. Neither will submarine the other. "It helps that me and Michael are so close," he said. "There've been times I've had to rally myself a little bit. I won't lie. It's been tough. We've just said to each other, 'Whoever's in there, let's just keep playing our butts off.'"

There's no change in the starting assignment, though. Reid said Vick's still his quarterback when healthy, which could be Sunday in Tennessee, or after the bye the following week.

But as Reid has shown, his quarterback assignment is written in pencil. Stay tuned.

Sensitive Ben is back.

He's not crazy about the "Big Ben" handle anymore. He got emotional pulling into the stadium parking lot Sunday morning, and even more emotional during the Star Spangled Banner when he looked up into the

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private box his father and stepmother were in, thinking of all the stuff he'd put them through in the past year or so. "That's when I got a little teary," Ben Roethlisberger told me last night. "I know it's been rough for them, and they've been there for me."

Then the game. It all set up perfectly for Roethlisberger, coming back from his four-game league suspension for violating the league's personal conduct policy. The Steelers had a bye last week, so Roethlisberger had a week to get prepared after being away for a month. The game was at home, against Cleveland and first-time Browns starter **Colt McCoy** at quarterback.

The natives forgot how ticked off they were at Roethlisberger for his off-field boorishness (and, allegedly, worse behavior) and showered him with cheers from the time he pulled into the Heinz Field parking lot at 10:30 Sunday morning. Then the game: 16 of 27, touchdowns to his three key targets (**Mike Wallace, Hines Ward, Heath Miller**), one bad pick, and 257 yards, almost double what the Steelers had been averaging through the air.

"It sounds funny, but it was great to get hit again," he said. "It was great to do everything -- but just to be out there playing."

When he stepped into the huddle for the first time, Roethlisberger said nothing memorable but will remember the looks he saw around him. "Smily," he said. "Excited. I could tell. Nobody had to say anything."

I thought his touchdown throw to Wallace, with linebacker **Matt Roth** bearing down on him, was his best moment. Roethlisberger had to slide the line over during his cadence to account for a Browns blitz. He hung in, knowing he was going to get hit. When I asked him to grade his game, he said, "B-minus, C-plus. I left a lot of throws out there."

Now it gets harder for Roethlisberger. Sunday was the dry run for him. Now it'll get nastier, on the field and in the stands. Pittsburgh goes to Miami on Sunday, then plays three straight prime-time games -- at New Orleans on Halloween night, at Cincinnati the following Monday, Nov. 8, and at home against New England the following Sunday. Roethlisberger knows the road won't be as friendly, in all ways.

Ben Roethlisberger Returns

Source: [SI](#)

SI.com's Damon Hack analyzes Roethlisberger and the Steelers.

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