

Updated: Jan. 12, 2007

Weekly Conversation

Alexander keeps the faith in more ways than one

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

Editor's note: Each week during the season, Graham Bensinger talks with a high-profile NFL figure for ESPN.com's Weekly Conversation. This week, he checks in with Seattle RB [Shaun Alexander](#), who leads the Seahawks into an NFC divisional playoff game against the top-seeded Bears. Alexander recently released his memoir, "Touchdown Alexander: My Story of Faith, Football and Pursuing the Dream" (Harvest House Publishers) and has also started the Shaun Alexander Foundation (www.shaunalexander.org), which is dedicated to helping empower and improve the lives of fatherless young men through education, athletics, character-building programs and leadership training.

Graham Bensinger: There's 1:19 left in the game. The Cowboys' Martin Gramatica has to kick a 19-yard field goal which will put Dallas ahead 23-21. What's going through your head?

Shaun Alexander: You know, I'm honestly thinking, man, if we get the ball back with one minute we could throw a lucky pass, maybe hit a slant to Deion [Branch] and get us across the field, and [kicker] Josh [Brown] will hit a game-winner. Then, after that thought, I was like, "If he could just miss this, it'd be so much easier!" [laughs]



John Froschauer/AP Photo

Shaun Alexander said watching Dallas' Tony Romo's bobble sent him on a series of highs and lows.

Bensinger: That didn't even need to happen. Cowboys QB Tony Romo mishandled the ball. What do you recall from the play?

Alexander: I remember when he bobbled the snap, I thought, "Oh my goodness, he's 'bout to run for a TD." [Jordan] Babineaux made a great play. He jumped over the kicker, goes running down the side and just makes a diving tackle. It was an awesome play.

Bensinger: Take me through your roller coaster of emotions during the play.

Alexander: It's a high to low thing. You're high that our team can win the game because they're driving down the field. Then, you're like, "No! Did we just blow it?" You start getting your emotions together to make a final drive. Then, the snap comes, he bobbles it, and you're high again. You see him take off running, you're low again. Then, they make the tackle and you're excelling. It's awesome. Everybody is just going crazy. Excitement was all over the place.

Bensinger: A play that you made seems to have been overlooked in all the game coverage. You dashed for 20 yards on first down from the Seattle 2 with 1:14 remaining in the game. How critical of a play was that?

Alexander: It's a big play because we end up having to punt and the game was pretty much over after that down. Instead of punting from the end zone, we punted from the 20- or the 30-yard line. It put the game in a place where we could easily grab it.

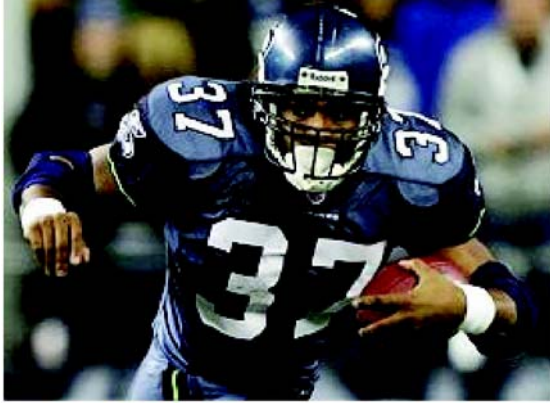
Bensinger: You're on the cover of Madden 2007. You fractured a bone in

your left foot during Week No. 1 of the season. Please tell me you're starting to believe in the "Madden Curse!"

Alexander: No, I really don't. I cracked it in Week No. 1 and played the first three games with it just being sore and everything. If I was the only running back to get hurt, then, maybe I would say there's something to that. Playing tailback is the most physical position. You're running at crazy angles and people fall on you all the time. For me to play six years and not miss any games, I just look at it like it was my time. It's a physical sport. Guys get hurt all through the season and come back. I can't give Madden that much credit because other guys from my position also got hurt.

Bensinger: What do you recall from when you sustained the injury?

Alexander: I hardly ever talk about pain or injuries. I remember, clearly, when we got on the plane in Detroit [following the first game of the season against the Lions], I said, "I'm really hurt here. I can barely walk." I figured that I just wouldn't practice during the week and would play in the game. We tried that for two weeks and the foot was swelling more and more without even practicing. I realized something was pretty bad with it.



Jed Jacobsohn/Getty Images

Shaun Alexander missed the Seahawks' early season loss in Chicago, but hopes to make a difference on Sunday.

Bensinger: You thought you could come back earlier than you did. To what extent were you satisfied with when you came back?

Alexander: Oh, I wanted to come back like two weeks after. [laughs] That's just how I am. Everybody in this building is the same when it comes to football. We're going to give everything we got. As a group, we decided we're going to put our teammates in front of ourselves and we're just going to play hard. Sometimes, that's playing hurt or a little beat up. Even though I was sore, I thought I could still do a little something. Even if I can't run as well, I know that I change defenses when I'm on the field.

Bensinger: When your teammates heard of your desire to come back in two weeks, did anyone pull you aside and say, "Man, take it easy. Give it a rest!"?

Alexander: No, it wasn't that deep. Even though I wanted to [come back], I'm not going to be in denial that it was broken. You have to be smart. It wasn't like I was going out there regardless of what the X-rays said. I wasn't at that stage, but I was shocked every time I saw the X-rays. I'm like, "Gosh! I can't believe it's not healed yet because I feel a lot better!" It is what it is. The X-rays showed it was broken so I still had to sit.

Bensinger: What effect, if any, has the injury had on your game this season?

Alexander: I just think its chemistry. Our line is new so the chemistry of all of us playing together is different. That's the biggest thing. Whenever guys are shuffling in, chemistry is always the thing that you're trying to improve.

Bensinger: The Seahawks didn't have you or Jerramy Stevens when the team lost to the Bears earlier this season. How do you quantify that impact?

Alexander: If you have a good tight end and a good tailback playing in a game, your possibility of controlling the clock is just better. You're going to get embarrassed really fast if you don't control the clock with the Bears. That's the difference. It gives us a chance of getting a couple more first downs by throwing the ball to the tight end over the middle, a couple of extra running plays will get you more time with the ball, and it gives your team a little bit more of a chance to play and be around in the fourth quarter to try and win it.

Bensinger: What do you think of Chicago?

Alexander: I've never played in Chicago. The atmosphere there was exciting, though. You could tell the old traditions of that town. It's just like when you play in Green Bay. It's generations of fans where their grandfathers took their dads and their dads took their sons. That kind of thing is exciting. Those sons are taking their kids, now. I think that's a great thing about some of the football towns. It can be made a family tradition.

Bensinger: What's the most challenging aspect of the Bears team for you?

Alexander: They just do a good job of causing turnovers. For me, that's always a challenge. I know how important it is with turnovers and ball control. If you turn the ball over, you're almost guaranteeing your team the greatest challenge in football.

Bensinger: You remained a virgin until your wedding night. I still recall talking to you about it when we first met during my sophomore year in high school. You talk about it in your new book "Touchdown Alexander." It's something you're very proud of. That's hard enough. Faith aside, there's something called temptation and desire. How do you hold off kissing your wife until the altar on wedding day?

Alexander: Well, I had kissed other girls before. I just knew with her that if I even want to give myself a shot at being pure before I marry her, I need to draw lines. It was just being real with myself. If you're going to set a goal with anything, whether it's football, faith, jobs or whatever -- you have to know who you are and be real with yourself. For me, I knew I had this goal of purity. Being real with myself, I knew that I would cross the line with this girl who was going to become my wife. I just made an extremely strong stance where I'm not going to put myself in any situation that would not keep me there.



Frazer Harrison/Getty Images

Bensinger: How were you able to show affection for each other?

It wasn't until his wedding day that Shaun Alexander kissed his wife, Valerie.

Alexander: That's a worldly term. I think sometimes you can confuse affection with other things because you don't really know what true affection is. True affection or intimacy could be in a conversation, how you talk, what you talk about, friendship, goals or where you're going. A lot of times, people confuse true affection with a good time. A good time might not necessarily be affectionate at all. [laughs] And you know what I'm talking about... [laughs]

Bensinger: What's the best part of waiting?

Alexander: I just think that there's no doubt in my mind, and it's not a fearful thing, of who my wife is. If I'm not in town, there's no, "Would she go do this or that?" There's no, "Am I missing something?" We fulfill the desires that we have for each other 24/7. All right? [laughs] It's a great thing to have that kind of peace where I have no desires for anything else and neither does she. I know that's true because she could have anybody just like I could. That peace is worth more than any fun time or any dollar value that you could ever have.

Bensinger: Here's a nice segue for you ... How's that wait compare to the wait to win a Super Bowl?

Alexander: [laughs] The wait to win a Super Bowl is brutal. If you're talking about it in terms of that way, I pretty much just jumped in bed butt naked and then decided to get up and go home! [laughs] I would not have done that to myself. There's a totally different playing field! [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