

# Sports

## Super Sibs. Brothers and rival coaches, the Harbaughs face off for the NFL title

By Sean Gregory

THE HARBAUGH BROTHERS—JIM, THE coach of the San Francisco 49ers, and John, the coach of the Baltimore Ravens, whose teams will duel in the Super Bowl on Feb. 3—want to purge their sibling ties from the game's story line. "Every moment that you're talking about myself or John, that's less time that the players are going to be talked about," Jim told reporters a day after his team made the Super Bowl.

But in the name of every pair of battling brothers who have spent a lifetime trying to best each other, that isn't going to happen. After all, the Harbaughs have a golden opportunity, on America's grandest sporting stage, to teach families how to behave. "Embrace it," says Jeanne Safer, a psychotherapist specializing in siblings and the author of *Cain's Legacy: Liberating Siblings from a Lifetime of Rage, Shame, Secrecy and Regret*. "These guys are lucky. How many of us get to make so much money safely acting out our sibling rivalry with the whole country cheering us on? It's healthy to recognize it and healthy for people to see that it doesn't have to destroy the relationship."

Here at the pinnacle of their profession—the Super Bowl, the most watched U.S. television program—stand two guys who were raised in the same Ann Arbor, Mich., house, where, as family lore goes, they'd each try to toss a football over a front-yard tree. And here's the plot twist: only younger brother Jim, the star athlete who played quarterback for 15 seasons in the NFL before retiring in 2002, could do it. He became an NFL head coach nine years later, while big brother John had to spend decades working his way up the coaching food chain. Now they meet at the top of it. "What's happened this year in the NFL, two brothers coaching in the championship game," says ESPN analyst Mike Ditka, who coached Jim Harbaugh when they were both with the Chicago Bears, "will never happen again in any sport."

Many fans have pined for a Peyton Manning–Eli Manning Super Bowl. Both quarterbacks have reached the game twice

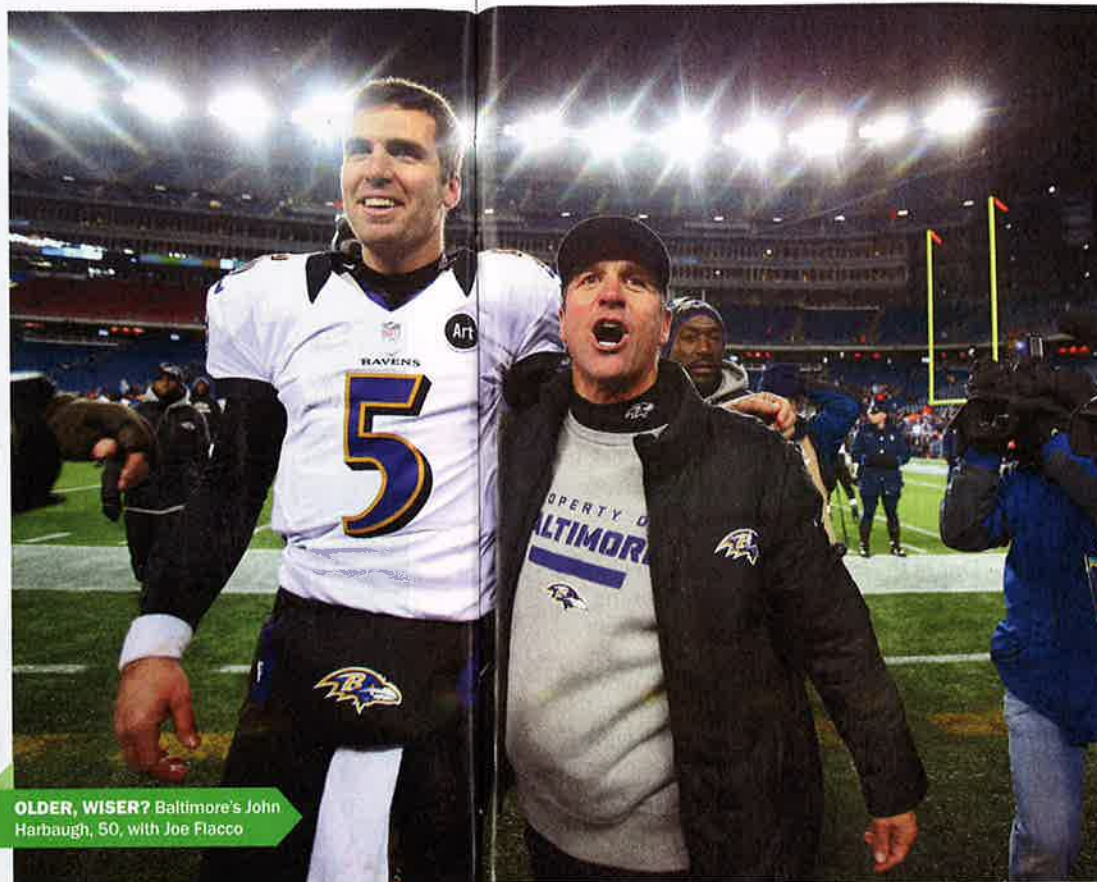
but not in the same year. The Harbaugh matchup, however, is even more compelling. While the Mannings would each command an offense, the Harbaughs are trying to outwit each other in a high-stakes sideline chess match pitting the Niners' potent offense, led by quarterbacking sensation Colin Kaepernick, against the Ravens' stifling defense, led by line-backing legend Ray Lewis.

The Harbaughs are close but competitive—especially with each other. They used to talk lots of football shop, but now that they both work in the NFL, they've curtailed the strategy sessions. A day after their teams won their conference-championship games, the Harbaughs still hadn't spoken on the phone. "A couple of texts," says Jim of their communication. "I'd imagine [there] won't be much more."

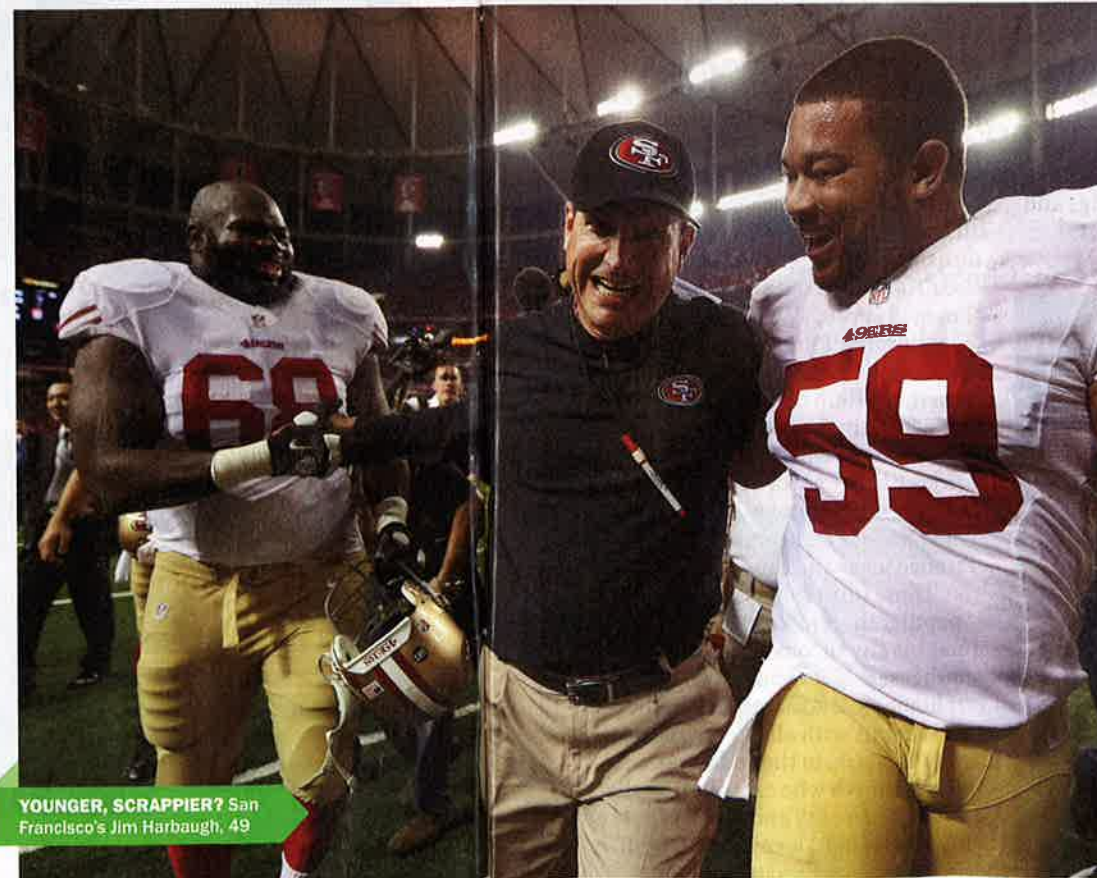
According to Safer, a sibling like Jim is "a tough act to precede." He's 15 months younger than John, who turned 50 in September, and became the starting quarterback of his high school team as a sophomore—beating out his older brother. John blew out his knee in college at Miami University in Ohio. Jim was a star quarterback at the University of Michigan. The Bears drafted him in the first round in 1987. Though he clashed with Ditka, Jim shone in Indianapolis, pre–Peyton Manning. He earned the nickname "Captain Comeback" for his late-game heroics.

John, meanwhile, took up the family business: coaching. Jack Harbaugh, the boys' father, was a football lifer, serving as an assistant coach for Michigan,

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**OLDER, WISER?** Baltimore's John Harbaugh, 50, with Joe Flacco



**YOUNGER, SCRAPPIER?** San Francisco's Jim Harbaugh, 49

**Harbaugh Helper**  
What you need to know about the bros

29

Number of years John has coached at the college or NFL level. Jim has coached 11 years, after a 15-year career as a player



**COACHING DNA**

John, left, and Jim, with sister Joani—who is married to Indiana University hoops coach Tom Crean

16-6

Score of the first Har-bowl, won by Baltimore on Thanksgiving night 2011. The Ravens sacked the 49ers' QB nine times

**OH YEAH, PLAYERS**

Colin Kaepernick, below left, was second string until the 49ers' starting quarterback got a concussion. Ravens QB Joe Flacco has won playoff games in each of the past five seasons



Stanford, Iowa, Bowling Green and other schools and as the head coach at Western Michigan and Western Kentucky, where he won a Division I-AA title in 2002. John followed a similarly nomadic path, serving as a college assistant in five different spots before the Philadelphia Eagles hired him as a special-teams coordinator in 1998.

After Jim's playing career ended, he also took up coaching full time, working as a grunt with the Oakland Raiders. Just two years later, the University of San Diego hired him to take over its program; John was still an assistant. A few years after that, in 2007, Stanford hired Jim as head coach; John was still an assistant. John thought about working for Jim at Stanford as his defensive coordinator. Instead, John stayed in the NFL and got the Baltimore head-coaching gig in 2008.

Though John reached the NFL's head-coaching ranks first, Jim's NFL success has been meteoric. He reached the Super Bowl in his second season, while John needed five years to do the same. After toiling for nearly three decades, John is so close to the ultimate prize—unless Jim grabs it. "It's impossible for him to not feel some rivalry, some resentment," says Safer of John, refusing to believe any public statements to the contrary. "That's not pathological. It's human nature."

The brothers have very different styles. "John is not as uptight as Jim is," says Fox sports analyst Tony Siragusa, who in 1987 was a defensive tackle at the University of Pittsburgh—where John was an assistant coach—and played with Jim in Baltimore in 1998. "John will sit down and shoot the s--- with you." Jim is also more outwardly intense; for example, in the Jan. 20 NFC championship game against the Atlanta Falcons, he threw a certified temper tantrum on the sideline after a ref's call didn't go his way. "John is one of those guys who will find his way around the wall," says University of South Florida head football coach Willie Taggart, who is close to the Harbaugh family—he played and coached for Jack at Western Kentucky and worked for Jim at Stanford—"where Jim would try to run through the wall." Now he's trying to run through big bro. Again. ■