



## Super Bowl players tell the world's media of their faith

By Art Stricklin  
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*EDITORS' NOTE: Sportswriter Art Stricklin, in his third year of BP coverage of the spiritual side of the Super Bowl, will be reporting this week from the site of Super Bowl XL in Detroit.*

DETROIT (BP)—While former Chicago Bears quarterback Jim McMahon once got media attention for writing offbeat messages on his headband during Super Bowl week, Pittsburgh strong safety Troy Polamalu plans his own method of expression during Sunday's championship contest, even if it will never be seen by the millions watching in TV on in person.

He will be wearing his simple, silver wedding ring under his black gloves as he goes about his defensive exploits against the Seattle Seahawks.

"I don't think we put any value on marriage any longer in our country and, to me, the wedding band is a symbol of my wedding bond with my wife [Theodora] and my bond with God," Polamalu said during the Super Bowl media day Jan. 31.

He was one of several Steelers happy to talk about their faith in Christ to the assembled worldwide media at Detroit's Ford Field, the site of Sunday's championship game.

Wide receiver Antwaan Randle El eagerly surveyed the chaotic media scene of hundreds of journalists with notepads in hand, dozens of video cameramen and countless live radio interviews being conducted. Then he gave his assessment of the proceedings:

"People think this game may go down in history, but it's really only temporary. I thank God that I am here, but I know I have to ask Him for guidance because I didn't know what to expect....

"I can't let this game get me too high or too low," El said. "I have to stay focused on God and stay focused on His word."

Steelers starting center Jeff Hartings, a former Detroit Lion who was nervous being a favorite target of local media welcoming home a former player, said his faith in God extended even into the media session.

"I've been praying every day that I would honor Him and I'm praying now that I don't embarrass Him during this time," Hartings said. "I want to give Him His praise all the time and use this time as a platform not for me, but for Him."

Hartings accompanied Steelers chaplain Jay Wilson on a mission trip in 2004 and said that trip, along with the knee injury he overcame to gain his Pro Bowl status, has changed his career.

"God humbled me with the injury, but over last three years I've been able to refocus on Him and honor Him with my play. Every year, I just take it one step at a time if He wants me to continue to play. That's the way it's been lately for me and the way it should continue to be," Hartings said.

"I just want to be a Christian man giving Him the glory. That's my plan for this game."

Steelers fullback Dan Kreider said the familiar routine of daily prayer times with his wife over the phone and morning Bible reading in an unfamiliar city is helping him overcome temptations connected with the Super Bowl.

"There certainly is a lot of temptations here with parties and women and things we know we shouldn't be a part of," Kreider said. "It keeps you humble when you can pray over the phone every night with your wife or spend time at the team Bible study.

Offensive tackle Max Starks said the annual media gathering, which drew more than 3,000 participants, was seen as a God-given opportunity to the Christian Steelers players, not a hindrance.

"I'm just a tool from God and this life is just a test from Him," Starks said. "God has given the Christian guys a world stage in this big game and promises us a reward in the end. You have the opportunity to use your faith in everyday conversation. That's what we need to be doing."

Polamalu has been nicknamed the Tasmanian Devil for his frenetic on-field defensive style, but didn't hesitate to use his opportunity to promote his faith as a key to success.

"Keep God No. 1 in your life all the time," he said in response to an ESPN Argentina reporter who asked how his soccer-mad country could be successful in American football as well.

Former Philadelphia Eagles offensive lineman Barrett Brooks, who is in his 10th year in the NFL but only his third with the Steelers, said the constant shifting of players among teams has made it difficult when Christian brothers face each other on the football field.

"You know a lot of Christian guys in this league, but we just have to keep strong for Him and give God the time He deserves," Brooks said.

"God will have His will regardless of what we seek on the field," he said.

With less than five days to go before the final showdown between the Steelers and Seahawks, there will be plenty of time to talk, scheme and study every possible way to defeat the opposition.

But for a number of the players, their focus is on more than just a three-hour encounter.

"This [Super Bowl] is big to the world," Hartings said. "But I have to separate myself, give God the glory and honor He deserves. Give my best on the field on Sunday and off of it every other day."

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