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2/22/2010 6:40 PM ET By Terence Moore

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- Terence Moore is a national columnist for FanHouse

INDIANAPOLIS -- It's been a couple of weeks since the Indianapolis Colts suffered that come-from-ahead loss in the Super Bowl. And, yes, the New Orleans Saints were pretty good along the way to riding those Who Dat wings of destiny to a world championship, but the Colts mostly blew it.

So you just wonder: What do those around here think about The Interception and the legacy of their historically golden quarterback who was tarnished by it all? With the Colts driving in the final minutes for a game-tying touchdown, Peyton Manning was the anti-Joe Montana by firing toward teammate Reggie Wayne with one hand on the ball and the other around his throat.

That's me talking. I sought the views of the Colt Nation, and this was interesting: Spanning from Monument Circle to Conseco Fieldhouse to Circle Center Mall to the area near the little race track that features 500 miles each May, a slew of folks alluded to the "c" word, but not for choke. They viewed The Interception as their version of a second gunman on the grassy knoll -- as in conspiracy.

Among the conspiracists, some said Manning threw The Interception on purpose to defensive back Tracy Porter who sprinted 74 yards for a touchdown to seal the Saints' 31-17 victory. Most said he threw it subconsciously.

Whatever the case, both sides said Manning had the Saints' welfare more than that of the Colts dancing around his mind at the moment.

Consider the evidence for the conspiracists: Manning was born and raised in New Orleans. And his father, Archie, is legendary around the Gulf Coast region. And the Mannings (which includes New York Giants quarterback Eli) knew as well as anybody before the game how much a world championship in New Orleans would brighten the souls of those still recovering from Hurricane Katrina. And Wayne, who possibly ran a shoddy route against Porter, also is from New Orleans.

I'm not buying the conspiracy thing, by the way. All I know is that truly great quarterbacks aren't intercepted in these situations. That's a choke. I'll leave the other "c" word to many in the Colt Nation.

For instance ...

"I honestly think Peyton Manning gave them the game. He gave them the game," said John Fraction, 40, an Indianapolis native, swinging his fists at nothing but air after he took a break from serving tables at a downtown sports bar. He spent the Super Bowl rubbing his lucky horseshoes that he swears helped the Colts win their first and only world championship for Indianapolis in 2007.

This time, when the horseshoes became just a bunch of rusty iron in Fraction's world after the Colts botched a 10-0 lead, he recalled how he wiped tears from his cheeks, and then said softly to himself, "There it is."

Added Fraction, "I'm speaking for myself. You know? There's that dilemma that this guy faced, because Peyton Manning is an outstanding quarterback. It just seemed like a battle between pride and greed. Peyton
Manning wanted to win a second Super Bowl ring in front of everybody and keep it for himself. That was greed, but pride took over. And you also had the completion thing in play.

"Peyton just looked at it as if he were being a better humanitarian if the Saints won the Super Bowl, especially given what the city of New Orleans had gone through. So he got a ring, and Eli got a ring (the year after Peyton in 2008), and in a sense, maybe Archie got a ring with the Saints winning this Super Bowl."

Give or take a few points, others echoed Fraction.

There was Deagria Cook, for instance, whose customers as a hair stylist in town include some of the Colts cheerleaders.

What were Cook's first thoughts with The Interception? "It was all of our thoughts, when we were watching the game during a conference in Arizona, and it was 'Oh, my goodness. He gave this away. Did he really just give it away like that?'" said Cook, another Indianapolis native, shaking her head, between bites at a downtown restaurant. "I mean, really. 'Was that intentional?' That's what we were thinking. At the same time, I felt it was great for the Saints for what it would do for their city. We had our moment a couple of years ago when we won it.

"But, yeah, seriously. Was that intentional?"

Was it?

Greg Ballard laughed. Then he laughed some more.

Not only is Ballard a staunch sports fan as another Indianapolis native who has bled blue and white since the Colts came to town in 1984, but he is the mayor of Indianapolis. He couldn't stop laughing from the conference room next to his office when told of the Manning conspiracists who won't back down.

"So Peyton works his entire life to get this point, and he's going to throw it all away," said Ballard, laughing again. His press secretary, Robert Vane, added nearby, between chuckles, "And we also never landed on the moon."

But, seriously. Was that intentional?

Said Ballard, easing into the non-nonsense voice that he used when he was a lieutenant colonel for the Marines, "That's ludicrous. It's just plain ludicrous for people to think that way (about the Super Bowl). There is no question that Peyton Manning wanted to win that game. Even if you remember what happened after that onsides kick (by the Saints to begin the second half). New Orleans went down and scored, and what happened right after that? Peyton drove them right back down the field, and the Colts took the lead right back. That tells you what kind of guy he is."

This is the kind of guy who still is beloved throughout Indiana, especially around Indianapolis, and for good reason. Not only does Manning have a record four NFL MVP awards, and not only did he help the Colts win more games during a given decade than any team in league history, but he is extremely charismatic (see his commercials), and he is an noted philanthropist. In fact, he gave so much of his time, money and spirit to the St. Vincent Children's Hospital through the years in Indianapolis that they named the place after Manning in 2007.

He studies more than any quarterback in the game. He also works harder than any quarterback in the game.

That's not the profile of a game-thrower.

"No, no, no," said Michael Stern, 44, a limousine driver, who was waiting for a client outside of a downtown hotel. Stern is yet another Indianapolis native, and he has met Manning. Added Stern, "I've met all of them. I've driven Eli, Archie and all of them around, and I'll tell you about Peyton. He's always involved with something involved in this city, which tells you he'd never do anything bad to this city."

Not on purpose.

When you choke, you can't help it.

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**gambitkhan** 2-22-2010 7:00PM

Wow, Moore, you still can't get over the loss. You really are a loser.

★★★★★ ▲ reply

**HI CMA MAN** 2-23-2010 8:46AM

Most if not all sporting events are FIXED. It is all about the money. I like to see Manny's swiss account for fixing the game.

★★★★★ ▲

**greg** 2-23-2010 9:26AM

Look at it this way fellows, when you have premier losing teams such as the Arizona Cardinals in 2009 and the New Orleans Saints in 2010 reach the Super Bowl, something is definitely not right in the NFL. lol

★★★★★ ▲

**FixedGame** 2-23-2010 12:59PM

Peyton got millions for fixing this game. Peyton would have done it for free based upon what the Colts did years ago. Great job Peyton for throwing the game. They deserved it and so did the rest of the Colt players.

★★★★★ ▲

**beechjetdd** 2-23-2010 2:15PM

Amen...This Saints Cinderella story...is just too hard to swallow. First Favre chokes against them. Then Peyton. That is way too coincidenal!

★★★★★ ▲

**bikerviking** 2-23-2010 2:20PM

People can't accept that money makes the world go round and vegas controls the money. Just look at the last three Superbowls.

★★★★★ ▲

**stvstreett** 2-23-2010 2:31PM

they just flat out lost. petton is a legend in his own mind. with all that fancy audiable crap, cmon man, run the freaking play. can't stomach watching him play anymore

★★★★★ ▲
And I thought the people in Louisiana were the ones who are not smart, my bad.

** restitution0123 2-23-2010 3:47PM**

And did the Colts defense give up the game too? After all Brees did very well passing so thats got nothing to do with Peyton..Brees did put up 24 points. Did the colts know about the onside kick to start the 2nd half? Did they say lets not recover the kick? When a good team gets beat by a team that just happen to play better that day, then all the excuses come out. How many yds did Brees have passing?? Peyton don't play defense last time i checked. How many yds did the Saints gain over all?? Peyton don't play defense last time i checked...The better team won...

** richardthemover 2-23-2010 3:53PM**

the whole team choked. look at all the defensive plays that were not made. Im no payton fan but it takes more than 1 play over three hours to lose a game. Were was the colts' defense. Payton did not score the saint's touchdowns!

** jumps40 2-23-2010 3:57PM**

I don't think the word "conspiracy" should even be mentioned with peyton manning, unless of course this is substantial evidence. He's provided spectacular proformances over the years, and I think it brings dishonor to his name to even be in the same sentence as conspiracy. I guess that just goes to show how screwed up the media can take issues. If he did throw it, thats one thing, but without evidence don't mention it.

** Kevin and Mark 2-23-2010 4:12PM**

YOU MUST BE KIDDING. The saints lost many a game they were ahead in the start and so did the Colts. GET OFF YOUR PITY PARTY and just admit the New Orleans Saints beat the Colts and are Super Bowl Champs. HATER!

** salper1004 2-23-2010 4:28PM**

I suggest reading Steve Alpers novel The Steam which centers around a game fixing Referee and addicted sports gambler, much like Tim Donaghy. It's actually a great read, and gets into many of these conspiracies. After reading The Steam I think most will know what typically goes down in an even like the Superbowl.

** dunkalladay 2-23-2010 4:29PM**

Yeah, let's quote a freaking sports bar waiter who claims Manning threw the game, because his dumb opinion means something. What, you couldn't find a homeless lady with no TV to ask?

** hookmrl 2-23-2010 4:29PM**

terence moore ,you are a sleez bag to even think about something like this,hey try out in the NFL you could not make waterboy

** bcoilerupman 2-23-2010 4:33PM**

ok ok ok you make me sick making a comment that is so miss leading to the viewers of this you see the colts did exactly what they were born to do get in the big game and choke, there isnt even a chalenge manning is a baby, brees is a joe tiller purdue grad that the colts wished they could have , skill won that game it wasnt any thing to do with manning other than the lack of skill, all ill say is watch next year for the brees & company then the whole world will see a two super bowl ring winner drew brees is the best go brees...................... bill carr

** morgstall 2-23-2010 4:37PM**

I've read some stupid articles and some stupid opinions before. This one wins all prizes. This might be the single stupidest conspiracy theory I've ever heard of. It insults the Saints, it insults Manning, it insults the entire NFL. If Manning wanted the "throw" the game, don't you (whoever is stupid enough to actually buy this argument) think he would have done it BEFORE the game came down to the end. He played great the whole game and Brees had to play a near perfect game (after the first 2 drives) to win. Manning COULD throw the game but does anyone actually think he could do this without ALSO relying on a defense to fail? Brees was 29 out of his last 32 (including a drop and a spike). Everyone is now stupider for having read this mess.

** smi9263 2-23-2010 4:41PM**
Manning is a class act, he had the look in his eyes, he seemed if he was battling himself to comeback and win. Peyton threw the game personally in my mind. I didn't see the Saint's being more dominate through out the year compared to the Colts. Hat's off to Manning, he'll be back once more and he'll win it again as well as Eli doing it for the Giants.

hookmrl 2-23-2010 4:47PM

brees-4388 yds-rating 109.6 34 tds 70% passing 11 ints------------------------manning--4500 yds--rating 99.9--13 ints seems like he has taken MVP from brees----super brees was 32of 39 saints defenxe gave up 7 points in the last 32 quarters..petton was good but saints were better on that day Peyton is still a great quarter back 4 time mvp
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