

January 20, 2006



An Interview With:

COACH MIKE HOLMGREN

Q. It seems your assistants often get overlooked. Talk about the importance of assistants and having the same group and how that got you here.

COACH MIKE HOLMGREN: I think that's a great question. They do get overlooked. It happens to a lot and my staff is outstanding, they really are. A lot of them have been with me a long time. **Gill Haskell**, the offensive coordinator, for example. He does coordinate the offense. I just get to call the plays on Sunday. And that's the fun part of it for me, but he does all the hard work. And John Marshall, I can't say enough about John and what he's done for the this year. Ray Rhodes was sick and John had to step in and the defense has played very, very well.

I'm proud of the job they've done. They are good communicators, good teachers and the players have responded to them very, very well.

Q. Coach, can you talk about the chemistry that this team has? It seems the moves you made in the off season, you and Tim Ruskell dispensing with some players and bringing in some character guys have made a difference with this football team?

COACH MIKE HOLMGREN: I think that's a fair statement. A couple of things happen. You have players that either won't buy in or never buy in, and then you have some players with problems that are non football related problems that become a distraction. And I think we were victims last year of that just a little bit. I wouldn't lump those players in a big pile that people have a tendency to do. Each had their own issues and sometimes a player needs a new place to play. I'll admit to that, as well.

There were five or six players that left, and the five or six players that we brought in to replace those fellows, have been tremendous. Free

agency, guys like **Bryce Fisher** and **Chuck Darby** and **Kelly Herndon** and **Andre Dyson** and those fellows, and in the draft **Lofa Tatupu** and **LeRoy Hill** who are playing as rookies as linebacker. Things happened to me that I never had happen before and that's one of them.

I think the team has responded to our leaders, Jones, Hutchinson and Hasselbeck, and the people that have been here four or five years, and they respond to each other, I think the locker room is very positive. Winning helps a lot of things. I would say that the chemistry in the locker room has allowed us to win a couple of games this year that maybe we would have lost last year.

Q. There is all this talk about Steve Smith, everybody is paying attention to him. I'm wondering, in particular, this wide receiver screen that everybody seems to use, they seem to get so much more out of it than most teams. Talk about Smith and Dan Henning and the design a little bit and how they're doing what they're doing?

COACH MIKE HOLMGREN: **Steve Smith** is a tremendous football player. A lot of times you look at a defensive player and some of the stuff he does is hidden. **Steve Smith**, everything is out there for people to see. And you're right, they get a lot of mileage off that one particular play. And not only that, but they do throw it out to him quickly and they don't even run the screen. They just say "Here, throw it out there and you run with it."

I think he's a special player. And of course **Dan Henning**, I've known Dan for a lot of years and he is a really good football coach. He will play to his team's strength, like hopefully all of us do. He has done a great job, I think, using **Steve Smith**. They move him around, they put him in the backfield. He's on reverses not just that one play. I think you give credit to the young man, too. He is as competitive and as tough a wide receiver as I've seen in a long, long time. Obvious things, he has great speed and those types of things, but you really see in his play how much fire he has and that's one of the reasons he's great.

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Q. Is there another five-nine receiver that you can think of?

COACH MIKE HOLMGREN: We played against one last week.

Q. That's true.

COACH MIKE HOLMGREN: That was very important to the Redskins. **Moss** had been their big play guy. We had some experience in dealing with a key man on the other team's offense, just like Steve. I think there are different types of players. But again, a little shorter wide receiver, but very, very explosive and someone you had to deal with to be successful in the football game.

Q. What was Lofa Tatupu doing last week?

COACH MIKE HOLMGREN: I asked John Marshall that same question. I didn't put it as nicely as you did. In our coverage we have a couple of coverages where he is the middle linebacker and you've seen the coverage. It's become an important coverage in the league where the middle linebacker takes away the middle of the field, not usually as Lofa was, but the way he explained it to me when I asked him. He said, "Coach, there was someone running next to me, so I kept running with him."

I said, "That's good. I'm glad you did." (Laughter.)

Q. This is obviously an outstanding offensive line. In my opinion, the best in football. Having this great offensive line, what kind of freedom does that give you as an offensive play caller?

COACH MIKE HOLMGREN: You know my feelings about the offensive line. We talked about it. As a single caller or play caller or offensive coach, it really -- I can't say it doesn't matter. It matters that you have a quarterback and it matters that you have a good running back and good receivers and all that. But if you don't have a good offensive line it's hard to move the football, it really is.

One of the keys for us this year, and we talked about this coming in the off-season, is we had **Walter Jones** as a free agent. **Robbie Tobeck**, **Chris Gray** and **Pork Chop Womack** were all free agents. We had put a lot of time and effort into developing the line and keeping the continuity in the offensive line. Here we are in this situation. I said one of the priorities must be to keep those guys together. They feed off each other, they get along great together.

Offensive linemen are funny, the longer you keep them together, the better they are, and that has been a huge, huge reason for our offensive success this year, in my opinion you need an offensive line. We drafted I think in the last couple of years with that in mind.

We have a couple of good young people that aren't playing now. Our number one draft pick **Chris Spencer** hasn't played much this year, but I think with your offensive line, you take care of that, without that it's tough to move the ball.

Q. COACH MIKE HOLMGREN: Quarterbacks coming out of college that have post-season success in the NFL, what did you see in Matt?

COACH MIKE HOLMGREN: That year, if I remember correctly, first of all, **Andy Reid**, who was on my staff at the time and coaching quarterbacks, it was his job prior to the draft to go out and look at the quarterbacks. I believe we had three or four on our list. Of course, **Brett Favre** was with us, so we weren't going to draft within. We weren't prepared to draft a quarterback in the first round or anything like that.

I always liked to pick a quarterback in round five or six or something. And it's just I'm curious and I've always liked -- that was part of what we did. We did it with **Mark Brunell**, we did it with a few people. When talking about Matt, Andy came back and was sold on him and sold me and our staff. We looked at film. And then when I got to meet him and he was around with us, he has the measurables that you would like to have in a quarterback. He threw the ball pretty well. He is quite bright, he was courageous, he moved pretty well for a tall man, a big guy, and then now it's just a matter of seeing how he handles the pressure, the decision-making and things like that.

He didn't get much play in **Green Bay**. Over 15 years no one did, but in the brief time, I really liked what I saw, so when it came time to bring in another quarterback here in Seattle, we had four or five guys on our list and Matt came out ahead. I'm very, very proud of the job he has done. He's worked very hard to become the player he is today. He is stronger and better because of some of the tough things he had to have gone through. He and I kind of banged around a little bit early, and we're in a good place now. We trust one another and I think it shows on the field.

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Q. Does it help for the guys that don't have to play right away, they can mature and play under established guys on the team?

COACH MIKE HOLMGREN: It might help some. But I always thought a player learns faster by playing as long as he doesn't get killed. I mean, he has to have a team around him where he can have some success. You don't want him, one, to get hurt, or two, get so destroyed mentally he can't function very well. Again, in the case of **Green Bay**, we kind of threw that quarterback in the frying pan. And I did that with Matt, quite honestly, here in Seattle. We played him right away. He got hurt a little bit when we played him that way.

You learn watching, but -- and I know there are other opinions about this. I've always been of the opinion that if I can play him, and he can get experience there and you can live with the result, I'm talking about the owner, your general manager, all those people, you live with the result as the quarterback is learning, I think that's a better way to go.

Q. Shaun Alexander will be playing I guess eight days after he suffered a concussion. What concerns do you have about his performance being diminished, his ability to finish the game and what contingency plans do you have? Have you prepared?

COACH MIKE HOLMGREN: I think he's just fine physically. I think in this day and age of the league and all teams, you're very aware of concussions and I think we treat them more conservatively than we have in the past. But it's the right thing to do. In Shaun's case, right at the end of the game, right in the locker room at the end of the game, he seemed to be in better shape than other guys I've seen have concussions. That's not to say he didn't get bonked pretty good. He did. When he passed the test, which is a normal protocol for the guys who have this kind of injury with us, he went through the test, he passed with flying colors, he didn't have the headaches or some of the residual effects that normally take place. I got the okay from our medical people to play him. Heck, he's practiced. He practiced well all week and I expect him to play well. I don't think there will be any effect from that.

Q. Can you talk about Darrell Jackson's physical status for this game and his impact on your offense?

COACH MIKE HOLMGREN: Darrell will practice today. This is the first day he's practiced. He came out of that game pretty sore. Washington is a tough physical defensive football team and we

got banged around a little bit, but both he and Engram practiced today. Darrell hasn't played a lot of football this year. He has been hurt and out with that knee injury, but when we have him, obviously it's good for our offense.

He caught nine balls last week. He had a fine game. He is a good football player and we are a better team when he's playing. That's not to take anything away from the fellows who were playing when he was hurt because they had a marvelous job. But you would like all your guys if you can have them and Darrell is ready to go.

Q. You've done this before with the Packers and others but your team hasn't and most of these players haven't. How do you keep them from getting distracted, getting ahead of the prize going to the Super Bowl and not getting consumed by what's at stake?

COACH MIKE HOLMGREN: That's a good question and something I've worried about all week. But I will say this about this particular group. You know, coaches, I think one of the things maybe overused cliches we talk about all the time is, we play one game at a time. I don't think about the next week, and you know as well as anybody during the course of a season, to get a team to do that and not skip a game and look ahead to a big rivalry game or something like that, that's hard to do.

This team, though, this has been a different team and a different year. We've said that all yearlong. They have shown an amazing ability to focus in on the game at hand, regardless of who we were going to play the next week or the magnitude of the game or whatever. Now, having said that, the magnitude of the next game is huge.

But honest to goodness, our practices and how they've gone about their jobs, and I've talked about it, doesn't seem to be any different than they've handled it all season. I'm hopeful that we'll focus in and they know you've got to take care of business here otherwise you don't get to the big one. I kind of think they'll do that.

Q. Can you expand on your relationship with Matt? Were you fully confident this day was going to arrive or did you have your doubts?

COACH MIKE HOLMGREN: No, I knew Matt was going to be a fine football player. I never doubted that. There were moments early on that we battled a little bit, just like I probably could say the same thing about -- well, some people sitting in the audience here.

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You know what, I never doubted his ability to play the position. Once you're with a quarterback for a while you kind of make that decision. I always just thought at that position, it does take a little time. It's different than the other positions. It takes a little time. It takes time for not only the player to start to feel comfortable, but it takes time for the coach to find out how he can best help that player. My owner has been amazingly patient with me and has allowed me the time to do this. So now it's paying off. That's why I said, I'm very very happy for him, because he's certainly worked very very hard to be here today. Thank you all.