

An Interview With:

MIKE RUCKER

*Q. Talk about the first **Philadelphia** game, what do you remember about that and how will that help you get ready for this game?*

MIKE RUCKER: Well, it started out good. The opening play, you get an interception, that's the way you kind of wanted to start that game. It was the ending that kind of stuck out most; that we didn't finish the game like we wanted to. And so we're going to take some good things from that game, but there are some things we need to clean up from that game. And a lot of that was missed tackles, too.

*Q. You played the **Colts** earlier this year. How do you scheme against a quarterback like **Peyton Manning** who changes so much based on what he sees at the line of scrimmage?*

MIKE RUCKER: You know, with **Peyton**, it's like you have to kind of get in your defense and have just got to make sure it's a clean defense that can stop the run and the pass. And it's kind of a guessing match whether he's going to run or pass, but you've got to have guys that can do both in there in case it is a run or a pass. It's tough because your arms get tired when you're down there and it makes for a long day.

*Q. Talk about doing the same for **Donovan McNabb**.*

MIKE RUCKER: Yeah, that's going to be another option that we have to take care of and with his running ability. He's really taken off last couple of weeks, especially that **Green Bay** game. He could do it with his feet and his arm. He's really a problem now.

*Q. Do you believe that the **Carolina Panthers** are the surprise team this year?*

MIKE RUCKER: I think to the rest of the world, yes. But here in **Charlotte**, I don't think so. We were a good ballclub when we were 1-15. We just lost a lot of close games. From those close games that year and last year, we've taken those close games and we've turned them around and now we are winning those close games.

You have to learn from your mistakes. That's the kind of thing you have to teach your kids. You have to learn from your mistakes when you do something wrong. We've done that and now it's paying off for us.

*Q. With the injuries the **Eagles** have had, they are still getting it done week after week and now heading into the playoffs. What do you see that might scare you about the **Eagles**?*

MIKE RUCKER: Well, when you're a team, it's kind of like us, we find a way to win. They have had some injuries, but when you have guys step up in the injury spots and making things happen, that's when you know you have a good football club; you've got depth, and it can only be good for you, especially in the future.

*Q. Can you talk about your process from when you were drafted and you played behind **Reggie White** and some of the other players, and now you've gotten to the point where you're seen as one of the leaders on a team that's on the verge of going to the **Super Bowl**?*

MIKE RUCKER: When I was drafted the first two years, I didn't really get a whole lot of playing time and I just tried to take advantage of the playing time I got and learned. Then when they brought **Reggie (White)** and (Eric) **Swan** and (Sean) **Gilbert** were here and **Chuck Smith**, I really saw an opportunity to learn from a lot of great guys that have played this game for a long time. What I've done is I took something from each guy and just kind of stored it away in my memory.

You know, like just this past year, there's been a couple of games where I brought out my hump move that **Reggie** helped me on. I'm not a big guy, I don't use it all the time, but in certain situations I did. So I took that from him. And **Chuck Smith** helped me on some alignments and some keys, and so just different things like that that I've really taken from them and really appreciate the time that I spent with them.

*Q. **John Fox** when he was with the **Giants** always seemed to devise a good game plan against **Donovan McNabb** when he played in the **NFC East**. Has he added any wrinkles to the defensive scheme for this week?*

MIKE RUCKER: I'm pretty sure he has. When we go with our defense coordinator, they

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already have a game plan drawn up. They have been over here for hours and hours the days before that, so I'm sure that some of the stuff that's in there is from him and what has worked with him in the past. But directly him coming in here and drawing something up, he hasn't done that.

*Q. As a defensive line this year, after being together now for two years, has **Coach Fox** put in more and defense coordinator put in more things for you to do, do you have more wrinkles significantly more than you did last year?*

MIKE RUCKER: I think so. I think as you stay in the system longer and longer, you can start adding more different things. We put a system in, there's only so much you can do and only so much guys can retain. Now you've kind of got a base package laid down and now you kind of just keep building on that and throwing in different things.

Q. What kinds of stuff have you been able to add this year that you would not have been doing last year?

MIKE RUCKER: Well, I just think different movements, different schemes, different looks that you give the offense, just different things like that. Just different wrinkles that you might show them something that looks like one thing but it's something else. So that's just different things that we have evolved to in the past year.

*Q. I know you guys are relatively young and you're new to the **NFC Championship** game stuff, but is there a window of opportunity, do you feel like you need to take advantage of this that you're not -- that you may not get many more opportunities and you don't know what the future holds?*

MIKE RUCKER: That's absolutely true. You talk to people around here that have been around here for a long time. There are some guys have been in the league 10 or 11 years that never have been in this situation. There are some guys that have been in the situation before a couple of times, but it's been eight, nine years since then.

So it's definitely a window of opportunity that you have to take advantage of because you might not ever get back here. Or, it might be a long time.

Q. Do you feel pressure?

MIKE RUCKER: No. No, not at all. That's one thing that I really feel like me personally and as a team, I don't see the pressure. We've been the underdogs all the time. So, what do we have to lose? **We** just go out there and play like the **Bad News Bears**.

*Q. Considering the **Philadelphia** running game always helps the defense and now that the **Eagles** know what **DeShaun Ffoster** is capable of, how do you approach, especially the front line, how do you approach this game against the **Eagles**?*

MIKE RUCKER: Well, definitely the running game definitely helps our defense. There's been times where we've hardly had any time on the field because our running game has worked so good. It's no different from us knowing their running backs and them knowing our running backs or the plays being ran. A lot of times, it's just being able to stop it. We know the kind of stuff that they ran against us and hurt us and what they will do. It's just the key is the tackle, and when you recognize the play, is to get over there and wrap up.

Q. How is your knee?

MIKE RUCKER: It's getting better each week. Each week that we keep going, it keeps getting stronger and stronger which is good.

*Q. Is it a little disappointing that you didn't get in the **Pro Bowl** considering the season you had?*

MIKE RUCKER: Well, it was tough. It was tough that day. I was disappointed.

But then I started thinking, you know, there's a bigger picture here and there's a bigger mission at the end of this year that I really want to get and I want to be a team player. I didn't want to harp on an individual goal. That just means I have to work harder next year and I'm willing to do that.

*Q. Do you like the **Pro Bowl** selection process?*

MIKE RUCKER: I mean, it's worked. That's the way it's been. I don't know what else you could do. I don't see any real problems with it.

Q. Could you rehash your feelings after last week's game that might go down as one of the greats in recent playoff history?

MIKE RUCKER: Well, I hope it does. I think that that was a good football game. I think it was a good football game for everyone to watch, just the fans, to be able to see a good, good **American** football game was good. I think that's what they got. If anybody says that that wasn't a good football game, we'll give them their money back.

*Q. How many folks and friends, relatives, etc., **Were** there to see you, being it was so close*

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to home?

MIKE RUCKER: From **St. Joe, Missouri**, we brought about 25 people. We were there strong. They were up there. I saw them up there with the jerseys and white towels up there representing.

I was happy. I felt comfortable. Even though we were in their home stadium, I felt good being in my home state.

Q. How about your mom, dad brother?

MIKE RUCKER: Yeah, the whole family, family, friends, everybody, third, fifth, sixth cousins.

*Q. Do you have a favorite **Super Bowl** memory, and what do you remember from the game watching while you were growing up?*

MIKE RUCKER: The biggest one was really recently. It was when the **Rams** were down there playing and they won that. And just that catch at the end, I think they fell short -- I think it was **Tennessee** fell short. For some reason that thing just always sticks out in my mind because it was such a close game, and the way that ended, that was another good football game.

*Q. When you played for **Dante**, did you ever think that it was going to get to this point in your career that you were going to be playing on the cusp of going to the **Super Bowl**?*

MIKE RUCKER: To say that, I would say no. My goal was always to play in the **NFL**.

But back then, I mean, the opportunity, the doors weren't opening left and right at that time, but I just kept working hard and they worked me hard. He had been a college coach before, so he kind of knew that I wanted to be the linebacker. I wanted to be the quarterback or receiver and he said: 'That's not what you're going to be.' When he got that through my head to let me realize, hey, you're a d-lineman, that's what you do, that really helped me.

*Q. You kind of had a few looks, was **Nebraska** the only **Division I** that was looking at you out of high school at that point?*

MIKE RUCKER: It was **Nebraska, Missouri, Kansas**, and **Oklahoma** a little bit. It was mostly those **Midwest** schools right there. But **Nebraska** seemed right off the bat to jump on top of me, recruit me hard, call me every day. That's what really stood out for me and that's what really eventually got me.

Q. What are your thoughts on the program now and the coaching move, etc.?

MIKE RUCKER: It's been a tough situation for everybody, fans, ex-players, players. It's been tough. But I think **Steve Pederson** thinks this is the best call. So we are going to roll with that and we are going to support him. He's part of the **Husker** family now so we are going to support him.

*Q. You go from playing in the **Dome** last week and now you go north and outdoors, tell me about southern team playing in the cold, if you think that will cause any problems?*

MIKE RUCKER: I don't think it will cause any problems. I think it's supposed to be dry. Any time you've got dry weather, you shouldn't have any problems regardless of the temperature. It's when you get snow, rain, something like that that can affect the game with the ball. But as long as the ball is dry, I think that you won't see any problems.

Q. As a defensive lineman, is it more fun to play in a game when it's cold and wet and sloppy and that kind of stuff?

MIKE RUCKER: I think it just depends on the person. I think that if you let it get to you, it will get to you. But as a d-lineman, it doesn't really bother me. It doesn't matter either way.

*Q. Having **Donovan McNabb** as a focal point, does it make it more dangerous that other guys haven't stepped up to that level or could damage the defensive lineman or your defense?*

MIKE RUCKER: Even though he's the head of that team, you can't put all of your focus on him because there will be other guys that will get you. They have got a great running back core. Even though they had one running back go down, they have two that have been playing this whole year that are going to pick up the slack. The receivers are coming on and catching those deep balls, catching some tough passes. So you can't just put all of your focus on him, otherwise the rest of them will get you.

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