

**January 20, 2006**



An Interview With:

## **COACH BILL COWHER** **Pittsburgh Steelers**

**Q. A lot of players have been talking all week that there's something special this week, do you notice anything different with this team than your past AFC Championship teams?**

COACH BILL COWHER: I think every team takes on its own identity and personality. Certainly I think the road we've taken to get to this point has certainly been different than the ones in the past, from the standpoint of playing two road games starting the playoffs. I think certainly it's different just because of how we got here.

**Q. Is there any indication from your previous AFC Championship experiences, both positive or negative, that will make a difference in this particular game?**

COACH BILL COWHER: I don't think so. I think each game has its own identity. The last three we've lost to the world champions. We lost to the best team in the National Football League.

I think each year is a new year, and I think the thing right now with this football team is how we got here, the last six weeks we've been in the playoff mode, with no margin of error. I don't think we've had any time to reflect on which game it is and more importantly how we got here.

We have not really reflected on anything, it's more a short-term focus we've had to take, because with each step it's getting a little tougher.

**Q. Your team seems to have embraced the role of the No. 6 seed. They have embraced the fact that they're going to have to go on the road and win three games to make it to Detroit. Is there a sense that this team doesn't sense any pressure. They're just going about their business like it's any other game?**

COACH BILL COWHER: We haven't had time to think about it. Like I said, I think we've

really been in a single elimination mindset for about the last month and a half. I think at that point, whether we're playing at home or on the road, there's a level of desperation we've had to play with.

Where we're at, it's no different. It's a short week, and I think the fact of the matter is we're playing, with each team a tougher opponent, a bigger obstacle. With that comes a greater challenge. We realize we're going to have to play our 'A' game in every phase -- offense, defense, special teams - to have a chance to beat this team. They won 13 games in the regular season, and haven't lost a game at home. It's a big challenge for us.

**Q. Specifically, how is Ben different now than he was a year ago at this time?**

COACH BILL COWHER: I think he was worn out by the end of the year (last year). He got into the playoffs and it was just a long year. I still think all year long he was reading everything off his wrist band. And with each play, if one guy wasn't open, he took off to try to find an open receiver.

This year the comfort level he has with the offense-- more important than that, he has been able to pace himself mentally during the course of the year. He was fresh at the end of the year, and having gone through it, for any rookie, it was a long year to begin with. You couple that with what the demands were for him last year. The second year makes a dramatic difference to any player. He's more comfortable with the offense, and it makes him a better quarterback.

**Q. Will Casey Hampton play more this game because of the packages you used the last two games, and how much of a difference does it make?**

COACH BILL COWHER: Like you said, the offense we are playing, they run the football, and they run it very well. So Casey will be a big part of that. It's going to require not just Casey, but really our front seven to play disciplined football. These guys do a great job of attacking you. And if you void the gap, backside, or you're on the ground, they will take advantage of it. They're very patient doing so, and I think that's a play action

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game. They do a great job of utilizing Jake (Plummer) and what he does well. Couple that with a very efficient group of backs, and their very potent offense, and it will be a big challenge for us to make sure we try to stay away from the big play and stop the run.

**Q. Your coaching philosophy hasn't changed over the years, in terms of being physical on both sides of the ball. Have you changed at all in the way you interact with the players?**

COACH BILL COWHER: I like to feel you're growing every year. You never stop learning in this business. I think you try to take each team and it's different. You see where you pull back the reins a little bit or let it go. I just like to think I'm still growing as a coach, as a person. I think we all do that. I've got a great group of assistants that have done a fantastic job with the players. There's a good mix of veteran leadership, and there's some young players playing vital roles. I think it all goes hand and hand. My role is a very small one, just to make sure that everything is kind of directed in the right manner. Those guys run the ship, more or less.

**Q. Last week when Denver beat New England, they had five turnovers, in fact the punter even had a turnover. Talk about their take away edge, and also the fact that on offense they handle the ball pretty well.**

COACH BILL COWHER: We played Cincinnati, and they were plus 24 in takeaway. Denver was second in the League. They have the fewest turnovers in the National Football League, fourth most takeaways in the National Football League. There's no question that they're a football team that can put pressure on you, and make you make mistakes. We cannot turn the football over or give them a short field in the kicking game. Defensively, we'd like to get some turnovers, but the biggest thing is not to give up any big plays. If we can do that, get this game close in the fourth quarter, we will give ourselves a chance.

**Q. Jerome has mentioned that over the years the players have changed, but the characteristics of those players that you're building from training camp on is a big part of this team's success, and is that a big part of getting to six Championship games in 12 years?**

COACH BILL COWHER: It's taking the players you have and playing around those players. We've tried to bring the right players, and

I think they've done a great job bringing in the right players here. We're very selective in free agency, in trying to bring in the right guys. It's a close football team. You have to be a close football team, offensively, defensively. There is an unselfishness that has permeated through this team. Duce Staley that hasn't dressed in the last few months, but he's ready to go. I think that exemplifies what this football team is all about, that the players have accepted roles, and they have excelled in roles, but they're ready to be there. That's the one thing about this team. Players have left their egos at the door. They are coming in here, and doing the little things that it takes to win football games.

**Q. What have been your coaching points, particularly with the linebackers? I know you want them to play fast and physical against this stretch and run and play with the Denver Broncos. But do they have to be patient on the backside when you're going to get some of that bootleg action from Jake Plummer?**

COACH BILL COWHER: I think your point is well taken, because the bootleg does become a part of what they want to do. We have to be very disciplined. We're a team that loves to fly to the ball. Last year on our second play against New England, they ran a reverse play for a big touchdown. We're a team that is going to be disciplined, a little more patient than we've been in the past. We're going to have to be on top of our Ps and Qs, and not get our eyes wandering where they shouldn't be wandering. These guys test you in that manner because they have a great play action game, and the receivers run very good routes and throw some double moves in there on you.

We need to be patient, and again, we have to get into some third downs and get off the field, and get our offense out there and try to get a lead. The Broncos jump out on people. They've been unbelievably successful in the first half of games, and that has enhanced their ability to use the running game and play action game.

**Q. We've talked about the offense, the defense, not a whole lot about the special teams. I know you believe in special teams more than anybody. How do the special teams match up and what do your special teams have to do to be successful this week?**

COACH BILL COWHER: It becomes a field position game. Look at last week. We had three punts inside the 20. I think one of the

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biggest was the last punt we had before we stopped them. It was a 52-yard net punt.

And these guys are good. Charlie Adams and Darrent Williams are good returners. It becomes a field position game. It's so critical, and hidden yardage is involved there in the playoffs, particularly when you play good teams. It can become the hidden factor, so to speak. This is going to play a big role in this game. We've talked all week about the field position game.

**Q. How do you prepare this team to deal with the altitude in Denver?**

COACH BILL COWHER: We've been hydrating all week. We're not going in there until late Saturday night, and we play Sunday. Last week we went in the day before, as well. The biggest thing is hydration, and making sure our players are drinking plenty of water and Gatorade, and they've done that this week, and they'll have it on the plane. I don't think it will be that big of a factor.

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