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Weekly Conversation

Edwards out to make a difference on and off the field

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: Obviously different things work for different coaches. You've now had the opportunity to coach for two franchises. What do you think makes for a successful head coach?

Herm Edwards: Good players (laughs). The first thing you have to have is good players. If you have good players, you have a chance to be successful. Your players have to trust what you're trying to accomplish. We all have to be on the same page. There's a trust factor there. Then, you've got to have a good coaching staff. If you have those three things, along with some luck and staying injury-free, you have a chance to have a successful football team.

Bensinger: What's the most difficult part for a head coach?

Edwards: Trying to establish your philosophy. Players have to understand there are going to be changes. Players sometimes don't accept change as fast as others do.

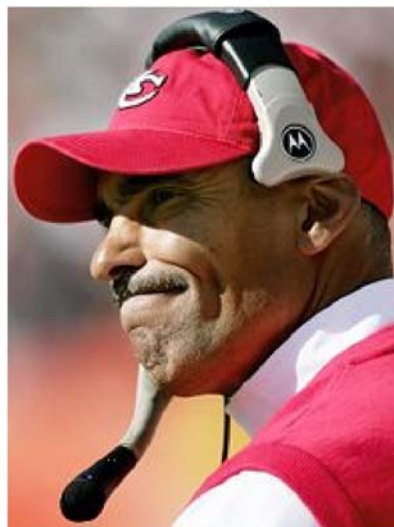
All philosophies are workable. It's just a matter of how quickly everyone blends in and accepts what you're trying to do.

Bensinger: What from your childhood has most prepared you to be a leader?

Edwards: Probably faith and believing in what you want to accomplish. You can't let the naysayers destroy your vision or damper what you want to do. My parents gave me a strong foundation for my work ethic. I work hard, work with people, and judge people for what they are. I never have a preconceived notion about someone's lifestyle. You need all types of people to be successful. You have to be a great communicator in today's world. You have to be a good listener. It's important to give people an opportunity to talk and have a conversation. You can learn a lot that way.

Bensinger: What is the biggest lesson you took from your first head coaching experience with the Jets?

Edwards: Experience. I don't think you can ask for better experience than coming to New York in your first go around. Everything you do is very intense there. You're only as good as your last performance. It's what have you done for me lately. That's probably the way it is everywhere, but there it seems a little more magnified because of all the media coverage you get. The thing you learn about teams that play in New York is you're either real good or you're real bad. There's no in between. That's something you have to understand. The second thing you have to understand is that you have to keep the distractions away from your football team. You can't let your team start reading the paper, listening to the radio talk shows, and the guys on television critiquing your team. They [the media] try to tell you about your football team, but they have no idea. They watch your team one week and maybe get to see the first 15-20 minutes of practice, but they don't know



Doug Pensinger/Getty Images

Herm Edwards tries to impact players' lives both on and off the field.

the day-to-day operations of your team. They have no clue what's going on. You guard against the influence of people outside the football circle.

Bensinger: What went into your decision to leave the Jets and go to the Chiefs?

Edwards: It was a decision that was made by both parties. It was probably best for the Jets and for me. At the end of the day, both parties agreed that was the best thing to do. I am really thankful to have been with the Jets for those five years. That was my first head coaching job. It was a great venue to learn how to coach in. I had great players. I still have great admiration and relationships with many of the players and ownership. In this game, there comes a point in time where you know it might be time to move on. It was best for everybody.

Bensinger: You've said your goal is to not only coach your players, but to make them better men. Why is that so important to you?

Edwards: At the end of the day, that's part of your task as a coach. You get these young players when they are 22 or 23 years old and coming out of college. Generally, if they have a career in football, they are done playing around 33 or 34. They have another life to live. They probably have another 50 years to live. Have you taught them how to be responsible? Have you taught them how to be accountable? That all relates to life. They have to make decisions that aren't just about them, but about the team. You can be a better man. You can go out in the real world and understand that you're going to need a lot of people to help you. You can't do it by yourself. You need to ask yourself what you're bringing to the table to help others. If you do that, when you do get out of football as a coach, you can say I gave something back to the game.

Bensinger: Oftentimes, you have players that come in making lots of money with huge egos. How do you go about doing that?

Edwards: You have to make them understand that they are only as important as the guy next to them. They can only have success if the team is successful. It takes a lot of people for you to win. One player alone can't win. You have to check your ego at the door if we're going to be successful. You can have individual success, but if your record is still bad you aren't going to be accomplishing the team things that will make you even more successful. Players realize that. The star players are a little more high maintenance than the other guys, but that's the same with every team.

Bensinger: Racism in the NFL. How prevalent do you think it is?

Edwards: I don't think it's prevalent. Sometimes we fall into the trap of that being a good word to use. The number of minority players on football teams has changed dramatically from when I entered the league in 1977. Football is a part of society. If you look at big businesses and corporations, you could ask: why aren't there enough minority CEOs? It's just part of the process. There are only 32 teams in the NFL. We need to step back and judge our society. That's where it starts. When you're in business or in football, you're comfortable with the people that you know. If you don't have access to talk and visit with other people, you are kind of in a box. You can build a box without even knowing it and get stuck in it. The NFL was like that for a while. The box is expanding now.

Bensinger: How have you most seen it change?

Edwards: In players. When I first came into the league, there were certain positions that you knew you weren't going to be able to play. They stacked players at certain positions. There weren't many minority coaches. Now, there are [minority] players playing all of the positions in the NFL. There are a lot of minority coaches. It's not an issue, but it's a concern when you see guys [minorities] who have the ability to be head coaches that don't get granted the opportunity to be interviewed. There also need to be more minorities being interviewed for management positions.

Bensinger: What are your thoughts on the Rooney Rule?

Edwards: It was done so that people would open their box up and allow for other guys [minorities] to be interviewed. It didn't mean you have to hire them. You have to hire the best guy you see fit to coach your football team. You also have to grant guys interviews so at least they go through the process. They might not get the job, but it helps them because when they interview the next time they'll be a lot better.

Bensinger: Did you ever view the Rooney Rule in a demeaning way?

Edwards: No, not at all. It creates opportunities. You have to create opportunities.

Bensinger: We're now past the one-month mark of the season. How would you describe your time in Kansas City thus far?

Edwards: It's been good. It's a work in progress. We've got a team here that's learning a little bit about the philosophy in which we like to go about doing things. It's changed a little bit from what Dick [Vermeil] used to do, but some has stayed the same. It's been enjoyable. I wish we'd have more wins at this point, but we don't. We won a big game at home. Now, we have to go on the road and try to win another one.

Bensinger: What do you think about where the team presently stands?

Edwards: We wish we were a little better. If we can get a couple wins in a row, we'll be feeling a lot better about our situation.

Bensinger: Given that this is your first year as head coach of the franchise, how do you judge success?

Edwards: You can judge it by wins, but that doesn't always tell the true story. I've learned to judge it in other ways. Did you develop players? Do you have the right kind of players to fit your system? Are you doing it the right way? It's a process. It's certainly not a quick fix. Some coaches want to get it done right now and do whatever it takes. Some guys have more patience than others. I believe you build things with a good foundation. You have to have patience to do that. This organization is built on that. It's had a lot of patience and great ownership.

Bensinger: What have you found the biggest transition has been for you in switching franchises?

Edwards: Nothing big at all because I started out here. That's the saving grace for me. I actually started my coaching career here in Kansas City. I'm real fortunate to be able to come back as a head coach because generally that doesn't happen. I've been very blessed.

Bensinger: What do you think of the hype that the defense has been getting?

Edwards: It's just hype. I don't think a whole lot about it. At the end of the year we can evaluate what type of defense and team we are. Our offense has really helped the defense. Our time of possession and not turning the ball over has gotten overlooked. When you don't turn the ball over, you always give the defense a chance to play on a long field for the most part. The time of possession has kept the defense pretty fresh. The defense is coming together, but we're far from where we're supposed to be.

Bensinger: Trent Green goes down. When he took the hit, what are you thinking?

Edwards: My main concern is to make sure that he's going to be OK. The second thing is to get the next guy ready to go. You still have to find a way to win the football game. You advise your team of the situation, tell them that the QB is going to be fine, and then get their focus back on the football game.

Bensinger: How's Green doing?

Edwards: He's doing well. He's getting better. It's day-to-day. It's a slow process, but it's one that we are willing to wait on. When the doctors say he's ready, when Trent says he's ready, he'll be back.

Bensinger: How eager is Green to play?

Edwards: He's eager. There's no doubt about it. He's that kind of guy, but you can't rush something like this. This is not something you rush.

Bensinger: What do you think of the NFL's efforts to protect QBs?

Edwards: The NFL has done a good job. They're in a tough spot especially when you have some QBs that can run around in the pocket. You get a lot of bodies flying around. The guys are getting bigger, stronger, and faster. When you lose your starter it is tough. All teams try their best to protect the QB, but it's tough.

Bensinger: I talked to Carson Palmer about this a couple weeks ago. Obviously, the NFL has continued to improve their efforts to protect QBs, but he said, "I still don't see how it's going to work. It's a tough thing to call ... it's going to have to be blatant." What do you think of that?

Edwards: He makes a great point because it is. When do you call it? When do you not call it? It's tough because they [QB] have the ball and when they go back to pass the object is to knock the QB down. You've been taught that ever since you've been playing football. If you knock the QB down enough times, you have a chance to win.

Bensinger: We last spoke in July at the American Century Golf

Championship in Lake Tahoe ... How's the golf game?

Edwards: I haven't played anymore! (laughs) I played those five rounds and it was the most I'd played in the whole year! If I get invited back, next year I'll be playing another five rounds. (laughs)

Graham Bensinger is a regular contributor to ESPN.com. Visit his Web site at: TheGBShow.com. You can e-mail him at graham@thegbshow.com
