

Pro Football Hall of Fame LB Derrick Brooks: “Orlando Should Become Pro Bowl’s Permanent Home”

ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex will be buzzing next week as NFL Pro Bowl Week returns to Walt Disney World Resort for the second consecutive year.

Beginning Monday, the sports complex will host a variety Pro Bowl events that are free of charge and open to the general public including AFC and NFC team practices and the 2018 NFL Pro Bowl Experience, which will showcase an assortment of football games and activities like the 40-yard dash, a long snapping accuracy challenge and a vertical jump contest.

One of the game’s greatest players – Pro Football Hall of Fame linebacker Derrick Brooks, who retired from the game in 2014 after 14 seasons in the NFL – is thrilled that the NFL’s annual All-Star game is returning to Orlando. In fact, Brooks, an 11-time Pro Bowl linebacker for the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, thinks the city of Orlando “should become the Pro Bowl’s permanent home.”

Beginning Monday, Brooks and former Tampa Bay Buccaneers and Florida State teammate Warrick Dunn will serve as honorary captains for the NFC team during NFL Pro Bowl Week at ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex.

Disney Sports caught up with Brooks days before the start of Pro Bowl Week where he offered his take on a variety of topics which included his commitment to helping today’s NFL players become great men off the field, the amplified trash talking that’s already begun with AFC honorary captains Jason Taylor (Miami Dolphins) and LaDainian Tomlinson (San Diego Chargers) and the role young players play in protecting the future of the NFL.

DS: Every Pro Bowl game you played in was in Honolulu, Hawaii. Do you think guys are just as excited to play in the Pro Bowl here in Orlando?

DB: “First of all, I think Orlando is a perfect site to host our Pro Bowl for a number of reasons. First, it’s centered around the entertainment capital of world and by that, I mean Disney. For the NFL to be associated with a brand like Disney is a winning combination.

From a player perspective, the partnership with Disney serves the entire family because Disney offers something for everyone. More people within each Pro Bowl family can easily come to Orlando versus Hawaii from a distance perspective, so that’s a clear advantage for keeping the game in Orlando. From a weather perspective, the weather in Orlando during this time of year is normally similar to the weather in Hawaii. Players don’t talk about this, but it’s also easier to get more of your family and friends to Orlando to take part and enjoy the overall Pro Bowl and Disney experience, and I know for a fact that all the players appreciate the fact that it’s a little bit cheaper to get family members to Orlando that it is to fly them all out to Honolulu.

And finally, for the citizens of Orlando, the Pro Bowl gives them the opportunity to claim their own unique

football brand on a professional level because the Pro Bowl and the surrounding events are taking place in their town. I hope the city of Orlando, Disney and the NFL come together and make Orlando the Pro Bowl's permanent site because that would give the state of Florida the opportunity to host two Super Bowls and a Pro Bowl in a matter of three years. If that holds up, the Pro Bowl would be played in Orlando next year and the Super Bowl would be played in Tampa.

The next year, the Pro Bowl would be played in Orlando and the Super Bowl will be played in Miami. If that takes place, no other state would have the opportunity to lay claim to that kind of NFL exposure, so I really hope a long-term partnership for the Pro Bowl to remain in Orlando can be worked out."

DS: Fans may not know this, but you and Warrick are two competitive guys who don't like to lose at anything. How bad do the two of you want to beat Jason Taylor and LaDainian Tomlinson?

DB: "Let's just say this. The comments have already been made and the shots have already been fired during the Pro Bowl selection show. Warrick and I definitely feel like we have the advantage knowing that we have had a longer working history together both as college teammates and professional football teammates. We've simply been at this longer than Jason and LaDainian. We feel like we will be able to get our men going and rally our team in all areas to make sure that we are successful."

DS: Jason and LaDainian are two tough guys in their own right. They both own gold jackets and are members of the Pro Football Hall of Fame just like you are. Do you think you and Warrick are taking them too lightly and is there a side wager you care to divulge?

DB: "I'll just say this. There are some things on the line that I am not at liberty to speak publicly about, but I will say this. The outcome of the game matters - more than some people realize."

DS: On a more serious note, mentoring and giving back has always meant a lot to you. How much mentoring of the young players will you do during Pro Bowl week?

DB: "I enjoy getting a chance to connect with the younger players to provide some football knowledge not just to the guys who play my position, but to guys throughout the NFL. I'm looking forward to this opportunity to serve as a legends captain because it's going to give me an opportunity to talk to guys about things away from football. Things like transitioning into your second career. I really get excited to talk to guys and learn what they want to do when they are done playing the game.

What I try to do in those situations is be a sounding board and offer advice, counsel and serve as a resource. What I can tell you is that when players are around each other at the Pro Bowl, they trade institutional knowledge. They do a good job of sharing playing and training techniques and they share insights into the games of other players.

Warrick, myself, LaDainian and Jason are all going to be there to provide that big brother advice to guys to make sure that are doing things on the field and off the field the right way. We want them all to see themselves as gatekeepers to our great game. They are Pro Bowl players - they are the best of the best that our League has to offer. We want them to understand that being the best carries responsibility. They have to understand that if they don't protect the game at all times, then we're going to lose our game, and nobody wants that. So, we'll be there to remind them of how important the role they have as gatekeepers and protectors of our great game."

Derrick Brooks Fun Facts:

NFL Career Games: 224

NFL Career Starts: 221

Never Missed A Game During 14-year NFL career

2002 Super Bowl Champion - Super Bowl XXXVII

2002 NFL Defensive Player of the Year

2006 Pro Bowl MVP

11-time Pro Bowl selection

5-time First Team NFL All-Pro selection

Selected to the NFL's All-Decade Team of the 2000s