

January 20, 2006



An Interview With:

MIKE RUCKER **Carolina Panthers**

MIKE RUCKER: I think the intensity is going to have to step up. There's a lot of marbles on the table. And we're going to be on the road in a hostile environment.

So we're facing a team that's well rounded. Some of the other teams had some strength in a lot of areas, but this team is pretty strong in all their areas in all three faces of the game. So we're going to have to bring high intensity.

Q. Any doubt in your mind that (inaudible) is going to be playing in the game?

MIKE RUCKER: He's feeling good, he practiced today. There's not going to be too many things that are going to hold the big man down. You try to get healthy when you get nicked up, we all get nicked up sometime throughout the season.

We have a good training staff to get us back on the field in a decent fashion. So I'm looking forward to seeing him out there.

Q. How do you guys stop Shaun Alexander?

MIKE RUCKER: We have to be disciplined. We have to stay in our gaps. We can't do somebody else's job. If we're supposed to be in the 'B' gap, you need to be in the 'B' gap, don't try to go to the 'C' gap and make a play, because he's going to cut back into the 'B' gap. We have to be disciplined and play through our gaps and make plays. I think we're going to have to be physical. It's going to be a physical ballgame. They have a great offensive line. And so that's going to be a big task in itself, because he's a big back, too, with speed.

Q. Fox was saying that this defense is ahead of where it was in 2003, do you agree with that and why, do you think?

MIKE RUCKER: I do agree with that, for the simple fact that back in '03 it seemed like people on the defense, we relied on our defensively line a whole lot to create things. This year around, we're well rounded. Our secondary is tremendous. We've got two solid corners. We've got our linebackers are solid, and our 'D' line, we're solid. So I think we're better than the '03' team.

Our offense is -- with **Steve**, Drew, Keary, Ricky, you've got four solid receivers right there. And Jake has got more experience than the '03. And the offensive line is playing well. So I think that we're just better off. And we had a good '03 team, but I think we've made some good upgrades in positions.

Q. How do you explain what Steve Smith has been able to do in these first two playoff games?

MIKE RUCKER: It's been exciting. To have a chance to have a front row seat to the show has been exciting, because you don't see too many people doing those kind of things. You'll see a lot of good receivers catch long balls, or in the middle, but he's going to make those tough catches, like the one it was almost intercepted and he took it away. The guy is just jumping off the building. And he's got a lot of athleticism, and he uses it on the field. It's been fun to watch him and his celebration dances, and have a front row seat.

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