

## **INDIANAPOLIS COLTS POOL REPORT**

**February 2, 2007**

**BY PETER KING**

**Sports Illustrated**

DAVIE, Fla.—A minor injury bug hit the AFC Champion Indianapolis Colts Friday, two days before the NFL title game. Defensive end Robert Mathis, the 2006 Colts' sack leader, left their final full pre-Super Bowl XLI workout with back spasms and was placed on the injury report as probable. It was not immediately apparent how Mathis tweaked his back, but coach Tony Dungy said he didn't think Mathis would miss Sunday's game with Chicago because of the tender back.

"He'll be fine," Dungy said after the Colts' third practice at the Miami Dolphins practice facility, a one-hour, 34-minute workout conducted in 86-degree heat. "He left [practice] as a precaution."

In addition, both Colts cornerbacks are battling injuries. Right corner Jason David, who started all 16 games during the season, missed practice with a nagging abdomen injury that has troubled him off and on this year. The Colts added David to the injury report as probable. Starting left cornerback Nick Harper missed practice for the third straight day with an ankle sprain, and Dungy said Harper's availability would be a gametime decision.

"We decided it didn't make any sense for him to go out and try to practice today," said Dungy. "We'll wait to see how Nick feels on Sunday at the stadium."

Two other Colts did not practice Friday, but neither is expected to miss Super Bowl XLI. Dungy said he planned to give safety Bob Sanders and guard Ryan Lilja the day off to rest, and though Sanders is still listed as questionable, both are virtually certain to start Sunday.

On a hot, blustery day (winds blew from the south gusting up to 25 miles per hour) that played havoc with kicker Adam Vinatieri's field-goal attempts and Hunter Smith's punts, the Colts had their normal Friday game rehearsal. Vinatieri and Smith, along with special-teams coach Russ Purnell, adjourned to the practice bubble next to the fields for 20 minutes of weather-free work.

In addition, Friday is the day Peyton Manning breaks in the footballs for the coming game, and he and the Colt ballboys and equipment staff were busy because of the special football rules for the Super Bowl. Instead of having 12 footballs available for each offensive team, as is the case during the regular season, the NFL mandates that 54 balls be ready to be put in play during the Super Bowl. It's thought that only a dozen or so will be used, but the Colts have to work the balls in anyway, so Manning and the Colts staff worked before and after practice to break the balls in.

Dungy will bring the Colts back to the Dolphins facility 27 miles north of Miami for one more short walkthrough practice Saturday at noon. He chose not to have the team work at Dolphin Stadium because "we never work out at the stadium on Saturday, and there was no reason to change our routine."

Dungy invited friend and two-time Indianapolis 500 winner Helio Castroneves to practice Friday and had him talk to the team for five minutes afterward. Castroneves' message, Dungy said, was to believe in your crew. "That's a good message for us. Since

he's won the big one, I thought he would be a good person to talk to our team, since we're trying to win the big one. He talked to the team about sticking together and getting it done.''

The Colts coach was visibly happy to hear the news about Brett Favre's decision to return for the 2007 instead of retiring. "It's great to see Brett come back," Dungy said. "You always want to see competitors stay in the game when they are still able to play. That's good news.'"