

'Wacky Wyche' ready to bring innovations to House of Pain

HOUSTON (AP) — It's not the first time Sam Wyche's intelligence quotient has been put up for public scrutiny.

It wasn't so long ago Wyche was being called "Wacky Wyche" for his offensive ideas with the Cincinnati Bengals.

Then came a 12-4 season and a trip to the Super Bowl and suddenly Wyche's quick-snap offense and sideline huddles became smart innovations.

Now the Bengals have lost three of their last four games going into Monday night's AFC Central Division game against the Houston Oilers, and Wyche again faces a dilemma.

"When you go to the Super Bowl you become instant geniuses," Wyche said. "So, right now, we're struggling. We maintain our IQ."

The Bengals and Oilers, preseason contenders for the Super Bowl, both enter the game with 5-4 records, trying to recapture their playoff magic. Cincinnati has been hit hard by injuries that include the loss of running back Ickey Woods for the season. Only three offensive players have started every game.

The defense that once was the Bengals' backbone has gone porous, dropping to 18th in the NFL in total defense. They are

27th against the rush and ninth against the pass.

Nose guard Tim Krumrie is still recovering from a broken leg he suffered in the Super Bowl.

Despite the Bengals' struggles Wyche has seen some vindication for his offensive ideas.

His no-huddle innovation is being used by other coaches around the league and in the college ranks.

"A lot of the things that we were so wicky-wacky about seem to be happening," Wyche said.

"Some coaches are swallowing hard and

saying 'Well, there may be something to it. We laughed and made fun.' And of course, the media people joined in that song."

What was so wacky before, now seems to make sense.

"I see a lot of the no-huddle around the league," Wyche said. "A lot of the colleges and the pros seem to be huddling on the sidelines."

Houston Oilers coach Jerry Glanville once criticized the tactic because it inhibited his free-wheeling style of substituting players for different situations.

Now Glanville accepts the challenge.

"They've forced us to call multiple defenses without a huddle," Glanville said. "Their innovative thoughts have helped make us get ready. We actually thank them."

Wyche started the no-huddle to keep opponents from substituting defensive specialists.

A rule passed prior to this season allows defenses time to make a substitution if the offense substitutes. The penalty is 15 yards for unsportsmanlike conduct.

Cincinnati still can quick-snap if it does make an offensive substitution.

Preseason hype hard for Oilers to live up to

HOUSTON (AP) — The Houston Oilers are finding it difficult to live up to preseason forecasts that they are contenders to reach the big game this season.

Both Houston and the Cincinnati Bengals will go into Monday night's game in the Astrodome with 5-4 records looking for the magic to propel themselves back to the playoffs.

"We haven't been the advertised powerhouse a lot of people thought we'd be," Cincinnati coach Sam Wyche said.

"It's been tougher this year all the way around. Because of the injuries we've had, we've lacked punch. It's difficult. We are approached differently. From week to week, we are everybody's big game."

The Bengals gained their status by putting a 12-4 record last season and advancing to the Super Bowl, where they lost to the San Francisco 49ers 20-16.

Now it's the second half of this season and the Oilers have lost three of their last four games, falling into second place in the AFC Central Division behind Cleveland.

"We know how tough this division is but I'm surprised to be sitting here tied with Houston at 5-4," Bengals tackle Anthony Munoz said. "I thought we'd meet in this game and we'd each have one or two losses maximum."

Injuries in the offensive line have been particularly troublesome to the

Bengals and they've also lost running back Ickey Woods for the season.

Nose guard Krumrie is still rebounding into shape after breaking his leg in the Super Bowl.

Cincinnati's troubles have not been related to a post-Super Bowl slump.

"I don't think it's a fact that we said 'hey, we got to the big game last year and this year, we can kind of cruise,'" Munoz said.

Having a shorter off-season and less recovery time may be contributing to the Bengals' long injury list, Wyche said.

"The short off-season may have been a contributing factor to our rash of injuries," Wyche said. "But all those things, I don't think, have anything to do with a mental let-down."

"Those are just circumstances that happen now and then."

The Oilers made the playoffs the past two seasons and were forecast to break away in 1989 but they've remained back in the pack, unable to shake their hot-and-cold personality.

Houston coach Jerry Glanville brags that the Oilers are the only NFL team not to lose two games in a row since 1987.

They are also the team that has won more than two in a row only once since Glanville has been head coach.

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