

***New Orleans Saints Coach Sean Payton***  
***Monday, January 22, 2007***

**Opening Statement:** *Despite our late arrival from Chicago due to the weather conditions, it was unbelievable to see the turnout at the airport and the number of people who waited. It was cold. The reception we received from the fans was representative of the reception we received all season from them. We are grateful for it. Their resolve and loyalty to this team is certainly felt in the locker room and throughout the organization. We appreciate that. I know the players, coaches and everybody on that flight that stepped off the plane and drove through the streets of people were impressed and grateful. I want to thank the fans for all of their support this season. I said last night as the season's finished now, this game will take a while to get over, but there is still a lot of work and a long ways to go for this region. However in living here for a year, the resolve of the people in this area is unparalleled. It's important that they know it's not going to be easy, but over a period of time this city will be better than it ever was. I thank the fans on behalf of the team and the organization. We look forward to getting back in that game and getting into the biggest game of them all. It's not easy. We're starting our work in the off-season here. I just read where Bill Parcells retired. I think it's only appropriate in my case to thank a guy who's a Hall of Fame coach and one of the best coaches that's ever worked in our league. I know he'll be missed, not only by the Cowboys, but by everyone who's associated with our league and who has worked with him. He's been an important part of my development. I was fortunate enough to have three good years with him. We wish him well. I had a chance to visit with him briefly a few minutes ago. He's had an amazing career.*

**Q:** *Did you call Parcells to wish him luck?*

**A:** *No, I called him about something else and he shared with me what he was planning on doing. Since then it's been announced. I was actually calling to discuss a couple of meeting ideas.*

**Q:** *Do you expect to see your name floated for that job?*

**A:** *No. We're like players. We're under contract. I'm happy to be here under contract with New Orleans. This is the spot for me.*

**Q:** *Do you expect some of your assistants to be considered for promotions in other locations?*

**A:** *First, I feel like I have a great staff. I can't thank them enough for their energy and efforts this season. Anytime they have an opportunity to further their careers, I will be the first to help in anyway. I think that's a good sign to have those problems that come up every year. It generally means that you're hiring the right people and you're having success. When I first started putting this staff together, you think of some of the coaching trees in this league like (Bill) Parcells, Mike Holmgren or what you see in this Super Bowl with Tony Dungy and Lovie Smith, but the one thing that's common is that those*

*trees have had success and people have come to hire their assistant coaches. Someday, 15 or 20 years from now you can look back on this staff and see a number of head coaches. When that time comes for a number of these guys, I don't know, but when you try to hire each assistant coach, you keep in mind if he is a good teacher, his organizational skills. You ask yourself if he will help his position group, be a good leader and if he has good character. I think in the case of our staff, I would say yes to all of those questions. This is the time of the year where some of that stuff arises and we'll deal with that accordingly, but I really want what's best for the assistant coaches and his career. That's the approach that I think is the right approach to take.*

**Q: How did you see the Michael Lewis fumble based on the replays and challenge?**

*A: I think the explanation I received was a fair one. The video replay that he had seen was one in which he (official) wasn't able to capture the knee as it pertained to when the ball came out. They're doing their best. It was replayed. I know that we spent an inordinate amount of time on it. It didn't work out. Mondays after losses always talk about why it happened and who's to blame. Sometimes, Mondays after losses don't pay enough credit to the team that won. Credit Chicago. Lovie's (Smith) done a great job with that team. They played every well yesterday. They hustled to the ball and made the plays when they needed to. There were a number of things looking back that I'm wrestled with through the night and this morning. You get back up and get back to work. You don't lose sight of what happened and you hope that you can draw on that experience the next time we are in the NFC Championship game and then onto the Super Bowl. I told the players that after the game.*

**Q: Did you see the safety as a turning point in the game?**

*A: There was a sequence in the third quarter where I thought we had some momentum. We had just scored and (Reggie) Bush had just scored on the long touchdown. We forced the three and out and had a decent drive. On a run, Mike Karney put us down to about the 29 (yard line). That three and out really hurt. It was a field goal. We were a little bit further than we wanted to be for John (Carney) at that point, so Billy (Cundiff) kicked it. If there is one series I wrestle with myself as a play-caller, it would be that sequence of when we are at the 29 and maybe punching it a little bit closer. I think that there was an opportunity to go ahead. We weren't able to. Consequently, they ended up punting. Brad Maynard did a great job of pinning us back. I would say that within that seven or eight minute time block, there was a chance to take advantage of the momentum and we came up short. Right there I think was a critical point. I think Chicago had given up a couple of big plays, but had played pretty well defensively. I wouldn't argue with that.*

**Q: What will you remember the most about this season?**

*A: There's so much (to remember). You'll never forget the group of guys in the locker room that put this team together, starting in the off-season, going to Millsaps and then heading into the season with a lot of questions. There were a lot of new faces on the roster. I don't think it would be possible to forget the people and the fans in this city.*

*With each home game, each away game, each visiting hotel, restaurants and wherever you came in touch with the people who have seen this team play for a long period of time, I began to appreciate the importance of this team to these people. Those are memories that you'll have forever. The Monday night game's one, but there are a number of games. I think in the end, it's not the games, but it's the people. It's the people on the playing field. It's the people that follow this team. It's the people that cover this team. It's the people in this building that you have. In 10 or 12 years from now, you'll remember the 2006 season. Those games will start running together. They already do for me. But the stories leading up to those games and the work that it took leading up into those games, such as the amount of time we spent in mini-camp and the draft and the time we spent in June and July are the things that you'll always remember.*

**Q: Will you wrestle with the number of running attempts your team made in the game?**

*A: The challenge with that each time is that obviously you want to establish your running game, but when the turnovers come the time of possession switches. The snaps become fewer. It becomes magnified. With more snap and with a longer time of possession come more plays and more opportunities to run and pass. With less (snaps and shorter time of possession) comes less (plays and opportunities). I definitely would have liked to establish our running game more last night. I did feel that we had some looks that were going to make it difficult. There were still some times that you look at it and see where this would have been a great opportunity to hand it to Deuce (McAllister) one more time. But, when you reflect back and look at some of the losses we had this year, the same can be said about a couple of games. It gets away from you and you kind of go back and forth. When we closed the gap to a two point lead and had a chance there at their end. Right after that is when it began to get away from us. It's disappointing and frustrating and you hope to learn from it.*

**Q: Was that the point where you might have adjusted your play calling?**

*A: The drive that I'm wrestling with is the drive where we stopped at the 29-yard line. I was proud of the effort last night by all our guys. It's tough to finish like this in such an important game, but to have had the opportunity to play in that game was pretty amazing for this team. Credit this team. It's tough.*

**Q: What do you think this team will take away from this experience next time they are in a similar situation?**

*A: I think that you have to establish a foundation and I think we've been able to do that. I think we have some good young players that have played significant roles for us. We have a good group of veteran players. There's a mix in that locker room that's fit well. They've put the team first, every one of them. Chemistry and all of those things that you look to build in a team changes a little bit each year, because the rosters change a little. You're always looking for that type of environment. It's hard to put a handle on it sometimes, but I do think that there's a good foundation for us to build on. I think that the experience on that game, we'll be able to build on. I don't think that you can pick up where you left off*

*either. I think that beginning in a couple of weeks the free agency period evaluation begins. Our people are already working on it now in pro personnel. That is followed by the combine. You turn the page and turn the calendar to the next month leading up until the draft, the mini-camps, and the spring mini-camp. Those are the things that are ahead. I will be important for us, the players and the coaches to get away as well. We'll be coaching in the Pro Bowl in a couple weeks. It will be a good break for a lot of people.*

**Q: When will you start evaluating the current roster?**

**A:** *It will start this week. We'll begin to evaluate the position groups. We'll evaluate each player. It's pretty common in our league in the week after the season to almost put closure on the year and try to clean up any of the work from the games you just played. Some weeks we were on short weeks, so we might not have turned in a full grade, but you try to spend time on your own team, your own free agents and the free agent pool and then the draft. Those will all be things we'll do here in the next two months.*

**Q: Can you discuss what Charles Grant and Joe Horn mean to the team?**

**A:** *Both of those guys have been awfully important to our success this season in different ways. Charles had an outstanding year at defensive end. I know for Joe, it was disappointing, because he's been injured for the latter half of the season. Those are guys that provide good leadership, are well respected in this locker room and there are a number of guys that we feel that way about. This team's won so many games together that in the case of a game like yesterday, where we lost, I think every guy in that room would say that we lost together. In regards to commenting about any free agents, now's not the time.*

**Q: Are you entering a better situation than usual for a team based on the low number of starters that are impending free agents?**

**A:** *I think that might be a little bit smaller than normal. I think if you went around the league and looked at the other rosters, you might say that the number of unrestricted free agents that we have who are starters might be a little bit smaller than it has been in the past. Those players have all played an important part of what we've been able to accomplish. When you've been able to get going like this and you're having a season like we're having, as a coach and as a player, you become blind as to who the rookie is, who the veteran is, who is the player in the last year of his contract, who the player is that was brought back after he was waived. None of that really matters. You just know that you're counting on that guy next to you and you're counting on your coaches and your players to play their best in the next game. The fact of the matter is that the time is on us and free agency is coming up. The process of evaluating and making those decisions, we'll address in the future. Those guys have been a big part of our success.*

**Q: Are all of your assistants under contract?**

**A:** *No, but I think that there is a correct approach. Outside of the league allowing an assistant to take a job as a head coach without permission, they don't allow (permission to interview with another team for an assistant's position). But that doesn't mean the club wouldn't give permission. Sometimes when you look at a situation with an assistant coach, if it truly is a job where he has a chance to improve where he's at from a coaching standpoint, such as a coordinator's position for instance, I'm not going to hold somebody back from doing that. That's just the approach that I would take. Everyone's under contract. We finished our first year.*

**Q:** *Will your family make the trip to the Pro Bowl with you?*

**A:** *I think so.*

**Q:** *Is it a tough transition to make in terms of your in-season coaching mode to coaching the Pro Bowl?*

**A:** *I don't think the hard thing about it is going to Hawaii for a week. The hard thing about it is that it generally means you just lost the AFC or NFC Championship game.*

**Q:** *Are you going to have two mini-camps?*

**A:** *We're going to have what the league allows us. In your first year (with a new coaching staff), the league allows you a bonus one. We'll have the rookie camp, the main mini-camp which I always put back to the end of May or early June followed by the OTA's. I might push the off-season workout program, which usually starts in the second week of March, back a couple of weeks because of where we're at now. You're looking at the off-season program, the rookie camp two weeks after the draft and then you're looking at the mini-camp followed by your organized team activities and I have to lay all of that out right now in the next week.*

**Q:** *Is there any specific positions you will be looking at in free agency or the draft?*

**A:** *Nothing specific right now. We will certainly have a plan in place. We'll make decisions in regards to the players. It would be too early to speculate now.*

***New Orleans Saints General Manager Mickey Loomis***

***Thursday, January 18, 2007***

***Q: Can you talk about the possibilities of the Saints playing the NFL game in London?***

***A:*** *No. That's the furthest thing from our minds right now. Obviously, the league and owners have voted to play a regular season game overseas and certainly we'll be considered for that. At some point we'll need to do that, whether it's this year or in the future, I just don't know.*

***Q: Has this season exceeded your expectations?***

***A:*** *It would depend on what my reference point would be. If we're talking about last January, then it has exceeded my expectations a great deal, but if we are talking about late September or October then not as much. I kind of felt like coming out of training camp we had a chance to have a pretty good offense. Obviously, we had some questions about our defense. Our coaches, including Gary Gibbs, have done an outstanding job with our defense.*

***Q: Can you talk about how difficult last season was?***

***A:*** *Obviously, we have come a long way from last season. Last season included a lot of adversity for our organization and it's gratifying to see the people in our building and our communities enjoy the success that we've had. The satisfaction I get is from seeing the impact our success has on the people close to me.*

***Q: Can you talk about the possibility of winning the Executive of the Year Award and what that would mean to the organization?***

**A:** *It's a great honor. I would appreciate the recognition, but it really should be the front office of the year award. I had a lot of help with Russ Ball, Rick Mueller, the scouting staff, Rick Reiprish, Mr Benson and obviously Sean Payton. The decisions we make are group decisions, so it's a little bit embarrassing to be recognized as an individual. We're appreciative of it and it beats the alternative.*

**Q:** *Can you talk about what this week has been like for you so far?*

**A:** *It's been crazy. It's been great. There is a lot of work and a lot of things going on. Our timetable for the offseason gets a little stretched and we're going to have a lot of work to do when our season is over, but hopefully that won't be for a few more weeks.*

**Q:** *Can you talk how the organization arrived at this point?*

**A:** *We have great people in the building. They were here last year and they have been here for a while, so I think they understood what the task was going to be. We were lucky enough and fortunate enough to come across a group of people, players and coaches, which embraced the circumstances that we had here in New Orleans. We had people who didn't shy away from the challenge; Sean Payton and Drew Brees for example. Coaches on our staff who had opportunities else where were able to look past some of the surface problems we have here in the region and on this team and see that it was a good opportunity.*

**Q:** *Can you talk about this being a team of destiny?*

**A:** *I don't know what that means. I think Chicago feels like they are a team of destiny. We have a good football team and you don't win games with destiny, you win with playing good football. I think our players and coaches have done that.*

**Q: Was luck involved in this season?**

**A:** *We didn't have to draft Reggie Bush, we could have taken another player, but then people would have accused us of not being very smart. We had to be prepared and opportunity will come along. We have had some fortunate things happen, every team does. It seems like we had some unfortunate things happen last year.*

**Q: Can you talk about how detail-oriented Coach Payton is?**

**A:** *He has a great capacity to look at every item. He pays attention to every item, no matter how large or small, and it's not just an occasional deal for him, he does it every day. We felt the sense of that from the very first time we met him and obviously that's carried through. It's good that the players see that as well.*

**Q: Can you talk about the success you've had at the linebacker position?**

**A:** *I think the credit for our defense goes to the coaches and obviously the players. We signed Scott Fujita in free agency, he was a guy coach Payton and Gary Gibbs were very familiar with from Dallas. Scott Shanle we got late from Dallas and Mark Simoneau even later in the trade with Donte' Stallworth. I think it's a credit to those players that they were able to come in play at the level that they have played pretty quickly. They have a great coach in Joe Vitt and they don't get enough credit to be honest with you.*

**Q: Can you talk about how some people may view this franchise as a model for reconstruction?**

**A:** *I don't know that. I don't know if a player of Drew Brees' character is going to be available at that position each year. I don't know if you're going to be able to attract a head coach the caliber of Sean every year. As a first-year head coach he has been remarkable. I don't think there are any secrets here. We didn't uncover and secrets here, we were just lucky in some instances and good in others. I don't think there is any magic here.*

**Q:** *What did you see in Jahri Evans and Marques Colston that other people didn't see?*

**A:** *I don't know that other people didn't see it. We just had the opportunity to draft them during the second day. We targeted six or seven guys on that second day and we had some picks, so we were going to get a handful of guys. Jahri was a result of some hard work and Jim Monos who's father was connected as a coach to Jahri. In Colston's case that was just good work of our area scouts. We saw him at an all-star game. We weren't geniuses in that deal or we would have taken him on the first day in the second round or third round. He has exceeded our expectations and that is a credit to his position coach Curtis Johnson and Marques himself who has worked really hard to have the type of success he has had this season.*

**Q:** *Did you expect to see so many new faces on the roster this season?*

**A:** *I think in any given year, if you don't change your coaching staff, you are going to have 15-20 new faces on your roster. That is just the nature of free agency and the game we have today. If you have a coaching change then that number is going to go up into the 20-25 range. We had a few more than that, 27 new players I think, I didn't think it was an inordinate amount considering we made a coaching change. What is surprising is that when you have*

*that many guys come in they can gel together and play as well as we have.*

***Q: Do you sit down and formulate a plan on what you're going to say to free agents in regard to Hurricane Katrina aftermath?***

***A:*** *We spent a lot of time thinking about how we were going to approach coaches and how we were going to approach players in regard to our circumstances. Ultimately we decided that we were going to show all the warts- we were going to show them exactly what happened here. Our feeling was what they saw on the news was a little more sensationalized than what was actually going on. I don't mean to say we don't have serious problems- we do. But, there are areas in the city that are still pretty good. So, we wanted to highlight those and explain what the issues were and what the problems were and how they were going to improve. That's what we did with the coaching staff and the free agent players. We made a good first impression, but at some point we made sure we went to the areas that were devastated so they could see that first hand and see the magnitude and issues that we had. At the same time, we went downtown and we to some of the great restaurants in the city to make sure they understood this was a viable city in a lot of areas.*

***Q: Did you get more questions about Katrina or football when talking with potential free agent players?***

***A:*** *We had some of each. People were concerned about school systems and medical services. We had a lot of questions about what the impact of Katrina was on everyday life and that's what we tried to communicate. I think the questions were split 50-50.*

***Q: Can you talk about the possibility of John Carney being inducted into the Hall of Fame when his career is over.***

**A:** *I hope so. John has been a great player for a long time. He was a great player in San Diego and when I was in Seattle he made a lot of kicks against us that broke our hearts. I don't know what the criteria is for kickers to be inducted, but John is certainly up there.*

**Q:** *What could you tell about this team after the win on the road in Green Bay?*

**A:** *We were resilient. We started that game off with some bad things and some turnovers. We weren't able to come back from adversity the last couple of years, so that tells you a lot right there about your team. No one pointed fingers everyone just did their job and we were able to do that a number of times during the season. Our game against Philadelphia for us early in the season was a milestone because they had been playing so well at the time, and were recognized as one of the better teams in the league. The Atlanta game was a milestone because there was a lot of emotion in that game and sometimes you can play at a higher level than your opponent when emotional level and energy level is higher.*

**Q:** *What was the plan going into the draft before you knew Reggie Bush would fall past Houston?*

**A:** *I would rather not say what we had intended on doing. It would have been good though.*

**Q:** *Why did you choose to target Scott Fujita in free agency?*

**A:** *We felt like we needed help at linebacker and we had Sean's experience with Scott. We knew he was an intelligent player and a reliable guy. Not only was Scott a quality player, but we also felt like we had a good chance of signing him because of his relationship with those coaches. Sometimes in free agency you need to go after the guys you can get, not just go after anyone and*

*everyone particularly in our circumstance. We had good grades on him as a player. I think he's had an opportunity to make big plays here and he's made big plays in the past. We're not surprised by Scott's success.*

***Q: How well has Coach Payton handled the discipline aspect of the team this season?***

***A: I think it's difficult for coaches, but he's done an excellent job obviously, and if you ask the players they will tell you they have responded to it. They understand what's necessary and why it's necessary and they have responded to it.***

***Q: If you didn't have Drew Brees before the draft last year would have you been concerned about acquiring a quarterback?***

***A: Absolutely. We needed to address that position and it's something Sean and I talked about from the very beginning. You either do it in free agency or you do it in the draft. If we hadn't been able to sign Drew then we would have had to address that in the draft.***

***Q: Was is after the win over Philadelphia during the regular season the moment you realized that this team was a Super Bowl contender?***

***A: I don't know if I would put it like that, but I felt like we had a real chance to make the playoffs. I don't know if you're thinking we are going to go to the Super Bowl, but you do think we have a pretty good team that's won some close games and we have an opportunity.***

***Q: Did you think that you would have trouble attracting free agents and coaches to New Orleans?***

**A:** *Initially, I thought we may have some trouble. As it turned out a lot of credit goes to Sean and his reputation and the things he does. He attracted a number of high-quality assistants and deserves much of the credit.*

**Q:** *Who's decision was it to move Jammal Brown from right tackle to left tackle?*

**A:** *That's ultimately a coaching decision. When we drafted Jammal our intention all along was to play him at right tackle for two or three years and then move him to left tackle. It was always in the plan, but Sean and his staff decided to move him to left tackle and it's worked out.*

**New Orleans Saints Coach Sean Payton**  
**Thursday, January 18, 2007**

**Q: How difficult is it to put together a coaching staff in this league when it is your first time as a coach and you are trying to do it in a hurry?**

**A:** It's very important. Depending on the year, it can be more or less challenging. I think I was somewhat fortunate because there was a lot of turnover in one period of time last year. That frees up a little bit of the pool in which to choose from. However, the challenge now is that with coaches under contract with their teams, it's really no different than players. Unless a coach has worked off of the last year of a contract, the club does not have to allow him permission to interview with your own club regardless if it's a promotion. The only decision the club has to allow the coach a right to interview is if he is going from an assistant to a head coach. Outside of that, you're either on the last year of your contract which is expiring where a prospective coach can interview or the club gives him permission. That's challenging. In my case, I was somewhat fortunate because of the larger pool available and I wasn't afraid to hire some college coaches that knew well, had worked with and felt good about. I think one of the most important steps in the process of turning things around is getting the right staff in place and I think that we have a good group of guys that are excellent teachers. They work hard at it and do a good job of making me look good.

**Q: Can you discuss the hiring of Gary Gibbs and what you think of him?**

**A:** In Gary's case, he had just finished the last year of his contract and I was familiar with Gary having been in Dallas for three years. He was the first guy I hired. It was an important hire, because he was going to be in charge of the defense. He's done a great job. He's someone who's been a head coach before at Oklahoma. He's had a lot of experience being at the major college and professional level. Having been with him for three years, that time gives me a much better grasp of what I'm getting in the hire. I've been very pleased in that and pleased that I was able to hire him last year at this time.

**Q: How important are the roles of Brad Maynard and Robbie Gould in the Bears special teams?**

**A:** I think it's awfully important. I'm familiar with Brad. He was with us in New York when I was with the Giants. Gould came up big in a game last week. You see these games like last weekend's specifically come down to field goals and opportunities to win or not win games. The kicking game is as important as your defense and your offense. That's a big challenge for us. We've spent a lot of time talking about it. All three phases are going to be important in this game. I think our players understand that and I'm sure Chicago does as well.

**Q: Why has Steve Gleason been so successful at blocking kicks?**

**A:** *He has a pretty good knack and understands angles and leverage. He's someone that works at his trade very hard. Obviously the big block he had against Atlanta was instrumental to us getting off to the right start in that game. He's someone that spends a lot of time in what he does. He works extremely hard at it. He's tough and John Bonamego and Greg McMahon have done a good job of getting those guys in position. There's a combination of things when you're able to block a punt or come up with a big play. It's technique, effort and a lot of things.*

**Q:** *Do you feel that the talk about the Saints being a team of destiny discounts the hard work of the coaches and players?*

**A:** *It's not offensive. It's a term that can be used for a few storylines. You have to play the game, you have to play well for four quarters and the best team wins and gets to play in the Super Bowl. That's what happens this weekend.*

**Q:** *Is it easier to coach this team because they play like a team in every sense?*

**A:** *We've tried to put together guys who have good character and put the team first. We're looking for good football players as well. I think that if you're able to put the right group of people together in a locker room that put winning and the team first, it's going to serve you well during the course of the season. It doesn't mean you're going to win every game and doesn't guarantee you're going to win the division, but what it does mean is that when times get tough and there is that momentum swing in the course of a game or a season, you're going to have the right response. That's something we've tried to do this season. We're constantly re-evaluating and looking to tinker with the roster and find the right mix of guys. So far, we've been able to do that. Obviously, there are a lot of people that watch these games. The impact that these players have on our children is enormous. If that can provide a positive experience for parents or for the child itself, that's certainly a positive and you wouldn't ignore that, but I think it starts with hiring the right people. That works the same way for hiring your coaching staff and what you want to do within the organization. The details and the right people are what we tried to sell when it came to free agency and those are the things that we look for as we put this team together during the spring and training camp. The trick is to find the right mix of player and what you're profiling. So far, it's turned out pretty well.*

**Q:** *Did you think that a scenario of a brand new quarterback, your best receiver being hurt for much of the year and using unproven wideouts to be a scenario for a top-ranked offense?*

**A:** *There are a lot of things that go into that. I think what's most important is that we're efficient on offense, that we're able to score, that we're able to convert third downs and protect the football. Credit Drew (Brees) and the players around him including the offensive line. They've done a good job with the protections. Obviously if you're throwing the ball effectively, you must be doing a good job with protections. Drew has a good grasp of what we're trying to accomplish. Some weeks you throw it more than other weeks. I think the things we look for most is improvement from a year ago as to where we*

*were statistically offensively in a number of categories, such as third down, red zone and turnovers. Those are the things that concern me more. Total yardage statistically, sometimes you end up throwing from behind. What's most important is being efficient, protecting the football, doing a good job in the red zone and on third down. Those are the things that we immediately look to improve on each week and certainly in the off-season.*

***Q: Can you talk about what John Carney has done to be one of the most successful kickers in the league?***

***A:*** *He's done this a long time. He's been consistent. I think he takes care of himself. He's in good shape. I think he's a confident player. All of those things like work ethic along with talent are a pretty good recipe for playing for a long time in this league. He's been able to do that and take the highs and the lows. That's what you have to do as a kicker. For him, there's fortunately been a lot more highs. He's someone that's pretty level-headed. He's had an amazing career.*

***Q: Do you tinker with your offense when you face a player like Brian Urlacher?***

***A:*** *I think each week when you gameplan, you begin with the scouting report. You talk about the personnel on both sides of the ball and on special teams. Certainly when you talk about the Chicago Bears defense, one of the first players you talk about is their middle linebacker in Brian Urlacher. He's a fantastic player and provides a physical force inside. He can run extremely well. He's a good leader. He's played very well this season. He's arguably one of the best defensive players in the league. That provides a challenge for us along with the other ten players on that defense that he inspires and there are a number of good players on that defense and that's why they have been as successful as they have all year. That defense has been very consistent and extremely talented. They do a great job within the scheme. Lovie (Smith) and his staff including Ron Rivera have done a great job of installing packages, sticking to it and putting the right pieces in place. Brian's certainly one of those pieces. I was in New York for one of the first games he played mike linebacker when he made the switch early in his career and he has everything you look for in the middle linebacker position. That organization has a pretty rich history at that position.*

***Q: Billy Miller told us that every coach that cut him said that they might have him back and that you were the first to do so. Do you think that you build a special type of relationship with your players?***

***A:*** *In his case, it was the truth. When we released him at the end of training camp, I told him that I wanted him to stay in shape and stay ready. If something happens, I was going to be calling him and bringing him back. It's not just because we know the offense, but we saw enough there, that it was a tough cut no different than when we cut Jay Bellamy right at the end of the preseason who we had to release and bring back. Obviously Jay's playing quite a bit and in Billy's case the same way. It was just the truth. If we had a nick or injury, we were going to bring him back. To his credit, he stayed in shape and he was*

*kind of out there on our short list. That opportunity came for him, he was ready and he's done a good job.*

**Q: Can you discuss the fan reaction in this city compared to some of your other stops?**

*A: I've been fortunate to have been in some pretty good organizations in terms of history. In Philadelphia, the fans there are certainly passionate about their team. In New York with the Giants, there's a long tradition there. There have been a lot of loud crowds in Giants Stadium. The Dallas Cowboys are obviously another team with a lot of tradition. Each city and each team is a little bit different, yet you still find the common characteristics of fans that love their team and coming here to New Orleans, it's amazing to come across people who followed this team through the 70's and the last 20 years. You hear stories of their parents having been at the first game. You become educated a little bit more about this team and how it fits with the city. I've been educated more. The crowds here and the passion they have for us being successful are fantastic. I think it's great to have the support, to have the stadium sold out before the year begins and to have a waiting list for next year. Those are all positive things for the city and positive signs for this fan base, they've been outstanding.*

**Q: In baseball, it is said that good pitching can beat good hitting. In football, have you found that a good offense can stop a good defense?**

*A: I don't know. There are some things you can compare baseball to football with, but I think it's important that Chicago has an offense that is pretty good and I feel like we have a defense that feels they're pretty good. We're not talking about the Bear defense and the Saint offense staying on the field for all sixty minutes and playing a game. Obviously good defense is important in winning championships. Playing smart and playing well on offense is important, as well as doing all the things right on special teams. I think the comparison to baseball is difficult.*

**Q: Do you think your defense has been underrated?**

*A: I think they've done a good job. There are a lot of new faces over there on that side of the ball as well. I think Gary (Gibbs) and his staff has done an excellent job of putting in the scheme and being demanding in regards to what they're looking for. There are a handful of players that have played on that defense a year ago and there are a number of new faces on that defense. I think through the course of the season, they've gained more and confidence. I don't know where statistically they were a year ago, but to finish where they did this year as well as the progress made down the stretch (is impressive). They played one of the better games I've seen a defense play against the Giants at Giants Stadium. They came up big for us last week in the playoff game and I thought they became better and better as the year went on. In Dallas, they played very well. They're a big reason why we're where we are at right now. It's just not about two units. It's just not about the Bear defense and the Saints offense. It's about all three phases for both teams that are important in this game. I think both teams understand that.*

**Q: What has Gary done well this year that you weren't sure about?**

**A:** *I think he and his staff have done a great job of teaching the fundamentals and really working on all the things that help you play good defense, such as tackling, running to the ball, pursuit and being where you need to be. He teaches the specifics, the importance and the exactness of the linemen and assignment. I think Gary works at it extremely hard. The guys on his staff on defense are the same way. I think the players to their credit have responded the right way. We've gotten good play from our defensive ends outside in Will (Smith) and Charles (Grant) and inside at the tackle position we've been able to rotate and keep guys fresh. We've talked a number of times now about the linebackers. I think the back end has played well. Mike McKenzie has played as well as I've seen him play in the last half of this season. When you start playing some down safety defense and put the corners on the island, he's been real good. I think that it's a group effort. There are a lot of guys that you lean on. I think that the improvement we've seen, not just from last year to this year, but from the beginning of the season to where we are now on defense have helped us tremendously.*

**Q: Do you have any input on the defense?**

**A:** *Gary will keep me abreast on what we're doing, but he's in charge of the defense. Gary's no different than coordinators on any side of the ball. He'll have input from his staff. We have a good group of coaches that work with him in that room. I lean heavily on those guys, no different than me leaning on Doug Marrone to handle things when a meeting's going on and I might not be in that meeting to keep me up to speed. Obviously I'm more involved in the offensive meetings than the defensive meetings. I think hiring the right staff and the right group of guys is the first step. I can't say enough about the group I've had. They've done a great job.*

**Q: How do you evaluate the Bears offensive line and what are the keys in stopping the running game?**

**A:** *It starts with being physical and tackling the ball carrier well. They're very good up front. The center's a Pro Bowl player and a leader for them. I think that stopping the run week to week, the same things apply. You need to be physical, hold up the point of attack and get play from the safeties. There's a lot that goes into pursuing the football. There will be a lot that goes into it. They have a solid offense. They pride themselves in being able to run the football. You see it each week. They do a real good job from a scheme standpoint. That's a challenge for us.*

**Saints QB Drew Brees**  
**Wednesday, January 17, 2007**

Q: What do you do to help combat the weather conditions? Do you have any recommendations for teammates when it comes to the weather?

Brees: "I think everyone has played in cold weather before, some more than others. It is just part of the deal. We went up to Pittsburgh earlier this year and it was a little chilly. We have been to other places where obviously you deal with wind or rain or snow or whatever it might be. I think there is still a big emphasis obviously on offense of taking care of the ball and I am not sure of what the weather conditions might be but there is always an emphasis on that."

Q: How has Marques Colston developed throughout this year both on and off the field?

Brees: "He has gotten better every day. He went through a little bit of injury there midseason and missed three or four games and battled back from that. Mentally he plays about four receiver positions so we move him all around and obviously that is tough on a receiver to all of those things, when a guy goes down he might have to move to another receiver position and he has to just snap into the mode. He has done a great job of it. He is a heck of a football player and continues to get better. He is a very quiet guy who goes about his business and gets it done."

Q: Have the injuries to the Bears defense really impact them from earlier in the season?

A: "They are still pretty good. Obviously they were good then and they are still good. Good teams find a way that when guys go down the other guys step in and get the job done and that is probably a product of good leadership and that sort of thing from the other guys on the defense. Also, I think everyone on this level is expected to step in and replace the guy and make sure there is not a lapse in production."

Q: Were you extra motivated coming into this season to prove that you were recovered from your shoulder surgery?

Brees: "I was motivated anyway. Really the Saints were the only team that felt a hundred percent confidence in me that I was going to come back. They had as much confidence in me as I had in myself. That meant a lot and that is the reason that I here."

Q: How much has this community meant to this team and do you play for them? Why did you commit so much to helping rebuild this community?

Brees: "I feel it is such a great opportunity. Obviously for me coming here that was another major reason that I came here. I didn't see this city as a city that I wanted to shy away from because of the situation and circumstances after Katrina. I embraced that as an opportunity to really not only be a big part of this team and this franchise but to really be a guy in the community who would give back and really just do my part. I have just

followed the lead of a lot of the guys on our team, guys like Joe Horn and Deuce McAllister, who were already doing a lot of things. As I have learned about this community and this city you just grow to love it. The people care so much about this place and that just rubs off on you. I love being a New Orleanian and I love where I live, rehabilitating an old house it just fun."

Q: What does it mean to be nominated for the Walter Payton Man of the Year by this team?

Brees: "It is a tremendous honor, when you look at that I know it is not just what you do on the field but predominately what you do off the field as far as community, leadership and character and those types of things. That is a tremendous honor because I know there are a lot of guys on this team that would deserving of that, for them to pick me it is a big honor."

Q: Can the fact that this is the first time for this franchise to be at this point be intimidating? If so how can you prevent that?

Brees: "We are going up against a heck of a team this week and for me offensively it is their defense. We know we have a tough challenge and we know we are going to have to play a great game to get a win so that is our only focus."

Q: Were you concerned if Deuce and Reggie could coexist?

Brees: "I wasn't concerned. I think you look at the two of them and you can tell right away that they are two different types of runners. I think it is a great one-two punch. Obviously what Deuce brings, just as physical as he is and then you throw in a guy like Reggie who can run circles around you but we do so much with Reggie as far as special teams returning punts or splitting him out as a wide receiver, having him catch balls out of the backfield and handing him the ball. We feel like with those two guys as well as the weapons we have on the perimeter that we can give defenses fits."

Q: What did you think when Reggie Bush was available for the Saints in the draft?

Brees: "I was shocked. It was great for us and for me as a quarterback it gave me another weapon."

Q: Will you guys look to run the ball against the Bears since some of their injuries up front?

Brees: "They are still one of the leagues best. What they do so well is they play very patient and I think they lead the league in takeaways and negative plays. I think they thrive on getting you in those third and long situations and play that soft zone and making you throw it underneath and running up and tackling you. They tackle you hard because they are knocking balls out and getting turnovers. I think for us the emphasis is taking

care of the football and getting in third and manageable situations and hold onto the ball and score points. Do all of the things that have gotten us here."

Q: What did Dr. Andrews say about the seriousness of your shoulder injury?

Brees: " He said my shoulder is one in five hundred that he would see in a dislocation like that, pretty rare. He was actually watching the game, so when I called him on Sunday he said he figured I would be calling because it looked pretty nasty. I think we all knew how bad it was but we were all optimistic. He is one of the best surgeons in the world at what he does so his confidence level kind of matched my expectations for how I wanted the reconstruction to go and also my rehab."

Q: What is the coldest game you have played in since high school?

Brees: "Probably a game a couple of years ago in Cleveland there was a blizzard and a wind chill of minus ten. It snowed the entire game and there was like six inches of snow on the field with 20 mile an hour winds just blowing snow sideways the whole game. That was a cold one. A couple of practices that we would go through in college those were right around zero degrees. In the Midwest that is the way it goes."

Q: Do they make a bigger deal out of the weather than it is?

Brees: "I don't think so it is something that you address what the conditions are going to be like. If it is real windy you just manage that if it is real wet or snowing you just manage it. I don't think you should be overly worried about it. I don't think it will stop what we plan to do within our game plan."

Q: Does the weather affect your arms or legs?

Brees: "The only thing I think for a quarterback is grip. That is why you see guys wearing gloves for the snap or to grip the ball to throw it. That is all it is."

## **New Orleans Saints Coach Sean Payton**

**Wednesday, January 17, 2007**

**Q: Can you talk about who missed practice today?**

**A:** Mark Campbell didn't practice today and is listed as questionable with a knee. We anticipate him being able to go tomorrow. Omar Stoutmire did practice. Joe Horn took some of the reps, but missed some of the team reps with a groin, and we'll list him as questionable.

**Q: Can you discuss why you decided to work inside today instead of outside?**

**A:** Like I said before, my biggest concern is the footing. We've played in cold weather. In 2000, I think the last 37 practices we had in New York were indoors and then we played outside. We're kind of in a pretty good routine and I like the routine. We'll adjust accordingly.

**Q: Would you describe today's practice as a normal Wednesday practice?**

**A:** The schedule is the same. We're in a normal workweek. Wednesday is base first and second down with some nickel in there. Tomorrow will be third down and Friday we'll work on some red zone and short yardage. We are in a normal week. We are going to travel Saturday. The players are in their normal week; we have meetings at three o'clock today. We are keeping things exactly the same.

**Q: How are the ticket requests going for you from all the people in Illinois?**

**A:** They are all done. If they haven't heard from me, then it's not good news.

**Q: Can you talk about how the footing and swirling winds put a premium on establishing an effective running game?**

**A:** It puts a premium on ball security. We have quarterback who played in the Big Ten and understands the conditions. We've been on the road earlier in the season, in Pittsburgh and New York, and I think it is what you make of it. You have to make sure you have the right shoes on and get in and out of the cuts and make sure you get adjusted to the surface. I think that's what is important. You pay attention to the wind and field position to determine what type of game you are going to play. Those are the things that are important.

**Q: What's the coldest game you've ever coached in?**

**A:** Giants Stadium in the teens. We played a lot of cold games at Giants Stadium.

**Q: How much does the fact that the Saints have been a rallying point for this city factor into motivation for your team?**

**A:** I think our players' objective is to go play their best and win the game. With that being said, we understand what kind of impact that can have not only on this city, but on this entire region. It's been a relationship that has worked pretty well and it's something that we don't shy away from.

**Q: Do you rally around the fact that you are "America's team" now?**

**A:** We are trying to do our best this week to watch enough film and eliminate all distractions and get ready to play a football game. It's something we've tried to do since the start of the season. Obviously, there are more media requests and attention as you advance each round, but with that being said, the routine and our schedule doesn't change. We understand that having a good practice week and eliminating all distractions is the most important thing to us this week.

**Q: How do you prepare for Devin Hester and how explosive he has been?**

**A:** He is someone you look at and say 'we've got to have a plan in place' because of the threat he possesses. You see that on film and it's easy to convince your players because all they have to do is watch the tape.

**Q: What were the things you were looking for when you were putting together your roster this season?**

**A:** We did a fairly long evaluation process when we arrived. Even as we bring in players they are evaluated the first day they come. We wanted to make sure that we weren't prejudging any players. We wanted to trust our eyes and trust what we saw as coaches regardless of how these players were acquired or how much they make. We were looking for the best guys at their position and the guys we felt had toughness, leadership and character and placed the team first. That began very early in the off-season program and mini-camps that we had leading all the way up to training camp.

**Q: What happened leading up to drafting Reggie Bush?**

**A:** We heard that Houston had signed Mario Williams and that was that. You go through the scenarios that go along with picking second in the draft and you're hopeful that you are going to find a good football player. Our job is to find a way not to be picking second anymore. We had finished our evaluation on Reggie at that point and I think what was important finding a quarterback prior to the draft and the flexibility that gave us when Reggie became available. I think you always have to be somewhat flexible in your personnel and when we drafted Reggie we began to think over some things and find the right fight for our offense. It's something that is always ongoing. Some weeks you may not have a tight end, receiver or fullback so you have to be flexible.

**Q: What was it about Drew Brees that gave you the confidence that he would be successful in New Orleans?**

**A:** The risk was in the injury, so I think the feeling was knowing everything else about the player, including his work habits and commitment that he would do everything they tell him to do in his rehabilitation. He's a guy that would work hard and be patient, so it was more of an investment in the person more than it was in the player. We knew that Drew was a guy who would stay on the plan and that's what happened. You're talking about a guy who has been a winning player in high school and in college. He is a detailed person and he has a lot of those intangibles that you look for in a quarterback.

**Q: You had a chance to coach in Oakland, what made you think New Orleans was the right fit for you?**

**A:** They were two completely different opportunities and after having the chance to meet with Mickey and ownership and recognizing some of the potential here, this job definitely fit. Leaving the second interview, the concerns here were about schools and housing, the same concerns a lot of people have following the hurricane. There were concerns of putting a staff together and determining where the players were going to live during the off-season program. I felt like we could overcome those obstacles and get the right people in place. The focus more for me regarding the Saints was an opportunity that I thought was pretty strong. I don't want to compare every situation to the Oakland opportunity, because they're different. This one provided the things that I was looking for and it worked out.

**Q: How concerned were you about attracting and signing free agents here after Hurricane Katrina?**

**A:** That was a concern. You're not only talking about signing the player you're also talking about signing his family and relocating a lot of people. I think you sell yourself and sell the player on the people in the building, the coaching staff, front office and people in the organization. That was the focus when we started with guys like Scott Fujita or Brees. We felt like we could overcome some of those challenges and that was important.

**Q: Can you talk about your thoughts on how Rex Grossman played last week?**

**A:** I thought in media market such as Chicago, in a playoff game, he played extremely well. I thought he answered the bell in overtime. On third down he came up with the big throw to put them in position to win. That position generally gets too much criticism and too much applause, there are a lot of people around that position that can impact his play in a positive or negative way, but I thought in his case he played exceptionally well and was very impressive.

**Q: How impressed have you been with your players community efforts this season?**

**A:** I think that's important and I think this is an area that can be challenging with distractions and they handled that well. You don't want to have to worry about if a guy is down on Bourbon Street the night before a game. I think we have the right fit and right commitment from these guys.

**Q: Can you talk about how your past playoff experience has helped you this season?**

**A:** This is my fourth time being involved in the postseason and each one is different. You stick to your routine and the attention to detail and all the little things you do as players and coaches to get prepared to play this game. Sometimes things get heightened as you get to this point in the year. We try to stick to our routine and try not to alter the schedule so much that you get out of whack. It still comes down to playing smart football. As you watched the games last weekend, when you get down to the final eight teams or final four teams your margin for error isn't as big because they are all good football teams.

**Q: How important have your two defensive ends, Charles Grant and Will Smith been to this defense?**

**A:** They have been very important to our defense. When you come in and you've got two young players that have played well, it is important. They have been a key to part to what we have been able to do defensively and they continue to be, so it's nice that those guys were here when we arrived.

**Q: Have Grant and Smith really been playing at an elite level?**

**A:** They have been. Will is going to a Pro Bowl and Charles Grant played really well last week.

**Q: How far do you go back with Lovie Smith?**

**A:** Lovie was an assistant coordinator at St. Louis when I was a coordinator at the Giants, and I think we had a handful of games, whether it was pre season or regular season, where it's not uncommon for assistant coaches to get to know other assistants through the Combine, the Senior Bowl. I think he's done a great job and I've got a ton of respect for him. He's been outstanding for that team and for that city. What he's been able to accomplish since he's been there has been fantastic. I know he's well thought on our side of it too. I know his peers think well of him.

**Q: You kept practice normal. You said you'll keep films normal. Have you addressed to the team any of the things that won't be normal this week?**

**A:** Everything's going to be normal this week. Their time with you is going to be the same although there's more people in this room. But the schedule's the same. No one is changing the schedule. The meetings are going to start at three, so the longer you keep me the less time you'll have with them. They're in their routine. I know that you're saying it's an important game, but I don't know what's physically changed in regards to

the schedule. It's the same. Jump on a plane Saturday. Check into the hotel, have a few meetings. Get up Sunday morning and have a pre game meal and then play a game. Obviously there is added distraction, but we've tried to eliminate that as best we can. I think we've done a pretty good job.

**Q: Fred Thomas with his set of injuries. It appears that teams are trying to attack him and exploit that. He was injured early on. Have you taken any steps to try and sure up his confidence ?**

A: I think Fred's a confidence player. I was asked this the other day. Fred has been a big reason why this team has had such a good run. He's leading the league in a lot of categories. He's a big reason why we are playing in the NFC Championship game. He understands the importance of consistent play out there, I think the best thing a corner back like Fred can have as an experienced player is a short memory. You've got to get back out there and get back up. We saw some good players last week and a good offense. He's just got to get back up and start playing again and get ready for the next challenge.

**Q: What has surprised you the most about this team this season and what you've been able to accomplish?**

A: You try to set goals coming into the season, and for me as a young coach, you're not real familiar with how your training camp is going. You hope that you're doing things the right way, but you're waiting for the season to start to see where you stack up against the opponents. There have been a lot of things that have been encouraging. The ability for us to acquire two linebackers a week before the season starts that haven't been here at all. Literally a week before the season starts, and for those guys to come in and start that opening weekend and play as well as they have has been encouraging. I could go through a lot of different players and I don't think that's why you're asking the question. We've had some young guys step up and play well. We've had some injured guys. We've had some guys that weren't on the roster when the season started. Jay Bellamy we brought back. Billy Miller is playing a lot. Terrance Copper was a player that was waived by the Cowboys that we acquired. So, there have been a lot of players outside of the names that we talk about a lot here that have played a role. Your roster isn't always going to be healthy, and you're going to have to sometime count on your depth, and that's been something that I think has helped us get to where we are right now.

*New Orleans Saints RB Deuce McAllister  
Wednesday, January 17, 2007*

**Q: Can you discuss the physical state of the team right now?**

**A:** *It usually takes about three or four days before you recover fully. My legs feel fine. If you have to determine in a week (what level) where you would normally be, I would say seven or eight.*

***Q: How many Saints fans are there in Mississippi and Jackson specifically that are pulling for you and for this team?***

***A: I think there are converted Saints fans as well as lifelong Saints fans. You can't put a number on them. They are so excited for us. I have so many calls from people wishing us congratulations and good luck. I think that considering everything that we went through as a team and as an organization. So many people are pulling for us and we'll take it.***

***Q: What was the biggest game in your career prior to this year's playoffs?***

***A: Probably the biggest game was back in high school. It was our division championship game. A lot of our bowl games were big, but to advance, that was the biggest one up to this point.***

***Q: Is being in this position something you've always dreamt about?***

***A: Every player dreams about making that run and getting into the playoffs. That's one of the goals that I've always had, to be able to get in. Once you're into the playoffs, it's a one game season. I don't look at it any different from that aspect. Probably the one thing about it is if you lose, it's over, but from a preparation standpoint, it doesn't really change a lot.***

***Q: Given the fact that the weather conditions might not be optimum in Chicago, how important is it that you run the ball effectively?***

***A: We're going to try to stay as balanced as possible, regardless of the weather. Unless it gets to a point where we can't throw the ball, that's where we'll rely heavily on the running game, but we're going to try to stay as balanced as possible. It's going to work in both teams' favor. If we can't run it, then we want to be able to take away their run as well. Elements won't just affect us. They'll affect both teams.***

***Q: Can you discussed why your relationship with Reggie Bush is so good and also why the combination of the two of you has worked so well where it might not work on some other teams?***

***A: First of all, I think it's based on the mutual respect that we have for each other. If you can't respect an individual for who they are, it's hard to get along and work with them. The important thing about is that he's been willing to listen, not only to myself, but also to some of the other veteran running backs that we have. I think that a lot of my success has been with him being involved and with him having success as well. I want him to succeed. I look at it in the manner that if he's not playing well or not succeeding then it's really a lot of my fault, because obviously you can look at the talent that he has and I can help him to be a better running back. I'm just trying to help him as much as possible. I like watching him play as well.***

***Q: What were your thoughts when the team first drafted Reggie last April?***

**A:** *The first question you ask yourself is what's going on. Why are the Saints taking another running back, especially this high? Then, I sit down and talk to coach Payton and our general manager Mickey Loomis and they give you the comfort level that everything can work. That gives me a little motivation to continue to hit the weight room, continue to work on my rehab and make sure that I'm 100 percent or as close to 100 percent as possible. Then there can't be any ill feeling towards Reggie, because I have to accept him as well, because he didn't ask for the situation. He's coming into it. He wants to succeed and to come in and do his job well.*

**Q:** *Did you feel a little bit too young to be a mentor?*

**A:** *I'm still young. I still consider myself young, but I'm going to try to help him as much as possible, just because some of the things he's going through, I kind of went through myself with Ricky (Williams) when he was here. I didn't want him to feel like I did sometimes when I was involved and when I was trying to learn the game as a professional as I did when I was a rookie.*

**Q:** *How was Ricky towards you?*

**A:** *Ricky was a good teammate. He was hard to read and understand and to get to know. Once you broke into that barrier that he had up, he was a pretty good guy. As far as learning different things about the game of football, I can't say he didn't teach me a lot, but it wasn't really enough. There was so much more that I felt he could have taught me that I had to learn either later on or on my own.*

**Q:** *On Saturday night, people asked why you didn't get the ball a little more. Did getting cramped up, the prospect of keeping you fresh and getting Reggie Bush some carries play a role in this?*

**A:** *I think it limited it, but at the same point, we didn't want to get out of our main game plan. We felt like we could run the ball once they wore down, but at the same time there were some other things that we felt like we could do to get that separation from them as far as the game was concerned. We were trying to protect the lead there, so you want to run the clock, but at the same time we felt that we could move the ball through the air as well as Reggie having some success whether it was running or with some different passes.*

**Q:** *Have you had a chance to look back and reflect at where you guys are or what you are on the verge of?*

**A:** *You think about it, but it's not going to consume my daily routine. My preparation isn't really going to change. I'm going to do the same thing I've done for the last sixteen or seventeen weeks and what the regular season calls for. Probably the biggest difference is the media coverage and the fact that a lot of your peers will call to wish you good luck*

*and things of that nature. I think if we continue to prepare as a team then it really doesn't change.*

**Q: *What do you see in Chicago's defense?***

**A:** *Speed. That's the thing that jumps out at you. They do a good job of rallying to the ball. There is always one guy that makes the initial contact and then there's three or four guys coming in trying to rip the ball out. They do a good job of trying to create turnovers. I think it starts up front with those guys. They do a good job of keeping guys, whether it's fullbacks or linemen, off of you. Their linebackers make a lot of plays. When you do get somebody up on them, whether it's the fullback or the tight end, they do a good job of shedding it and being able to get an arm on it or being able to make that play.*

**Q: *Is the cold that big of a factor once you are dressed properly?***

**A:** *No, it's just like going outside now. We're just going and playing a game. When you look at and understand and realize what's at stake, then you don't let weather affect you in any way. It's like you're saying, you're one game away from playing for it all, so you're going to tell me that the elements that you really can't control are going to stop you from playing a game. I don't understand it and I don't see how it will affect you.*

**Q: *Is that how your teammates feel as well?***

**A:** *That's how we look at it as a team. We can't tell Mother Nature what to do. If that's what the elements are then that's what it's going to be.*

**Q: *Can you discuss where you played your last bowl game? Did you play it in bad weather conditions?***

**A:** *My last bowl game was up in Nashville. We didn't have snow and it was cold. That was Mississippi State and Texas A&M where it snowed.*

**Q: *Speaking as a sports fan, is the Saints story one of the greatest in sports history?***

**A:** *No, I think there's more. It's one of the greatest stories, but there's still a story to be written. We have to finish the deal off to be the greatest or one of the quote unquote greatest stories, but there are still stories out there to kind of trump this one.*

**Q: *Who did you play in that bowl game in Nashville?***

**A:** *West Virginia.*

**Q: *Which Mississippi high school team did you play in that playoff game you discussed?***

**A:** *Forest High School. We were Morton. We won in overtime 10-7*

**Reggie Bush Transcript**  
**1/17/2007**

Q: How does it feel to be a Saint this season? And helping the team get to the NFC Championship game?

A: "I mean obviously it's been a special season. I couldn't ask for a better situation coming here to New Orleans. And right away, coming here from USC to another program, another organization and just to continue to win. And then, to do it in this city after all that the people here have experienced and gone through and having to endure has been very special, so you know we're excited about this season and just about everything that we've been able to do for these people cause really this whole season has been dedicated to them."

Q: It's going to be a cold weather game and people say that if anyone is going to have a problem on this team it might be you playing in southern California and playing down here. What's your response?

A: "I wouldn't worry about that. You know, I'm just going to play football. You know, cold weather is not going to bother me. You know, it's still a football field. It's still 100 yards. It's still a football. It's not going to change."

Q: Have you played in cold weather?

A: "Yes, I've played in cold weather before."

Q: Reggie, you've been playing for championships all your life. Does it ever get routine?

A: "Never. It never gets routine. It's always special. You know, it's even more special this year. It's my first year in the NFL. So every year, it's my main goal. I only set one goal every year. I'm not big on setting personal goals. I only set one goal and that's to win championships."

Q: Do you think that playing the big games in college helps you with a big atmosphere like this?

A: "I think so. I think it does. It does help me just from being familiar with the hype and everything that's going to play into this game to make it a huge game. Just being familiar with that and coming from college. It really does help."

Q: The success of the team this year has been such a rallying point for the city of New Orleans. It's lifted people's spirits at a time when it really needed that. To what extent has that become a rallying point for this team? A motivating factor for this team?

A: "From the preseason, from game one and from the first time we stepped onto the field as a team, it has been a rallying point for us. We've always talked about just doing this for the city of New Orleans and playing for them and fighting for them, and winning for them. So, this whole season, like I said, has been dedicated to them."

Q: Do you guys ever talk about the effect that you could have on the city?

A: "It's kind of just a known thing. It's just kind of one of those things that it's not talked about too much. Maybe a little bit between the guys in the locker room and stuff like that but not too much. But it's just one of those things that are just known. It's just in the back of your head, and you know it. You just see the effects from when we win how big it lifts these people's spirits."

Q: "Could you talk about your relationship with Deuce and how he's helped you learn the ropes and why it's worked out so well?"

A: "Deuce, just in the way he has played the game, has been a big help. Just seeing him and seeing how he plays the game and how he carries himself. Deuce has been a great role model for me. I couldn't ask for a better person to help teach me and to help guide me in my first year as a rookie in the NFL."

Q: Does the dynamic with him remind you at all of how it was with LenDale White?

A: "Yeah, it does obviously in the way that Deuce is more of the big bruiser type back and I'm looked at more as the scat back with some power. But it is very similar, and it's easy for me to adjust to the situation coming in right away coming from USC and me and LenDale and the way we were used is very familiar to me."

Q: Reggie, when you heard that you were going to wind up here, when that gradually started to happen; did you start to think of Deuce McAllister and think of other things?

A: "Well, I didn't know. There was a lot of uncertainty when I was first drafted about coming here. There was a whole lot of uncertainty. I didn't know even if we were going to be playing in New Orleans. I didn't know if we were going to have a stadium or if it was going to be another season where we would have every game was going to be at a different stadium. So there was a lot of uncertainty for me coming here, and obviously it has just been a blessing from the start. From when I came here and the way the team embraced me and Deuce and the guys. It obviously could have gone the other way with Deuce. He could have felt threatened by it, but Deuce has been a huge help and he has been nothing but a role model for me."

Q: Coach Payton talked about trying to keep this week as normal as possible. Do you have to try and convince yourself that this is just another game so that you guys don't get too hyped?

A: "It's not about convincing ourselves. We've been in big games this year and I think it's just more about not playing into the hype and not allowing the hype to affect our emotions, just taking it as another game. Everybody is a pro here, and that's just something that comes along with being a pro is just learning how to not allow big games to affect your emotions and playing calmly throughout the game. We've all been in big games, and we're not going to let the hype of this game affect us."

Q: Look at the Bears' defense. Who among the players do you have to account for?

A: "Obviously the Bears' defense in general is a great defense. They've been playing great football all year. They're almost all like an offense because they score points. They put points on the board and they get turnovers for their offense which allows the offense to score touchdowns, so really you've got to be fundamentally sound. Obviously they do have key players like Brian Urlacher and Briggs and their defensive end, Alex Brown, and those guys. Just in general you've really got to account for the whole defense. You've really got to be fundamentally sound when you play against these guys because they are very disciplined and they do a great job at creating turnovers."

Q: Can you talk about George Henshaw and his coaching style and maybe any of his idiosyncrasies?

A: "George is from the old school. George is a good coach. He's a guy with a lot of experience. He's been around a long time. Everything he tells us, he's right about. He's just a really good coach that gives you a lot of experience. He's the guy that's going to help you with whatever."

Q: Coach wasn't concerned about the weather. He was concerned about the footing. What can you, as a running back, do to adjust your style?

A: "I don't think, unless it's raining out there other than if you change your cleats you can't do much."

Q: How important was it for you to live in the city? What do you think that has meant to people?

A: "Well, when I was first looking for a place to live, I wasn't sure what was going to be available. So I just looked around and decided that I wanted to live close to the city, but obviously not too close. I live downtown, so when my family comes out or my friends come over they can go out to Bourbon Street or whatever they want to do. It's not too far."

Q: You've provided a lot of highlights this year, and I was just wondering how often you look at your highlights and did you look at the highlight you provided Saturday night with the hit that Sheldon Brown put on you?

A: "I mean honestly I see it every five minutes on TV. It was a good hit. It was a perfect set up. He took the shot. I mean I would have taken the same thing. I probably should have gotten a medal of honor for that hit. I'm a tough guy. It took me a second to catch my breath and I got right back up and went back to work. That's what it's about. That's what football's about. It's a tough sport. You're going to get hit sometimes, but it's not about how many times you get hit. It's how many times you get back up."

**New Orleans Saints Coach Sean Payton**  
**Monday, January 15, 2007**

**Q: Can you talk about the overall health of the team?**

**A:** *I thought we came out of the game pretty healthy. We have a few nicks and bruises, but nothing at all significant that I would like to talk about now. Wednesday will be the first day we update you guys on our official injury report. We will see where Joe (Horn) is at that point. I think he's made progress, and I thought he made progress last week.*

**Q: Can you discuss your thoughts on the Philadelphia game?**

**A:** *It was a hard-fought game with two good football teams playing. Much like the first game, there were momentum shifts back and forth. I said this after the game, but you have to give credit to Andy, his staff and their team for what they were able to accomplish this season after losing a quarterback with the talent of Donovan McNabb. We have a lot of respect for the way Jeff Garcia was able to come in and lead that team to a NFC East title and a divisional playoff game. I've said this before but we've set our program up in the same manner that they have in Philadelphia. We knew going in that it was going to be a tough challenge and it proved to be just that.*

**Q: On how his players handled adversity during the Philadelphia game?**

**A:** *I was proud of the way our players handled the momentum shifts in the game. We talk about the adversity that you are going to see in a game. When they scored to go up by eight points in the third quarter- that's a challenge and offensively we were able to get a drive and come back and score. Defensively we hung in there and when we needed it the most in that third quarter, we were able to force a three-and-out. That enabled us to get the ball back and run out the clock.*

**Q: Can you talk about the play of the offensive line and running backs?**

**A:** *The offensive line played their best game to date. Obviously Deuce McAllister played outstanding and Mike Karney played his best game at fullback.*

**Q: Can you talk about what this win means to the organization?**

**A:** *I'm happy for the organization and the city. It was a big win for us. It put us in a position to play in another big game, so here we go again. We've got our work cut out for us. We're going to have to play well this weekend. This team we're playing in Chicago presents a great challenge. They are the team that finished with the number one seed in the NFC and we are playing on the road. They have great football tradition in Chicago and their defense is outstanding. They do a great job on offense with balance and yesterday you saw the plays they made in the passing game down the field. Their special teams present another challenge, so we have a lot of work to do. The schedule will remain normal, like any other week.*

**Q: Can you talk about what corrections need to be made coming out of the Philadelphia game on Saturday?**

**A:** *There are some things. I think you can take a few different approaches. I think the one thing we want to work on is our trips to the red zone. I thought on a couple of trips to the red zone when we settled for field goals early on, is always cause for concern. We had a chance to make a couple of interceptions on defense that could have changed that game around. We were fortunate punting the ball at the end of the half that we didn't have one blocked. There are always two or three things, then we you put the tape on you find two or three more things that nobody would have ever seen at the game. When you watch it everything gets back to the fundamentals and everything we preach. If you go on to the next game without looking at the last one, then you take the chance of mistakes reoccurring. It's really taking care of the little things and the details.*

**Q: Do you change your schedule this week as you approach the Chicago game or do you keep things the same?**

**A:** *Our schedule will be the same this week. The one challenge is always trying to eliminate distractions during the work week- media requests and ticket issues. Trying to minimize these things and staying on schedule is the goal. I think it will be a normal work week schedule, it's a normal Sunday game and we will travel on Saturday. With us playing Saturday night we were able to give them a day where they could get home. It was a late night Saturday so today we will run, lift weights, look at Saturday's game then we'll move on to Chicago.*

**Q: Did Marques Colston make that catch at the end of the first half?**

**A:** *No. I didn't think he made it during the game either. The rules are very specific in regards to a completion and an incompletion. One thing that is very specific, and this came up in a game a few years back, but when you hit the ground you must still have the ball. I thought the officials did a great job the other night and they got that one correct. I just wanted to make sure it got reviewed and I was told it did. My worst fear was getting into the locker room and it wasn't reviewed. It was communicated to me that the booth saw it upstairs and their first look at it and their second look was clean. You have to show possession as you hit the ground and it was close, but he didn't catch it.*

**Q: Do you have any special feelings going back to Chicago?**

**A:** *Home for me is Chicago. That's where I went to junior high, high school and college. The obvious first concern is the ticket request. I have a lot of friends there and family there. It's a great sports town and always has been. There are a lot of good memories for me in that city and growing up nearby in Naperville. When you look at the itinerary we arrive on a Saturday and leave on a Sunday, so there really is not time for a lot- you get in there and its business. You have meetings in the evenings, you eat and you go to bed. You get up early the next day and you play the game. It's more on the opponent now and in this case the Bears and dealing with all the problems they can create. Sure, it's special because it's a place I'm familiar with and consider home, but outside of that it's just another game.*

**Q: Do you have any relatives who still live in the area?**

**A:** *My sister and niece live in Skokie. My parents retired a few years back from that area. I still keep in touch with a lot of people up there, high school and college buddies.*

**Q: Who were your players and teams growing up in Illinois?**

**A:** *It was the Bears, Bulls and Blackhawks. You had to be either a Cubs or a White Sox fan and I probably rooted more for the Cubs. I was college when the Bears won that Super Bowl in 1985-86 and I spent a lot of time watching the great success of the Bulls. So, it's a great sports town and it's a great place to call home. I would consider myself a Midwesterner and I think that's a good thing.*

**Q: What advice do you have for Saints fans headed up to Chicago for the game?**

**A:** *The weather will be cold but that won't be a problem. The gumbo down here is spicy enough. Getting a ticket will be difficult- good luck. Our support wherever we travel has been great. It's always more challenging in the postseason because of demand on tickets. It's an exciting time. To play in an NFC Championship game is special. It's a lot like all the playoff games in that there is finality for the winner and loser. Our fans here have been outstanding and the opportunity to play in this game is significant and we're looking forward to it.*

**Q: Can you talk about your time as a replacement player?**

**A:** *It was three and a half weeks. We were all young out of college and looking to make our impression on the football world. Mike Ditka was the head coach at that time and ironically we finished our last game against New Orleans. The last pass I threw was an interception.*

**Q: Who does Bears quarterback Rex Grossman remind you of?**

**A:** *That's a good question. You know I think all of the quarterbacks in our league are somewhat different. He's a guy that is obviously one of the leaders on their team. Against the Seahawks he had the weight of a lot of people on his shoulders and playing in his first playoff game of this season, I thought he was outstanding. I watched him yesterday and he hits the deep throw, the third-down throw and the overtime throw to set-up the field goal. It's a funny business because you're graded each week on your last performance. You're talking about a team that is the number one seed in the NFC. The quarterback position always carries a little more criticism or applause than is sometimes necessary and certainly in a big city that is always a challenge and he's handled it well. Lovie (Smith) has done a great job of handling it and most important his teammates have a belief in him.*

**Q: Did Mike Ditka play a role in influencing your coaching style?**

**A:** *My time with him was so brief. It was a month. I think that growing up there and watching the success he had with that team in leading them to a Super Bowl Championship, you certainly saw his competitive spirit and what he brought to that team. It was significant and it was a team*

*that it seems like everyone else is measured against. The next time the Bulls are in the heat of it they will be measured against the Bulls that won six championships. That's just how our sports are. That success at that time that Mike brought to the Bears with the team that they had was outstanding and exciting for everyone.*

**Q: *If you make a call that doesn't work, do you dread it after?***

**A:** *I don't think so. I think that you when a game's over, just as you want for your players, you just want to know that you did your best and that you did your homework during the course of the week. There are two or three instances on Saturday night where the two point play debate occurred. I've said all along that we go for two points in the fourth quarter. If it's a low scoring game, you consider going a hair earlier, but if it's a high scoring game, you certainly wait until the fourth quarter. It's one of those things where you can always be the devil's advocate. I didn't get any questions about two point conversions the other night. If we had lost that game, I would have had 80 questions about the two point play. Philosophically, you know how I stand on that. It ended up being a three point game. Had we gone for a two point play along the road and not gotten it and they kicked the field goal to win, there would have been a lot of questions, too. You trust your gut and instincts. You have a belief and a conviction on what you want to accomplish. You stick with them and you hope it serves you well. There's pressure behind some of those decisions that you're talking about, but that's part of the deal.*

**Q: *Can you talk about the job Mickey Loomis has done and some of the things he has done to help the team?***

**A:** *When the game ended, we gave Mickey the game ball. You'd be hard-pressed to go through that locker room and find somebody that he wasn't involved in signing or dealing with in some shape or form, starting with me and going all the way down through player 53 on our roster. He's given us great support. I think he's a great decision maker. I think he's always well thought out in regards to the decisions he has to make. I think he has a tremendous amount of respect from not only our coaching staff and ownership, but also the players and everyone else in the building. He's a guy that's had to take this team from a year and a half or two years ago with everything that went on and needed to be relocated. I can't even imagine the magnitude of issues that come up in his position when something like that occurs. He handled that, the transition back here from San Antonio, as well as getting the coaching, the coaching staff and players very well. All of those things fall under his umbrella and I think he's done a great job. He'd probably also say that he's supported well with a great group of guys working for him in Russ Ball, Rick Mueller and the scouting department on the pro and college side, but it's been a really good fit. He's somebody that's given me great support. I thought it was appropriate to give him the game ball after that first win.*

**Q: *Now that you've been in New Orleans a year, has the entire year been a whirlwind for you?***

**A:** *The season's always a little bit of a whirlwind, because of the schedule. We're a little bit insulated, a lot more than you guys would be. As a coaching staff, we're in early and out late. Occasionally we get exposed to what's going on outside of the building. I'm sure down the road there will be a time when you reflect more on it. Right now, the focus is Chicago and going*

*through our traditional routine and putting a plan in place that gives your players a chance to win.*

**Q: Can you recall a situation where a high profile rookie like Reggie Bush has come in and had enormous team success in their first year?**

*A: I'm sure there are probably some if you went back and charted the winning teams like New England and Pittsburgh. You always hope you can receive contributions from your high draft picks. He brings a confidence with him. It's not his first big game. A lot of these players have played in big football games and National Championship games. Devery Henderson played against Oklahoma in the National Championship game three years ago. Jammal Brown was in that game. Those college games are significant. We tried to talk a little about that last week. We had a video put together. A lot was said about not having playoff experience. I don't know how you get it until you play. These guys have played in a lot of big games. In Reggie's case, he's played in a number of big games. We all get butterflies and excited about playing and we all have our own way of handling that excitement and that pressure. It's the thing that you miss when the season's over. It's the thing that you miss when you stop playing. It's the thing that you miss when you're no longer around football, that feeling of when you were a high school player on Friday night. Saturday came around when you were a college player and it shows up on Sunday morning for me as a coach. You're looking forward to the opportunity. You become excited about it. Feeling those butterflies and all of those things that go with big games is healthy. I think these guys have been in that environment in high school, college and the NFL.*

**Q: How did it all come together for you to obtain six starters and contributors out of the draft?**

*A: There's a lot of communication and work done on behalf of the scouts and personnel staff. You start your preparation on the players you are grading as well as the pro end where you look at the Jeff Faine's. This comes into play when all of a sudden you can back up and acquire Roman Harper and Jeff Faine and back up and acquire Jahri Evans and Hollis Thomas. You're trying to find players that fit what you are looking for first. Going out and doing it is just as challenging. Those are decisions that three years from now you look back on and hopefully they serve you well. The key is putting two, three or four years together of those type of drafts and off-season acquisitions and sticking to your convictions in exactly what you are looking for in a player.*

**Q: Have you spoken to Bill Parcells recently?**

*A: I spoke to him last week briefly after the Seattle game. We spoke a little bit. I called him to see how he was doing. He was doing well. We spoke for five minutes. He was very supportive and excited for our opportunity. I know he was disappointed in the way their game finished. That's the last I spoke to him.*

**Q: Are you aware of the history of this franchise in the context of what you have accomplished?**

**A:** *Each year you start with a group that wants to accomplish a lot. When you set your goals high, which we try to do here, you hope as the season goes on that you can get into position to play in a championship game; an NFC Championship game and on to the Super Bowl. Years from now, you guys will be able to grade the teams, the history and all those types of things, but I think that the importance of this team getting to a place that no other team in this organization's history is something that is an accomplishment. Yet, there is still work to be done. I think the players still feel like the challenge is in front of us here. We have a really good football team we're playing on Sunday with great opportunities. You're down to four teams. You're in the final four. With that being said, the four teams left are all going to be good football teams that are going to have to execute, tackle and block and they're going to have to protect the football to get to that next game. It's a big challenge.*

**Q:** *What does getting this opportunity mean to you?*

**A:** *I think the players would say it and I know that the coaches would say, as well, that you understand and appreciate that there are a lot of things that go on to get to this point. You just have to go around the room. This is the fourth opportunity for me in the postseason in nine years in the NFL. Each coach has a different background. Some of it falls from where you were working as an assistant. Some of it falls from where you were playing as a player, but they don't come around every year. It doesn't come around ten or 15 times in your career. There are opportunities that come up. It's important to take advantage of the opportunities and to understand that when it's in front of you, it's hard to get here and hard to be in these games. If it was easy there would be a lot more people with Super Bowl rings on their hands. Winning championships is very difficult. That's what probably makes it so gratifying.*

**Q:** *Can you discuss how Jahri Evans and Steve Weatherford played in the game?*

**A:** *He (Evans) was outstanding. It was probably his best game of the year. His postseason experience against East Stroudsburg was pretty good. Weatherford made a nice play in avoiding a potentially disastrous play. He's a good athlete. I thought he initially was going to run and punt. He kept running. I was glad he made the first down.*

**Q:** *Was that an ad-libbed play?*

**A:** *Clearly.*

**Q:** *Do you work on how to deal with those situations in practice?*

**A:** *You practice a field goal awry where you scramble and you practice some of those things. Asides from Dan Dalrymple running Steve Weatherford for conditioning drills, that's probably the first time he's had to run 30 yards.*

**Q:** *Was Walter Payton one of your favorite players?*

**A:** *Walter was one of them, asides from the fact that I have the same last name. He was a great player on that team when they weren't great. He was outstanding. It was neat to see him play on*

*a winning team at the end of his career. He was a great player on that team when they weren't as good and was obviously one of the best running backs to ever play the game.*

**Q: *How will you handle playing in a cold weather game?***

**A:** *You know going in that there's going to be different environments. You become adjusted and get used to the footing and the noise you have to deal with. You go over all the ways to stay warm. We played in New York and Pittsburgh not too long ago. You try to address those things and take care of them. I think when the game starts and the temperature is in the 20's. I think with the players, it's not until after the fact in a hot shower that you realize how cold it was. I think that the conditions are obviously important to get adjusted to in terms of how you play, so that you're not slipping or falling. Outside of that, I think you become acclimated quickly.*

**Q: *How much confidence do you have in Fred Thomas this week?***

**A:** *I have a lot of confidence in him. We just saw one of the better offenses we played all year. He's a big reason why we were ranked 11<sup>th</sup> on defense this season compared to where we were in the past. We're sitting in this position playing in the conference championship game. I have a ton of confidence in him. He's made big plays for us all season long. Donte' Stallworth did a great job on third down and made a play. He's been around this long enough and he understands exactly how to play in these games.*

**Q: *Will you practice outdoors this week in preparation for Chicago?***

**A:** *I don't know yet.*

**Q: *Will you conduct one walk through outdoors in Chicago?***

**A:** *Probably not. Seattle had one because they traveled on a Friday and came from further away. We usually travel on Saturday and get to the hotel. We meet, go to sleep, eat and we play.*

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