

**January 18, 2006**



An Interview With:

## **JULIUS PEPPERS**

**Q. You've been with Steve Smith for four years now. Are you amazed at how far you've come in those four years?**

JULIUS PEPPERS: Well, I've seen him improve over the years, I've never seen him play at this high level. I'm not surprised because he always has the potential for big plays. He's playing at an extremely high level right now. He has us on his back and he's carrying us.

**Q. How much do you guys miss Kris Jenkins, and how good is this run defense playing right now?**

JULIUS PEPPERS: We miss Kris. We'd love to have Kris in there. But *Jordan (Carstens)*, and *Kindal (Moorehead)*, they have done an excellent job of stepping in and carrying that weight, carrying that part of the team. We do miss him, but without him, we're still a resilient defense. We'd love to have him back, though. We'd be much better with him.

**Q. What's the mood of the team right now? You've won two games on the road, you have two more games to go, what is the mood of the team?**

JULIUS PEPPERS: Well, we feel pretty confident. We're pretty confident I feel like. Everybody is pretty calm and focused on the task at hand. And that's the main thing, just staying focused and not feeding into all of the media attention and all of the good things everybody is saying about us and just staying focused on the next task.

**Q. What is it about playing on the road that you guys have been so good in the post-season?**

JULIUS PEPPERS: Well, like I said, the focus during the week on the preparation has been

exceptional from everybody to starters to role players to the scout team guys helping us prepare for the game. So I think it's been the coaches keeping guys focused.

**Q. Can you compare a sack to a slam dunk in basketball? Can you kind of talk about the art of getting to the quarterback and just what a rush it is being the guy to get to him?**

JULIUS PEPPERS: Well, it's a sack -- both of them are big plays. I never dunked in a real game so I don't even hardly remember what it feels like. But getting a sack, it's just like any other big play in the game and it's one of those things that can change the momentum. So it is a rush to get one of those.

**Q. Do you have a little bit of a friendly rivalry as far as who gets to the quarterback?**

JULIUS PEPPERS: We always say we're going to -- it's not a thing where we're competing against each other to get sacks. We root for each other and we're always trying to help each other out. We always say "I'll meet you back there" or "I'll meet you at the quarterback," stuff like that.

**Q. You must prepare similar for road or home games, getting back to how well you play on the road, is there something about the hostile crowd that brings out something in you guys?**

JULIUS PEPPERS: I think when we go on the road, it's just us against the whole city. You go to a city like New York and Chicago where we only travel with 46 players and the coaches and the media guys through the organization, less than one hundred people; it's us against the whole people basically outside of the fans that come. So I think we see the challenge. I think it brings us tighter when we're on the road because we know we're all we have in that city at that time.

**Q. Knowing you did it two years ago, does that help you guys this year?**

JULIUS PEPPERS: Yeah, once you do something before and you have another

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opportunity to do it, if you had success the first time, it makes it a little easier because you know what to expect in that experience. That plays a little part in it.

We feel confident in our ability to go on the road and play well because we've done it before.

**Q. How different are you guys as a team compared to two years ago? What's the biggest difference this year?**

JULIUS PEPPERS: Well, we're two years older, we've been playing with each other longer. The chemistry is there just like it was two years ago. The trust that everybody has with one another is still here.

We play well as a team, as well as a team as anybody else in the league I think. I think it shows up, when our backs are in the wall and we get to the playoffs and we're in tight spots.

**Q. How much of a key is the preparation? It seems like John Fox has you guys extremely prepared for these playoffs.**

JULIUS PEPPERS: Yeah, he does. He does a good job of game planning and switching the game plan up so we're not the same all the time. We attack people's weaknesses and we use different schemes each week.

So we know that in order for us to play well, we've got to know what we've got to do. Everybody is focused on the game plan and focused on what we have to do.

**Q. They are obviously going to pay a lot of attention to Steve Smith and stopping him, are you confident that you have other receivers that can step up if they do something to keep him in check?**

JULIUS PEPPERS: We're confident in our team. I think everybody else has also been focusing on **Steve Smith**, too, but nobody has stopped him yet. But when somebody stops him, we have other players: **Ricky Proehl** who makes big catches; **Drew Carter**, young guy, great speed will get a big play in every now and then; **Keary Colbert** can catch the ball. We have other players that can make plays, just because Steve has been dominating so much, we've just been going to him.

**Q. What has it been about Steve's play that has not allowed defenses to stop him? Is it other players on offense or is it what he's**

**done specifically, anything that you can pinpoint for his success?**

JULIUS PEPPERS: I don't know what it is. He's a competitor. He competes so much. Right now he has it in his mind that nobody is going to stop him no matter what. When a player is in that zone and he's feeling like that, there's really little that you can do.

**Q. Do you enjoy being the road team?**

JULIUS PEPPERS: Yeah, we do. We play well on the road, so we like going on the road. We love going to the other people's stadium and using the crowd against them.

**Q. A lot of people were questioning whether Hasslebeck could win a playoff game, and the fact that he did it without Alexander, did he open your eyes with what he did last week?**

JULIUS PEPPERS: Well, I really never doubted **Matt Hasslebeck**. I know he's a good quarterback, Pro Bowler, did an excellent job last week of managing that game without the MVP. They would not be this far without a great quarterback. So I'm not surprised that he was able to win that game last week.

**Q. What did you see when you look at Shaun Alexander on tape that makes him dangerous from the defensive end?**

JULIUS PEPPERS: I see that he runs the ball hard and he has good vision for the cut-back run. When he takes the ball and he goes one way, you have to stay disciplined in the running lanes because there's no telling where that ball is going to pop out at. He can stay the course or he can break the play off and reverse field and comeback the other way; he could go inside; he's all over the field. So you've got to be disciplined when you're playing against a back like that because you never know where he's going to take the ball to.

**Q. You guys have one of the best defensive lines in the league and Seattle has one of best offensive lines, how do you assess that match-up?**

JULIUS PEPPERS: Well, it's a challenge for us. It's a challenge for us to stop this running attack. They have been pretty successful running the ball. They definitely can run the ball. And we have success stopping the run. So that's one of

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the match-ups that's going to be big and deciding which way this game is going to go. It's a challenge for us up front, to contain them and slow them down a little bit.

**Q. The last two weeks you had the New York defensive ends say how they were the best defensive ends and then you had the Chicago guys running their mouths. Do you have any motivations this week?**

JULIUS PEPPERS: Yeah, we have motivation. Those players running their mouth didn't motivate us. It was just one of those things that was kept in the back of our minds that added a little bit to it, a little bit of fuel to the fire. But that wasn't our motivation.

Our motivation is to win the NFC Championship Game, and that's our motivation, not what anybody says about us because we could care less what anybody else says about us. We know that we have a good football team and that's all that really matters.

**Q. Two years ago everybody talked about the Patriots in the Super Bowl, you nearly beat them that year, how much does that experience help this team in moving forward?**

JULIUS PEPPERS: It was a good experience for us to get to advance that far. We would love to have come out on top of that game, but we learned from it.

We came back last year, we thought we were going to make it back but we had a few unfortunate injuries and things that went wrong for us. But the experience that we gained in that game, I think has helped us this far through the season and through the playoffs and hopefully we can rely on it a little bit in this game coming up.

**Q. It's interesting, you look at the Panthers, it's an organization that's less than 20 years old and it is playing in its third NFC Championship Game and could be going to its second Super Bowl in a couple years. I know there was that one little down period, which is why you became a Panther, second pick, but could you talk about why this organization has been on this run in such a quick time?**

JULIUS PEPPERS: Well, good people. You know, good people do things the right way. Usually when you have good people that do good things, usually good things happen.

So from top to bottom, it's very hard to find somebody in this organization that isn't a good person. Good character and things like that go a long way.

**Q. I don't know if you paid attention to Seattle lately but it rained like 27 straight days and they have rain forecast for Sunday, the only day without any rain; is that a good omen for you guys?**

JULIUS PEPPERS: Well, I hope so. Last week after we won the New York Giants game, **Mike Minter** said when we went into Chicago, it wasn't going to be cold, and that came true. So hopefully the change of weather thing is a good sign for us.

But I know we can't rely on that. We've got to come play football. But if it doesn't rain, you know, we'd love to have it dry out there.

**Q. Sounds like Mother Nature wants you to win.**

JULIUS PEPPERS: Yeah, hopefully.

**Q. How is your shoulder?**

JULIUS PEPPERS: It's feeling okay. It's feeling good. It's a little sore, a little soreness in there, but it's getting better day by day.

**Q. And I assume your ankle is completely healed up from earlier in the season?**

JULIUS PEPPERS: Yeah, the ankle is fine.

**Q. Jake Delhomme, is he kind of the perfect quarterback for the post-season, the fact that he manages the game so effectively?**

JULIUS PEPPERS: Yeah, he is. But he's a perfect quarterback for us. It seems like when he plays well, we play well as a team. You know, I guess there's something about the post-season that brings the best out of us because you know, when we get to this time of the season, he's playing at that level that we need him to play at to win these games.

So you know, as Jake goes, we're going to go, and right now, he's going pretty good. So hopefully he can continue that and take us to the promised land.

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**Q. Would you talk about the fumble recovery you had the other day, did you think you were going to go with it or was your knee down or what happened there?**

JULIUS PEPPERS: Well, from the replay that I looked at, I thought that when the knee was down, he didn't have control of the ball and when the knee came off the ground, he finally gained control of it and then he lost it after that.

So I thought it was a fumble, but that's just my personal opinion. The call from the referee was, you know, he didn't have -- his knee was down. So I guess that was the right call. They got instant replay and looked at it a few times so evidently they saw something that I didn't see or they knew a rule that I don't know. I thought it was a fumble, but again, that's just my personal opinion.

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