

October 19, 2005

NATIONAL FOOTBALL LEAGUE

An Interview With:

LaDAINIAN TOMLINSON **Running Back** **San Diego Chargers**

THE MODERATOR: *LaDainian* can score a touchdown this week against the Eagles in Philadelphia for the 19th consecutive game, which would surpass the record of 18 games he currently shares with Pro Football Hall of Famer **Lenny Moore**. **Mr. Moore's** record, a record that he established with the **Baltimore Colts**, has stood for 40 years.

Q. What do you see from the Eagles' defense from the film you've watched so far?

LaDAINIAN TOMLINSON: I see it as a group of guys, mainly the linebackers, who like to run and make plays. Trotter is the leader of that group, he's the main guy that really brings a physical method to what they like to do. And their secondary speaks for itself. They have got big Pro Bowlers back there, a really good group. But I think it stems from their front four being able to put pressure on people, where the secondary would be able to stick people and cover and cause interceptions.

Q. How important is this record to you?

LaDAINIAN TOMLINSON: To be honest with you, I don't want to say that it's not important, but at the same time, it's just not a main focus for me. This is not something that I really want to do – it just kind of came about as I continue to play each week, and the record just kind of crept up on me. All of a sudden – boom – here is this record.

It's definitely a great record. Any record that's held by a Hall of Famer like **Lenny Moore**, you have to be proud of it. And since **Lenny Moore**, no one has been able to touch it for 40 years. So it's something to be proud and happy about.

Q. What's it like for you with Drew Brees, the quarterback?

LaDAINIAN TOMLINSON: It's a great relationship we have. **Drew** is a very bright guy.

Everybody is really on the same page with **Drew** at all times pretty much, because we work so hard during practice during the week, and even afterwards sometimes we're staying after practice just to get the right timing down that we need with **Drew**. That's the type of stuff that you appreciate, and so we have a great relationship.

Q. As a running back, are you a fan of Brian Westbrook, and do you see some similarities between your two games?

LaDAINIAN TOMLINSON: Yeah, I think Brian and I are very similar running backs as far as we're both versatile running backs who can run and catch the ball in the backfield. We run some of the same type of routes. That's one of the biggest things that I see as far as a comparison.

Q. There's been a lot of comparisons with you by coaches and other players, is there one that you like hearing or reading?

LaDAINIAN TOMLINSON: You know, it really doesn't matter. People are going to have their own opinion about who I've seemed most like to them. It really doesn't matter. I've been compared to almost all of the great running backs.

Q. How much does Lorenzo Neal help you, being that fullback to kind of guide you along the way?

LaDAINIAN TOMLINSON: Lorenzo is our man. He's been the head, he's kind of the leader of our group. And being in the league so long and having seen so many things, man, it's just great to have a guy like him in front of you who. There is nothing that shakes him. He's always looking to dominate people and hit people. Any time you have a guy like that – that loves to hit – you've got to appreciate what he does.

Q. What, if anything, do you know about Lenny Moore?

LaDAINIAN TOMLINSON: I understand that he was a guy kind of like myself – he can run and can catch the football. He's real versatile. That that's one of the things that I know of how he played the game, he could do a lot of things.

Q. Have you ever seen him on any highlight films?

LaDAINIAN TOMLINSON: Maybe a couple. I've seen him a couple of times running

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the football.

Q. After Denver you talked about winning a few more and about catching the ball more, did they make a concerted effort to do that or did things just turn out that way?

LaDAINIAN TOMLINSON: I think the whole time that was the plan anyway, but for whatever reason, the first two games, you don't have the ball as much as you want it, and sometimes the game plan changes for whatever reason.

And so I think after that point, we started being able to control the ball a lot more, so you have me being able to touch it a little bit more, too.

Q. Has it been frustrating for you?

LaDAINIAN TOMLINSON: No, I'm not frustrated. We know we're a good team and we felt like it was only a matter of time before we win games and try to get on the road.

Q. Andy Reid said today that the Chargers are a Super Bowl-caliber team; do you feel that way in the locker room?

LaDAINIAN TOMLINSON: We feel like we're definitely a championship team. We feel like we could play with anybody in this league. So whenever you feel like that, I think it's safe to say that you, as well as any other one of the great teams like Philadelphia, can be a Super Bowl team and win the Super Bowl.

Q. You've had some success, the Chargers have had success the last couple of years, was there any one thing that really got the team turned in a better direction?

LaDAINIAN TOMLINSON: Just getting the right guys to fit the system, that our coaching staff is looking for. They really made us look a lot better because we had the right type of guys in the system.

Q. Last year you were bothered by a groin injury; first of all, how much were you bothered by that, and how difficult especially for a running back is it to be playing in pain like that?

LaDAINIAN TOMLINSON: Well, you know, last year, it was really bothering me a lot. I was hampered most of the season, wasn't even sometimes 50 percent. And you know, it's hard as a running back, because you do a lot of cutting and running and a lot of things. It's just definitely real hard to play with a groin injury.

Q. Would you say you've reached that point in your career where you feel like you can go out and dominate a game like some of the other great running backs?

LaDAINIAN TOMLINSON: You know, I think I'm pretty close. But at the same time, defenses are so good in today's game, and defensive coordinators are so much better, a lot of people can double-team you and even triple-team you at times to basically stop you from doing what you do best.

So I think it's kind of unfair to say that you reach a point where you dominate a game because it's hard to dominate a game, especially with the way it is today with defenses.

Q. You said you felt like the game slowed down for you this year a lot, did you have a feeling coming into the year that it was going to be a different year for you or a more special year for you?

LaDAINIAN TOMLINSON: I feel like in my fifth season now, there's not much in the **National Football League** that I haven't seen. This is the time of your career where you really step into your prime and become what you are supposed to become once you're drafted.

With that said, I think for me, I feel so much better and just knowing exactly what's going on. Like I said before, it does feel like the game has slowed down for me.

Q. What is it that you think you were supposed to become, LaDainian?

LaDAINIAN TOMLINSON: Well, obviously a first-round pick and being the fifth selection in the draft, people expect you to play to an All-Pro level when you're drafted that high.

Q. How about your own expectations, what were they?

LaDAINIAN TOMLINSON: My expectations were to become a great player, nothing less.

Q. When you look at all of these touchdowns, there has got to be something special about having a nose for the goal line, but what goes into a guy who can score this many touchdowns in this short of a period?

LaDAINIAN TOMLINSON: I don't know, just when you get down by the goal line, you've kind of got to have a different mindset of not letting anyone stop you from getting across that goal line. You just kind of set your mind that no matter what,

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I won't let them stop me.

Q. When you played in Detroit a couple of years ago, one of the players said you're the closest thing he's seen to Barry Sanders. What will you think in a few years when you people start comparing younger running backs to you how flattering that might be to you?

LaDAINIAN TOMLINSON: Well, I think that would be the ultimate respect. As you grow up, you look up to different guys. I looked up to **Emmitt** and **Barry** and even **Walter** as a young child. So for a young guy to look up to you and then ultimately people compare them to you, I mean, it's a tremendous honor to be one of the greats and a legend of the game. That's the reason why you play.

Q. Can you talk about some of the similarities you have with Barry Sanders, being compared to him?

LaDAINIAN TOMLINSON: I think the biggest thing is our cuts, our jump cuts and being able to cut it back against the grain. I think that's what people in us.

Q. Can you talk about what you're seeing as far as what blitzes have done, because I know in the first couple of games, teams were blitzing you, and you had to stay in a little bit more. Did you have to scheme to get back into some of the pass routes? What are some of the teams doing with the blitz that might be keeping you out of some of the pass plays?

LaDAINIAN TOMLINSON: Well, they are bringing more than we can block sometimes. Sometimes you make adjustments to that and you're able to throw the ball quick and really beat some of the blitzes. I think that's the biggest thing that we were doing.

Q. Do you know that people are already saying you are their shoo-in candidate to win the MVP award, and we're only six weeks into the season?

LaDAINIAN TOMLINSON: I think it's too early to start talking about MVP. We've still got ten games to go and you want to continue on well beyond six games. So, yeah, it's a little bit too early.

Q. For the record right now, do you feel any more like a marked man this week than in any given week?

LaDAINIAN TOMLINSON: I'm always a marked man. You go to stadiums and teams are looking to stop you. They come out in the media and say it, and then they have got signs in the stadium that say to stop you. You know, I feel like that all the time.

But, the thing about it, it's good to have other players on the team that can make plays. That's the biggest thing. If I was the only player on this team that made plays, then it would be a concern for me. But it's not that way. We have other guys that can make plays for us.

Q. When did the team decide to start making you practice throwing the football as accurately as you have with your two touchdown passes this season?

LaDAINIAN TOMLINSON: Through the years they have always seen me throw the football a little bit, even in practice sometimes just throwing it. You know, (Chargers offensive coordinator) **Cam (Cameron)** is the type of person that loves to explore anything, so he's the right kind of offensive coordinator to have in that situation. He likes to try things like that.

And so for a while, I've been practicing on throwing the football, but I've always had a pretty good arm. So this worked perfect.

Q. And how much has Marty Schottenheimer helped you become better as a player, and what's it like playing for him overall?

LaDAINIAN TOMLINSON: I think the biggest thing with **Marty** that has helped me is preparing for a football game. It's one thing to have a physical ability, but another thing is to prepare for it to help you have that extra edge. And that's one thing that **Marty** taught me, how to prepare for a football game. I've enjoyed playing for him and it's been an awesome four years.

Q. What does Cam do as far as adjustments, does he keep an extra tight end to keep you up and get you out in pass routes for the balls, or what are the strategies over the last couple of weeks that got you more involved with the offense?

LaDAINIAN TOMLINSON: We just try to give different teams different looks and really, like I said, try it throw the ball quick. If they are going to blitz, have them have to adjust to what we're doing, instead of us adjust to what they are doing.

Q. Getting back to that question about

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having a nose for the goal line, can you describe the vision that you have in trying to find a crack of daylight, what it's like, what you see, how tight it is when you're that close to the goal line?

LaDAINIAN TOMLINSON: Well, everything speeds up and you kind of – it's blurry for a minute. But you've got to have a little patience sometimes to just find a soft spot. There's always a soft spot in the defense and it's your job to find it.

Once you see that soft spot there, you've got to hit it, you've got to hit it at full speed, like I said, with that mindset of I'm not going to let them stop me.

Q. Being in the league for five years now and the way you've developed into a complete player, can you talk about what you can continue to get better at?

LaDAINIAN TOMLINSON: Well, I think consistency. You hear running backs, the great running backs talk about consistency, being able to do it over a long period of time. That's my focus. That's my concern. I want to be able to do it over a period of time.

Q. Do you think winning the AFC West last year in 2004 has given you more motivation because this team now knows it can make the playoffs every year and beat any team and has helped you be motivational to contribute to the offense and score a touchdown in these last 18 games?

LaDAINIAN TOMLINSON: Every year is a different year. You can't be really motivated off winning the AFC West last year because teams are much different. Denver is a much better team. Kansas City is playing better football. You really can't go off of last year. It's like the *Patriots* – how they look at everything; they don't even look at themselves as a champion, because it's a new year.

We're motivated just on the schedule we have, having a tough schedule and wanting to prove to people that no matter if we have a tough schedule or not, we're a good football team and we're going to win games.

Q. Would you rather have the record this weekend or a victory?

LaDAINIAN TOMLINSON: A victory.

Q. Would you explain the significance of either?

LaDAINIAN TOMLINSON: Well, a victory is always better than any record. I share the record with Lenny now and I'm not a greedy person. So if we can win the game and I don't get a touchdown, I'll be fine with that.

Q. Were you frustrated for the first couple of games of the season when you were not being used as much as you are now in the lineup?

LaDAINIAN TOMLINSON: No, I really wasn't, because I just feel like it was only two games. It's a long season, and I knew I was going to get my share of touches and have a chance to make plays. So I really wasn't frustrated at all.

Q. If you could write your own dictionary definition for *LaDainian Tomlinson* as a football player, what would it say?

LaDAINIAN TOMLINSON: Oh, man. I guess a guy that whenever he steps on the football field does anything and everything to help his team win.

Q. Can you talk about working with Michael Turner?

LaDAINIAN TOMLINSON: Mike has done a great job for us and just coming into the game whenever we need him and keep the chains moving. He's a powerful guy that really runs through tackles and has really good speed, also. He's done a tremendous job in only his second season.

Q. The way they are using you, aren't you afraid that your career will get shorter and the possibility of an injury increases?

LaDAINIAN TOMLINSON: No, I'm not at all. I take really good care of my body and I feel like that's a big key to why I have stayed healthy so far.

Q. You've been described by many, including myself, as the best player in football. Is that something you would agree with, or is that something you would shy away from even talking about?

LaDAINIAN TOMLINSON: I don't know, you've got a lot of great players in this league. Definitely people are going to have their own opinion about who is the best. But I tell you, whenever you're in the off-season working out and you're putting in the work every day and striving to be the best, that's what you think about, being the best in the league.

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So when people say that, I feel like my work in the off-season and everything I do to take care of my body and really become a better player paid off.

Q. You talked about at the beginning of the season that you wanted to get to 2,200 yards, do you think you'll be able to accomplish that this year?

LaDAINIAN TOMLINSON: Well, I said that was a goal of mine. Every year I have a goal that's way up there that I'm looking to reach. That's a part of staying hungry and staying focused on being good, being great. I don't know if it's still – I think you still can accomplish it. But will it get done? I don't know, we'll see. But I tell you what, I'm going to keep running like it could be accomplished.

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