

Eli and Archie Manning
Conference Call – September 14, 2005

Q: Can you identify with the Saints and what they're going through?

AM: During my playing days I can remember a couple of times when we couldn't go back. We couldn't get back to New Orleans one night after a preseason game because a hurricane was coming. I remember the Saints having to go to San Antonio and practice just a year or two ago. I can also remember one time when we left training camp and had to go up to Syracuse, where we were playing a preseason game. There was bad weather down in Florida so we spent a week up there waiting for a preseason game. So, yes (I can understand) a little bit, but they are going through what everyone else is going through, or a lot of people, with the inconvenience part of it.

Things are pretty well set for pro football players to go in and do their work everyday with practice and preparation. I really commend everybody on the job they did last week, especially the coaching staff. I know how it is on the coaches, all the hard work they do with 18 and 20 hour days, but they did it when they didn't have their own facilities and their own machines and technology and so forth.

Somebody said to me, "I feel sorry for the Saints," and I said, "Well, the Saints don't want you to feel sorry them. They are just like a lot of us; we're better off than thousands and thousands of people. They are just inconvenienced a little bit and they'll get through it."

EM: The Saints are doing a good job. Obviously you have to make adjustments and that's what they're trying to do. I think their focus is on trying to play the season and making the best of it -- also to try and help the people of New Orleans. From everything I've watched on the news what they've done so far has been terrific, but they're also focused and ready to go out and try to have a good season.

AM: I did a couple of interviews yesterday about the Saints game and the great win they had (against Carolina). At one point I had to correct the guy and say, "Now wait a minute, you have to understand, this wasn't like TCU beating Oklahoma two weeks ago -- the Saints have a good team. They had a good offseason. I did their preseason games. They had a good preseason with good preparation. They've got good coaches, good players and a good team."

Q: Eli, what was it like as a kid growing up in New Orleans?

EM: It was great. In the area we grew up there were always kids around. Our house was the place we'd always have pickup games. We had a basketball hoop in the back, a little yard in the front where you could get touch football games going -- it was fun growing up in New Orleans. I know you think of it as a big city, but we were still in a neighborhood where there were a lot of kids to get games up and treat it like a normal childhood.

Q: What is the extent of the damage to your home?

EM: I don't know exactly. My Dad might have a better idea.

AM: I was down there last week. Our home is fine. We didn't take water. Our area did not flood. There are trees and power lines galore down, but they aren't on our house and thus far we have not been looted. We were very fortunate, especially being in an area where we didn't get the high water.

Q: Archie when do you think you'll be able to go back and resume a normal life?

AM: This time last week nobody could go back and you really couldn't talk to anyone. People were saying it might be six months to a year. But I think they'll be a lot of people going back in the

next few weeks, but it's going to be week-to-week to see what gets done and whether you can live in your house. Then they have to get commerce back in the city and other things they need to do. It's going to be weeks and maybe months, I don't think a year, but it's going to be awhile. So many people had to put their children in new schools and they've moved their offices to other towns. Some people are making a four to six month commitment to another place.

Q: Archie are you going to the game Monday night?

AM: I'm not going to be able to go. I regret it, especially with everything the NFL is doing with this telethon. I think it's going to be unbelievable -- the effort the NFL is putting into this and all the other things they're doing. By the way, on behalf of New Orleans I want to thank so many people, but especially the NFL. I understand that they have already given \$10 million towards the relief effort, which is fantastic, and there will be a lot more. There are so many players doing things.

But we're still in a little turmoil. We're in one town in Mississippi and we're going to be moving to another town this weekend where I think we'll spend the rest of the fall. My oldest son (Cooper) is there with my two little grandchildren and another baby on the way, so we're trying to help them a little bit. We're going to watch this one on TV. We've got plenty of Colts and Giants games we're going to make this year.

Q: Could you ever have imagined something like this would happen?

AM: I've lived there for 34 years and we have hurricane scares every year. I haven't evacuated every year, but we've evacuated a lot. I always leave and I always leave early. But you always hear about the 'Big One'. I was in college in North Mississippi when Hurricane Camille hit, but I so well remember it because I had teammates from the Gulf Coast who lost relatives and had their homes blown away. You always hear about the 'Big One' and what could happen with a category five and the water surge from the lake and those types of things, so it's not like it's a total surprise.

Eli and I are in the same boat -- I'm from Mississippi and Eli had his college days at Ole' Miss -- we were really effected by what happened to the Mississippi Gulf Coast too. They're the ones who really got hit by the hurricane. New Orleans didn't get hit by the hurricane, I mean it was a wide storm, but it was really incredible that we didn't get the category five storm, but the flooding and surge happened anyway. I didn't envision that this was going to happen after the storm hit. I thought New Orleans had dodged a bullet and the Mississippi Gulf Coast had taken the brunt of it.

Q: Do you think the NFL has handled this as well as it could in regard to giving the Giants a ninth home game?

AM: I think so. Jim Haslett is a good friend of mine. I haven't talked to him, but I could tell by his comments that he was a little miffed and I can understand that -- when you're supposed to have a home game and you have to go on the road. But I don't think the League was suggesting to the Saints that they would have to play all of their games in someone else's home stadium. I think it was just the urgency of not missing this game and my guess is the League didn't think they could put it together in time, obviously not at LSU or San Antonio. I also think the League had this telethon in mind, too. I think this is going to be a really good football game and maybe the home-field advantage will be equalized by the Saints (motivation) -- they're talking about the Saints being America's team instead of the Cowboys this year. Maybe they have a little chip on their shoulder there, so I don't think it's really a big factor in the football game.

Q: Do you guys think you can play a part in rebuilding the city of New Orleans?

AM: I think so. I look forward to going back. I know they will call on us -- they will call on Eli and they will call on Peyton in different respects -- to help out in those areas. We've got some good leaders in New Orleans. It's going to be a huge, huge job. We look forward to being a part of it.

EM: I feel the same way. I still consider New Orleans to be my home even though I don't have a house there. When I go back during the offseason I stay with my parents. I love going back there and I can't imagine New Orleans not being rebuilt and being the same way that it once was. I think it's important that people who lived there before move back and get New Orleans back to the way it used to be.

AM: Eli your mother wanted to talk to you about maybe getting your own place!

EM: (Laughing) Yeah.

Q: Archie, a lot of people go to New Orleans and fall in love with the city. How would you describe it?

AM: I love the city. I never intended to stay in New Orleans. I'm a Mississippi boy. Before we had children (Olivia) and I went back-and-forth to Mississippi most of the time. Our plan always was to go back to Mississippi when I was finished playing football. Along the way though, New Orleans was really good to me. Most of those years we were the only pro team in town and I was the quarterback. We weren't too good, but the fans were passionate about the Saints and they were extremely good to me and my family. Plus, it's just a doggone fun place to be. You get a lot of company when you live in New Orleans -- people like to visit you. It's fun to have family and friends come visit you and do New Orleans. It's also the type of the city where -- we've had our problems -- you get mad at New Orleans sometimes, but I love it.

After 15 years we had a family meeting and I said, "Where in Mississippi do you ya'll want to move back to?" And everybody said they didn't want to move anywhere, they wanted to stay right here. We can spend a lot of time in Mississippi, we're close and we can go back, but we've enjoyed living in New Orleans. The people there have been wonderful.

Q: Eli, even though you won't get to play in the Superdome, this is still going to be a special game for you isn't it?

EM: Yeah, sure. It's going to special playing the Saints. I was looking forward to playing in the Dome though. When Peyton was in high school he played there every year -- Isidore Newman always had a regular season game in the Superdome -- but once I got to high school we stopped that, so I've never played there. I grew up going to all the games and I've been on the field afterwards playing pick-up football. When my Dad was announcing I'd go with Peyton and Cooper and get to bring a buddy. I was looking forward to having the opportunity to go in there and play -- Peyton's played twice there as a pro -- but it's still going to be a special game. It is the team that I grew up rooting for and the team that my Dad played for. It is something that I will always remember -- especially now, under the circumstances -- it brings a little more (importance) to the game.

Q: What did you think of the way they played on kickoff weekend?

EM: I thought they played well. They came out there and they played well enough to win. They beat a good Carolina team. The Saints have a lot of talent. They have a lot of playmakers. We have to have a good game plan and a good week of practice and go out there and play well to try and compete with them and win the game.

Q: Is it hard to get amped up to play a team filled with players who are suffering through so much, or do you have to approach it as business as usual?

EM: You have to approach it like every other game. You have to prepare the same. The Saints aren't going to let up any. They are going to play hard and they're playing with a lot of motivation and with their abilities they have a good thing going for them. We have to go out there and compete and play to the best of our ability. If we go out there and make mistakes it's going to be a tough game. We have to handle our business.

Q: Do you expect that the Saints will keep their emotional edge?

EM: That's what you have to count on. We have to go into the game expecting them to have a lot of motivation and be emotional and play hard for the whole 60 minutes. That's what we have to expect and that's how we have to play. We have to go in there and play hard and compete every play. We can't have mental mistakes. We have to execute our game plan to have a chance to win.

Q: When you and Peyton went to Louisiana how much of a sense did you get about the importance of football to the victims at a time like this?

EM: When Peyton and I were down there talking to some of the people in the shelters it was amazing how many people asked, "How are the Giants? How is Plaxico? Are ya'll going to be alright? How is this Big Brandon Jacobs?"

A lot of people knew where I went to high school, kept up with me through college at 'Ole Miss and last year in the pros. They've driven by our house in New Orleans, they know where we live – it's amazing how much they've kept up with us.

Even though we play for different teams, just the fact that we're locals makes a lot of people from New Orleans follow our careers. They know exactly what's going on. To have them ask questions about the Giants and say, "Good luck this year. We're rooting for you." That was pretty amazing. Knowing how many things are going through their heads -- not knowing what they're going to be doing in the future and what's happened to their homes and their families -- it shows that even though football seems like a little thing, to them, it is important. It gives them motivation and something that -- even if it's just for few hours on a Sunday -- gets their mind off things so they can cheer and have fun. It's something special.

Q: If the Giants make it to the playoffs and this one game was the difference would you feel uncomfortable about making it under these circumstance?

EM: I don't think so. We had no say in this. It's not going to be any easier for us just because it's a home game. We still have to play a tough New Orleans team. We have to go out there and play the game. That's all we can worry about. The NFL made this decision and I don't know all the circumstances of exactly what went on, but I think they just had to find a place. LSU wasn't available, the stadium's not ready and there is a lot going on; they just needed a place to have this game. We just have to treat it like another game and go out there and play to the best of our ability.

Q: Archie as a father, how did it make you feel to see Peyton and Eli take this on themselves and head down to Louisiana?

AM: I was very proud of them. I'll tell you what, they were both calling me three or four times a day during the whole deal. I asked them, "Aren't ya'll supposed to be practicing football?" But I guess they were getting close to that last preseason game and had free time or something.

It was heavy on their hearts. They moved fast. Peyton got that plane lined up and they were talking to people. I was very proud of how quick they reacted. I think they knew they had a free weekend coming up and they wanted to do something. Their mother and I were very proud and I think it did some good. I've heard so many comments from people in New Orleans and other folks

in Baton Rouge have e-mailed and called me. And then talking to the boys when they got back – it did them good too.

Q: Archie do you think Eli's had to grow up in hurry in regard to playing in New York and the recent tragedy?

AM: He's a big boy. This is a tough profession. It's not supposed to be easy. You're always going to have things confront you, especially when you play the quarterback position. He deals with things real good. I'm proud of him.