

January 20, 2006



An Interview With:

COACH MIKE SHANAHAN Denver Broncos

Q. You've brought 21 new players here, not counting your draft picks before the season, I think only five of them went to your practice squad. That's a lot of players. And there's usually a couple of issues involved. Are they going to be as good for your team as they were for the other team? And what about the chemistry they either enhance, or not enhance when they come to your club? Can you talk in detail about those two issues?

COACH MIKE SHANAHAN: I think with free agency now, most of your team changes every year.

We thought we needed to add to the defensive line to start out with. We felt we needed more depth. Once we lost **Trevor Pryce** to a back under after the first game, we felt that was one area we needed to improve. And obviously we went out and got a number of defensive linemen. And we had a number of guys returning from the previous year. But when you look at **Courtney Brown**, **Gerard Warren**, and **Michael Myers** and **John Engleberger**, those are four guys that have played quite a bit for us this season and played quite well.

We felt like in the linebacker position we got **Ian Gold**, and played well before knee surgery. And then we felt like we needed to address the defensive back situation. And we didn't think we could get the people that we wanted through free agency for the obvious reasons. But we took our first three picks in the draft, and went that direction. We were very fortunate to get three quality players.

When you take a look at offense with **Dwayne Carswell** playing around 300 pounds we felt like we had to address the tight end position. **Jeb Putzier** was a former wide receiver, and even though he played the position and played it quite well, he was more of a receiver than a complete

tight end and went out and got Stephen Alexander. And we felt that was a position we needed. And he played quite well for us.

At wide receiver we didn't have a proven player, but we wanted the position to help us in special teams as well as contribute to the three- and four-wide receiver set, a guy like **Charlie Adams**, who had been on and off our team throughout a few years finally was healthy, really had a good preseason, and one of the reasons we went his direction was just consistency throughout camp. And a guy named **Todd Devoe** was a very talented guy who had went to different practice squads, but really stepped up playing the special teams role and has been a big contributor in that area, and he's made a couple of big plays when he has played the wide receiver position, in the **Philly** game. We got some depth in other positions, Ron **Dayne** has come in and, like I said, if **Mike Anderson** had went down early, Ron would have come in and been the same type running back. When he played, he's played very well.

Q. In finding out whether these players are going to be the citizens you want to be in your clubhouse, how extensive is that?

COACH MIKE SHANAHAN: I felt very good about that, when you took a look at the defensive linemen, every one of them had been a captain of their team at one time or another. When you look at captains, you're talking about natural leaders. **Ian Gold**, we knew he was a natural leader besides a great football player. And you look at **John Lynch** and **Champ Bailey**, and those are not only two Pro Bowl players, but two natural leaders. You don't know about rookies, and a guy like **Domonique Foxworth** was one of those guys that was a straight-A student. I think he was class president, if I'm not mistaken. So a number of those guys we thought would fit in well, and **Steve Alexander**, Coach Tim Brewster had coached him at the Chargers. And we felt he would fit in. He's a natural leader, too. There were questions about **Todd Sauerbrun**, how would he do, and react in a different environment. We felt he was everything a player could be both on and off the field, and a big help to our special teams.

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Q. Mike, what did you see of those four defensive linemen from Cleveland that made you believe they would contribute better for you here than they apparently did in Cleveland?

COACH MIKE SHANAHAN: Start out with Courtney **Brown**. He had a number of injuries throughout his career. He played, I think in 62 games and started 31. The injuries were major injuries. It wasn't just a little nick here and there. It was the type of injuries that could be career-ending. He went through a run of bad luck. And we liked the way he played. We liked the type of person he was. We liked the type of athlete he was. It was unfortunate that he had the injuries that he had. And we were hoping that when he did perform for us he would perform at a pretty high level. He has. He's stayed healthy.

Gerard Warren had a couple of sacks, he was running sideline to sideline. For a guy weighing 335 pounds, it was pretty impressive to me. When I talked to **Gerard** when he came in, before we signed him, I told him what we expected of him and how we practiced, and how we handled things. I had a good feeling about it. He said he would be at every workout throughout the off-season. He'd make his commitment to be in Denver, he'd never spent an off-season at Cleveland, it was always back in Gainesville. I thought that was important for him to have the type of year we were hoping.

Ebenezer Ekuban was an overachiever. He was the guy from the days of Dallas to his days the Cleveland, had eight and a half sacks, he was the guy that always practiced and played extremely hard. And you knew we were getting a guy that football was very important to.

You take a look at **Mike Myers**. We liked **Mike** and we thought that if we could get him signed that he would be our No. 1 nose tackle. We felt that he was a more consistent player and more of a stunt nose tackle.

John Engleberger was a guy that I felt that we got -- I can't say lucky, but he was available and **Willie Middlebrooks** was available, so we switched there. And he is a guy that has served in a role that has really helped our football team. He plays the run pretty good. He rushes the passer, and he's an overachiever-type guy. He's just fit in well with our football team.

Q. Can you talk about the growth of Jake Plummer over the last three years, and why he's so successful this year, and in the playoffs now?

COACH MIKE SHANAHAN: Well, Jake is a guy that's an incredible athlete. He's a guy that can make plays when there's nothing there. He does a great job throwing on the run to his right and to his left. There's not a lot of people that can do that. I think in the maturation process of being in our system looking at it for a couple of years, he's been able to study it, and feel more comfortable within the system, which has eliminated a lot of his mistakes. And that's time. That's feeling comfortable with the terminology, feeling comfortable with the system, the talent of the other players, where he doesn't have to think, he just has to react. He'll go back and take a look at his mistakes from the previous two years during the off season, and presented with this same situation, he's eliminated a lot of those mistakes. And it's even more amazing when you think about him having three interceptions in the first game of the season. He didn't have any in the preseason, and had four the remainder of the 15 games. So he's been playing pretty steady.

Q. Could you talk about the challenge of running against a 3-4 defense, and how that's different than what you're used to going against?

COACH MIKE SHANAHAN: Well, to be honest with you, you go against the 3-4 defense more and more. We went against Houston, they're a 3-4 team. Used to be going against the 3-4 was unusual. It's not unusual anymore, because there's so many teams that use the 3-4 defense or a variety within. We'll use it, too, so going through our defense we get some looks.

Q. What did you see in the film of the Pittsburgh-Indianapolis game -- why were they so disruptive of the Indianapolis game? And what can you do to protect Jake Plummer?

COACH MIKE SHANAHAN: If you get in a one-dimensional game with their ability to bring any combination of zone balance, you could be in for a long day. They do a great job of disguising their coverages. They did a great job against Indy looking at the 40-second clock, making adjustments right before the ball was snapped. It keeps the quarterback guessing and off balance, and it's hard to get appropriate protection against a team that does that.

Q. Having studied the Steelers over the last few weeks, and these last days, do you remember at any point during your career, having faced a team so mentally strong, and

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how difficult could that be during the game?

COACH MIKE SHANAHAN: Well, they're very mentally strong, very tough. You don't go on the road and beat the No. 1 and No. 2 seed without being a great football team. The reason they're 15-1 last year, is because they're very good. They're very impressive. Anytime you average 9 yards per pass play, good things are going to happen. They're very physical on offense. They come up with the big play – that's one of the reasons why they won two big games in a row, and defensively, they've been consistent for a number of years. They've given up 3.4 yards per rush attempt. Every year they lead the National Football League. They are physical. They haven't given up a lot of points and have done a very good job in turnover ratio. When you do that, you usually win a Championship game.

Q. You've put a lot of pressure all season long on the quarterback, which hasn't really turned into a lot of sacks. But the hurries and the importance of the hurries in the interceptions you've got has seemed to work out?

COACH MIKE SHANAHAN: I think what you said is true. What you're trying to get is turnovers. You lead the division in sacks, and you don't have turnovers, obviously you're looking for the turnovers. But it's the combination of playing well on defense. If you can put pressure on the quarterback, regardless if there are sacks or not, they have to throw earlier than he wants to, you have a chance to make good things happen with the turnovers.

Q. The fact that he went plus 29 last year from this year in give aways, take aways, seems to be the difference in the 10 and 6 and 13 and 3?

COACH MIKE SHANAHAN: You're right. Anytime you win ten games and lose six, and you have a minus 8 or minus 9 in turnovers, that's quite unusual, too. Usually you're 500 or below. We knew in order for us to improve in the playoffs and do something that we had to improve in this turnover area. And we have on both sides of the ball.

Q. The running game you guys take pride in stopping, is that all about more turnovers are likely to happen when you force a team to throw? Can you talk about that?

COACH MIKE SHANAHAN: If you take a look at the great teams, especially in the playoffs and through the years, you've got to be able to

stop the run. And the teams that usually win Super Bowls are able to stop the runs and put the offense in a one dimensional game.

If you take a look at Pittsburgh, the 3.4 yards-per-carry and our football team, we've been successful against the run. It gives you the chance to put the offense in a one dimensional game.

Q. When Ben Roethlisberger came out throwing against Indianapolis, did that show you something offensively from the Steelers than what you would expect?

COACH MIKE SHANAHAN: No, they've been doing that all year, very successful in throwing the football. You constantly hear them talking, and you see, consistently, a good running attack. When you're able to do that, then the play action play and throwing the football becomes a lot easier, and they've been doing that all year. They were ranked No. 2 through the season, and being the most effective team throwing the football. That's yard per play. One of the reasons they do that is, because they have a great running game. And it's obviously consistent with the play action, and they're able to get some big plays.

Q. You have four guys going to the Pro Bowl. If you had to pick one guy offensively and defensively for your MVPs, who would it be?

COACH MIKE SHANAHAN: It's one thing about football that I think is interesting, that it's not about one guy. And for Champ Bailey to do what he did this year, is because -- it's because of that pass rush. He's an incredible athlete. He does things that most human beings can't do. Unless you get pressure on that quarterback, it's hard to be effective. I think we're better overall, because we've improved as a team on defense.

Same thing on offense. If you can't get the running game going, and keep the defense off balance, I don't care how good your quarterback is, he could be in for a long day.

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