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An Interview With:

New Orleans Saints Drew Brees & Sean Payton

QB DREW BREES

Q. Drew, Sean has established himself as one of the more creative offensive coaches in the NFL. Lovie Smith is similar on defense. As sort of a subtext to this game, are you at all intrigued about those two matching wits, the Saints offense versus the Bears defense?

DREW BREES: I think it's always a little bit of a chess match. Obviously you're trying to guess what they're going to do just like you're trying to guess what they're going to do and obviously you try to anticipate different looks and hit them what you think is going to work and exploit what you think might be their weaknesses.

But I think that there are these match-ups all the time throughout the NFL. And I mean everybody likes to get excited about the number one offense against the number one defense in the NFC, statistically and all those things.

But the fact is, on any given day you still have to go out and do what's gotten you there.

Q. Drew, with the preparations winding down, what concerns you most about this Bears defense?

DREW BREES: I just know their defense plays well at home. They thrive on obviously the atmosphere and I just know they play well together as a unit. I know it's going to take our best game to be effective against them. But we're not going to change anything we're doing. We're still going to play aggressive, try to be balanced. Spread the

ball around, do all the things that have gotten us here.

Q. Drew, seems this year, as opposed to other years, the high profile quarterbacks, yourself, Peyton Manning and Tom Brady, how important is it, I guess, quarterback play, it's obvious, but how important is it to making it this far?

DREW BREES: I think it's very important. But, hey, it's still a team game. And I think the teams that make it this far are the best teams in every sense of that word.

And obviously there are a lot of players that kind of go into that. Everyone has a role. Obviously the quarterback has a major role. But I'm not going to overstate it or downplay it, but it is what it is.

I mean it's good to know I think that we've all played well enough to establish ourselves as the team that we are and to be in this position.

Q. Drew, simply put, how did you guys get this far?

DREW BREES: Simply put? Well, we've got a great group of guys. And we've got, I think more so than anything, not only good players but good people. Guys with great character. Great leadership skills. And guys that really came together for a common purpose here. Saw the opportunity that was ahead of us and have taken every advantage of it, every little bit. So it's fun to have been a part of it. And obviously we understand, again, the opportunity that we have this weekend. And it's a great one. Who would have thought we would be in this position? But we are.

I think we all know the opportunity at hand here.

Q. Two quick questions, first of all, kicker John Carney can you talk about his

professionalism and role on this team?

DREW BREES: Yes, John, he's been doing it for a long time. I mean he's been to the Super Bowl before with the Chargers back in '94. A lot of us weren't even in this league yet. A lot of us weren't even thinking about playing football in the NFL at that time. The fact is he's been doing it for a long time. It's great to have him as a teammate. I think we all see the manner in which he goes about business every day. He's a true professional. Works extremely hard. And you know he's one of the best in the league at what he does.

Q. Quarterbacks are ultimately judged by how they do on the biggest stages. Personally what can a win in a game like this against Chicago and even the Super Bowl do? Can it put you among the elite, do you think?

DREW BREES: Well, it would -- a win this weekend would get us into the Super Bowl and then after that it would, you know, put that championship on our belt. For me personally yes that would be great. And that's why you play the game. You play the game to win championships.

To try to be the best at what you're doing and gain respect. I'm not going to blow it up anymore than it already is. It's another game.

Q. You've talked about your motivation being to always try to prove people wrong all the way back to high school. The same token, can the sting of losing in the playoffs and having your season abruptly end like that, can that motivate you in this game?

DREW BREES: I'm not sure what you're talking about.

Q. The sting of a playoff loss. Avoiding that sting, can that be as big a motivating factor as trying to prove people wrong?

DREW BREES: You don't go out to play with the attitude of we're trying to win because we don't want to lose. I mean we're going out and we're going to play like we have all season long. If it's good enough to win then it's all happening for a reason we deserve to be there. If it doesn't then hey we gave it our best shot and we'll move on. But obviously like I said we have a team that's good enough to win this game and to win the next game and just keep this thing rolling. But we understand it's a big task and we have to play very well in order to get that done.

But I think the motivation just comes from within from the guys that we have realizing what we've been through all season long and just knowing that we can do it.

Q. Drew, based on having been around here all season what do you think a win would mean to the city of New Orleans?

DREW BREES: It would be tremendous. Look at the attitude and just the atmosphere right now in the city and it just continues to grow with each win.

So we know that there would be no shortage of that if we were to win this week, because that's -- I can't -- I like to flip on the news at night and watch something other than football, but it seems like all everybody is talking about even on the news is the Saints, which that's a big reason why I think this season has been so special is because of that bond we have with the fans and the city.

Q. Drew, earlier this week Joe Horn said when he looks at the Bears secondary, he sees them as a unit with something to prove. A lot of them are young, lot of them inexperienced, and they took a hit when Mike Brown went out earlier this season. What do you look at when you see them; and do you feel you'll try to exploit some of that youth and inexperience?

DREW BREES: Well, shoot, I mean to me this is the defense that ended the season as the number one defense in the NFC, if not the league. Definitely in taking the ball away, getting turnovers, negative plays, all those things. The defense has made a lot of plays.

So obviously losing Tommie Harris and losing Mike Brown, I know those were big losses for them. But I think the guys who have stepped in replaced them have done a good job. They've got good leadership. You see it in Urlacher, Briggs and some of those other guys, they're used to playing well and at a high level. Obviously we have a great game plan. But I've said it once and I'll say it a thousand times. We're just going to stick with what got us here. We're going to worry about us and our execution and our philosophy is make them stop us.

Q. Do you guys have any rituals anything you do in the locker room before you

go out for a game?

DREW BREES: We all kind of have our routine. We all have things that we do. Maybe not as we're leaving the locker room but as we're on the field, just kind of before the game. So something that gets everybody kind of ready to play.

Q. Taking on a defense of this caliber, what kind of peace of mind do you have as a quarterback knowing that Deuce McAllister is not only behind you but playing exceptionally well the last five or six weeks?

DREW BREES: Well, I think it just adds a whole nuther element to what we're doing as an offense. We want to be balanced. I think when you're balanced you're hard to defend. Because defenses have to declare what they are going to try to stop – are they going to try to stop you through the air or on the ground. When you're able to be effective with both and able to have each one set up the other, then I feel like that puts you in a position to really control the game, to control the tempo and all those things. When we're at our best as an offense is when we're balanced and we control the tempo of what we're doing.

Q. Drew, to reach this game and the magnitude of it, how tough is it to flip off the TV, the film machine at night, or in this case the DVD machine, and not look for more maybe than what you've done in the past?

DREW BREES: You know, I think everybody thinks that the bigger the game, maybe the more time you have to put in, the harder you have to try. I mean that's really not the case. I think we've all worked extremely hard to get to this point and you don't want to fall into the trap of trying to do too much.

I think you stick with your routine. I think it's okay to maybe watch that blitz reel one more time or maybe get that one extra rep in the weight room, just for good measure.

But for the most part, I think for me this entire week has just been go through my routine, make sure that I get everything done that I need to get done, and that makes me feel confident so that when I go out there on game day it's just -- I've put it in my head so many times, it's just putting it into fruition.

Q. Can you put in perspective how unlikely it was for all of you to be in the

position you are, from a Super Bowl, through a coaching staff change, you underwent major shoulder surgery, Deuce coming off a major knee surgery?

DREW BREES: It's not time to reflect yet. We still hopefully have a few more games to look back on. Talk to me in a few weeks. A lot of us were brought together for a reason. I think you look back to a year ago and Coach Payton was just getting hired here; and obviously looking at this, kind of evaluating the situation and starting to put together a plan, I was still thinking I was going to be a Charger. Deuce coming off the knee, obviously for a running back, that being very tough.

Reggie thinking he's going to be a Houston Texan. You name it. Marcus Colston, probably not knowing if he's going to be playing football. So it's pretty interesting the way we've all been brought together here and the way things have played out.

But, hey, like I said earlier, you put a good group guys together and maybe a plan from the man upstairs and just maybe it was all destiny.

Q. Drew, if you could hand pick the weather for this weekend, what would you choose?

DREW BREES: 29 and snowing. How about that? I should be a weatherman.

HEAD COACH SEAN PAYTON

Q. Sean, wanted to ask you, when did you notice that Drew started to feel comfortable coming off the shoulder surgery?

COACH SEAN PAYTON: Well, the first week and a half of training camp he was probably throwing about 80 passes a day; he wasn't 100 percent at that time. I would say as we got into the preseason, we felt a lot better about his progress. And I don't know which game specifically, but once we got into the preseason, you started to see a little bit more of the velocity that you were looking for. And he would be able to specifically answer at this time he felt he was 100 percent. But early in training camp he was still gaining his strength back and was still just operating on one practice really 80 throws.

But I would say probably a month into training camp, or three weeks into training camp,

you begin to see the progress. And the surgery he had was significant. And on your throwing arm, throwing shoulder, he was able to, during the summer, do a great job with his rehab and I don't think really suffer any major hiccups or setbacks that kept him from throwing on time. He just gradually, gradually got better and I know he worked extremely hard at that.

But it took him a while. And I would say this, that the doctors were right on when they talked about when they thought he would begin to start throwing, when they thought he'd be at 100 percent. In other words, we didn't ever feel like he was three weeks behind or a month behind or two weeks ahead. I think if anything he was ahead of where most people would have been with the procedure he had.

So it was getting through the early part of training camp and monitoring to make sure that there was nothing that he did that would set him back that would hurt him at the start of the season.

Q. Did you have to adjust your play book at all with him in terms of what he could or couldn't do or what you would have --

COACH SEAN PAYTON: You know, I think the adjustment was more in the scheduling early on in training camp. Just making sure that we weren't throwing him too much. Maybe we bring another quarterback to training camp. I don't recall ever thinking from a scheme standpoint because of an injury that we were changing what we were doing. We would always look to adjust our scheme because of the player and what his strengths and weaknesses are. But I think he's done a good job throwing the football down the field.

I don't have it in front of me, but I know he's done a good job of getting it down the field, yards per completion; all the statistics have helped us to put us in this position.

Q. It seems like this playoffs, the final four, you have some of your high profile quarterbacks and it's not like that every single year. Just how important is it to have solid play behind your quarterback this deep into the playoffs?

COACH SEAN PAYTON: I think one of the reasons you're deep into the playoff is because you had solid quarterbacking throughout the regular season. I think that I've said this before

that position touches the ball 60, 70 times a game and there's decisions that go on.

He's someone that when I say he, the position is someone that can lose games as quickly as any other position in sports.

In Drew's case, he's someone that's provided not only all the things for us from an execution standpoint and someone that we think is accurate, does a good job reading defenses, but I think he's been an exceptional leader and I think it's important to have good play at that position to be successful and that would be no different as it pertained to the off season either, or as it pertained to the post season either.

Q. Coach, are you aware of what this team's success has meant to the city of New Orleans and how that was motivating this team as you go into this NFC championship game?

COACH SEAN PAYTON: Well, we've talked a lot and probably answered a lot of questions about the importance of the relationships of this city and the relationship of this team with this city, and I think at the start of the season we just talked a little bit about the first thing that we could do was to provide a better product, do a better job of winning more football games, and outside of all the things that a player might be interested in doing or someone from the organization in regards to charity work or contributions that improving this team and playing better football was the first way we could help.

I think that ownership's done a great job. Mr. Benson, management, Mickey Loomis, in taking a leadership position and being a part of the recovery process.

There's still obviously a lot that has to go on in this city and there's a lot of areas where I would say we're behind.

That being said, the relationship between this city and this football team prior to even Katrina has been pretty significant and been pretty strong and for me not being from this area until we moved here, you can't appreciate that.

And I think the fit right now, especially right now after everything has happened has been pretty good.

So it's still about playing football. It's not about all those other things outside of football right now, and yet I think we all recognize all those other things that are taking place.

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