Colts like their spot

by Jay Posner

INDIANAPOLIS - Speaking by phone with reporters here Wednesday, LaDainian Tomlinson referred several times to the Colts as "the champs."

Funny, but that's something you'll never hear from the champs themselves.

"The one thing that we've never really talked about is being defending champs," said quarterback Peyton Manning, who will lead Indianapolis against the Chargers in Sunday's AFC divisional playoff game at the RCA Dome.

Manning Wednesday said coach Tony Dungy and club President Bill Polian made it clear during training camp that the Colts' long-awaited first Super Bowl championship (at least in Indianapolis) meant nothing in the 2007 season.

But Dungy said he didn't see any complacency from his players even as far back as the beginning of offseason workouts in March. He said the team knew "we weren't going to have Nick Harper and Jason David and Cato June and some of the guys who had been so special in that 2006 season. They realized it wasn't going to be the same team and we've had great work."

Said defensive tackle Raheem Brock: "Once you taste that Super Bowl win, you want to get back and get another one. Everybody just has that good mentality that we have that goal we want to reach and we're going to go get it."

Making the Colts' task easier were the New England Patriots. With the Spygate controversy breaking after the first week of the season and the Patriots remaining unbeaten throughout, Indianapolis almost was treated as an afterthought, 13-3 record or not.

"We've got a lot of the focus off of us, which has been good," Dungy said. "I think the fact we lost some players, we had some injuries and nobody has viewed us as the exact same team from last year has helped sell that message.

"I think that's been a good way to go and our players have bought into it that this is the 2007 team and we'll define where we are in these next few weeks."

Dungy's attitude seems to have spread through the locker room. The Colts aren't upset about the lack of national attention; rather, they seem to relish it.

"We're not worried about publicity," Brock said. "We're just trying to win Super Bowls."

Said Manning: "I think any time you can keep winning and stay under the radar, that's probably a good thing. Usually, staying under the radar means you're not winning games and nobody's talking about you.

"Obviously we know it changes now. With the playoffs, there's only a certain amount of games - a lot of teams aren't playing - so it creates more interest. And believe me, these are the kind of games that you want to be playing in."

Without hearing Tomlinson's reference to his club, Manning said he believes the Colts' opponents really don't care that Indy won it all last year.

"I just know speaking from years past, as you get into the playoffs, I kind of forgot who won it the year before," Manning said. "It didn't matter to me if we were playing somebody and they had won it the year before. I thought, 'Hey, it's a new year, and you have to go out and do it again.'

"So that's kind of what we're trying to do right now."

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