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January 17, 2007

## **PRESS BOX NOTES – NFC CHAMPIONSHIP GAME**

**COMPETITIVE PLAYOFFS:** The 2006 playoffs through the first two rounds have been the **most competitive since the NFL went to the 12-team format in 1990**. The average margin of victory in the eight Wild Card and Divisional games was 7.3 points per game. That is the lowest point margin since 1990. The previous low was a 9.8-point average in 2003.

Through the first four games of the National Football Conference playoffs, the average margin of victory has been 2.5 points per game -- with two games ending on game-winning field goals (NY Giants-Philadelphia Wild Card and Seattle-Chicago Divisional).

If Sunday's game between the New Orleans Saints and Chicago Bears is decided by 14 points or less, it would surpass the 1970 NFC playoffs (5.0 average margin of victory) for the smallest margin in conference playoff history.

A look at the lowest average margin of victory in NFC playoff games since 1970:

SEASON	GAMES	AVERAGE MARGIN OF VICTORY
1970	3	5.0
1979	4	7.0
1971	3	7.7
1998	5	8.2
2003	5	9.0
<b>2006</b>	<b>4*</b>	<b>2.5</b>

\* One game remaining

### **-- NFC CHAMPIONSHIP GAME --**

**NO. 1 VS. NO.1:** The Saints' No. 1 NFC offense (391.5 yards per game) will face the Bears' top conference defense (294.1).

Sunday will be the 11th time that a conference championship game featured the top offense and defense in the conference. In the previous 10 games, the club with the best offense won seven times.

Conference championship games featuring the top conference offense and defense:

SEASON	OFFENSE	DEFENSE	FINAL SCORE
1974	Oakland	Pittsburgh	Pittsburgh, 24-13
1978	Dallas	L.A. Rams	Dallas, 28-0
1984	San Francisco	Chicago	San Francisco, 23-0
1987	Denver	Cleveland	Denver, 38-33
1988	Cincinnati	Buffalo	Cincinnati, 21-10
1990	San Francisco	N.Y. Giants	N.Y. Giants, 15-13
1991	Buffalo	Denver	Buffalo, 10-7
1992	San Francisco	Dallas	Dallas, 30-20
1994	San Francisco	Dallas	San Francisco, 38-28
1999	St. Louis	Tampa Bay	St. Louis, 11-6
<b>2006</b>	<b>New Orleans</b>	<b>Chicago</b>	<b>???</b>

**YOUTH BEING SERVED:** Head coaches **SEAN PAYTON** of New Orleans and **LOVIE SMITH** of Chicago have coached the second fewest combined regular-season games (68) by opposing coaches in conference championship history. They trail only the 42 games of Baltimore's **DON MC CAFFERTY** and Oakland's **JOHN MADDEN** in 1970. In his first year as an NFL head coach, Payton took the Saints from a last-place finish in the NFC South in 2005 to a division title. Smith has led the Bears to consecutive NFC North titles in his first three years as a head coach.

The fewest combined regular-season games by opposing coaches in a conference championship game:

SEASON	COACHES	GAMES COACHED
1970	Don McCafferty (14) vs. John Madden (28)	42
<b>2006</b>	<b>Sean Payton (16) vs. Lovie Smith (48)</b>	<b>64</b>
2000	Brian Billick (32) vs. Jon Gruden (48)	80
2001	Mike Martz (32) vs. Andy Reid (48)	80
1994	Bill Cowher (48) vs. Bobby Ross (48)	96
1995	Barry Switzer (32) vs. Mike Holmgren (64)	96

**-- NFC CHAMPIONSHIP GAME --**

**SAINTLY TURNAROUND:** With a win this Sunday, the Saints can become the sixth team in history to go to a Super Bowl after finishing last in its division the previous season.

Teams to reach the Super Bowl after finishing in last place in their division the previous season:

TEAM	PREVIOUS SEASON RECORD	SEASON (RECORD)	SUPER BOWL
Cincinnati	6-10	1981 (12-4)	SB XVI
Cincinnati	4-11	1988 (12-4)	SB XXIII
St. Louis	4-12	1999 (13-3)	SB XXXIV
New England	5-11	2001 (11-5)	SB XXXVI
Carolina	7-9	2003 (11-5)	SB XXXVIII
<b>New Orleans</b>	<b>3-13</b>	<b>2006 (10-6)</b>	<b>???</b>

**-- NFC CHAMPIONSHIP GAME --**

**BIG-PLAY BEAR:** Chicago Bears wide receiver **MUHSIN MUHAMMAD** has 21 receptions for 448 yards – a 21.8 yards per catch average -- in eight career playoff games. With four receptions at his current average on Sunday, Muhammad will have the highest average yards per catch in postseason history, minimum of 25 receptions.

The most yards-per-reception in playoff history (minimum 25 receptions):

PLAYER	TEAM (S)	AVERAGE
Charlie Brown	Washington	20.74
Randy Moss	Minnesota	20.66
Frank Lewis	Pittsburgh, Buffalo	20.5
Tom Fears	L.A. Rams	19.6
Paul Warfield	Cleveland, Miami	19.3
<b>Mushin Muhammad</b>	<b>Carolina, Chicago</b>	<b>21.8</b>

**FROM HEISMAN TO SUPER BOWL?:** With a New Orleans victory, Saints running back **REGGIE BUSH** would become the fourth player in history to win a Heisman Trophy and appear in a Super Bowl in his rookie season, joining **MIKE GARRETT**, **TONY DORSETT** and **RON DAYNE**. Only Dorsett's team, the 1977 Dallas Cowboys, won a Super Bowl.

A look at the players to win the Heisman Trophy and advance to the Super Bowl in their rookie season:

PLAYER	COLLEGE	HEISMAN YEAR	NFL TEAM	SUPER BOWL
RB Mike Garrett	Southern California	1965	Kansas City	SB I vs. Green Bay
RB Tony Dorsett	Pittsburgh	1976	Dallas	SB XII vs. Denver
RB Ron Dayne	Wisconsin	1999	New York Giants	SB XXXV vs. Baltimore
<b>Reggie Bush</b>	<b>Southern California</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>New Orleans</b>	<b>???</b>

**GEORGE HALAS TROPHY:** Pro Football Hall of Fame inductee **TONY DORSETT**, a four-time Pro Bowl running back for the Dallas Cowboys, will present the NFC champion with the **GEORGE HALAS TROPHY** on Sunday. Dorsett played in five NFC Championship Games and two Super Bowls. His 66-yard, one-touchdown performance against Denver in Super Bowl XII helped lead the Cowboys to a 27-10 victory.

Dorsett played in 17 playoff games in his career, amassing 1,383 rushing yards. That is the fourth highest total in NFL postseason history. His 1,786 yards from scrimmage ranks sixth in playoff history.

Halas, the late owner of the Chicago Bears and a founder of the NFL, is the second-winningest coach in history (324-151-31) behind **DON SHULA** (347-173-6). He won six NFL championships with the Bears and is a charter enshrinee of the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

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