

January 20, 2006



An Interview With:

GRANT WISTROM

Q. First of all, we're disappointed we don't get to see the practice shorts here.

GRANT WISTROM: A tribute to Trent when he first came to the league, real high shorts.

Q. Mike has talked about trying to keep the same practice schedule. Do you feel he's accomplished that? Does this have the same feel to it, game feel?

GRANT WISTROM: With the exception of you guys, it's regular game. The only difference is all the media attention around it, pretty much.

Q. Was there a defining moment this season where you knew this team was different than last year's team and had the opportunity to go far?

GRANT WISTROM: I think a couple of them, the first one being the Washington game, for most of the game we were getting it handed to us early in. We came back and had a chance to win. We didn't. It showed the resolve of the team.

The second being the Dallas team where **Jordan Babineaux** picked off the interception at the beginning of the game. We didn't win, and not that we weren't capable of doing it last year, it was a different mentality and different resolve to this team than last year. This year no matter what the score is or how much time is on the clock we're going to find a way to win the football game. We've shown that on a number of occasions this year.

Q. Talk about the chemistry that you have with the team this year.

GRANT WISTROM: We have a number of guys on this team that have been cut by other teams that really we picked up off the street, guys that weren't given a chance in other organizations to play, for whatever reason. The powers-that-be decided they didn't have the talent to play at this

level, and these guys have come in and been starters for us and contributed and done well right from the start.

We lost a number of players this year just on defense. Our secondary at one point was very depleted. They've come in and believed that they belonged here from the first day, they practice like it and then go out there on Sunday and show it. It's what put us in the position that we're in right now going into the NFC Championship game. Without those guys we are an average football team, a little above 500. I think we owe them a lot.

We talk about **Shaun Alexander** and **Matt Hasselbeck**, and **Darrell Jackson** and **Bobby Engram**, our Pro Bowlers that put us at 13-3. The guys at the beginning of the season that didn't figure in the equation all that much that kept us in the hunt, put us where we are.

Q. The Panthers have some injuries on offense. I'm sure you are aware of that. What do you think about that and is there concern or wonder if they're going to do things differently to compensate for their losses?

GRANT WISTROM: I don't think so. **Nick Goings** is a great running back, and that's pretty much the same boat we were in. When we lost guys on offense and defense, we didn't change what we did, we just moved those guys out, put these new guys in, we'll expect them to go out and execute at the same level of the guys we lost, what they were playing at. And it's going to be the same way for them.

They're not going to change anything, running back or the type of offense they run, they're going to get the ball a number of times in the game, rely heavily on **Steve Smith** and **Jake Delhomme**. It will be the same great offense.

Q. Jake Delhomme, talk about him a little bit and your concerns about stopping him.

GRANT WISTROM: Right now, and since he's been in the playoffs, he's got one of the hottest hands in the playoffs. The guy picks it up in big games. And big time situations is when he tends to have his best games. We have to do everything we can to harass him as much as possible, keep him in the pocket, and not allow

...when all is said, we're done®

FastScripts® by ASAP Sports

t. 212.385.0297 f. 917.591.3417

visit our archives at www.asapsports.com

Grant Wistrom - 1.20.06.doc

time for his receivers to get open. That's when teams have had the most success against them, when they keep them in the pocket, when they hit around him. That's easier said than done. They have a very good offensive line and it's one of the better, if not the best offensive lines we've faced all year. We have our work cut out for us on Sunday.

Q. We haven't heard a number 89 brought up. I'm curious what is it like as a defensive player getting ready to take on -- try to contain Steve Smith.

GRANT WISTROM: Great choice of words, contain him. You don't stop a guy like that. I respect his game probably more so than any receiver in the NFL. The guy is good just because he wants to be good. I think the perfect example of why **Steve Smith** is good, when **Delhomme** throws a ball and the DB came down with it, at the bottom of the pile Steve ends up with it.

That exemplifies his game right there. The guy made himself into a great receiver. He has a competitive desire. I respect the heck out of it. It's going to be tough for us. Our DBs know that. They are fully aware of it. So it's as much their responsibility to cover **Steve Smith** as it is our responsibility to put as much pressure on **Jake Delhomme** to keep him from getting the ball right on target. Make **Steve Smith** use his desire to go up and get maybe the pass that isn't hitting him on stride and getting our DBs in a better position to make a play. When the guys hit him on stride you can't do anything about that, but if he's off, it gives the DBs a better shot.

Q. You've been in this position before. What can your teammates expect on Sunday to get ready for this?

GRANT WISTROM: We had a taste last week in the divisional game. This week in the playoffs the intensity steps up for a little bit more. One, there is more on the line. But No. 2, you're obviously facing a better opponent. You have two teams remaining out of 32. This is almost the best that's left. So you just really have to focus. You have to block out things like this.

Doing things like this is a necessary evil. It's part of our jobs. We can't worry about all the media attention surrounding it. You have to focus on the game. On Sunday once that opening kickoff occurs, you have to focus on the task at hand. You have to get back to playing football and block everything else out and focus on beating the man across from you.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports....

...when all is said, we're done®

FastScripts® by ASAP Sports

t. 212.385.0297 f. 917.591.3417

visit our archives at www.asapsports.com

Grant Wistrom - 1.20.06.doc