

Super Bowl excerpts from Hawkeyes past

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When the Green Bay Packers face the Pittsburgh Steelers in Super Bowl XLV on Feb. 6, offensive tackle Bryan Bulaga will be the 30th former Iowa player to be on a Super Bowl team roster, which is remarkable in the sense that just over 12 months ago, he was capping his junior season at Iowa starting in the 2010 Orange Bowl.

Bulaga will also become the 13th former Hawkeye to ever start on either offense or defense in a Super Bowl.

I know this second tidbit because I wrote a 12-part series for *The Daily Iowan* back in 2007 about the other 12 to do so, and successfully interviewed 11 of the 12 for a season-long series that ran in our Pregame tab that fall.

My reason for bringing this all up is because I'm somebody that saves all of my interviews I've ever recorded, and I held on to the transcripts from each of the interviews I conducted for this series. To give Hawkeye fans out there an idea of what will be going through Bulaga's mind in the days leading up to Super Bowl XLV, I wanted to share some excerpts from a few of the others that I once talked with about this.

First, a little background:

1. I stress the fact that these guys have started. Yes, there have been more than 13 Hawkeyes to have actually appeared in the Super Bowl. For example, Tim Dwight returned a kickoff back 94 yards for a touchdown while playing for the Atlanta Falcons in Super Bowl XXXIII. Dwight, however, did not start

for Atlanta at wide receiver. Two years ago, former Iowa defensive end Kenny Iwebema was in Super Bowl XLIII as a member of the Arizona Cardinals, but he did not start at defensive end for Arizona in that game. And when the Miami Dolphins went to Super Bowl XIX, they had Reggie Roby booming punts down field. The excerpts below are from those who actually played on either offense or defense for their respective teams from the first snap to the final whistle.

2. Bulaga will be joining the following fraternity of Hawkeyes to start in a Super Bowl on either offense or defense: Bob Jeter, Curt Merz, Wally Hilgenberg, Paul Krause (Pro Football Hall of Fame), John Niland, Jay Hilgenberg, Mark Bortz, Andre Tippett (Pro Football Hall of Fame), Merton Hanks, Ross Verba, Bob Sanders, and Dallas Clark.

3. Bulaga will be the third former Hawkeye to start in a Super Bowl for the Green Bay Packers. Jeter, who was the MVP of the last Rose Bowl that Iowa won back in 1959, was a defensive back for the two teams coached by Vince Lombardi. Just like Bulaga this year, Verba started along the offensive line as a rookie in Super Bowl XXXII after Green Bay selected him in the first round of the previous draft.

With all this in mind, here are some riveting excerpts from interviews I conducted with some of these former Hawkeyes:

Bob Jeter, CB, Green Bay Packers (Super Bowl I and II champion):

"To me, it was just another game. I felt like we won the championship before we played them. I didn't think they were ready or good enough to beat us. The AFL did get bigger and stronger, but I did not think Kansas City was ready for us, or that Oakland was ready for us that second year."

Curt Merz, OG, Kansas City Chiefs (Super Bowl I):

"The first hint that I really got on how big the game was, and

I was an offensive lineman at the time, was that the reporters wanted to talk to offensive linemen. I would get calls from back in New Jersey, from my hometown paper The Newark Star-Ledger, because a Jersey boy was playing in the first Super Bowl. That was the crux of you realizing just how big a deal this was going to be. Even then, after it was all over, we still had no idea how big the Super Bowl would become. To play in the first one has some significance, I suppose."

Andre Tippett, LB, New England Patriots (Super Bowl XX):

"We basically went out and did the things we knew we were capable of. We had come close, but in '85, we decided to wake up and do the things that we were capable of and we knew we could compete with anybody around, and it turned out that way. It was an amazing season. We went on the road, and won all three playoff games on the road, which was a tough thing to do because no one had ever done it. We were a tight-knit group of guys, and we were able to basically go on the road, play well, and not be distracted by anything."

Mark Bortz, OG, Chicago Bears (Super Bowl XX champion):

"It's a long wait. When you get in the regimen of playing every Sunday or Monday, it's pretty tough to sit there for two weeks with all the hype. It's a long two weeks. You'd rather just play the next week and get it over. It's a big media thing. The game is essential and pretty simple. It's just another game, but with all the hype, it's a pretty big build-up going into the game."

Merton Hanks, S, San Francisco 49ers (Super Bowl XXIX champion):

"...When we got to the Super Bowl, the question wasn't whether we were going to win the game. It was by how much, and how fast can we put these people away, because I have a party to get to after this thing is over with. You want to celebrate finally achieving the goal, so to speak, of winning

championship. It was just something that you always knew was going to happen, almost as if 'Look, I know the sun is going to rise in a few hours. It's just a matter of time before it does.' We were going to go out, we were going to play in the Super Bowl, we were going to have fun, we were going to play to the best of our abilities, and at the end of the game, we're going to win the game. The question is 'Are we going to win it by a little or are we going to win it by a lot?' From that standpoint, it was a very fun event."

Ross Verba, OT, Green Bay Packers (Super Bowl XXXII):

"What made that [1997] season so special was that those two aspects were allowed to work together, just being excited for the game and realizing what was at stake, that we're winning every game, we're a great football team, and just trying to be a small component of that. I took a lot of pride in never letting Brett [Favre] get hit. If you look at my film, Brett never got blindsided or depleted from my side. That's probably the most important stat for an offensive lineman, and it certainly was for me. That was very dear to me, and it certainly was a good experience for me."

Bob Sanders, S, Indianapolis Colts (Super Bowl XLI champion):

"[Lifting the Vince Lombardi Trophy] was the best feeling in the world. It was something that I had been dreaming about since I was a little kid. Growing up, I was always watching Michael Jordan when he was able to win those championships and he would kiss the trophy. In my mind, I was like, 'I want that! I want that feeling. That's something I want to accomplish. That's something I want to do. I want to win a championship.' I strived for that in college. We worked as hard as we could. We came close. But I think it was an even better feeling to win the Super Bowl because there is nothing higher in this sport than winning the Super Bowl. It was an awesome, awesome feeling, and for me to hold that trophy up in the air and know that all of my dreams had come true, it just

makes you hungrier and want to get it year in and year out."