

**January 16, 2004**

**NFC FINALS**  
**Carolina Panthers at Philadelphia Eagles**  
**Pre-Game Day Press Conference**

An Interview With:

**COACH JOHN FOX**

*Q. You said you wanted to take a look at Stephen Davis. You got a look at him today. Impressions, will he play on Sunday?*

COACH FOX: I thought he looked very good today in practice. The team is back in Charlotte. Our trainer Ryan Vermeillon and our offensive coaching staff will take a look at them again in **Tom**'s workout. We may even go as far as an early stadium workout game day. So right now there is no announcement whether he will play or not. But everything thus far is encouraging.

*Q. What was your impression of the way he worked out?*

COACH FOX: It was a positive impression.

*Q. A lot of questions were asked about Eagles about facing their third NFC Championship and the pressure that they are facing. Do you guys have any pressure going into this game? Do you sense your team is pretty loose?*

COACH FOX: We really stress a lot our preparation during the week, the focus it takes to prepare for a game, especially against an opponent as worthy as the Eagles, you know, as far as pressure, there's always pressure, how you deal with it is critical. We will find out.

*Q. If Davis is like he was today on Sunday will he start?*

COACH FOX: That's hard for me to say. There's time between now and Sunday, and we will evaluate him each day and I'd say we will make an announcement about an hour and a half before kickoff.

*Q. Can you give us any context to this remark that the Eagles have put on their bulletin board about Green Bay -- can you tell us when or where you said that?*

COACH FOX: I am not sure where that quote came from, my team is aware that it could be somewhat fabricated. I don't know if their team is aware of that. I am not sure really where that quote came from. But our approach is just words, and it will be answered Sunday.

*Q. What is your general philosophy about using a spy against a very mobile, very large quarterback?*

COACH FOX: You have to be extremely disciplined in your rushing the passer approach. There's a lot of different ways to do that. There's bringing more than the designated rushers which is usually 4 and 7 ratio. There are spies, you know. Basically it's just takes a lot of discipline not to give yourself up as far as when you are rushing, staying alive, don't get deeper than the quarterback. So really there will be a variety of things. It's not going to be any breaking news as far as how we defend them. We have played Michael Vick, we have seen very mobile quarterbacks. It's just going to be a matter of executing.

*Q. Do you think there's possibly some kind of advantage to sort of a cat-and-mouse game keeping them guessing with whether or not Stephen will play?*

COACH FOX: That's not the intentions at all. We have got a player that was injured a week ago. It's fairly evident if you watch the tape, we are doing everything in our power to get him healthy. If he's healthy, he will play. If he's not, he won't. It's no different than every other game we have played thus far.

*Q. Any advantage?*

COACH FOX: I prefer having players out there practicing all week, for the record. That's not just able to be the case at this point.

*Q. Last time you played the Eagles Westbrook picked up quite a bit of yards. How much different does their offense look without him?*

COACH FOX: We have the utmost respect for the Philadelphia Eagles. This is their third time to the Championship game. They have got outstanding players, **Duce Staley**. I am very familiar with, he's very smart, tough player that's good both out of the backfield in protection and is a runner. Again Westbrook is an excellent athlete. He exhibited that in our last matchup. He won't be here this time. But they have a very, very capable guy in **Duce Staley**.

*Q. Your take on the magic between your running game and -- you had a lot of success*

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against St. Louis. What is your take on that matchup and how you approach that?

COACH FOX: We are going to run the football, that's no mystery. We're going to do everything in our power to attempt to do that Sunday. It's hard for me to speak about matchups until they become reality. But it's going to be something that we're going to try to establish in the ballgame. I don't believe that's a mystery to either team.

Q. Talk about Finals being handed down. Any comment on that?

COACH FOX: Again, I am pretty aware of the rules. We have people that have been in this for a long time. Our understanding it's an either/or. We went with the either. (Laughter).

Q. Could you describe what impact your two big wide receivers by play-makers, had in the Playoffs thus far?

COACH FOX: I think the reason why we are standing here today is that our passing game has progressed as the season went on. It's something that we talked about as our season got underway, we started making strides, you know, we want to run the football. That's something that, you know, is a trademark for us. But in this League you have to be able to do both in order to be successful in my opinion. It was an area that we had to progress in. I think it's been a combination of our pass protection, I think it's been the definite progress of our quarterback Jake Delhomme and gotten better and the players have gotten more skillful in their craft and we have executed much better in the passing game. I think that has been extremely critical for us to progress where we are today.

Q. Dan Morgan's last game, didn't do much. Now he says he's healthier. How much of a difference is that?

COACH FOX: I think we made a lot of strides toward the end of the regular season when we got Dan back; last couple of regular season games as well as the Playoff season thus far and he's a huge part of our defense and when he's healthy we are a lot better.

Q. Do you think he's learned something this career about taking care of himself a little better, resting when he needs to?

COACH FOX: I think he's been pretty good about that the last two weeks. I don't know about the whole season. He plays the game very fast. He's a physical, hard-nosed guy that throws his

body around. It's a physical game. Unfortunately he has been injured more than he would like or we'd like, but you can't really change that or fault it. We really don't expect him to change. I think he's been a little bit unfortunate here. Lately he's been more fortunate.

Q. A lot of the coaches in the NFL are sort of defined by who they work for, that sort of thing. Is it are you more of a self-made NFL guy; do you feel like you are not?

COACH FOX: Not at all. My very, very first coaching job was with a gentleman by the name of Sid Gillman. Sid had a huge impact on my coaching career. I have been very pleased to be around some outstanding coaches, Chuck knows my very first NFL job as head, coach both those people are Hall of Fame coaches. So we're all products of who we have been with and what we have been around. You take and pick different things from the people you are with. I just didn't pop out of nowhere, so there's been a lot of people who have been a huge influence on me.

Q. How much influence on you was Bob Mears?

COACH FOX: I like that. Good question. Bob Mears was my junior college coach in Southwestern Junior College. I went to junior college for two seasons and he taught me a lot about the game. Taught me about the toughness of the game but he was somebody I hold in high regard.

Q. What point do you feel like the players start to believe in Jake's ability to lead this team?

COACH FOX: Really if you look at it I thought it happened really kind of the minute he went on the field against Jacksonville. If you look at how our team responded we had excellent preseason. We had a very tight battle. At the quarterback position, I felt all three of them had exceptional pre-seasons. We went with **Rodney Peete**. He was our incumbent from a year ago. We started the season that way. Very lackluster first half, not to pin it all on Rodney because I don't believe -- that wasn't reality but we needed to do something to spark our team. Jake came in and actually at that point it was 17-nothing, gotten the field goal in the third quarter, the rest is history. So he's -- Jake has done an outstanding job as far as leading this football team, and I have seen steady progress every week he's gone out there.

Q. The Eagles are a team that's been

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*outgained in most of their games this season; they've still won 13 games. Opponents seem to have a habit of letting up or loosening up in the fourth quarter against them. Have you talked to your players at all about finishing this game hard fourth quarter -- (inaudible)?*

COACH FOX: I think if you look at our season our team understands how to finish games. We have had a lot of close contests, a lot of overtime contests, it's something we stress a lot is finishing.

I can't speak for the Eagles other than you know I have watched them on tape, and I think that No. 5 there does a good job or outstanding job of bringing his team back. He's somebody we definitely will have to contend with. As far as yards, I think it's one of the less important statistics in the National Football League. A lot is made out of it, particularly in the media, you know, but last time I looked it's not yards that win; it's points. I think Philadelphia has done an outstanding job of that. I know that people have been critical of their run defense, and how they give up yards, but as long as you are not giving up points, no matter how you are giving up the yards you got a chance to be successful. I think that's what they have done. Just look at their record.

*Q. When it comes to trying to contain McNabb is he similar to a guy like say Vick that you faced before; is he kind of his own animal?*

COACH FOX: I don't like comparing people too much other than that you know, obviously they are both mobile quarterbacks. I think **Donovan** has definitely grown as a quarterback. I saw him when he first broke into the League. Even at which point they were even sharing time with him. He has gotten incredibly good at throwing the ball much better than he was in his younger days making good decisions. Their coaching staff has done an outstanding job utilizing those talents. I think the guy is remarkable. I think my opinion he's a big reason why they are where they are today.

*Q. Playing in a NFC Championship game, especially for the first time, what do you tell your team? What are they facing when they hit the field?*

COACH FOX: No different than when we started the season. Or actually when I began being the head coach at the Carolina Panthers. I have been to a Championship game; just not as the head coach. I think I understand what a big game is. But the thing I stress to our team is that the game is only big outside our team room. The

game is still in the same size field, still going to be home or away, going to be the same timing element, you know, the further you go and the more success you have, it just gets bigger on the outside of that room. I think that has been something that we have talked about from Day 1. I have just stressed to them that I want them to be able to experience this opportunity, and it's something they will never forget.

*Q. Did you perhaps consult with Jim at all on something that you know, areas that you might not have accounted for as a defensive coordinator in preparing --*

COACH FOX: Well, most definitely. I have researched with a lot of coaches, rather not go into names but just experiences from even how we conducted this, as far as bringing the whole team up here early, or waiting to bringing a select few then bringing the team on a normal schedule. So all those things we don't leave too many stones unturned.

Yes, I have talked to Jim and to a lot of other coaches, and you are always trying to draw from other peoples' experiences. One of the things I found being a head coach is you know, you have to pretty much go with your gut, whether it's selecting your 53-man roster, whether it's making a call on draft day, whether it's making a call on game day, it's something that I am not smart enough to be anybody that I am not. I am going to be me. I am just going to make my gut instinct decisions. Ultimately that's what I will be accountable for.

*Q. About leaving the team behind and bringing them up tomorrow. What did your gut say about that decision?*

COACH FOX: It was a little bit of research as far as effectiveness of either way. I just wanted to treat it just like another game. That's what we normally do.

*Q. Would you want to discuss the circumstances under which you left the Raiders?*

COACH FOX: Yeah, very simple. I resigned and left.

*Q. Could you talk about the defensive line and (inaudible) --*

COACH FOX: We have a very talented defensive line. They are also young. I think they will just continue to improve and the further we go and the bigger the game is -- I am anxious to see how they respond to that. But they are a very

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talented young group that we're very pleased to have.

*Q. With the time that you spent all your different stops in the NFL and just being in your second year, what is the level of personal satisfaction of --*

COACH FOX: Like I have told our team, now is not the time to reflect. I try to practice what I preach. Really hasn't sunk in. We have a huge opportunity Sunday, and we need to take full advantage of that and right now it's not the time to reflect.

*Q. When you were looking at quarterbacks in the off-season why did you choose Jake?*

COACH FOX: Well, we did a lot of research, you know, that was a team that was in our Division so we had actually seen him talking to people that would be trustworthy in those discussions. He had the leadership skills, a lot of the intangibles that I know our organization, myself in particular, have a high regard for in that evaluating that position. Really the only thing missing in Jake was an opportunity, and he's a guy that in our recruiting process, in our evaluation process that we had a real strong feel, and we're reaping the benefits for that right now.

*Q. Can you tell us the reality perception from -- the elements from the cold. How much stock is there in that for both teams?*

COACH FOX: I got to admit as I stepped off the plane today and looked out and just saw that look, I miss the grittiness. I hope our football team feels the same.

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