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Weekly Conversation

Palmer has lofty expectations for 2006

By **Graham Bensinger** Special to ESPN.com

Editor's note: Each week during the season Graham Bensinger will be talking with high-profile NFL figures for ESPN.com's Weekly Conversation.

Graham Bensinger: Next week, Bengals-Steelers ... what comes to mind when you think about that?

Carson Palmer: They're the best team in football, a great opponent, and got us the last time we played them. It's a huge game. It's a division game and our rival. A game we need to win going in to their place [Heinz Field]. It's going to be exciting.

Bensinger: What do you expect it to be like?

Palmer:: It's going to be a knock-down fight and a drag-out, four-quarter battle. They are a very physical team and we're a physical team. We match up well. They have a good defense. We have a good offense. They have a good offense. We have a good defense. It's a very evenly matched game. Whoever executes better and plays their best football that day will win.

Bensinger: To what extent did last season's wild-card playoff game vs. the Steelers intensify your hate toward them?

Palmer: I don't hold a grudge toward them. I don't think Kimo [von Oelhoffen] took a cheap shot or anything like that. Just the fact that they knocked us out of the playoffs means a lot, makes us want to beat them bad, and get the best of them.

Bensinger: I know you forgave Kimo and said it's all part of the game, but what surprised me is that he never attempted to reach out to you. To what extent were you surprised he never contacted you?

Palmer: I really didn't think twice about it. He obviously had a lot going on. He's on his road to the Super Bowl. It's part of the game.

Bensinger: Come on ... there was plenty of time between the end of last season and now. Years ago your injury would have been career-ending. Some have said even now it was career-threatening. It may be part of the game, but don't you think he should have called?

Palmer: People get hurt all of the time. Every time somebody gets hurt, the guy that hit him doesn't need to give him a call and make sure they're OK. Football is an aggressive, physical game. I really wasn't surprised at all.

Bensinger: The NFL Rules Committee modified the rule regarding low hits on QBs. It's been dubbed by some as the "Kimo Rule." What do you think of the change?

Palmer: I like it, obviously. Anytime you're a QB and they do something to improve the health of your position, you like it. I still don't see how it's going to work. It's a tough thing to call. I don't think the hit that [von Oelhoffen] hit me on would have warranted a flag or a penalty. He was just kind of falling into me. It will be interesting to see when somebody gets penalized, when a flag gets thrown, because it's going to have to be blatant.

Bensinger: What do you think your teammates were thinking when they initially heard you proclaim you'd be ready for the start of

the season?

Palmer: They believed me. We were all in here during offseason workouts, training camp, and all of that. They saw me working. They saw me going at it every day. I would think they believed me, I'm not sure though [laughs].



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Bensinger: In order to do that, you needed to play in two preseason games. Then, you're standing on the sideline during Week 1 of the preseason and NBC told you coach Marvin Lewis planned on playing you that next game rather than waiting until the third game. When you heard that, what'd you think?

Palmer: I was surprised. There was a little bit of miscommunication. We weren't quite on the same page. That happens a lot. There's going to be miscommunication with all the talking that goes on and all of the things that happen. There's going to be people that think they hear things that they didn't. That was just a simple case of that.

Bensinger: To what extent did you not have your complete confidence restored at that point?

Palmer: I was still confident in what was going to happen. I had set a plan. I had made plans on when we were going to come back, when I was going to be ready, and ready to get going. I stuck to the plan. Looking back on it now, it really didn't matter ... it all worked out.

Bensinger: Tell me what you recall from watching Trent Green take that hit from Robert Geathers on Sunday.

Palmer: I just remember praying for him. I saw it happen. I saw the way his head snapped back. I didn't realize it was going to be that serious right away. I didn't realize he was unconscious for that long. Anytime you see a fellow QB go down, your heart goes out to him because you know what it's like to be in those positions and get hit like that. Especially, when you're outweighed by 80-100 pounds. It looks like he's going to be all right though.

Bensinger: Green called and offered you encouragement during the offseason. You've done the same. Were you able to reach him?

Palmer: I wasn't. I haven't spoken to him yet. I think he just got released from the hospital on Wednesday.

Bensinger: What did you want to say to him?

Palmer: I just wanted to let him know I'm thinking about him. I left him a message saying sorry about what happened. It's ugly. He's a tough guy. He'll bounce back. He'll be fine. He'll be back to his old self later on this season.

Bensinger: When you were coming out of USC, people were saying he's not the brightest guy ... it's going to take him 3-4 years to learn an offense. It was always yeah, Carson is talented, but ... It was as if people didn't understand you were talented because you were working your tail off. To what extent did that annoy you?

Palmer: Not at all. Coming out you hear a ton of negative things. When you're possibly a first-round pick, they're always going to look for something negative to exploit and talk about. I really didn't worry about it. I just got ready for training camp, my rookie year, and moved on from there.

Bensinger: You have to smile though when you consider you're now running a no-huddle offense though, right?

Palmer: Every guy that comes out, whether it's Reggie Bush or someone going in the seventh round, is going to have something negative said about him. There's always going to be a knock on you. They tried to knock me down and you just can't worry about that. In this game they're not just trying to knock you down on the field, they're trying to knock you down in the media. You keep playing, keep working, and try to get better.

Bensinger: The reason I bring that up is because you aren't playing now because you're a quick healer. You're playing because you were working your tail off rehabbing. Listening to people talk while you were rehabbing, how many of those same feelings during the draft returned?

Palmer: It was frustrating, but you get over it. I had a plan to focus on. Rehabbing was a mental hurdle just as much as it was a physical one. There are a lot of things you need to get over mentally: Can I do this today? Am I going to be ready to do this next week? Am I really going to be able to run in the next month? There are so many things that go through your head that you just need to block it out and go with what feels right. If you're not ready

to run, your knee will tell you that you're not ready to run. If you are ready to run, it's going to feel fine. There are a lot of physical hurdles to get over, but more of them are mental.

Bensinger: Has there been any point thus far where the injury has been on your mind while playing?

Palmer: Nope. That was why I wanted to wait until that [third] preseason game. I felt like I would be ready and 100 percent mentally focused on the game ... not worrying about my knee and not thinking about my knee.

Bensinger: Expectations for you this season ...

Palmer: I expect to win every game and go to the Super Bowl and win that! We have a phenomenal team. We have a defense that is playing great. We're going to keep riding the defense's coattails and see what we can do offensively. We expect to win every game every time we step on the field.

Bensinger: After you were 13 of 19 for 127 yards and zero touchdowns this past Sunday you said, "I know you don't throw for 400 and rush for 200 every game, but when you don't, and you're used to doing it, it doesn't feel right. It feels like we didn't do our job. It feels like we lost." Why?

Palmer: We set a high standard for ourselves offensively. We have a lot of respect for the teams we play, but we have a lot of respect for what we do and how we do it. We expect everyone to execute their job every single time the ball is snapped. When you don't have the scoreboard reflect that, it feels like you're a step behind. It feels like you aren't quite on the right page. Looking back at the film, we did a lot of things right. A lot of the things Kansas City did, they did well too. That was the reason we weren't as successful as we normally are. We're cocky. We want to go out there offensively and score 40 points every time we step on the field and we didn't. That's why we had that feeling.

Bensinger: Your best Chad Johnson story would be what?

Palmer: Man. ... There's a lot about Chad. I get a kick out of just seeing what he's doing new. First, he had the Mohawk, which was funny. Nobody was wearing a Mohawk. Now, he dyed it gold. So now he's got a gold Mohawk, gold teeth, and gold jewelry. He's always got something new. He's always changing something up to get a laugh out of it. It makes the locker room fun.

Bensinger: And why does he call you "Snowflake"?

Palmer: I don't know! He's got a whole bunch of nicknames for me. He always has a new one. Snowflake happens to be the one he's using right now.

Bensinger: How are the ping pong battles with Chad?

Palmer: He's been kicking my butt recently, but he's been practicing. I need to get in there and get some alone time on the table and work on my game a little before I play him next time.

Bensinger: Chad said if you didn't get injured he would have a [Super Bowl] ring. What do you say to that?

Palmer:Uh, you know, that's tough to say. Chad is a confident guy. He's confident in our offense and in our team. You could "if" yourself to death. Every team is saying if we converted that fourth down. If Nick Harper would have not gotten tackled by Roethlisberger and scored that touchdown for Indianapolis, they would have won. So, you can "if" yourself to death. I went down and the offense kept going. Defensively, we were playing well. We just couldn't get [the Steelers] that day. They played better than we did. The rest is history.

Bensinger: Dec. 31, Steelers-Bengals at Paul Brown Stadium ...

Palmer: Hopefully, we'll end the year 2-0 against the Steelers.

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