

Atlanta Falcons Media Conference

Sunday, January 5, 2025
Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Michael Penix Jr.

Postgame Press Conference



Panthers - 44, Falcons - 38 (OT)

Q. Mike, when you look back on this game and you think back on the connection with Drake London and what you all have been able to accomplish together within the last three weeks, how much confidence does that give you for what that duo could be in the future?

MICHAEL PENIX JR.: It gives me a lot of confidence. It gives this team a lot of confidence as well. Obviously he's a great player. He shows it each and every day. To be able to do what we did today, just see him making plays.

Obviously I'll talk about last week, just giving those guys a chance, just giving those opportunities to make those big time plays because they're playmakers and that's what they're going to do with the ball in their hands.

I feel like that connection is going to continue to grow throughout the game. I can't wait for this off-season to continue to build that and come back even better next year.

Q. What was working for you as it got going and you all found yourself in a shootout?

MICHAEL PENIX JR.: It was executing, just executing the simple plays. Early on we weren't able to run the ball as much, but we were able to pick that up later on in the game, Bijan and Tyler making big time plays, offensive line doing a great job giving them opportunities to make those plays.

It was good to be able to see everybody executing. And obviously in the pass game, I started off a little cold early on, missing a couple throws, but just started getting a rhythm. Like I said, man, the connection with the receivers is continuing to grow. It's still going to continue to grow. I feel like it was growing throughout the game.

I started to feel more confident and comfortable each and every throw that I made with those guys just knowing that I

gave them a chance and an opportunity to do something great.

Q. A three-game sample size, but what are you -- I know you have time to think about it after the season and stuff, but do you think there was enough there to build on and move forward, being on the field as the quarterback one?

MICHAEL PENIX JR.: For sure. Any time you're on the field, you're always learning and you're always growing. I'm definitely going to take stuff from what happened these past three weeks and find ways to get better.

Whatever I did good at, just continue to build off of that. So I'm super excited for the off-season to be able to get ready to do that.

Q. Given what was at stake today, the playoffs, division title, what was Coach's message to the team, and how do you all try to move forward?

MICHAEL PENIX JR.: The whole message all week was control the controllables. What we could control was what we did this game. Obviously we fell short. So it didn't matter what happened with the other game because we didn't control what we could control, which was today.

That was the main message all week. We come out here and win this game, and whatever happens with the other game, we can't control that. So we just had to come out here and dominate and get this win. We fell short of that.

Q. I know your perspective on this season has changed when your role changed, but given the excitement of the preseason, given where you all were at one point midway through the season, how surprised are you to find this team here now out of the playoffs?

MICHAEL PENIX JR.: Man, it's tough. I've seen these guys work extremely hard all off-season, all through camp, and just all season. Just seeing the relationships that was built throughout this team and the guys just always leaning on each other in big time moments.



Think about early on in the season, just getting the win, getting big win on Monday Night Football against the Eagles, our cool kicking game winners and stuff like that, stuff like that. Just seeing that, just knowing the guys we had around us, it's like we had the opportunity to beat everybody on our schedule.

Obviously it's the NFL. It's football. We're playing the best of the best, and things aren't always going to fall our way, but we've got to find ways to come out with those big time wins that really count. We'll do that. We'll do that in the future, and that's what I can't wait for.

Q. I understand you're learning on the job here in the last month, but what's your role as the starting quarterback now to sort of get this team past this moment?

MICHAEL PENIX JR.: Just tell the guys continue to believe. Obviously this season, I would just talk about it didn't go how we wanted it to go. We didn't get to the playoffs, but man, you've just got to continue to believe, believe in the process, believe in the coaches, the scheme that is put up each and every week.

Going into this off-season with the right mindset, the mindset to want to come back and get better. For me, this is my first off-season, so it's a lot of things that I'll be learning this off-season, just making sure that whenever we do come back, I'm completely ready, and I'll make sure I do a great job of that.

Man, we've just got to believe. Just lean on each other and always be there for each other and be ready for next year, whenever that time comes.

Q. Michael, you didn't do this all season obviously, but you had a lot of time to hold the clipboard and learn behind Kirk. How much do you feel it helps a rookie quarterback, especially a highly drafted one, to have the time to do that and to settle in? Then also, as far as utilizing your arm strength, Raheem Morris talked about how you guys are going to work on layering your throws. How do you manage that? Because you've got one of the strongest arms in the league.

MICHAEL PENIX JR.: It takes time. Everything takes time. Just continue to learn. I learn each and every day, like you talked about. Whenever I was behind Kirk, always taking mental notes. So taking mental notes. Whenever my time did come, I'll be ready for the moment.

I always believed in my abilities. I believe in everything

God has gifted me with, and for me to be able to be successful, I've got to go out there and trust that and go out there and execute and be prepared. That's the biggest thing. They say preparation breeds confidence, and whenever I stepped on the field, I felt confident.

With all the things I need to work on, I'm going to make sure I work on that stuff and come back even better next year.

Q. How would you grade your season, like as a starter? I know it was only three games, but how would you grade yourself?

MICHAEL PENIX JR.: It's a lot of work. It's a lot to learn from and a lot of things that I'm definitely going to go back over and look over throughout this off-season and see what I can get better at.

I feel like it was early on, the first two games, just the connection, building that connection. I talked about that. I felt like it was coming along today, obviously with Drake in particular. Obviously him, what he has done for this team, the way he's balled out all season, that was big time. It was big for us to be able to continue to build off of that.

It's a lot of things to build on, a lot of things that I'm going to go back to the drawing board and look at and see what I can be better at so I can help this team win football games. That's the main focus.

Q. You mentioned the slow start, but it seemed like something unlocked when you moved into the two-minute offense, moving a little bit faster. How are you preparing for those situations, and how do you take that into the off-season?

MICHAEL PENIX JR.: The biggest thing is executing. I'm always going to talk about executing, keeping a 1-0 mindset. Obviously things weren't going well for us in the beginning, but we had to find a way to make sure we put those plays behind us and we look forward and continue to get better throughout the game, and we did.

And just executing in big time moments. Making sure I'm protecting the ball, that's the biggest thing. I know I had a turnover today. Whether it's communication for me to let the offensive line know it's cover zero or telling the receivers to speed up the route so that we can be on the same page and stuff like that, that's stuff that we can continue to build and grow on throughout the season, throughout this off-season. So whenever next season comes, we'll be rolling.

Q. It seems like you're always on the verge of being

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able to make a clutch throw. Where does that come from? Is that something just innate in you?

MICHAEL PENIX JR.: Just never being -- just never letting a moment get too big or be too big. We've been through a lot of adversity. I talked about the adversity I've been through, and I feel like it prepared me for big time moments. It prepared me for moments like that. Whenever I get in those times, it's like I just want to have fun.

I had the game stripped from me a lot with injuries and stuff like that, so I take advantage of every opportunity I get. I've been in those positions, even this last year in college, we were down late in the game, just always staying cool, calm, and collected and making the next play. That's what it's about. That's what the team is going to feed off of.

For me, I'm just being myself out there and just having fun.

Q. As the game went on, were you guys conscious at all what's going on with the Tampa Bay game?

MICHAEL PENIX JR.: No. You're in the moment. You're in the moment. I still don't even know what happened. What happened?

Q. Tampa won.

MICHAEL PENIX JR.: I didn't know. You're caught up in the game, man. We're just balling, man.

Q. You spoke about getting better in the off-season. What does the off-season look like for you?

MICHAEL PENIX JR.: I'm still figuring that out. I'm still figuring that out. Like I said, it's my first off-season. I know for sure it's going to be a lot of work. It's a lot of work, but obviously a lot of veterans tell me take time to yourself because it's a long season. So I'm going to take time to myself.

Whenever I feel like it's right to work, I'm going to make sure I work. I'm going to talk to the people around me that's been in this position, when to take that time, when to put in the work so I can come back better than ever. That's something I'm going to build on throughout my career. It's going to be a lot of work put in, but I am going to have time to myself too.

Q. The words you were saying about your excitement for the future, I can only imagine Bryce Young is saying similar things right now. Did you have the feeling during the game as you guys were trading scoring drives that this could be the start of a division

rivalry between you two quarterbacks?

MICHAEL PENIX JR.: I mean, you're so caught up in the moment, we're just balling. We're playing football. They score, we feel like we've got to capitalize. We score, they probably feel the same way.

That's part of the game. You've got to make big time plays when it's required. That's what this team was able to do, and they were able to do it as well.

It's just always going to be a big time game. Every time we play them, divisional game, it's always big time. In the future, we look forward to winning them every time.

Q. You talked about adversity. One person that was with you through a lot of that was Kalen DeBoer. He was at the game today. What did that mean to you, and what is your relationship like? Do you go back and forth about your performance at all?

MICHAEL PENIX JR.: Yeah, Coach DeBoer. Nick Sheridan was there as well. I was with him, before I was with Coach DeBoer, at Indiana. He's the one that recruited me since I was a sophomore in high school, so I've known him for a long time, and he ended up with me at Washington as well.

So both of those guys being able to be here and bringing their families and their spouses, it was amazing to be able to see them. And knowing that they care enough to take time out of their day to come see me play. I'm forever grateful and thankful for them because I feel like they changed my life. They helped me get to where I'm at today, and I love and appreciate them so much for it. I was super excited to be able to see them on the sidelines pregame.

Q. Obviously Falcons fans are going to be disappointed about this outcome. Is your message to them, hey, we're building something special on offense? I'm here. I'm coming back. What is your message to those fans right now?

MICHAEL PENIX JR.: The message is continue to believe. I feel like we've got a lot of talent on this team, a lot of talent coming back. We're just going to continue to build off of this year.

I look forward to a lot of playoffs and even Super Bowls in the future here for this organization. So tell the fans continue to believe. We're here, and we're going to be coming next year. We'll be ready.

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