

January 16, 2004

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

An Interview With:

MIKE MINTER

Q. For the last month or two you have been talking about this team being special; at what point did you sense that and what did you see specifically?

MIKE MINTER: Well, the point that I seen it was the last four, five games of the season of last season, and when we went down to New Orleans and New Orleans had to win the football game to go to the Playoffs. We went down there and we took them out. Being an additional game and them needing to win we got that Playoff atmosphere that week and so I knew at that point this team is very special and we were going to do something special the following season.

Q. What do you think of Stephen today?

MIKE MINTER: Well, I didn't get to see him too much because we focus in the end on **McNabb** and the Eagles. I don't look at Stephen, you know, during practice, so I didn't get to see him that much.

Q. Is your team ready for this challenge, this big stage?

MIKE MINTER: No doubt. I mean, it has been seven years and that's all I want to do is play in a game like this, play in a Super Bowl. The whole time that I have been playing football, I have been winning championships, so it shouldn't stop now. So I have been waiting a long time for this one. My teammates have been waiting a long time for this one. We have been through a lot in these seven years that I have been here. So to say that we're not ready for this is crazy. We are definitely ready and we are ready to show up on Sunday.

Q. You get a sense you guys are a little bit loose it seems in the locker room. You have been laughing, joking. Seems like the Eagles are feeling the pressure. If they don't get it done that's three straight?

MIKE MINTER: Well, I guess it's perceived that way. Them guys are focused. I am going to tell you that's what is going on in their head. They are not playing; they are joking they are here to do a job and that's to win this game. So we come in loose, you guys think, but we're going to be

focused, intense also so it's going to be a battle. We know that, and so these guys don't have no more pressure than we do. We got to go out there and win this football game and that's just the bottom line.

*Q. Do you feel more comfortable when **McNabb** is in the pocket or running the ball?*

MIKE MINTER: Any time a quarterback is running with the ball you know the secondary is tough on you because you got to cover the guy, plus you might have to come up and tackle the quarterback at the same time. So it's pretty tough, so it's always easier when a guy stays in the pocket and you know, throws the ball from the pocket. When he's running around making plays with his legs and then all of a sudden you know, raise up and throws the ball that's tough. You look at the Green Bay game, that second touchdown, Donovan running around breaking tackles from linemen and then all of a sudden a guy is wide open, two people is on him previously, but once he starts scrambling they lose him and then they get the touchdown. So that's what is tough. A guy needs to stay in the pocket, so our front four that we have need to take him, keep him in there and make him throw it from that pocket.

Q. (Inaudible) the fourth and 26, how many times have you looked at that this week (inaudible)

? MIKE MINTER: Everyday we looked at that, to make sure if we are in that situation let's play it a little bit differently than the Green Bay Packers played it. So I mean, that's just the biggest thing right there is that fourth and 26, what you see is you see a great quarterback making a great throw and a great catch by Freddie Mitchell coming through the middle of the defense. So that was tough. I know that hurt the Green Bay Packers's defense and everything because everything was riding on that play. And them guys -- what it shows me, what the Philadelphia Eagles it shows me that they got a heart of a champion that they won't quit. They are going to keep coming.

Q. I know you said you didn't see Stephen today but yesterday he ran up and you know, basically told you that he's ready, he's going to play. How stunned would you be if he doesn't at

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least give it a try on Sunday?

MIKE MINTER: I probably would be a little stunned because it's just the simple fact it is the NFC Championship game and I am sure he doesn't want to miss it and he wants to play as bad as anybody else. And so I am sure he's going to do whatever he can to get out there and test it out and see if he can play, but you know, the crazy thing is that you got to put down guys before you get that opportunity to see people on the field.

So I don't know what Coach Fox will do with that situation, but you guys, you know, you can't forget that we do have DeShaun Foster who can come in and get the job done too. We're okay either way.

Q. You played for a number of different coaches. What does Coach Fox bring to this team?

MIKE MINTER: I will tell you the first time he came in, first of all, he gave us direction. He let us know where he wanted to go, what he wanted, he wanted smart, tough, better-conditioned football players than anybody else, and then you know, the first meeting we had and the guys could probably attest to this, is he said you know what, I don't question you guys' ability but I do question your toughness. I don't know how tough you guys are and when we get done with this training camp I will know. From that point on I knew we had the right guy and I knew we was headed in the right direction.

Q. You always like to feed off the crowd down in Charlotte. Looked like you had a bit of fun last week in St. Louis; are you looking forward to this crowd?

MIKE MINTER: I am looking forward to it. I tell you, I love coming in hostile environments playing up with the crowd, you know, talking to the crowd. I haven't faced a crowd like this, I don't think. All the media that you read, but I could tell you we played the New York **Jets** back in 1998 and I tell you them fans there was crazy, and I was like, man, I love this. So I can just imagine that the Philadelphia Eagles fans will be the same way in a championship game. They are going to be crazy, they are going to be fired up and so I am looking forward to getting out there with them.

Q. You talked about -- what does it do for secondary in terms of defending the pass, the front four, who can rush the passer --

MIKE MINTER: When you have four guys that can rush, I mean, that opens up your whole defense. First of all, you can drop your linebackers

some more in coverage. You can keep your safeties at the run out the box and double up wideouts. You can be do so much more when you have four guys that can get to that ball carrier and to that quarterback. So it definitely makes their job a lot easier when you have that, but two, you know, guys we all know that they are going to do whatever they can to block them front four, so we're going to have to hold up and do our thing too. So that's what makes this defense special is that when the front four is not getting there, we holding on and the secondary, we making plays and when the secondary needs some help, that front four comes up and make some plays. That's what you need when you have great defense, you need that.

Q. Talk briefly about how hard it has been the last seven years you were drafted the year after they went to the Playoffs. You probably thought hey, it's going to be every year?

MIKE MINTER: I tell you I was so happy, you know, okay, I am coming from Nebraska winning championships, all of a sudden I get drafted by the Carolina Panthers who is one game away from the Super Bowl so I figured well that's it, we're about to go to the Super Bowl, I am about to do it on this stage, and looking forward to it. It didn't happen that way at all. It went the other way. I tell everybody that I probably lost more games in the first two years with the Panthers than I did my whole career playing football. . So it was definitely different, and just a different thing that was going on and off the field, definitely added to it, and so you know, to be in this position right now is definitely special to be able to go through all of that, go through three coaches and finally get to the place that you want to be.

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