

## The Fifth Down



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## Rhodes and Ferguson Support Ryan and Burress

By JOE BRESCIA

In the last week few weeks, Rex Ryan has said he did not come to New York “to kiss Bill Belichick’s rings,” bragged that he would soon celebrate a Super Bowl victory in the White House and had a war of words through the media with Dolphins linebacker Channing Crowder.

Some might call it embarrassing trash talk for an N.F.L. coach. Ryan is fortunate that his players call it a motivational tool.

“He’s putting the pressure on us to perform,” said Jets safety Kerry Rhodes at the ESPN Zone’s Father’s Day Q & A event Tuesday night in Times Square. Rhodes, Jets offensive lineman D’Brickashaw Ferguson and the former Knick Allan Houston were the guests of honor.

“He’s putting the onus on us to win,” Rhodes said. “We’ve got to back it up. He knows we have the type of players that, deep down inside, we can go out and win. That’s his way of getting that out of us.”

Ferguson thinks the change from Eric Mangini’s tight-lipped style can benefit the team. “It’s good to have different personalities,” he said. “He’s a different person, so he’s going to bring something different to the table. As a player, you have to ride with your coach. If he’s going to do that, it puts us a bigger load on us to back it up. But it’s something that we feel that we can do.”

Rhodes and Ferguson also feel that the players can deal with Plaxico Burress as a teammate if he signs with the Jets. Rhodes says he knows Burress pretty well and that he would not be a distraction.

“He’s a friend of mine,” Rhodes said. “If it happens, I think he would be a great addition to our team. Everybody knows he can play football.”

Burress’s skills made life easier for one young quarterback: Eli Manning. And Rhodes says Burress can do the same for Mark Sanchez or Kellen Clemens.

“He’s a guy that’s going to take the pressure off the other players on the team and make everyone play better,” Rhodes said. “He’s a guy that can deal with double teams, go up and make the big catches for you when you need them. Whenever you can get a guy of that caliber it would be great.”

“I think that will be a factor,” Rhodes said of possible jail time for Burress. “But if you have a chance to get a player like that, I don’t see why you wouldn’t. If he’s joins us, you want to support your teammate. Whatever happened before that, don’t want to dwell on. If he’s here and starts a new chapter, I don’t think it will be a problem.”

Ferguson would also welcome Burress. “He’s a great talent. Athletically, he can provide us with some nice things. Every player has their own situation that they are forced to deal with. But aside from that, if that’s the direction the organization wants to go, I think he’s a really great player.”

No matter what direction the Jets decide to go with their choice of quarterback, Rhodes and Ferguson say they will be in good shape. Sanchez, the team’s No 1 pick, will compete with Clemens for the starting job.

“If it’s Sanchez, we all know he’s a great talent,” Ferguson said. “If they feel like he’s ready to go, so be it. I’ll support him. I think we have a lot of great options. Kellen Clemens is there, too. Whoever gets the starting nod, I think we’ll have success. As a team, we built up our line. We built up our backfield. We feel that we can do it. We’re not going to put pressure on the guy. The pressure will be on the line and our backs. We’ll take the pressure off him and handle business.”

Rhodes says an improved defense stressed by Ryan will make life easier for either quarterback. “Whatever guy is going to play QB for us, we’re moving towards being a defensive orientated team,” Rhodes said. “We want to win with our defense, the way Baltimore did. We’re taking the challenge upon ourselves to step up and do that. Whatever guy steps up, he’s going to be young. So we’re taking that approach — better defense — to the whole situation.”