

# Chicago Bears Media Conference

Sunday, January 18, 2026

Chicago, Illinois, USA

## Coach Ben Johnson

### Postgame Press Conference

Rams 20, Bears 17 (OT)

**BEN JOHNSON:** Colston was the one that didn't make it to the end there. He had a concussion, but everyone else for the most part made it through that game.

You know, disappointing result tonight. Our guys fought the entire way, just like they have all season long. I thought this was very much like our team has been, and you've got to give the Rams credit. Coach McVay does a phenomenal job. Coach Shula did a great job with their defense this week, and they ended up making a couple more plays than we did. That's why it ended up going into overtime and they ended up coming out on top.

Like I said, disappointing result. Our guys are feeling it right now. They all believed, man. They all believed all year long that we could find a way to win each and every week. So it's disappointing like that.

But I am proud of the group. It's a special group. I said that a few weeks ago. I believe that to my core, that when you're with a group of men for the last time in the locker room and you know it's just not going to be the same going forward that -- I appreciate all of them, the men and the women, coaches, players, support staff, everybody that had a role this season. It was a special year.

This will be hopefully a feeling in this locker room that we won't forget, and we'll be able to use it as fuel going forward.

With that, I'll go ahead and open it up.

#### **Q. How would you describe the difficulty and the suddenness of this ending for that group?**

**BEN JOHNSON:** Yeah. It's the NFL, right? You make it to the tournament like this, and the moment -- we knew we had to win four in a row to actually feel good at the end of the thing, and we didn't get that done. This is what happens is it ends abruptly. For the young players in the room, it's like, okay, well, come in tomorrow and we go



through the exit process and then we go on.

But the veteran leadership has been outstanding all year long. Those guys are a key part of what we've done. All those guys in that locker room, they've all played significant roles in us getting here to this point. It ends quickly, and that's life in this league.

#### **Q. What did you think of the throw Caleb made at the end, backpedaling at the 40-yard line?**

**BEN JOHNSON:** The 4th down to tie it up? Yeah, ridiculous. That's ridiculous. You talk about that 4th and 8 from last week and how outstanding that was, and I think this one was probably even another level ahead of that. There's some things that you just can't coach. He's got that bottom, he's got a knack, he's clutch. He does so many good things. He's an eraser. I have plenty of bad calls each and every week, and he helps make it right for me.

I know he's feeling it because we didn't win and had some turnovers mixed in there, and he's feeling it. But he's one of those guys I'm talking about that will remember this feeling, and he's going to be stronger for it.

#### **Q. Did you give much consideration to going for two there?**

**BEN JOHNSON:** Thought about it, yeah. Thought about it. Probably what played a little bit of a factor was our goal to go situations hadn't gone very clean. Our inside the 5 plan hadn't worked out quite like we had hoped. Just felt better about taking our chances there in overtime.

#### **Q. What was your viewpoint on the last interception from Caleb and the route --**

**BEN JOHNSON:** I'll have to see it. I stand behind the defense a little bit, so I did see space. I saw grass. I didn't see that defender from my perspective, so I'll have to see it. But I did think as the play was going on, oh, crap, we've got something. But great play by that player.

#### **Q. How do you make sure the special feelings you guys have now can carry over to next season?**

**BEN JOHNSON:** Yeah, that'll be something -- next season



is next season. It's a whole different group, it's a whole different chapter. We'll have to write a whole brand new story. That's the thing about this is you put in all this work and you sacrifice and you trust the people around you, and you can't take any shortcuts. I wish I could say that this is momentum from year one, we'll take it -- it doesn't work that way. It doesn't work that way.

Honestly, I don't even want to talk about next year yet. There will be a time and a place for it. But we're still hurting. We had a great opportunity here this year to make a name for ourselves, and I'm proud that we were able to get to this point and still disappointed that we fell short.

**Q. How do you assess what Caleb is right now, where you see these phenomenal plays that you can't coach? But you and him both talk a lot about a significant list of things where he can still improve and get a lot better.**

BEN JOHNSON: Yeah, he's gotten so much better over the course of the season. I can say that from being the play caller, the coaching staff would say that. I think his teammates would tell you the same thing. He's going to continue to ascend. His comfort level in what we were doing has gotten better each and every week. There's plays every week that go from us talking about over the course of the week and he just brings it to life on game day.

I'm very encouraged about where he's at. I think we're going to be able to watch this tape from this first year together, and I expect us to really learn from a lot of things and be better next year.

**Q. What did you think about the defensive effort today?**

BEN JOHNSON: Yeah, that's part of the shame. Our defense played their tails off. They did. I thought they did a great job. That's the No. 1 offense in football, both yards and points, and I thought Dennis and the defensive coaching staff, they had a great plan.

They got weapons all over the place on the perimeter, but also that running game is very efficient, and it can wear on you. They pose a lot of problems, and yet our guys did a nice job taking the plan, bringing it to life. I thought they played with great emotion. I thought they played hard throughout that game, and they certainly had us in it the whole time.

**Q. You mentioned the troubles, the goal post situations didn't go the way you wanted them to. Do you feel like that was an execution issue on you guys'**

**part or was it something they were doing on defense?**

BEN JOHNSON: I'll go back and look at that tape. I don't know that I was necessarily surprised by anything from what they were doing, but once again, they play very sound. They play violent. We've been saying that all week, particularly about their front, and they did a good job. They earned that, and we didn't.

**Q. Caleb is typically careful with the ball. Is it something that the Rams were doing, or was it kind of jitters for him?**

BEN JOHNSON: No, I mean, I'll go back and I'll look at all three interceptions, but no, I didn't think he had any jitters or anything like that. I thought he was the normal Caleb that I've grown accustomed to. Like I said, those guys made plays, and we didn't.

**Q. How did you arrive at your decision on the left side of the line, and how did you feel like that worked out?**

BEN JOHNSON: Yeah, a big part of that was predicated on you get going in the tape and you see a guy like Verse on their side and the type of rusher that he is. He's very powerful. He's very violent. He was that way coming out of college. That's translated to the NFL, and it showed up all over the tape where he's taking tackles and just driving straight back on the quarterback's lap, and we just thought Joe had a great anchor, and he was going to be able to help us in that regard.

Credit to him. Of course he's done it, and he's willing to do whatever is necessary to help the team win. Got a great group like that.

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