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SPORTS EDITOR

# Giants Will Return!!!

**J**im Fassel became famous for guaranteeing that the Giants would make the playoffs. Just a few days ago, he issued another guarantee. "We'll get back to [the Super Bowl]," he said. "And it won't take 10 years this time."

"We had a great year and a bad day," he told his players after the 34-7 loss to Baltimore in Super Bowl XXXV.

Best way to make sure people don't forget what the Giants accomplished this season is to continue to be one of the top teams in the NFL and not get written off as a one-year wonder.

And Fassel and general manager Ernie Accorsi were already beginning to think about the 2001 Giants.

"This is the best team I've had here in my four years," Fassel said. "And we can have a better team next year because we've done this the right way. We didn't sacrifice the future to get to this game. We didn't mortgage the farm.

"Ernie and I work well together, and that's important. Maybe we don't start out seeing things the same way, but we always manage to be in agreement in the long run. I don't believe you can go anywhere with the general manager and the head coach butting heads."

Accorsi met with Fassel after the game Sunday night and told him: "Don't let this game affect in any way what a great coaching job you have done. These things happen."

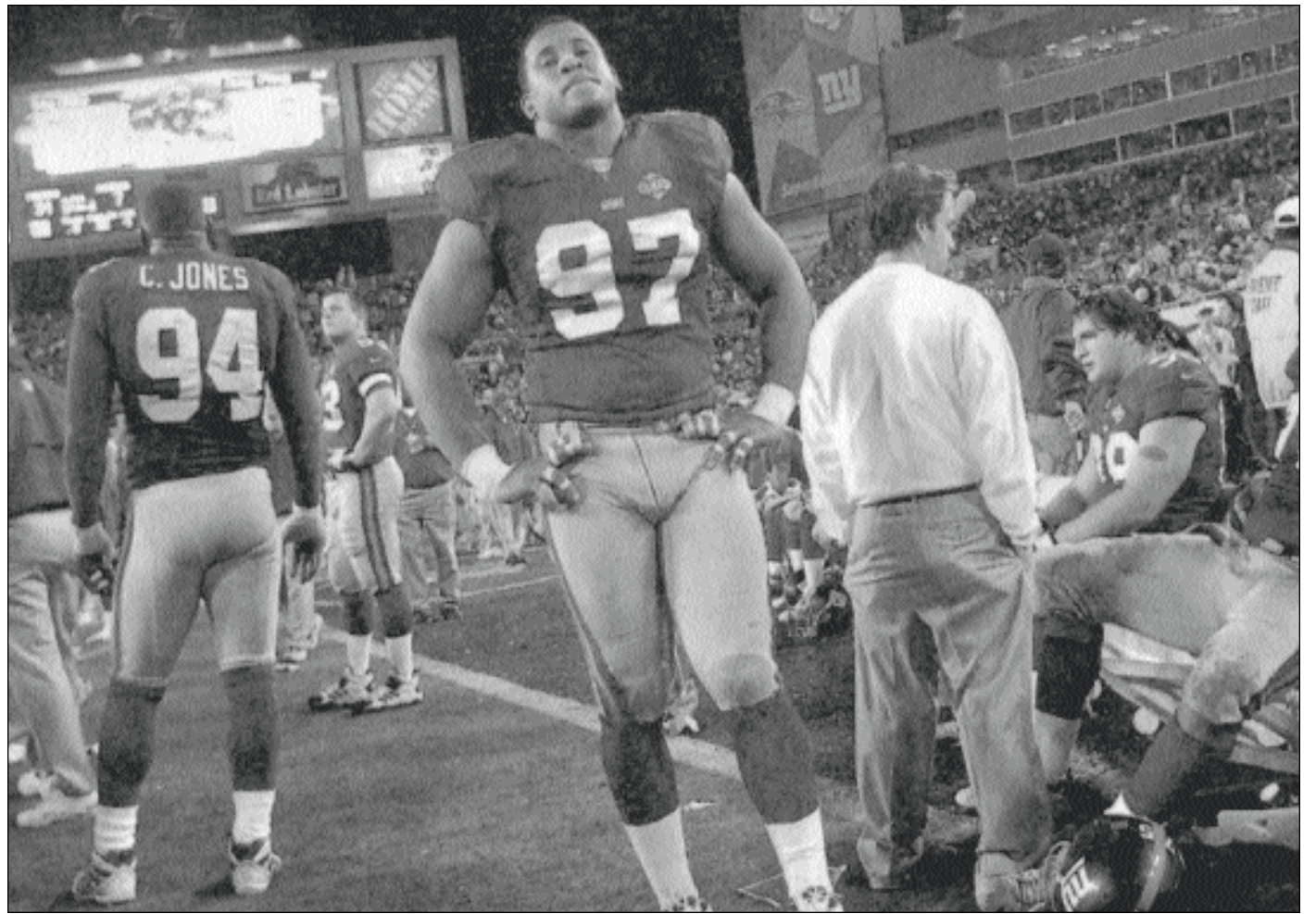
The next thing that will happen is Fassel's coaching extension, which now could reach as long as four years for as much as \$3 million per year. Neither side thinks coming to an agreement will be a big problem.

"From my standpoint, it's something I'd like to get off my mind," Fassel said. "I'm a New York Giant. I want to stay here. This organization always has been fair with me. They've shown loyalty to me, I've shown loyalty to them. I never floated my name with another team."

Tom Curtin, Fassel's agent, said he plans to call Giants vice president John Mara this week to set up a schedule to begin negotiations. "I don't expect it to be difficult," Curtin said. "The Giants want him, he wants the Giants."

"There isn't any urgency," said Mara, "but I'd like to do it fairly soon. I think Jim is going to get a healthy increase. No one will be holding any benefits for him in the near future."

The dreadful performance against the Ravens apparently did not cost Fassel any



Reality sets on the Giants bench: Cornellus Griffin (97) and his teammates sit and wait while the final minutes tick away in their 34-7 loss to the Ravens in Super Bowl XXXV.

negotiating leverage for the future. It did cost him some sleep, however. And Monday morning he still looked a little shocked at the turn of events that ended his team's unexpected charge to the Super Bowl.

"We got pinned down at the start," Fassel said of the poor field position that did not help his offense get off to a strong start against the Ravens. "I didn't want to have to play inside our 20 all the time because we were going to have some three-and-outs and with Jermaine Lewis sitting back there to return the punts, we could be in trouble."

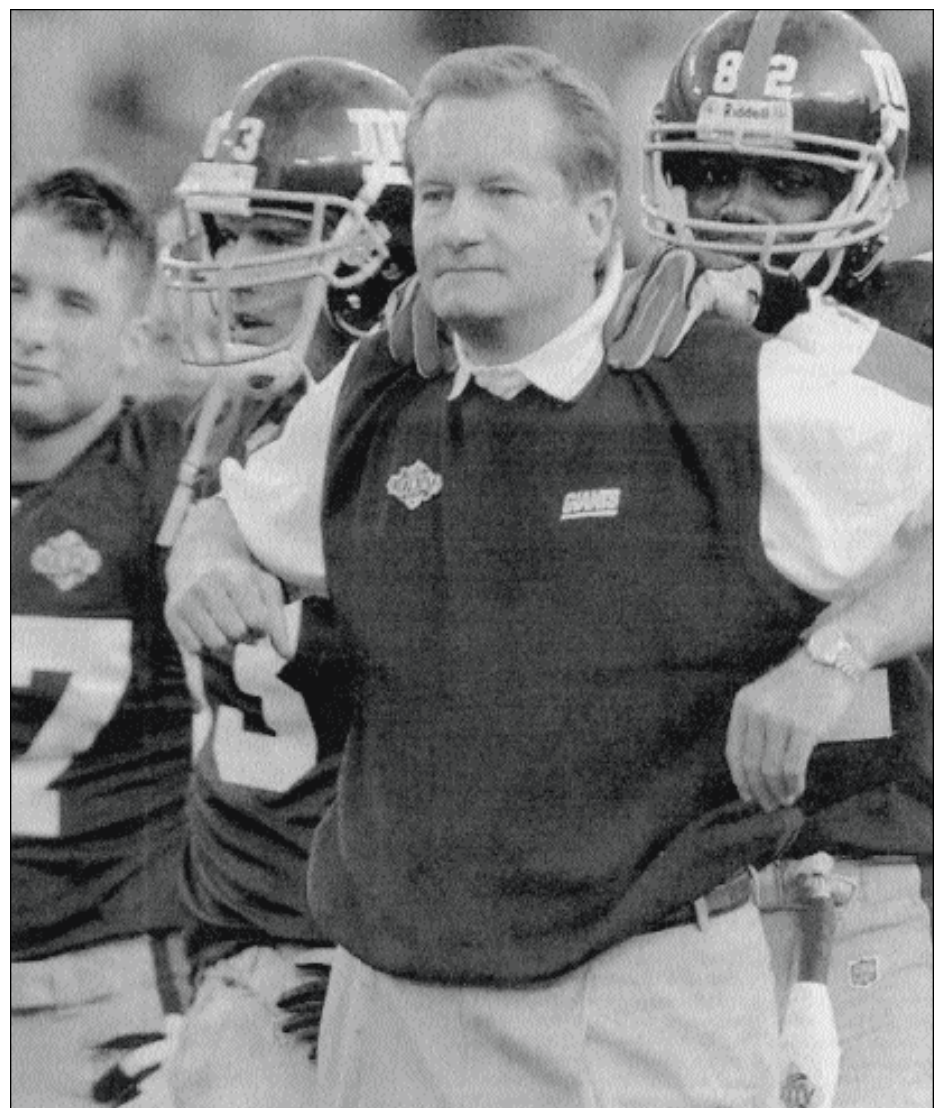
Fassel said, however, he did consider kicking off if the Giants won the toss (which they did), hoping to pin the Ravens deep in their territory. "I thought we would play better than we did on offense," he said.

He thought Jessie Armstead's interception return for a touchdown negated by a specious holding call against tackle Keith Hamilton and Chris McAlister's interception at the Ravens' 1 just before halftime were the key plays that doomed his team.

"It was a hell of a year and we came a long way," he said. "We didn't play well in the big game, but I don't want that to chew up the feeling of what we achieved when I look back at the overall picture.

"I think we have a solid enough team that with another off-season, we can get even better. I think we have the right guys in place, and with everything within reason, I think we can be a better football team next year."

*This article by Vinny DiTrani was reprinted with permission from The Record*



Giants coach Jim Fassel getting a rubdown from Thabiti Davis along the sideline before the opening kickoff