

# Kelly's system worked

By William C. Kashatus

**I**'m really proud of my teammates because we kept fighting," said quarterback Nick Foles after the Philadelphia Eagles' disappointing 26-24 loss to the New Orleans Saints in the wild card round of the National Football League's playoffs. "Sure, this loss is going to hurt for a while, but we're going to learn from it and improve in the future."

There's a refreshing sense of humility, as well as wisdom, in that statement, especially for a sophomore quarterback who's had as much success in the NFL as Foles. It also offers some bittersweet insight into the Eagles' season.

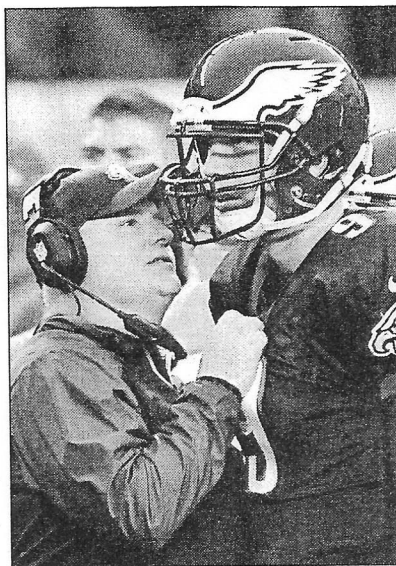
First, the "bitter." Nearly half of the Eagles' players had less than four years of NFL experience entering the season, which explains why they lost to a veteran Saints team with considerably more playoff experience.

What's so "sweet" is that Chip Kelly was able to reverse the fortunes of the team, improving from a 4-12 last-place finish under Andy Reid a year ago to a 10-6 regular season NFC East Division champion.

Even "sweeter" is the fact that the average age of these very talented Eagles is 26. It is one of the youngest teams in the NFL, which gives them an extremely bright future.

Kelly is the ideal head coach for this team because he's a superb teacher. He's had quite a bit of experience with young players, coming out of the college ranks. But his real genius is that he's adapted his college game quite successfully to the professional level.

Prior to the start of the season, NFL "experts" predicted that the fast-paced, no-huddle offense Kelly



Coach Chip Kelly and quarterback Nick Foles. RON CORTES / Staff Photographer

brought to Philadelphia from the University of Oregon would not work at the pro level. In the end, it wasn't Kelly's creative play-calling that transformed the Eagles, but his ability to get all his players to buy in to the "team-first" system that made his college program so successful.

The system's operating principle is that "a team is only as good as the sum of its collective parts." That's why Kelly insisted that every one of his players followed a proper diet, got lots of sleep, maintained an effective conditioning program, and checked their egos at the locker room door. Once that foundation was laid, success on the playing field followed.

Kelly's system also worked because he assembled a staff of teacher-coaches from both the college and professional ranks. Like good educators, they set the bar higher for the players each week, empha-

sized the need to learn from mistakes, and constantly provided positive feedback. And he found some willing pupils from the college ranks.

Draft picks Zach Ertz, a tight end from Stanford, Lane Johnson, a tackle from Oklahoma, and Bennie Logan, a defensive tackle from Louisiana State, made significant contributions to a team that already enjoyed such star performers as running back LeSean McCoy and wide receiver DeSean Jackson.

Finally, Kelly's system worked because it was based on the belief that football is essentially a fun game. The no-contact, continuous-motion drills set to the beat of hip-hop or rock music were much more constructive — and enjoyable — than the constant, bone-crushing physical contact that characterized practice sessions in the past. It also reduced the number of injuries and improved team endurance, which is necessary to outlast the opponent on game day.

To their credit, the players listened and learned. Even when the team got off to a 1-3 start, the players never stopped believing in themselves or in each other.

While Kelly's "college" system might not be acceptable to most NFL teams, it was a recipe for success here in Philadelphia and bodes well for the future of these young and talented Eagles.

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