



COLTS CHASING HISTORY & ANOTHER LOMBARDI TROPHY

The **INDIANAPOLIS COLTS** are a franchise steeped in tradition. By bringing home the team's first Lombardi Trophy since 1970 with a Super Bowl XLI victory – the city of Indianapolis' first major professional sports league championship – the 2006 Colts added another championship chapter to the team's already thick history book.

In fact, the Colts' Super Bowl win is the perfect punctuation mark on one of the most successful runs by any team in NFL annals. In 2007, Indianapolis can become the first team in NFL history to win at least 12 regular-season games in five consecutive seasons. Last year, they joined the Dallas Cowboys (1992-95) as the only other franchise to accomplish the feat four years in a row.

Another common theme between the mid-'90s Cowboys and current Colts is excellence at the quarterback position. **PEYTON MANNING** is the unquestioned leader of the Colts, much in the same way Pro Football Hall of Famer **TROY AIKMAN** was the keystone of the Cowboys' championship teams.

Though conventional wisdom seems to be that sustained success is harder than ever to maintain in the modern NFL, Aikman believes it's not impossible to keep a winner together.

"There was a time when I thought it was very hard to win consistently in the NFL today with the salary cap system and the player movement we see year in and year out," says Aikman. "Those mechanisms make it harder to hold teams together. But on the other hand, if you look at the success teams like Philadelphia, New England, and now Indianapolis have enjoyed, it's not impossible to keep it going. The biggest difference with those teams is talent evaluation. If you're making smart decisions about keeping the right veterans and drafting well, you have a good eye for talent."

Looking back on the success his teams enjoyed, Aikman points to not only the rare blend of talent on the Cowboys' roster, but also owner **JERRY JONES'** foresight and willingness to sign those players to long-term deals.

"One of the keys for us was definitely locking up our core group of players," says Aikman. "Jerry did a great job of that with **EMMITT SMITH, MICHAEL IRVIN, DARYL JOHNSTON, LARRY ALLEN** – all those guys signed long-term deals. We did the same thing with defense, too. If we hadn't done that as early as we did, our run might have been shorter."

It's clear the Colts have taken a similar approach to their cornerstone players. Although they haven't been able to hang on to every star, Manning, wide receivers **MARVIN HARRISON** and **REGGIE WAYNE**, center **JEFF SATURDAY** and defensive end **DWIGHT FREENEY**, among others, have signed long-term deals during the Colts' recent run of success.

"They've made good decisions on the guys they've kept," says Aikman.

The next challenge for the Colts is to keep winning now that they have the "defending Super Bowl champion" bull's-eye on their backs. Aikman, for one, thinks the Colts can do just that.

"We came out of nowhere and won a Super Bowl," says Aikman. "But with the Colts, I don't think they will notice a change in what they see week in and week out like we did. They've had a target on their back for a few years now because of what they've been able to accomplish. Teams know how prolific the Colts are offensively. They know how good Peyton Manning is. So they've already gone through that stage, even though they just won their first Super Bowl together."

Having a leader like Manning in the huddle is a luxury, but the Colts have also benefited from the calming influence of having head coach **TONY DUNGY** on the sideline. The pre-Dungy Colts enjoyed a high level of success with Manning at the helm, but the team reached its apex when Dungy came into the fold.

Since Dungy was hired in 2002, the Colts have posted a record of 60-20 (.750), which makes the Manning-Dungy duo the third-winningest quarterback-head coach tandem in the NFL since 1970 (minimum 50 games).

As long as those two pieces of the puzzle are in place, Indianapolis is in a prime position to continue its recent run.

"The main objective of every franchise is to put a Super Bowl-caliber team on the field, and the Colts have done that over the past few years," says Aikman. "They were right there competing and in the playoffs. They've done a good job of holding it together."

The top five quarterback-coach tandems in winning percentage since 1970 (minimum 50 games):

TEAM	QUARTERBACK	COACH	W-L-T	PCT.
Oakland Raiders	Ken Stabler	John Madden	60-19-1	.756
Chicago Bears	Jim McMahon	Mike Ditka	46-15-0	.754
Indianapolis Colts	Peyton Manning	Tony Dungy	60-20-0	.750*
New England Patriots	Tom Brady	Bill Belichick	70-24-0	.745*
Dallas Cowboys	Roger Staubach	Tom Landry	84-29-0	.743

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