

January 20, 2006



An Interview With:

## ROD SMITH Denver Broncos

**Q. Could you talk a little bit about the development of Ashley Lelie, and what it's meant to your game? You used to be the deep guy, but the way you stretch the defense seems to be that he helps you get open?**

ROD SMITH: You know, that's something that our whole staff worked on. You have to learn how to play the game inside, as well. And I think this last month of the season, he's done a great job of catching the short route, the slants and the under routes, and moving the -- being in the possession with a tight receiver and going over the top.

Like I tell him, those things will open up his game. And it's something he's worked on very hard this off season. And I think he's done a good job at it. But at the same time we're trying to build and get better.

**Q. This question is on Mike Shanahan. There's a lot of coaches that wouldn't take chances on the Cleveland guys, why do you think he's willing to take chances on those guys? Do you work harder because of that?**

ROD SMITH: You know what, I think like all those guys, I think at the time in their careers, they probably needed a fresh start. They were in situations, some of the situations were out of their control. And for them to have a chance to come to a new organization is kind of like a fresh start for them. From the minute they walked into our doors, we welcomed them with open arms. I joked with all the Cleveland guys -- they're not Cleveland guys, Bronco guys, Denver guys, I said we bought a bunch of lemons. I told them **Mike** bought a bunch of lemons. And they laughed and joked because they know there's nothing I wouldn't do for especially this.

I know for a fact now there's nothing they wouldn't do for me and our football team. I really

think it was a blessing for those guys to get a new opportunity to come into an organization like we have, that's won top notches in all sports, not just football. **Gerard Warren**, we've had a joke about how much he's smiling. I said, "Why are you smiling?" And he said, "This is paradise." For him, to see him, and not only the way he's playing, but to see him happy off the field, you know the guy is going to give you everything he's got. And his work, and all those guys, the extra effort they put in, because of the situation because of the situation they've got a chance to be in. You can see it on the football field. It turns into wins for us.

**Q. Talk a little bit about the difference in the locker room, from when you played with the '97, '98 Broncos versus right now? Is it the same excitement in the locker room as it was when you played on those last two Championship teams?**

ROD SMITH: You were in there. You know how it was.

**Q. I remember that excitement, but I don't know this excitement.**

ROD SMITH: You know what, man? We have a lot of fun. I don't know if we have as much fun as we did. The football team we had, that won those two Super Bowls, it was a special group of guys. And we had a bunch of characters. And on this team, there's no exception. We have **Burns**, he addressed that, he knew how to keep everybody light. Guys like **Gerard Warren**, and **Al Wilson** is more of a comedian. And honestly the guy that's the funny guy is our quarterback. **John Elway** wasn't the jokester guy. But **Jake** is a jokster. He's always relaxed. You see him smiling a lot. I think those type of things keeps the whole team relaxed, when they can see the No. 1 guy enjoying playing football. He enjoys being in the locker room around the guys. And he has that same special feeling we had back in the day, and it's fun. It's a lot of fun, and we know when it's time to go to work. But between plays, we can do whatever we want. And **Mike** kind of gives us the luxury to do that.

It's been fun. It's been a lot of fun. It's one of those -- it's the memories that you're going to

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always have, no matter what. And I love sharing it with the guys that I have now.

**Q. Rod, to follow up on Jake, what have you seen in his approach that makes him ready for a game like this.**

ROD SMITH: Just everything he's done over the off season. I don't know exactly what he's done, but whatever he has, I like it, honestly. The guy has -- it's just like a renewed life for the game. And his spirit lifts up everybody else.

He plays the game with a passion that a lot of people don't see. That same passion he plays with on Sundays is what we see in practice, the attention to detail. He's always studying, he's always focused on the task at hand. And right after that, he'll crack a joke.

I think he's really relaxed. I think he's enjoying himself on and off the field. He knows he has a group of guys that will do anything for him. And no matter what he does or where he goes, I told him I'll go with you. The other guys will go with him, as well.

**Q. Did you have that perception of him before he came here?**

ROD SMITH: You'll have to talk to *Mike*. I didn't get to pull the trigger on that deal. My thing was I was just glad to have -- and it kind of relates to the earlier question. I think there was time for Jake to move out of the situation he was in and get a fresh start. And the Pro Bowl quarterback that you see now is something that's probably been here all the time. And he's finally getting the chance to go out on the football field and put those skills to work. And he has a group of guys, like I always tell them, he can be good by himself, but it's up to us to make him great. That's what he's done. He's given us the opportunity with making the plays for him that he doesn't have to be a hero on this football team because he knows there's other guys that will do it for him.

**Q. The Steelers wide receivers get a lot of credit for making their run game go. Do you guys take pride in the run game, as well?**

ROD SMITH: Come on, man. You look at the stats. That's all I can say. Look at the stats, at least from when I was here. I think it's probably been here playing 11 years, I know we've got at least 17, 18 thousand yards rushing, at least. That's one thing we talk about, that's the first thing we talk about as receivers on this football team, you're not going to catch a pass until you get a block. That's something we stress each and every game. We know if we're going to catch a pass, the

running backs are in the backfield picking up blitzes and blocking defensive ends. For us it's a team thing. We don't play receiver, we play football, whatever that means.

If that means going in there and getting in the running game, that's what we have to do. If we happen to catch a pass, so be it. But the thing is we have a history of running the football around here. We're always going to have that history, and it's going to keep moving forward, as long as we have guys on the outside who are unselfish and willing to put their body on the line for the guys in the backfield.

**Q. One more question with Jake. There's been so much talk about his decision making ability and improvements this year. Can you talk about his intelligence on the field?**

ROD SMITH: He's in total control. He's the guy that you see when he leaves every week he's got a bag of tapes with him. The rest of us get DVDs, Jake gets a bag of tapes that he takes home to study and make sure that he can put all of us in the right position. Like I say, it's really great to see him get some of the praise that he's gotten, because for a while things were kind of hard on him. And as teammates it's up to us to take a lot of heat off him. And I think we've done a good job of doing that. But at the same time it's upon him. He took it upon himself to be the best professional football player he can be. He's changed a few things, I think about himself and how he goes about, how he approaches the game and has made his game that much better. And he's kept us out of a ton of bad situations. And not only with his arm, but with his legs and his mind. And this season we've -- I think we broke the club record for the least amount of turnovers in the season. That starts with the guy behind the center, because he touches every ball. His decision making has got us to this point and hopefully can move us forward.

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