

Atlanta Falcons Media Conference

Sunday, January 4, 2026
Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Coach Raheem Morris

Postgame Press Conference



Falcons 19, Saints 17

RAHEEM MORRIS: Man, tough-fought game versus a division opponent, the guys we don't like in the Saints, and the guys came out victorious. They found a way to win today, getting down to that onside kick, everybody going out there and executing at a very high level just across the board. Those guys are always going to come out ready to play division games. That's what these things always are, and couldn't be more happy for the guys going out there and finishing the season the right way.

Q. Could you discuss the play of the special teams? You get the blocked punt there to get you started and four field goals from the kicker today?

RAHEEM MORRIS: Huge job out of those guys. The blocked punt was huge, set us up to score, and then to be able to go out there, nail all those field goals by Zane, and then obviously Bradley on the field -- I don't know his exact stats today, but putting the ball in favorable position for us being able to flip the field when he had to punt it, those guys came out and played a heck of a defense. You've got to win in different phases of the game, and today our special teams came up big for us.

Q. How do you feel? You send the season with four straight wins, obviously, but you don't make the playoffs, but you end on a winning note. Is it mixed emotions? Is it what could we have done, a play here, a play there, a win here, a win there?

RAHEEM MORRIS: No, one game. One game would be the difference. Everybody is 8-9 in that division, and you have one game out there that we could have won that would have made a difference and maybe everybody a lot happier. Everybody we want to go to the playoffs. We want to do major things. We want to do really good football things, but the only thing we could do today was win this game, and that's what the guys did.

Our business is winning football games, and they did it

today.

Q. You got the sack record; how significant, if at all, is that to you?

RAHEEM MORRIS: Stats for losers is more about us finding a way to get to the quarterback, really setting our mind to it. We've got to give a lot of credit to Terry, obviously, and his staff, being able to find ways to build our D-line, build our people up on defense, to be able to go get after the quarterback. It's been a two-year process of getting those guys, whether it's been Brandon Dorlus, whether it's been Ruke, whether this year -- whether it's been Jalon Walker and all the different guys is part of that, and James pierce, and then obviously building the secondary at the same time, being able to get a guy like Watts, for him to contribute at a high level to make people hold the football, for us to be able to rush it, going out and getting some of the vets like we've been able to get, David Onyemata, being able to get Leonard Floyd, being able to utilize AK, there's been people that's been here before and find ways to get at the quarterback with this defensive staff being creative, I think it was a marriage well met.

Q. Have you had any discussions yet with Arthur Blank about next year and your future here?

RAHEEM MORRIS: No. You can't worry about those things. The ball is sitting right there. Listen, this is a business, what we do. I know it's fun for you guys to talk about it, but those decisions will always be made at the proper time. Those decisions will all utilize whatever is best for the Atlanta Falcons.

Q. Do you expect to be back next year?

RAHEEM MORRIS: You know, my expectations is always to be back, and I'm going to coach this football team as long as he allows me.

Q. There was an illness going around the team today. Do you feel like it had an impact on this game?

RAHEEM MORRIS: Not today, man. It was a week. Obviously a bunch of guys got sick. A bunch of guys



stepped up in different ways. Obviously I can't give enough credit to AJ, Kirk Cousins, all of those guys going out there and battling through that stuff, man, testing positive for flu, doing all the stuff you need to do to get ready to go. Those guys fought.

We had one guy that had to miss, Ronnie. He just couldn't go. But other than that, man, the guys went out there and really stepped up in a big way, Ruke. There was a bunch of guys that got sick throughout the process.

No excuses. We didn't talk about it, we just reported it so you guys knew to let you know we wasn't making none.

Q. Drake seemed to be very frustrated at various points in the game. Can you address what was going on with that?

RAHEEM MORRIS: Yeah, Drake is always frustrated. Drake wants to go out there and beat everybody and be dominant and get things done the right way, and he wants to execute at a very high level. He is a high-energy player. He's a pit bull. When you've got to get the pit bull to make sure he's not always off the leash, and sometimes you're going to go that way and go dark. It is what it is. That's why we love him.

Q. Particularly given the way the team finished, do you feel like it was capable of accomplishing more than it did?

RAHEEM MORRIS: Yeah, no doubt. Like we felt that way right from the beginning. There's no secret, we felt like we could be a playoff football team, and we didn't achieve those things. There's a couple games here and there that we'd like to go back and take some of those back, but you can't. This is a big-time season. This is a great league, and you've got to find ways to utilize and take advantage of the opportunity that you have in front of you.

Q. After last season, you named -- at the end of last season you named Michael Penix the starting quarterback for this year. Are you ready to name a starting quarterback now?

RAHEEM MORRIS: Man, it's a due process to everything, right. We'll go out and figure it all out. Our young quarterback is dealing with a significant injury right now, and everything about our young quarterback will be about our young quarterback, and we'll be focusing on him, making sure he can get out there and throw, do all the things he needs to be ready to start, and we'll find a way to go out there and make sure he's back, and as soon as he's healthy enough, we can make some type of decisions like that.

Q. Has Kirk Cousins' play and winning four straight games to end the season, has that impacted that decision at all?

RAHEEM MORRIS: No, man, that's what we felt about Kirk Cousins right from the beginning. That's why we went out and got him. We felt like he had the ability to lead us to the playoff march. It didn't go the right way. At the end of the stretch last year, we had to go to the young quarterback a lot sooner than we had thought. We went to the young quarterback, he went out and got hurt this year, Kirk came in and did exactly what we wanted him to do. It was the reason we were able to keep him and keep him on our staff and keep him a part of our building, despite all the other unpopular belief. That was our belief. That was the thoughts from our team of people that make decisions. I'm glad we did.

Q. It's so rare for a rookie to reach that double-digit sack total. What does it say about James, and can you kind of speak to his development from day one that he got here?

RAHEEM MORRIS: We went out and traded back in the first round to get a really talented football player. I thought it was something that was very unique, to be able to have the relationship with the general manager, with the owner, to be able to have those conversations, to be able to put yourself in position to do those things. All decisions you make there are always hard. They're always tough, and they're always going to be heavily criticized. But it sure is nice when a guy comes out and performs like you think he's capable of doing.

For James to come out here and get better and better throughout the course of the season, to be able to finish with 10 and a half sacks, arguably the Rookie of the Year, arguably a guy that's just gotten better throughout the process, that's helped us be able to get after the quarterback and be able to become a better defense than we were in the past, I can't say enough about him.

You've always got to put Xavier Watts getting five picks and being able to get a fumble recovery today and just to watch those guys grow and develop this year. We did those things with the thoughts that we had the chance to go do it this year. We fell one game short, according to the math. But we all know there's a couple other games out there that we had and we had an opportunity to win, that could have us in significant moments of going out there and making significant plays at significant times.

Q. What are the things that you think you guys need to do as a team and as an organization to finally reach



the playoffs again and finally have a winning season?

RAHEEM MORRIS: You do what we've been doing the last couple of weeks: Go out there and win the football games that we're capable of winning, find ways to win like we have the last couple of weeks.

These guys, we've got enough people in place right now to be able to do what we need to do, and we knew that, and that's what makes it so frustrating for all of us. If we can go out there and execute and do the things that we need to do every single week like we've done the last couple of weeks and make that who we are, and that was a part of why we wanted to do it and show it. It wasn't about me, it wasn't about anybody else, but it was about us going out there, finding ways to do the things that we know we're capable of doing to prove it to ourselves.

You've got to practice winning, and that's what those guys did the last couple of weeks.

Q. You know the division really well. How good does it feel to have swept the Saints?

RAHEEM MORRIS: It's always good to beat the Saints. Man. We don't like those guys. Obviously not personal. It's obviously our business. It's obviously our business to hate those guys. Obviously they've got a lot of really good coaches over there, a lot of good people, a lot of good players. Cam just walked me off the field letting me know all about it, and I drafted him. Those guys are really good people, but we love beating them. We enjoy beating them. We look forward to beating them again.

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