

Chiropractic History Made at Superbowl XXIV

Mike Radford

The legions of Bronco fans worldwide were stunned as the San Francisco 49ers handed Denver the most lopsided defeat in Superbowl history. In the the 55-10 romp, the 49ers were unstoppable from the opening whistle to the final gun. Many agree the game wasn't as close as the score indicated. The Niners could easily have run up the score in the final minutes as Joe Montana's backup Steve Young (featured in Mentors) took the final snaps and simply downed the ball inside the Bronco 20, choosing not to further humiliate the proud and talented Denver squad. Many highly respected football experts believe that John Elway is actually a better quarterback than Joe Montana. But that isn't what 110 million people witnessed on Sunday the 28th of January. What they saw was total dominance by San Francisco. The talents of John Elway and his bunch seemed to have been left back in the mile high city as the Niners did any and everything they chose to do. To say the citizens of Denver were embarrassed is being kind. So what is the secret ingredient that makes the boys from the bay so dominant? Is it superior coaching? Superior talent? I don't think so. Denver Head Coach Dan Reeves is a proven winner, and his offensive coordinator is none other than the brilliant Mike Shanahan, former head coach of the Los Angeles Raiders.

So what is it that made the game so lopsided? According to many players on the 49ers, the "secret" weapon in their arsenal was a chiropractor named Nick Athens from San Carlos, California. Unless you've been there to experience it first hand, the week leading up to the game is an unbelievable mass of media all vying for the "scoop" -- the "hot" story of the day. This year's game made chiropractic history.

An estimated 90 million viewers watched the CBS pre-game show as Irv Cross interviewed Dr. Athens while Joe Montana received his pre-game adjustment. With the advertising rates set at \$750,000 for a 30 second spot, the chiropractic profession received over \$2,000,000 of air time, not to mention the talent fee Joe Montana would normally receive for such "endorsements." Dr. Athens feels; "every DC in the world owes a large debt of gratitude to Joe and the rest of the 49ers. They are doing more to bring us into the public eye than anyone ever has!" All week long, Dr. Athens found himself surrounded by reporters from CBS Television, Fox News, USA Today, UPI & AP, Sports Illustrated, and dozens of newspapers from across America. Why? To learn how he was chosen to provide chiropractic care to what has now been dubbed "The Team of The Decade." As the throngs of journalists were poised with pencils & notepads they learned that it was Roger Craig who first began utilizing Dr. Athens over six years ago when Craig was a rookie running back trying to win a spot on the 49er roster. It was during this critical time in his blossoming career that Craig discovered the talents of Dr. Nick Athens, and the "magic touch" he possessed known as chiropractic.

Roger Craig is the workhorse of the 49ers. He's known as the Lou Gerhig of football due to his never missing a game in his entire career. This fact, he says is due largely to Dr. Athens and the chiropractic care he as been receiving. As time passed Craig began acting as the 49er's "unofficial" pied-piper for chiropractic. Other players watched as his durability improved, stamina increased, and he enjoyed rapid recovery from injuries that tended to take longer with other players who where not under chiropractic care. All the evidence pointed to Dr. Athens' success and further validated the efficacy of the treatments. The old cliché, "The proof is in the pudding" was never

more evident than inside the painted gridiron on the Superdome's artificial turf. On the Tuesday prior to gameday, Dr. Athens arrived at the 49ers headquarters in the Hilton Hotel in New Orleans. As he checked in, the attractive front desk clerk pulled a large stack of papers out of the message box. She smiled knowingly, "Dr. Athens it seems that you have a lot of players waiting to see you." As Dr. Athens combed through the pile of pink message slips it became obvious to him that many of the 49ers had been awaiting his arrival much as young children await Santa on Christmas, or the money being left by the tooth fairy. Message after message read essentially the same, "Nick, call me as soon as you arrive---I need you to adjust me!" The list was long, from Roger Craig to Joe Montana, Jerry Rice to Bubba Paris. Not wanting to delay any treatment, Dr. Athens immediately called the players in the order received, no special treatment. First-come, first-served. The first call was from defensive back Eric Wright, "Dr. Nick, I've got a groin pull---I need an adjustment right away!" Dr. Athens left the unpacking for later and proceeded directly up one floor to Wright's room. After one knock the door flew open, "I need an adjustment baaaad!" Eric Wright was in obvious pain as Dr. Nick watched him limp across the room. Within five minutes after the adjustment, Wright felt almost complete relief. Next on the list was Roger Craig, suffering from a severe case of the flu. Craig had lost nine pounds and felt very weak. After his evaluation, Dr. Athens designed a treatment program that would include adjustments three times a day for the following five days leading up to the big game on Sunday (the most dramatic case of the week). Defensive back Ronnie Lott had suffered a deep thigh injury during the championship game with the Los Angeles Rams two weeks earlier. The pain was so severe, walking was difficult. Dr. Athens gave him the needed adjustment and prescribed Lott's treatment schedule for the rest of the week. As Dr. Nick left for his next "patient" Lott smiled, "Thanks Nick!" And so it went, all through the evening and late into the night. The "word" had spread to all the 49ers---Dr. Nick was in town! By Wednesday, Dr. Athens needed the help of his colleague, Dr. Jody Serra. Athens continues, "He set up his practice in Lebanon, New Jersey. It's Dr. Serra who treats the team when they travel East. Jody Serra is one of the most talented men I know. He is very much in demand by the players." All week long there was so much demand for adjustments both doctors could barely keep up! Thursday, more adjustments. Friday, more of the same intense pressure. Then, on the final night before the big game it got out of hand when 35 players from the 49er squad had to see Drs. Athens and Serra. They knew that they would "bury" the Broncos if they felt good physically, and that meant they would be mentally superior, sharper, quicker, more intense. Defensive back Tim McKyer was hurting badly when he first saw Dr. Athens. A few adjustments later, his muscle pull was totally healed. After the final adjustment he began to dance around the room showing Dr. Athens how great he felt, he began to sing, "On Super Sunday---I'm going to be superrrrman!"

Bubba Paris was suffering from low back pain and was taking muscle relaxers as prescribed by the team medical staff. Paris was getting little relief from the medication, so at the suggestion of several teammates he called Dr. Athens. "Bubba was suffering with a fifth lumbar subluxation. The medication was sending his body phony neurological communications. After his adjustment he stopped taking the drugs and told me he felt like a new man." Bubba's remarks give further credibility to the success of chiropractic care, "I'm just worried that this wonderful feeling won't last until game time!" Dr. Athens assured him, "Don't worry Bubba, we'll adjust you right before the game." Paris' east-west smile showed Athens he had a happy and confident new patient. The unsung hero in the Bubba Paris case is Dr. Mark Steed who invented the adjusting table that carries his name. Bubba Paris is listed in the media guides as weighing 299 pounds. In reality he tilts the scales at well over 350 pounds so it took a quality table to support the mass. Dr. Athens really enjoyed working on the big man who, according to the doctor, "has a wonderful infectious personality. He's just a big kid in a huge grown-up's body. One thing for sure, he's now a real believer in chiropractic."

Everyone knows about Joe Montanas's back surgery a couple of years ago, but what the public

doesn't know about is his regular visits to Dr. Athens. He has been a regular patient along with his entire family for over two years, and of course received Athen's "magic touch" before the game on Superbowl Sunday. According to Dr. Athens, Montana's problem is his neck, lower back, and the elbow on his throwing arm. "Joe Montana has a subluxation near the atlas," Athens explains. "With regular chiropractic adjustments Joe knows his depth perception is better. He has more energy, quickness, and he tells me that he feels a sharper mental alertness." After his adjustments with Dr. Athens, Montana doesn't have the painful headaches that used to plague him. During superbowl week, it was Joe Montana who led the parade of 49ers getting their pre-game adjustments. Athens continues, "Joe felt as fresh in the fourth quarter as he did at the opening kick-off. During the pre-game visit, I adjusted his atlas, his right elbow, and again the lower back. Roger Craig has been a believer for over six years. On Tuesday of Superbowl week, Dr. Athens began his three times-a-day adjustments to relieve the flu symptoms. With Athens' help, Craig gained back the lost weight, and felt strong by game time. The 100% recovery was accomplished with nothing more than the adjustments. No drugs, no anti-biotics. Craig said he never felt stronger in his whole career. The stories go on and on.

Jerry Rice, the MVP in the the previous Superbowl, had a fantastic game scoring three touchdowns. John Taylor had a great game. The whole team, according to Dr. Athens was, "totally balanced for peak performance." The Broncos on the other hand were out of sync the whole game. They didn't have any idea how the 49ers were so dominant. "Let's be honest." Athens continued, "The Denver Broncos are just as talented as any team in the NFL. These athletes are all gifted. So you have to look at all the factors to evaluate why San Francisco was so overpowering. In my opinion, it's because they received chiropractic adjustments all week long. They know chiropractic works. They know it will prolong their careers. The Broncos would have been a different team if they had a chiropractor working with their players. John Elway was lost out there. He didn't have energy, his instincts seemed to be dulled, his peripheral vision was poor, consequently, he was beat up all day long. Montana wasn't touched the whole game. Both teams have talent; but it takes more than talent to win a Superbowl. It's a simple formula;

Talent + Balanced Health = Victory

Those god-given abilities were balanced with chiropractic adjustments. The Denver Broncos weren't. It's just that simple."

The 49er management has known for some time that most of their players visit Drs. Athens and Serra. It's obvious they embrace anything that keeps the ball rolling as it has been. Why mess around with success? Even the owner, Eddie Dibartolo has promised Dr. Athens that he'll come in for an adjustment once he returns from his post-Superbowl holiday. He wants to find out first hand how something so simple can work such dramatic results. After the game Joe Montana smiled, said he felt great, "Thanks Nick. Let's do it again next year!" The 49ers didn't know it at the time, but they were making chiropractic history!

The future is full of promise for doctors who will follow the proven path. It doesn't happen overnight. Dr. Nick Athens has been working toward this goal for over eight years. He suggests that chiropractors begin on the local level. "Work with the high school athletes and the local colleges. Remember, as the young athletes get older and grow into adults, your reputation grows right along with them. When a few make it into the professional ranks, who do you think they'll call? Of course it will be you, their personal chiropractor who helped get them there!"

Note: Dr. Nick will be featured in an upcoming issue of *Sports Illustrated*. The interview was conducted in New Orleans by renowned Sports Illustrated writer, Paul Zimmerman. To contact Dr. Athens call (415) 593-8441.

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