



Everything New Orleans

Super Bowl XLIV: New Orleans Saints linebacker Scott Fujita's diary of the time in South Florida

By Kevin Spain, The Times-Picayune

February 08, 2010, 10:15AM



Rob Car / Associated Press

Indianapolis Colts running back Joseph Addai (29) is upended on a tackle by New Orleans Saints safety Roman Harper (41) as Scott Fujita (55) looks on during the first half of the NFL Super Bowl XLIV football game in Miami, Sunday, Feb. 7, 2010.

Fort. Lauderdale, Fla. -- New Orleans Saints linebacker Scott Fujita has offered up his daily diary from the time the team arrived in Miami on Feb. 1 until today.

It's good stuff. Enjoy.

By Scott Fujita, New Orleans Saints linebacker

Monday, February 1, 2010

Destination: Miami

"It's okay to be pleased, but never satisfied." -- Dick Vermeil

Coach Vermeil was my first head coach in the NFL. He's a legend in the coaching profession, and his reputation as a man who cares more for his players' well-being than the game itself is unquestionable. He taught me to never accept complacency. So here, in the week leading up to the Super Bowl, some would say we've arrived. The Saints did it. Job well done. But let's get one thing straight: We're here to win the whole thing.

The Saints are on a mission. No group of people deserves a Super Bowl Championship more than the people of New Orleans. They have been patient, their support has been unwavering, and to be perfectly frank, they haven't had many people looking out for their best interest. But we have been. We care. We're in this thing together.

Let's be honest, the leadership in New Orleans since Katrina hasn't exactly been stellar. But those who have nothing, look to us. Those who'd like to return but can't, look to us. Those who want nothing more than a fair shake, look to us. Why? Because we have our stuff together. We recognize our role, and we don't take that responsibility lightly. They can count on us. Like I said ... we're in this thing together.

Our first day in Miami was exciting, but hectic. Airport security ... flight to Miami ... bus to hotel for check-in ... bus to University of Miami ... change into gear for practice ... bus to Dolphins facility for indoor practice due to rainstorm ... practice ... bus back to the U ... shower and change ... bus back to hotel ... meetings.

I heard from Coach Vermeil and Gary Gibbs (our defensive coordinator in New Orleans the previous three seasons) this morning, who called to share their excitement and best wishes for all of us. Also ran into Bill Parcells at practice today, who was my head coach in Dallas in 2005. I hadn't seen him in a few years, so it was great to catch up. He told me how proud he was of me, and that I looked older(?). Not quite sure how to take that last part. I owe him a lot. His desire to trade for me in 2005 really helped get me out of a stale situation in Kansas City, and I credit him with helping get my career back on track.

We had an NFL security meeting this evening ... you know, the "what to do's" and "what not to do's" the week of

the Super Bowl. The security rep from the league referred to us as "gents" about a dozen times. That might not sound very funny, but picture a room full of immature, overgrown men who have been riding buses all day and are looking for a laugh at someone else's expense. Needless to say, I don't know if anyone could take this guy seriously.

Highlight of the day: Being the first Saint to step off the plane in Miami.

Low-point of the day: Not getting a Nike schwag bag in my hotel room. All the guys who are endorsed by Nike got sweet Super Bowl schwag, with about \$5,000 worth of merch, including some products from their ACG line, which I love for hiking and for outdoor use. I was endorsed by Nike for seven years, but they voided my contract (after several warnings) for "spatting" my cleats on game-days. Some of us spat, or put tape around our cleats, to keep them tight. Nike, apparently, doesn't like that their precious Swoosh gets covered up. Oh well. Wouldn't be that big of a deal if it weren't for every teammate rubbing it in my face, parading around in all their cool new gear.

Tuesday, February 2, 2010

Media Frenzy

"Go Saints go! Who Dat!?" -- My twin two year-old daughters, Delilah and Isabell, upon seeing a Saints flag with a fleur-de-lis on it. (I'm guessing they're not the only ones shouting "Who Dat" these days)

Today was really our only scheduled "day off" of the week, but we had a two-hour "Media Blitz" at the stadium. Here's some advice to all you readers: If you ever want to get your name in the paper, play in the Super Bowl. I've never seen such a media frenzy in my life. I'm talking hundreds, maybe thousands of reporters, from all over the world, here in Miami to ask questions about this game. This wasn't just the local beat writers we deal with everyday ... this is Suzy Colbert, Rich Gannon, Ed Werder, Steve Mariucci (I was wondering who kept slapping my rear as they walked by ... come to find out it was Mooch), Michael Silver (Go Bears!), FujiTV (yes, the one from Japan), two guys sent by Will Ferrell to high-five everybody, some dude from Leno trying mess with us, a crazy chick in a bikini asking legitimate questions, this lady from a fashion mag presenting me with a "best hair" award and asking what products I use (weird, huh?), and even Telemundo. I made the mistake of saying a few things in Spanish to the fella from Telemundo (I know enough Spanish to get myself out of a jam), so he followed me the rest of the afternoon to get a full sit-down in just Spanish, without translation. For some reason, "Lo siento, yo solo hablo un poco espanol" didn't register with this guy.

I was quite popular with the reporters from Japan. They came an awfully long way to meet the big white guy with the Japanese name.

I spent the rest of the afternoon with Jaclyn and the twins, knowing it would be the last block of free time I'd have with them before we get into the bulk of the work week. Much needed ... my wife and kids are awesome.

I brought my Flip Video camera to document the whole week. And believe me, I had every intention of using it frequently. But here's the problem -- each player had a new video camera waiting for him in his room today. The result: Every guy on the team recording every moment together. So essentially, you've got a whole bunch of knuckleheads videotaping each other videotaping.

My wife's mom flew out to help with the girls for the week. She babysat tonight so Jaclyn and I could have a romantic dinner together ... with the aforementioned Mike Silver from Yahoo! Sports. I encourage everyone to email Silver personally and berate him for his third-wheeling tactics. He's lucky Jaclyn likes him so much ... there's no way she'd tolerate an evening of me commiserating over Cal's turn-of-the-century football troubles with any of my other Berkeley buddies.

Highlight of the day: The Media Blitz. Talk about a platform to get your ideas out there ... some would say it's every Berkeley grad's dream!

Low-point of the day: The Media Blitz. It's really, really, really hard to answer the same question a hundred different ways.

Wednesday, February 3, 2010

Back to Work

"Trust me, once we get to Miami, and we've got all the distractions and the media to deal with, the time you spend with us will be your sanctuary." -- Gregg Williams

Who would have thought that six hours in the meeting rooms and three hours on the practice field everyday with the same guys who have been saying the same things for the past six months would be our sanctuary? But Gregg is right. Super Bowl week is just different. Everything is more exhausting, every demand and request escalates, and the fact that we're preparing to play our 23rd game (that's right, 23rd!!) is becoming a reality. The sense of normalcy that comes with just sitting in meetings with the guys is really kind of cathartic. Coach Payton keeps telling us to get more sleep than usual, and now I see why. You really need it.

Today was a full work day, sort of a 6:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. schedule, so there's really not much to report. Jaclyn's mom watched the girls again tonight so she and I could grab a bite to eat, sans Silver.

Highlight of the day: The stench in Miami's locker room. Two of my teammates and buddies, Jon Vilma (JV) and Jeremy Shockey (Shock) both played at the University of Miami, or the "U" as they call it (I refuse to call it that in front of them). People from the U are different; they have this passionate sense of entitlement. Every time we go somewhere new together, they act like they own the place (I hope you get that I'm being facetious, if even just a little bit). Anyway, JV and Shock are quite proud of the U, and they continually remind us of that. Well, we're practicing at the U this whole week, and I'm betting those two clowns have been pretty pumped up about it. So when we stepped into that place of refuse they call a locker room, the sense of joy, accomplishment, and togetherness the whole team (minus two players) shared at that moment took our team's bond to new heights. Imagine a combination of litter box, doggie kennel, and burnt hair ... that's what the locker room smelled like. This is where all those vaunted National Championship teams were born? I make this vow: JV and Shock will never hear the end of this.

Low-point of the day: Itchy corduroy. The Super Bowl gift in our rooms today was a big black Saints robe, made of corduroy. I love corduroy. Teammate Troy Evans says I'm like an anthropology professor with all the corduroy jackets I own. But this robe is itchy. Very itchy. Bummer.

Thursday, February 4, 2010

Stand Up and Get Crunk

"When the media's gone, the band stops playing, and the fans are no longer cheering, the only thing left will be you and your thoughts. You need to be able to answer yourself one question: Did I do everything possible to win this game? If you can't answer that question the right way, it will haunt you." -- Bill Parcells

Coach Payton relayed Bill's message to the team the other day. There's a lot of hoopla the week of the Super Bowl -- Bill knows that ... he's been there a few times. As a player, you've got to be able to keep your eye on the prize, and especially on what's required to get you there.

Today was another full day of work, and our last day with any media obligations. So at least that's behind us.

The rest of my family started arriving in Miami today -- my folks, Jaclyn's dad (Gary), and my brother Jason and his fiancée Stephanie. They all have that Super Bowl glow, which was great to see. Jaclyn and I are so excited to be able to share this experience with them. Seeing the pride in my parents' eyes really reminds me how big this moment is. They know more than anyone how long I've dreamed of something like this. And I think we need to make a t-shirt for Gary that states, simply, "HERE TO PARTY." This guy is ready to roll. The over/under on high-5's by Gary this weekend is currently set at 500.

There was a family reception at the team hotel this evening. True to New Orleans, the Saints know how to put on a party -- live music, fancy lighting, tropical drinks, Cuban food stations, fresh-rolled Havanas, the works. Jaclyn and

I dropped in for a bit with the kids; one of our girls was drawn immediately to the dance floor. She spent the next 30 minutes doing the salsa with the Cuban entertainers, and was visibly unhappy with me when I told her it was bedtime. Our exit wasn't very smooth.

Highlight of the day: Joe Vitt getting un-Crunk. By now, I'm sure all you readers have heard the Saints' anthem of 2009 -- "Stand Up and Get Crunk." To say it's awesome when played in the Superdome would be the understatement of the year. Well Joe, our linebackers coach, usually gives the guys a little pep talk before we start practice everyday. Gregg Williams had one of our strength coaches play the song (at a really high decibel) to get the juices flowing, and to force us to concentrate in loud conditions. Apparently Joe couldn't hear himself think, and for the coach who regularly preaches "poise" and "composure," this was not his finest moment. All the LBs wished they had their little handy-cams with them to catch this tirade on film. The language used was definitely too passionate for this column. It was pretty epic, and we all had a good laugh after practice about it.

Low-point of the day: No food waiting for us after practice. Talk about a disgruntled group of players. D-Sharp got on the phone to order a bunch of pizzas ... pronto.

Friday, February 5, 2010

Who Dat Invasion

"The people of New Orleans love the Saints not because they provide a distraction from their fall, but because they are a reflection of their rise."

Saints fans are pouring into Miami. Maybe it's just my imagination, but I'd say we have the Colts outnumbered, at least 10 to 1 ... another example of how deep this connection runs. What this says to me is, ticket or no ticket, they're with us. Black and Gold is taking over the city ... sort of a Who Dat Invasion. I read an article the other day in the Times-Pic (New Orleans' local paper) -- a letter from the Who Dat Nation to the city of Miami. The gist of this letter? "Hey Miami, you think you've ordered enough beer, but think again. We're different."

The passage above is a text my wife sent me last week. She heard it on-line somewhere and knew I'd love it. One of the best things about this journey is that I get to enjoy it with her, someone who appreciates the connection and "gets it" like I do. Remember how cool Adrienne was in the Rocky movies? Well Jaclyn is my Adrienne.

The week is winding down, but the tension is building for the big game. I get constant reminders about how special this week is. One of my best friends and former teammates, Kawika Mitchell, came in today with his family. He won a Super Bowl with the Giants in 2007, and I know how much he wants this for my family and me. Kawika kidnapped our brother-in-law Brandon tonight to showcase some of the Super Bowl festivities. My guess is that they'll return in a drunken stupor.

My high school buddy, Nate Haros, has been texting motivational passages all week from some of our favorite movies. This game is about all the guys I grew up with too. Joe Vitt always reminds us to never forget where we came from. There were a lot of people who loved us when there was no upside to loving us, and I'm honored to play in this game for them.

Highlight of the day: Jaclyn's email. My wife sent me an email this morning reminding me of all the things we've been through the last 10 years together. Pretty powerful stuff. Like I said, she's my Adrienne.

Low-point of the day: Bed check. Today was our first night of the week with curfew and bed check. Not a big deal ... someone from the staff goes door to door, pokes their head in your hotel room, and makes sure you're in your room sleeping. We're used to this when we go on the road. But this guy, whoever it was, comes all the way in, blurts my name out a few times until I respond, and even turns my freakin' lights on! It took me at least an hour to fall back asleep. My off-season mission is to find that person and ruin a few nights' sleep for him.

Saturday, February 6, 2010

Won't Be Long Now

"Well, there is no denying it ... I would love to be strapping it up with you fine gentlemen. Exhaust yourself and enjoy a victory for this city and for yourself. You control this thing. Be courageous, be smart, have fun" -- 37

Steve Gleason, one of my favorite teammates of all time, sent the above text to me this evening. He's a New Orleans icon, widely known for blocking a punt in the early part of the Superdome re-opening game on Monday Night Football in 2006. That was one of the most electric moments I've ever witnessed. I wish he could play in this game as well.

Mike McKenzie, another great teammate I had in New Orleans, was the quintessential locker room hype man. He's the guy who gave me the nickname "Asian Assassin." As game-time would approach, he would always chant: "Won't be long now damnit!" For whatever reason, that always got me fired up. He got into Miami today to support us. He'd do anything to be able to suit up with us tomorrow.

Mark Simoneau, one of my teammates and closest friends, has played in a couple Super Bowls in his career. He told me this evening that what he remembers most about playing in those games was feeling like a kid again ... a kid who's just out there, running around, having fun. Can't wait to have that feeling.

The anxiety is building, and I'm ready to get this thing going. This is starting to feel like the longest week ever. We had our team walk-through at Sun Life Stadium today, and all the guys were asked to bring their sons to practice. That was a special moment.

As a team, and especially as a linebacker corps, we experienced a tragedy this season when Adam Zimmer, our assistant coach, lost his mother. Adam is very close with Scott Shanle, Mark Simoneau, and me. We think of him like a brother, and we know how difficult it was for him at just 25. Shanle and I played for Adam's dad, Mike, in Dallas. The linebackers were able to attend the service for his mother in Cincinnati ... I'm so glad that we were able to be there for him. Today Joe Vitt played a video for us about the Zimmer family and what they've been through this year. It was powerful. We play this game with Adam and his family in our hearts and minds.

Highlight of the day: Seeing "Jawbone" crying like a baby. Anthony Hargrove, aka Jawbone (because he talks so damn much), is one of our defensive linemen. The story of his journey in the last few years has been well-documented this season. He's been through a lot, to say the least, and to see him come through all that and prosper is a testament to what a good man can do with a second chance. He broke down crying on the field during our practice today ... again, another reminder of how big this moment is. I'm so happy for him.

Low-point of the day: That I have to wait another 24 hours to play this game.

Super Bowl Sunday, February 7, 2010

Time to Make it Happen

"There are those that make it happen, those that watch it happen, and those that stand around and wonder what the hell happened." -- Drew Brees

This will be my last entry before we take the field this evening for Super Bowl XLIV. Usually I sleep pretty well the night before a game, but I have to admit, I laid in bed last night just thinking about stuff longer than I normally would. So many things cross your mind at this point.

I remember the night before I left for college, I had trouble sleeping. I felt an overwhelming need to wake up my parents and thank them for adopting me, almost as if I was never going to see them again. So I did.

Last night I had a similar feeling. I felt the need to thank so many people and I began to reflect on so many things. So many people have been a factor in my being where I am today, and I am forever grateful.

To Jaclyn, my wife, my rock, my Adrienne, for "getting it." To my parents, for giving me the love and support required to chase my dreams without fear. To my girls, for making me smile everyday. To Jason, for always being

my biggest fan and most loyal supporter. To Grandma Lillie for her perseverance, and Grams for being the real Saint. To Gary and Donna for letting this kid marry their daughter. To Shannon for her courage. To Joe Vitt for believing in mutts like me. To Lyle Setencich for making me feel I belonged. To Dave Bregante for questioning my courage and toughening me up. To Dr. Clem Jones for giving me another chance to play this game. To Brian Husted, George Contreras, Dave Wilde, Randy Stewart, Dick Vermeil, Bill Parcells, Sean Payton, Zim & Zim, Top Dawg and the Snow Patrol, and everyone at Yee & Dubin. To Dave Fleming for telling my family's story. To Mike Silver, who, like his dad, stands up for the little guy. To Dave Zirin for sounding the voice others won't. To every teacher who challenged me to think critically, and to every teammate I ever played with. To every Saints fan who makes this about more than just football. To each of you, and to anyone I may have missed, thank you. I share this day with you.

Highlight of the day: Waking up and realizing that I'll be playing in the Super Bowl today.

Low-point of the day: How could there be a low-point?...I'm about to play in the Super Bowl!

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