

**January 20, 2006**



An Interview With:

## **COACH JOHN FOX Carolina Panthers**

COACH JOHN FOX: He's still listed as questionable. He practiced today. He felt much better. Right now we're still day-to-day on the shoulder.

### **Q. (Inaudible.)**

COACH JOHN FOX: I do, but I'm not willing to share it.

### **Q. Against the Seattle offensive line, what are you going to do differently?**

COACH JOHN FOX: Not a lot. They're very good, particularly the left side. They've been very productive all season. They've got a great running back behind them. We've got to play good, sound defensive line.

### **Q. How is Alexander a different animal?**

COACH JOHN FOX: **Shaun** is a bigger player. They play very similar as far as they like to cut the ball back. They have great vision. **Shaun** is a bigger back.

### **Q. What is it about the way that Steve Smith and Jake Delhomme play that allows them to hook up so successfully together?**

COACH JOHN FOX: First of all they're close. We've got a very close football team. **Steve** does a great job of getting separation. He gets open. And Jake knows that. Jake -- they've developed a relationship, two years ago, we missed **Steve** last year. And they kind of started where they left off from '03.

### **Q. You said they're close?**

COACH JOHN FOX: They're definitely the odd couple, but they're still very close.

### **Q. Can you explain what they're like together, personality-wise?**

COACH JOHN FOX: They're both great competitors, they see that in each other. They enjoy being around each other.

### **Q. Why are they the odd couple?**

COACH JOHN FOX: I don't know, you'd have to know them. They could explain that better than me.

### **Q. How do you expect Seattle to try and stop Steve Smith?**

COACH JOHN FOX: I'm sure they're going to double him. They utilized something very similar against **Santana Moss**, against Washington. Exactly how they do it, they'll mix it up, man under, zone under.

But the other option is you send pressure, and then hopefully your pressure covers any receiver. Not that -- nothing we haven't seen before.

### **Q. It feels like Nick has more of a burden on his shoulder knowing they're trying to stop Steve?**

COACH JOHN FOX: No, our guys understand what pressure is all about. They've got a job to do, they've prepared very hard to do that job. And I don't think he'll feel any bigger burden than normal. Nick's been there before and I'm sure he'll act like it.

### **Q. How much of what he went through last year filling in when DeShaun went down, when Stephen Davis went down gives you confidence that he can handle the situation right now?**

COACH JOHN FOX: I'm sure he'll be tremendous. He's done it. He's got skins on the wall as far as rushing the ball over a hundred yards in this League against NFL competition. The staff, myself, his teammates have tremendous confidence in him.

### **Q. How does this team compare to the last football team you had?**

COACH JOHN FOX: I've been asked that

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a few times. Again, we're not in the **Super Bowl** at this point yet, so we've got that yet to prove. And we've got a huge obstacle in Seattle ahead of us.

I think probably that team, we were probably running the ball better than we were throwing it at that time. And I think now we're probably throwing it a little better than we're running it. But very similar offensively. Defensively there's no question we're better this year.

**Q. Some personnel changes, you're still a run first, throw later offense?**

COACH JOHN FOX: We're one of few teams that's run the ball more than we've thrown it in the season. That's something that we try to do. Again, the effectiveness of our running game has been a lot better of late than it was at some points in our season this year. And I think that's been a big reason for us being able to move forward.

**Q. With the success that you all have had on the road -- what's the feeling like that you're giving the team, is it confident, is there an overconfidence, how are you feeling about the matchup Sunday?**

COACH JOHN FOX: You know, I think the reason that we've done well on the road, No. 1, is I believe we have a very close football team. I think they rally around each other, in a hostile environment. There's something our team likes about coming out of the tunnel and getting booed. Some people like getting cheered. Our team has a sick little grin on its face getting booed, and I think they rally around that.

**Q. At the same time they often thrive in the underdog role. Now maybe people are thinking you guys can win. Does that work the other way?**

COACH JOHN FOX: I don't think so. Again, what people think doesn't really amount to much, it's what happens. I don't see that our team is over confident or polishing any stars or patting themselves on the back or anything. It's a good game, as it should be. It's the NFC Championship game, and you have two very good football teams playing each other.

**Q. (Inaudible.)**

COACH JOHN FOX: At this place they're always hard, north, south, east, west, home or on the road. These games are hard to win.

**Q. How much do you think what the team went through last year, having to rally**

**around each other toward the end of the season has affected the success this season?**

COACH JOHN FOX: Without a doubt, in a positive way, I think very, very well. They've seen the darkness. We were one and seven, and they didn't lay down their sword, they kept swinging, and we were able to fight back almost to a playoff berth, and I think it taught our team a valuable lesson.

**Q. Why did you choose to go to Seattle tomorrow, why are you choosing to travel tomorrow?**

COACH JOHN FOX: We think it's better. We've done it before. We used to compete -- we had the division play in San Francisco, many trips to the West Coast from here, and a lot of people like to leave a day early, but going from east to west you don't need to. We'll stay on east coast time, conduct our meetings the same as usual. And we just like it better. So even had they made us go, I wouldn't have taken the whole team out today, I would have taken, like we did in Philadelphia, just myself and selected players.

**Q. What are some of the things that you've done in practice to kind of prepare for the possibility of bad weather in Seattle, for the crowd noise that you're looking at?**

COACH JOHN FOX: We always practice with crowd noise anytime we're getting ready for a road game. The weather affects both teams. It's not like they're anymore used to the rain than we are. I think too much is made of that. Crowd noise is definitely a factor. I think they have more procedure penalties in that stadium this year than any other stadium. But I can't even think at all it could be louder than what we've been practicing in.

**Q. Is that jet noise you guys use in practice?**

COACH JOHN FOX: That's what I'm told. I'm not sure what it is. It's awful sounding, and it's loud. I was told it was a jet engine recording.

**Q. What's the toughest or scariest part of their defense?**

COACH JOHN FOX: I think their front seven is outstanding, they've got great speed. They did lead the League in sacks, fourth in play as far as pass attempts. I think they play well together. They're a good unit. So I think they're a little bit underrated defensively, statistically. I think they're better than their statistics.

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**Q. (Inaudible.)**

COACH JOHN FOX: Again, he's focused on what we're doing. There's little things here and there, but that's the same with a coach that comes from somewhere -- not that I don't think there's going to be any difference. By the same token they know Ken Lucas, so it's kind of a wash.

**Q. Mike Minter and Mike Rucker talked about you getting here four years ago, you talked about improving tackling, and improving defense. Can you talk about what you tried to do here when you first got here?**

COACH JOHN FOX: It hasn't changed much. The emphasis is being able to run the ball and stopping the run. You can't block, and on defense you're not going to be very successful if you can't tackle. So it's not complicated, but it's not simple, either. So you just continue to do it every day and stress it and I'm under the belief you get what you emphasize. So that's really as simple as it is.

**Q. How much is it to stay on the same schedule, not going out a day early and so forth? How important is it for you guys to stay on schedule like you guys have, at least the last two games?**

COACH JOHN FOX: I think that's probably why people think it's an advantage to be at home, because you're in the same bed, you drive the same way to work. There's some comfort level there. We try to maintain as much comfort level as possible when traveling and schedule is part of that.

**Q. You've seen a lot of Panther jerseys, flags around town. Do you guys draw on that or are the blinders on?**

COACH JOHN FOX: For me personally, and the coaching staff, it's dark when we head home, so we haven't seen too much of that.

Our players are grounded, they've been through this before. The core of our players were here in '03. They've seen how this town gets. They appreciate it, but I think the focus is it in our preparation and not the hoopla outside of these walls.

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