



Everything New Orleans

New Orleans Saints Coach Sean Payton discusses upcoming visit with free agent Jake Delhomme

By Mike Triplett, The Times-Picayune

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I spoke with **New Orleans Saints** Coach Sean Payton about the Saints' first week of free agency and their upcoming visit with quarterback **Jake Delhomme**, who is scheduled to arrive Friday.



David Grunfeld/The Times-Picayune

Former Carolina Panthers quarterback Jake Delhomme visited with Coach Sean Payton when Payton was an assistant in Dallas.

Payton said he goes back with Delhomme, not only having competed against him in the NFC South, but that he spent a lot of quality time with him when Delhomme took a free agent visit to Dallas in 2003. Obviously, several Saints executives also know Delhomme well from his time in New Orleans from 1997-2002.

"He's someone we certainly have a lot of respect for, having competed against him," Payton said. "In his mind, I'm sure he's looking through his options, looking for place he might be able to start, if that exists. And if that doesn't exist, there could be a lot of reasons for him to come back here."

Delhomme, 35, will be the first quarterback to visit the Saints, who still could choose to bring back veteran backup Mark Brunell, who became an unrestricted free agent after his two years in New Orleans. Brunell is "very much in the mix," Payton said.

The Saints have also been kicking the tires on some veteran defensive ends and defensive tackles, but they've been working at a very deliberate pace so far in free agency - both because of their own plan and the restrictions of new league rules.

St. Louis Rams defensive end James Hall, a New Orleans native, arrived today for a two-day visit - the team's first visit so far in free agency.

"It's just going through the process of exploring all the options, having a chance to visit with each player," said Payton, who said the first week of free agency has "gone pretty much exactly how we expected it to go," even though they've parted ways with a handful of veteran players (Scott Fujita, Charles Grant, Jamar Nesbit, Mark Simoneau).

Payton reiterated that it was tough to lose a veteran leader like Fujita, whom he was close with. But he said he was happy for him "like a son" when he signed a lucrative deal with the Cleveland Browns.

"I go back to that night we took the bus back to the hotel from the stadium (after the Super Bowl) and thinking that was the last time that we all as a team collectively were going to be together," Payton said. "But you know that's how it works in this league, and it's like that every year."

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