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to stop the Steelers." And as Bradshaw said later that same week, "I'll keep throwing it until they stop it," but the Steelers passing attack was hardly perfect. It was a dangerous weapon, indeed, but it wasn't always the opponent that was getting hurt by it.

The Steelers finished 1978 with 39 turnovers, an astonishing number for a team that would finish 14-2, but Noll never pulled back on the reins, he never inhibited his quarterback from trying to make plays down the field to the wide receivers, he never went back to the style of offense the team had used to win its first two Super Bowl titles. Bradshaw's 1978 season is remembered as one continuous highlight film, but while he threw 28 touchdown passes, he also threw 20 interceptions. And this incongruity was being noticed even as the Steelers kept piling up the wins.

The Oct. 14, 1978 edition of the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* carried this observation: "The mystery has yet to be unraveled and the clues are difficult to read. Even though the Steelers season is six games old, it isn't easy to judge where they stand as a team. They're off to their best start ever, but nobody is claiming this is their best team. It is apparent they'll win their division and make the playoffs, but there are still a lot of unanswered questions about the team."

Swann was leading the AFC in receiving, Bradshaw was among the NFL's statistical leaders at quarterback, and the Steelers just kept winning. They were 6-0 after beating Atlanta, a game in which Bradshaw completed 13 of 18 for 231 yards and Stallworth caught six for 114 and a touchdown.

For the Steelers, winning in Cleveland had been as rare as a pink diamond, but they climbed to 7-0 after their fourth win in five years on the banks of Lake Erie, and the game was a microcosm of the team they had become. Harris rushed for only 41 yards, and the Steelers defense gave up 360 yards of offense. But four takeaways and touchdown passes of 28 and 32 yards by Bradshaw combined to make it appear to be an easy 34-14 win.

The streak would end the following Monday night at Three Rivers Stadium, courtesy of the Houston Oilers and a rookie running back



**The defense's four takeaways played a big part in a 20-point victory at Cleveland, which pushed the Steelers' record to 7-0.**

named Earl Campbell, who scored twice in a game that ended 24-17.

"I hate to lose, but something good may come out of this," said Jack Lambert. "There's some possibility that maybe we thought we couldn't be beaten. Now we know we can. That undefeated stuff is over with."

Noll was uncharacteristically upbeat after a loss. "Hopefully we can use this as a springboard," but after sloppy wins over Kansas City and New Orleans, it was Jack Ham who spoke his mind.

"Nobody on our defense is happy with the way we're playing," said Ham of a team that was 9-1 with a three-game lead over the Oilers in the AFC Central Division at the time. "You can lull yourself to sleep thinking you're playing pretty good football. But we're not, and we've got to get better and better."

The defense would get better, but Bradshaw fell into a slump. In Los Angeles, former Steelers defensive coordinator Bud Carson was holding the same job with the Rams, and his unit had a big day against the Steelers. The Rams intercepted Bradshaw three times and held the Steelers to 59 yards rushing in a 10-7 win. The next

week, the play of the defense was what allowed the team to survive the 1-10 Bengals, 7-6. Three sacks and five takeaways, two of which were interceptions by Mel Blount, nullified another horrible game from Bradshaw, who threw four more interceptions.

Afterward, Greene gave his offensive teammates a gentle nudge. "The load has shifted, but to win, we're going to have to get better offensively, because there are better offensive teams in the league than Cincinnati."

Bradshaw may have been in the latter stages of a regular season in which he would be the Associated Press Player of the Year, a first-team All-Pro and the Steelers MVP for the second straight season, but he just didn't seem to be comfortable in his own skin.

"I doubt I'll ever be able to look in the mirror and say I'm the best quarterback in football," said Bradshaw. "Maybe it's because of my personality. I think I have charisma, but I don't think I'll get the recognition. First mistake I make, I'll be battered for it. They (the media) make excuses for the other guys; they don't for me.

(Bert) Jones is always great. (Roger) Staubach may have a bad game, but he's still great ... the same thing with (Bob) Griese. I lose my greatness when I have a bad game. I go back to being a dummy.

"It's just the image people have of me. It's tough to shake that dumb image. I'm a country boy. I talk country, act country, do a lot of crazy things. I think that's a drawback to getting recognition as the best. And I'm not the stereotypical quarterback. I don't wear glasses, and I'm not super intelligent and I don't make brash statements. I don't stir up trouble.

"I'm kind of an ordinary guy playing on a great football team. In my mind, I compete with every other quarterback in the NFL. I want to be right up there with any of them ... because if I am, my team will be right up there. That's the motivation for me now ... to be the best."

With the playoffs at hand, and with home-field advantage secured, Bradshaw and the Steelers were primed to show the rest of the NFL that they indeed were the best.

**In Part IV, *The Playoffs*, the Steelers make history.**

