

January 20, 2006



An Interview With:

JEROME BETTIS Pittsburgh Steelers

Q. Can you describe to us how Ben is different now compared to how he was last January?

JEROME BETTIS: Well, I think Ben is a totally different player in the sense that he understands his role in the offense.

Last year, you have a tendency to look at years past and you see Elway with this incredible play, you see Montana driving down the field, and you see all these quarterbacks win these big games, so you automatically assume that's what you have to do. I think that's what he was feeling a little bit. Not only he had hit the wall, but he was fatigued from a long year.

This year is totally different. He understands he needs to manage the game. He needs to make the plays that he's supposed to make. And I think that's the biggest difference from last year to this year.

Q. As you said, I'm seeing a fresh, more mature, Ben Roethlisberger, I'm seeing a much improved Willie Parker. Is this a more improved team than the team you had last year, where you went 15-1 and had the No. 1 seed in the postseason?

JEROME BETTIS: It's hard to say it's a better team. It's a different team in the sense that we have different weapons and we use different parts of the field. Last year we had a deeper vertical game, that we used a lot more than we use now. There were some differences.

I really think this team is built to go on the road and do some good things, because it's a controlled offense, but it has the key components you need in order for play action with the tight end and utilize all the pieces that we do have. It's a different team.

Q. The further you guys have gone now, a lot has been made that this could be

your last year, with the wild twists and turns we've seen over the last couple of weeks. Is it more difficult to keep your emotions in check the deeper you get in the playoffs?

JEROME BETTIS: No, last year was the same thing. I thought last year was my last season and last year the AFC Championship was probably my last opportunity to make it to the Super Bowl. The emotions were running high.

The benefit now is that I've been there. I've been under those pressures and it's not a problem this year. I think that's the benefit for us. I guess the experience of having been here before makes a big difference for us.

Q. Is that why you feel this team is better equipped to handle what lies ahead Sunday than the last two opportunities you had to do it?

JEROME BETTIS: No question about it - being on the road presents a totally different challenge. We have the experience of having played in the game, having lost in this game and an understanding of what it takes to win this game. That definitely gives us an edge and we can benefit from it.

Q. How much is Coach Cowher's belief in his system responsible for his success in Pittsburgh?

JEROME BETTIS: I think it's all about his belief. You ask the question why have the **Pittsburgh Steelers** been a physical, smash mouth type of a team for so long? I think it's because the team takes the identity of its head coach. He looks for tough players. He looks for physical players and he has an idea of what he wants and he doesn't settle for anything less. Every training camp he's looking for the same thing and if he doesn't get it, he'll eventually weed you out. Maybe one year is better than the next year, but he's going to have the same traits in terms of being physical, running the football and being smash mouth.

Q. How do the players really like this time of the year, in the playoffs, in the AFC Championship game, especially when you play

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13 years, how do you pick it up another notch down the stretch?

JEROME BETTIS: Well, it's really easy for us to pick it up another notch because we were in this game last year. We lost this game last year. So that the sour taste, that bitter pill is still really in our mouth. It's not very hard for us to have to try to gather some more strength, because just a year ago we were in the same situation, and we lost. It was a devastating loss for us and we don't want that to happen again. We understand what we need to do to make sure it doesn't.

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