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## NFC NEWS 'N' NOTES

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## NFC SPRING ROUND-UP

**ARIZONA:** The Cardinals, who will host Super Bowl XLII at University of Phoenix Stadium, have hired **KEN WHISENHUNT** as their head coach. He takes the helm after six seasons with the Pittsburgh Steelers, including the past three as offensive coordinator. Whisenhunt worked with quarterback **BEN ROETHLISBERGER** to help the Steelers win Super Bowl XL and hopes to recapture that glory with quarterback **MATT LEINART**, Arizona's No. 1 pick in 2006. "This is a dream come true for me," says Whisenhunt. "It's a great opportunity. It's a team with a lot of young talent on both sides of the ball."

**ATLANTA:** The Falcons enter a new era under the leadership of rookie head coach **BOBBY PETRINO**, who compiled a 41-9 (.820) record at the University of Louisville. Last year, Petrino guided the Cardinals to a 12-1 (.923) mark, including a 24-13 victory over Wake Forest in the Orange Bowl. "I am excited about the challenge that awaits me in Atlanta," says Petrino, "and I'm equally excited about the potential that I see in this team." Adds Atlanta owner **ARTHUR BLANK**, "Bobby Petrino is a difference-maker who will bring a strong identity to the Falcons – one our team will buy into and take on as its own."

**CAROLINA:** Seeking to promote youth football in the region, the Panthers recently hosted the inaugural USA Football Youth Football Forum. Linebacker **ADAM SEWARD** served as the keynote speaker as 20 youth football leaders from the area shared experiences and discussed coaching education, participation and age and weight topics. "I have a great opportunity being an NFL player to give back to the community and make a positive impact in the lives of kids across the Carolinas," says Seward.

**CHICAGO:** After a successful season that ended with a Super Bowl XLI appearance, head coach **LOVIE SMITH** has remained busy. Smith, who has guided the Bears to back-to-back division titles, and general manager **JERRY ANGELO** have both agreed to contract extensions with the club. In addition, Smith and his wife **MARY ANNE** recently received a Volunteer Recognition Award at the American Diabetes Association's "Care to Cure" benefit. Smith, whose mother lost her eyesight due to diabetes-related complications, is active in the fight against the disease. "I've had a chance to see my mother persevere," says Smith. "I've had a chance to see her fight the diabetes that has taken her sight, but she doesn't complain. Every day, her glass is half full."

**DALLAS:** The Cowboys have already made a big splash this offseason by signing 6-6, 365-pound offensive lineman **LEONARD DAVIS**. The No. 2 overall pick by Arizona in 2001 has played both guard and tackle in his career. "You don't see very often the combination of natural ability and size that Leonard Davis brings to the table," says Dallas owner and general manager **JERRY JONES**. Davis, who grew up in Wortham, Texas and played at the University of Texas, said that his final decision came down to being close to home. "It just came down to where we wanted to live," says Davis, "and it just happened to be right here in Dallas."

**DETROIT:** The Lions teamed with the NFL, NFL Players Association and Local Initiatives Support Corporation to award a \$50,000 grant from the NFL Grassroots field grant program to Think Detroit PAL for new bleachers and fencing at the Plymouth Education Center's football field in Detroit. "The Detroit Lions are proud to continue to support local projects that improve fields, football development and bring families and communities together through football," says **TOM LEWAND**, executive vice president and chief operation officer of the team.

**GREEN BAY:** Five members of the Packers traveled north this offseason to visit Fort Wainwright, a U.S. Army base in Fairbanks, Alaska. Tackles **KEVIN BARRY** and **JOSH BOURKE**, cornerback **PATRICK DENDY**, running back **NOAH HERRON** and kicker **DAVE RAYNER** interacted with the troops and conducted a football clinic for the families on the base. "They look at us as NFL players on TV, but we look at them as heroes," says Herron. "They fight for our freedom. Just to meet those guys and understand what they do for everybody's freedom was an awesome feeling." Joining the Packers on the trip were New York Jets tackle **D'BRICKASHAW FERGUSON** and Houston Texans tight end **BEN STEELE**.

**MINNESOTA:** There is optimism in Minnesota with the addition of defensive coordinator **LESLIE FRAZIER**, who joins the team after helping the Indianapolis Colts win Super Bowl XLI. Frazier, who spent the past two years working as an

assistant under Colts head coach **TONY DUNGY**, also has won a title as player, helping the Chicago Bears to victory in Super Bowl XX. "It was very important to get somebody who understood the structure of this defense," says Vikings head coach **BRAD CHILDRESS**. "You hire guys to be experts at what they do. Then you let them do their job."

**NEW ORLEANS:** Saints quarterback **DREW BREES**, who led the NFL in passing yards last year, brought a whole new meaning to the phrase "airing it out" this offseason. The Pro Bowl quarterback, who was named the 2006 Walter Payton Co-NFL Man of the Year (along with San Diego's **LA DAINIAN TOMLINSON**), recently rode in an F/A-18 Hornet jet with the Navy's Blue Angels precision flight team at El Centro (Calif.) Naval Air Facility. "It's beyond words," says Brees. "It's surreal. This will be right up there next to winning the Super Bowl when that happens this year. I feel a big sense of responsibility to help support these guys, either by boosting morale or doing whatever I can to help. This is an experience I'll remember for the rest of my life."

**NEW YORK:** The Giants have appointed **JERRY REESE**, who has been with the team since 1994 -- including the past four seasons as its director of player personnel -- to succeed the retired **ERNIE ACCORSI** as general manager. "We felt that Jerry was the right man at the right time in the right place," said **JOHN MARA**, the Giants' president and CEO. Reese becomes only the franchise's third general manager in the past 27 years, following Accorsi and **GEORGE YOUNG**.

**PHILADELPHIA:** Eagles running back **BRIAN WESTBROOK**, who earned his degree at Villanova in management information systems, added an Ivy League touch to his education this spring. Westbrook enrolled in the NFL Business Management and Entrepreneurial Program at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania, part of an ongoing NFL-NFLPA initiative to assist players in preparing for their post-playing careers. A total of 116 NFL players are participating in the program at four schools (Wharton, Harvard, Kellogg and Stanford). "You have to have a life after football," says Westbrook. "You need something you can fall back on. A lot of times football opens doors, but you have to be a person who brings something substantial to that business."

**ST. LOUIS:** The Rams have used the free-agency period to add two more weapons to an already potent offense. Joining perennial All-Stars **ISAAC BRUCE** and **TORRY HOLT** at wide receiver is **DREW BENNETT**, who spent the previous six seasons with the Tennessee Titans. Tight end **RANDY MC MICHAEL** comes over from Miami to give Pro Bowl quarterback **MARC BULGER** another target and to block for All-Star running back **STEVEN JACKSON**. "These are great additions to our receiving corps," says Rams head coach **SCOTT LINEHAN**.

**SAN FRANCISCO:** **ALEX SMITH** came back and gave back. The 49ers' quarterback recently returned to the University of Utah to announce a \$500,000 donation to his alma mater's athletic department. "I have so much pride for this university and for being a 'Ute,'" says the former NFL No. 1 overall draft pick. "I feel it's not only my duty, but an honor to give back to this university for future athletes. It's really special for me." The donation is the lead gift for a \$1.5 million expansion of the varsity athletics weight room, which will be renamed the Alex Smith Strength and Conditioning Facility.

**SEATTLE:** The Seahawks have won the NFC West three years in a row and will look to continue that success in the upcoming season. Playing a big role in that quest will be **JOHN IDZIK**, who has been named Seattle's vice president of football administration after spending the past three seasons as senior director of football operations for the Arizona Cardinals. "John is very talented and well-respected in league circles," says Seahawks president and general manager **TIM RUSKELL**. "He will step right in during this important period and play a key role in our continued success."

**TAMPA BAY:** Buccaneers linebacker **SHELTON QUARLES** was one of four NFL players to visit U.S. troops at military bases in the Persian Gulf as part of a 12-day USO tour this March. Quarles joined Atlanta tight end **ALGE CRUMPLER**, Kansas City guard **WILL SHIELDS** and New England tight end **BENJAMIN WATSON** to continue an NFL-USO tradition initiated more than 40 years ago. In 1966, the NFL became the first sports organization to send players to Vietnam and parts of the Far East with a group that included future Pro Football Hall of Famers **WILLIE DAVIS**, **FRANK GIFFORD**, **SAM HUFF** and **JOHNNY UNITAS**.

**WASHINGTON:** The Redskins set out to improve their defense this offseason and wasted little time when the free-agency period began by signing linebacker **LONDON FLETCHER** and bringing back cornerback **FRED SMOOT**. "This is the place I wanted to be," says Fletcher, who spent the past five years with Buffalo. "It's one of the all-time great franchises." Smoot, who began his career with the Redskins (2001-04), returns after two seasons with Minnesota. "I feel like this is my home," says Smoot. "It's like moving back into that old room in my mama's house. I've been smiling ever since."