Rams, NFL's Smartest Team, Forget to Make Playoffs

by Con Chapman

ST. LOUIS, Mo. Jason Brown of the St. Louis Rams didn't realize something was missing from his life until this morning when he opened up this morning's Sunday New York Times.

Huge Alvin Ailey fans.

“I was looking for the review of the Alvin Ailey dance company's upcoming season when I noticed something in the sports pages,” said the 300-pound center. “All of a sudden it hit me—I should have been playing football,” he says as he fires up a homemade particle accelerator he uses to make zucchini *fritattas* with the heat generated by collisions between quarks and gluons.

The Rams are the NFL's smartest team based on their collective performance on the Wonderlic Personnel Test, a standardized exam given at the NFL Scouting Combine to college football players who hope to make the pros. Despite that surfeit of grey matter, the team hasn't made the playoffs since 2005.

Available online at *«http://fictionaut.com/stories/con-chapman/rams-nfls-smartest-team-forget-to-make-playoffs--2»*
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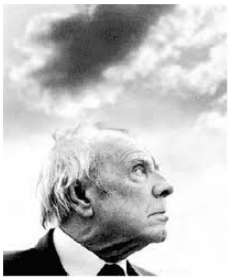
“Dante—Ezra Pound—Canto I, Canto II—hut!”

The Wonderlic exam includes questions such as: “Rope is selling for $.10 a foot, and Bob is on a train traveling 60 miles an hour from Kansas City to St. Louis. You should be in: (a) a seven-man front, (b) a nickel defense with a Cover 2, or (c) a basic 4-3 alignment with RE and RT stunting.”

Josh McDaniels, the Rams' offensive coordinator this season, says the team's IQ sometimes gets in the way of its performance on the field. “I told the guys to suck it up in training camp, we had a shot at a wildcard spot,” he said with disgust, “but no, they'd rather play chess and conjugate irregular French verbs.”

Cuthbertson's Irregular French Verb Wheel: I have one you can borrow.

“Don't blame me,” said running back Cadillac Williams as he looked up over a paperback copy of Jorge Luis Borges' *Ficciones.* “Our playbook is bo-ring.”



Borges: "The wind from the east is weak—we'll receive!"

Among the teams with lesser intellectual gifts who made the playoffs were the Denver Broncos, who will play the Pittsburgh Steelers today. The Broncos' coaching staff credits a top-to-bottom overhaul of the team's learning environment.

"The guys were listening to 'Hooked on Phonics' and Beethoven's late quartets in the locker room," says Marc Varbedian, assistant special teams coordinator. "We bought some heavy metal and alternated it with rap and Jessica Simpson, and I guess you'd have to say it worked." The Broncos were 7-2 in games in which Tim Tebow started, and Steelers' cornerback Bryant McFadden says he'll have his hands full trying to shut down the religious-minded quarterback's multifaceted game. "You don't engineer come-from-behind wins like he did this year if you're MENSA material," notes McFadden, referring to the high-IQ membership organization.

McDaniels says the problem with this year's St. Louis squad is common among intellectuals. "They're like a bunch of absent-minded professors," he notes. "They know which sonnet of

Shakespeare has the ‘bare ruined choirs' line in it, but they can't remember where they put their car keys.”

C.J. Ah You: “‘Bare ruined choirs' is Sonnet 73, line 4, left side!”

C.J. Ah You, left defensive end, was unapologetic. “Scientists are on the verge of incredible breakthroughs in nanotechnology, and all we ever talk about in team meetings is blitz packages.” You, or Ah You, whichever, blamed the Rams' coaching staff for the team's poor performance this year. “I told coach Spagnuolo to put ‘Make playoffs' on his to-do list, but he went and stuck it in a copy of a stupid Danielle Steel novel. Once you drop that in the library book return, some other knucklehead will check it out and you'll never see it again.”

The Rams' may de-emphasize their reliance on the Wonderlic test next season and draft players based on athletic rather than cognitive skills, according to assistant strength and conditioning coach Todd McInerney. “Kurt Warner is the kinda player we need,” he said, referring to the team's quarterback during its “Greatest Show on Turf” years. “Kurt's a snake-handling religious nut who used to tell reporters God made him throw for 300 yards, three touchdowns and no picks. He wasn't the brightest bulb on the scoreboard, but he got us to the Super Bowl twice.”

A slightly different version of this article first appeared in Flak Magazine in 2007. It will continue to appear annually, mutatis mutandis *as the lawyers say, until the Rams make the playoffs.*