

September 20, 2006



An interview with:

DEUCE McALLISTER

Q. It doesn't seem like the stage could be set any better for this game. There's enough excitement with the Saints returning home, but to do so at 2-0, against the Falcons, also 2-0, seems like a perfect setting. Could you comment on that, please?

DEUCE McALLISTER: I think the team has done a pretty good job of setting the stage. Obviously, you couldn't ask for anything better for a media guy or a ticket guy. I think the stage has been set pretty well for both teams.

Q. Do you feel like this is an official statement by the city to the world to say, Welcome back to New Orleans?

DEUCE McALLISTER: I definitely think so. I think obviously the excitement will definitely be there. I think there's going to be a heck of a buildup. The NFL and the New Orleans Saints have done a great job of promoting the game obviously. The teams, each of them being 2-0, I think there's going to be a lot of anticipation.

The City of New Orleans couldn't be more excited to show the world they're back.

Q. How surprised are you that you are 2-0, opening up on the road?

DEUCE McALLISTER: I wouldn't necessarily say "surprised." I think we went out and executed. All we can do is play the teams in front of us. Atlanta is next for us. All we can try to do is go out and execute.

You go out to win every game. I think that's what we've had success doing.

Q. Having a great start, can you talk about what coach Sean Payton brings to the team, the philosophy, how it fits your game?

DEUCE McALLISTER: He's going to demand for each player to go out and execute and try to be perfect. To be perfect is one thing. That's what every player should strive for. If you can reach close to that perfection mark, I think you've probably exceeded your will and your goal.

He's going to be demanding. He has been from when he was hired all the way till game three, our upcoming game. All we can do is go out and execute. He's going to demand you go out and execute to the level of your ability.

Q. Have you been back in the Superdome since it's been renovated? Was there a time when you saw what was going on in there that you thought it might never reopen again?

DEUCE McALLISTER: No, I haven't been back. I think the majority of our guys won't go in there until we practice on Friday night. I think that will be the first time a majority of our team will visit the dome.

Thinking back on some of the images that you saw, some of the things that you heard occurred in the dome, no, I didn't think that we would return and possibly play in the Superdome.

Q. Can you talk about how this affected the New Orleans Saints team and you as a person?

DEUCE McALLISTER: When you just think about it, the overall scope of everything, how it occurred, probably the first question that you ask is, Why? Why did it have to occur like this? Why haven't things gotten resolved in a lot of ways? There are still a lot of people that need help down in this region, in this area. Hopefully it will continue to come in.

As far as us as players, what we can do, we give these people something to cheer about for three hours, something to think about instead of wondering are they going to continue to haggle with their insurance people, are they going to have to continue to work on their home. For three hours

every Sunday they can go and cheer for their Saints. Hopefully we can continue to come away with victories.

Q. Two regular-season games with you sharing the backfield with Reggie Bush. What is it like to share the backfield on and off the field with Reggie?

DEUCE McALLISTER: He's been willing to learn. Any time you get a guy that comes in with as much hype as Reggie has had with him, with him being gracious to ask questions and gracious enough to want to know what teams are going to do to him as far as how they're going to play him, then it's kind of refreshing as a veteran player to be able to help him.

He's going to only make my job easier. Defenses are going to have to account for both of us. Whether he's in the backfield or I'm in the backfield, they're going to have to account for us. As far as what we're going to do on offense, we're basically going to take what they give us.

Q. What are some specific things you've tried to pass on from your game to Reggie?

DEUCE McALLISTER: As far as some of the tips of playing against some of the guys that I've played against, some of the defenses that I've played against, how they played me in the past, some of the things we're probably seeing on film of how we think they're going to play him. Once we get in the game, just try to get a feel for how they're trying to play him, what they're doing to him, as far as to help him be successful on some of the runs and pass plays, just some little tips that guys are going to try to help you hopefully get open, see him in the open field and make plays.

Q. Can you describe what you are seeing right now in the city as far as progress and rebuilding New Orleans?

DEUCE McALLISTER: You have areas that are thriving extremely well. You look in some areas of New Orleans, especially in the French Quarter, in the downtown area, you would think that a hurricane never hit. I guess as you move farther out from the downtown region, there's still areas that need a lot, a lot of work. That's in a lot of areas around here. You hope, whether it's federal or state, these people can get some help and continue to try to build their lives and put them back together.

Q. How about yourself? Was your property hit at all?

DEUCE McALLISTER: Yes, I had some damage. Probably the most fortunate thing about it, I didn't have any flooding. But I did have some damage as far as roof damage, some landscaping and different issues of that nature. I think everyone was really affected. To what extent, that just depended on where you were.

Q. A couple weeks into the season you went down with a serious knee injury. Can you talk about the things that went through your mind in the days after the injury, the process of getting back, the rehab?

DEUCE McALLISTER: It's a daily battle, even to this point. Probably the most disappointing thing about last year was not being able to go out there and play with the guys, the preparation you put into it leading up to that. You see them struggling and you can't do anything about it but just try to cheer them on from the sideline.

Right now I'm having a blast because I'm enjoying it literally, truly just to be out there practicing with them, hear them joking, to be able to go out and play on Sundays. When that's taken away from you, you really get a true appreciation for when people say I'm hanging with the guys or I'm playing with the guys, you really enjoy it.

Q. Where did you think you might be playing this year if the Superdome couldn't have been fixed? With all the time you had to think, what were you thinking?

DEUCE McALLISTER: You just try to listen. There were rumors. You listen to the rumors, whether we would be in San Antonio or whether we would be a team possibly moving to L.A., whether we would be playing in Baton Rouge or somewhere in Louisiana again. There were a lot of rumors floating around.

I think the first thing is you have to really thank the NFL, Mr. Tagliabue, before he stepped down, Mr. Benson for really stepping up, saying that they would not abandon this region. The NFL really stepped up and brought this team back home.

Q. Can you explain what this football team means to New Orleans.

DEUCE McALLISTER: Until you really visit it and spend some time here in the city, in this

region, you really don't understand what this team means to this region. Literally when you're born, you're born with that black and gold in your blood. It's a part of you.

Some people talk about different things being a part of your livelihood. Well, football and the New Orleans Saints is definitely a part of this region's livelihood because they bleed the New Orleans Saints.

Q. Can you talk about what quarterback Drew Brees brings to the table?

DEUCE McALLISTER: You just look at his leadership qualities, him wanting to go out there and be perfect, him wanting everyone to go out there and execute, him wanting to be up there with the best quarterbacks in this league. Sometimes I feel like he's getting shorted in a lot of ways, and he goes out there and plays with a chip on his shoulder. He really doesn't care what other people think because he's going to do it the right way.

That's what you respect about him. He's going to put in the time, he's going to put in the effort and the work. He wants to be successful. When you see your quarterback want that, you should want it, too, as another player.

Q. You talked about your own recovery. Psychologically what has been the hardest thing in terms of just trusting your body again after getting over an injury like that?

DEUCE McALLISTER: It's going to be a mental battle. Once the doctor tells you that your knee is structurally fine, you have all your strength, there's no looseness or anything as far as that's concerned, then you have to fight the mental battles which are your mind and your body. Once you make a cut, once you make a move, you know it's there, then you can kind of move on to that next stage.

It's a process that every athlete has to go through. Whether it's a knee or whether it's learning how to walk again, it's something that we all have to go through. I've been blessed up to this point.

Q. Do you ever wonder how or why the Superdome was reopened in such a relatively short time when other places remain so needy?

DEUCE McALLISTER: When you think of some of the tragic events you saw on television, some of the things they say happened in the Superdome, for the City of New Orleans to return

what better place would it be than to start there? If the New Orleans Saints are going to play in New Orleans, what better place to start than the Superdome?

I think it's definitely a positive for this city. The city needs the money as far as the tourism is concerned. We want to be here in New Orleans. The fans, you definitely have to thank them for showing their support and really selling out the Superdome for the season. They've been resilient. You think a lot of times, well, what they could have done with their money, they could have did this, but they chose to come and watch us play on Sundays, you're thankful for that.

Q. The Saints sell out season tickets for the first time in the team's history. This is your sixth season in New Orleans. What kind of excitement does that create for the players?

DEUCE McALLISTER: That's unheard of. Whether you're a part of it or not in the previous years, as far as visiting the dome, that's really unheard of. When you put everything into perspective of what these people have been through, the next year they're going to sell out that dome, there's going to be a person in every seat, that's truly unheard of. That shows the resilience of these people that are going to come and support you.

As players, that makes you want to go out and play even harder because you know some of the things they've been through.

Q. Last year as a team, practicing at high schools, having an office in parking lot, it puts things in perspective?

DEUCE McALLISTER: It definitely does. That's one thing that helps you looking at it as far as this year is concerned, having to deal with some of the issues as far as where will we be practicing today, are we going to have to be changing facilities, will we be moving as a team, where we will be dressing on a daily basis, having meetings. Things are a lot more normal than they were last year.

Q. You talked a lot about the city, the NFL, its players, what they've done to help the city. Do you think enough has been done? Obviously, the NFL, its players, there's a lot of money in this sport. Do you see enough of that from the guys you play with and against, more

against I should say, and the league itself, have they done enough to help the city in its recovery?

DEUCE McALLISTER: You could always say there's not enough being done. At the same time you have to put everything in perspective for each individual as well. There's a lot going on with everybody's lives. You would want more done. You have to put everything in perspective of what each individual has going on in his personal life. If somebody finds time to give, if somebody finds time to be able to do something special for these people, then you're definitely thankful for it.

Q. Why do you think that guys at the age of 30 start to break down in the running back position?

DEUCE McALLISTER: It's a violent game. You're either getting hit or hitting someone. Nearly 98% of the plays, you're in there. You think about over time going back from high school to college, I mean, that's a lot. The licks basically add up on a running back. You have to be in supreme shape, really take care of your body. Once you reach that age, you're a step slower. You know you have to be a lot smarter.

Q. Can you talk about Marques Colston, his progress the past couple weeks?

DEUCE McALLISTER: The big rookie is coming along well. He's always willing to listen. I think his background as far as him having to prove a lot to a lot of people, him not being drafted or rated highly, he wants to come out and be perfect.

He's been a success. We have a lot of different play-makers on this team. We're not asking him to go out and lead us in such and such category or do such and such. Whenever his name and number is called, he's been able to step up and make plays.

Q. Could you talk about the work still to do in rebuilding New Orleans. So much progress being made, so much improvement, there are still people who want to return home but can't because they don't have a home.

DEUCE McALLISTER: There's still some issues that have to be dealt with on a state as well as federal level, whether you're going to rebuild in this area, whether you're not, some different things, whether the insurance companies are going to insure you. There's some issues that still have been to be resolved before some people can move back.

I think the majority of the people want to move back to New Orleans. Hopefully it continues to get better for these people and they can come back home.

Q. Has it been difficult to concentrate on this game with so much attention surrounding it as such a big event?

DEUCE McALLISTER: No. I mean, as a player, you have to be able to separate and know and understand what you have to do. My job is to go out here and play the game, not get caught up in everything going on besides the game.

Q. You mentioned the resilience of the people in New Orleans. Given that, are you surprised at what's happened and the level of excitement of this? Did you ever imagine it?

DEUCE McALLISTER: With us winning the games we have, we've just added to it. I think these people are going to be excited regardless. This is to show the world we've returned as a city.

Q. Can you talk about the team's sense of strategy, how you try to create matchups using both you and Reggie Bush?

DEUCE McALLISTER: We're going to go out there and take what the defenses are going to give us. If they're going to try to play us heavy to stop the run, we're going to throw it. If they're going to give us the opportunity to pass, that's what we're going to do.

We can't try to outsmart ourselves. I think we've been pretty good at doing that. One of the things that we have to try to continue to do is try to take care of the ball. We kind of put ourselves in a hole the last game by turning the ball over early. We were lucky enough that the defense held Green Bay to a field goal. As a team, that's what we're preaching, just taking care of the ball, going out and executing, just seeing how it goes from that standpoint.

Q. How difficult or how easy was it for you to get used to share the load of the carries with Reggie Bush? Do you think the fact people are so happy having football back in New Orleans is Reggie or the fact they have football back again in the city?

DEUCE McALLISTER: It wasn't difficult at all because my ultimate goal is to get to the Super Bowl. I've been a starting running back for this

team the last five years. We haven't made it to the playoffs. Obviously I understand that something has to occur. When we have the opportunity to draft Reggie Bush, if I was the GM I would have drafted him, too, because the kid is talented.

As far as the people's excitement, I think Reggie added to the excitement. I think we were going to be successful as an organization regardless of whether we got him or not. The one thing about it is he's an exciting player. I think that added to the excitement around the New Orleans Saints returning home.

Q. What has Reggie Bush being in camp and practice done to your game?

DEUCE McALLISTER: We're going to compete. We're definitely going to compete. We're competitors as far as individually wanting to be successful. We both have the same goal, and that's for this team to be successful. I think ultimately that's going to make us both better.

Q. Was there ever a time when you felt like the Saints would not return to New Orleans, there would no longer be a New Orleans Saints?

DEUCE McALLISTER: When you think about some of the images, some of the things that are happening in this city, if you go back a year later, then, yes, there's definitely a time where you think we wouldn't be returning. You hear some of the rumors about us playing in San Antonio or us playing in L.A. Yes, there's a time you would have thought we wouldn't be back in New Orleans.

Q. Now you're back in the city. Is life normal as it was before Katrina?

DEUCE McALLISTER: In some areas there are. You still have some stores that aren't full force as far as enough workers, so they may close down a little earlier than normal. Then you still have some stores that don't open on normal days. There's some things, they're working their way back. There's some things. There's just not people here yet, enough workforce here yet for them to operate on a normal basis.

Q. Have these adjustments been easy for you as a player, for the players?

DEUCE McALLISTER: There's nothing you can do. There's nothing you can do about it. You can fuss and complain about it. All you do is adjust. Sometimes things aren't going to be perfect for you as a player, as an individual. You

wish all 32 teams were on an equal level as far as having the same things available to them. Sometimes teams aren't going to have some things that another team may have. There's no need to cry and fuss about it. You go out, you do your job, you just try to do it as best as possible.

Q. How about families? Players with families, kids in school, have many of them brought their families back?

DEUCE McALLISTER: The majority of them have brought their families back. Some of them may be going to a different school, different things of that nature. It may be an adjustment for them as far as we used to go 10 minutes to school, now it's 20 minutes, different things of that nature.

They understand and realize what has occurred. They're just trying to adjust as best as possible. If your family isn't here, whenever you get an opportunity to see them, they get an opportunity to come into town, that's what you have to do.

Q. Your family specifically, were they affected by this?

DEUCE McALLISTER: I had some family down on the Gulf Coast that were affected by the storm. You had some that lost everything like here in New Orleans, then I had some in my hometown that were affected. It was more wind damage, some flooding, but not hurricane damage.

Q. It seems like the NFC South is more competitive this year than last year. Can you talk about the strength within the division.

DEUCE McALLISTER: This is going to be a tough division year in, year out. I think last year was the first year that we didn't have a representative in the Super Bowl since they went to the new divisions. You look at Tampa, you look at Carolina, you look at Atlanta. Playing against those defenses, you know you're playing against probably the top 10 defense, one of the top 10 defenses, each week whenever you're playing them. You enjoy playing against these guys because you know they're "some of the best athletes in the league."

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