

NBC Sports Group Media Conference

Thursday, September 3, 2020

Al Michaels
Cris Collinsworth
Michele Tafoya
Fred Gaudelli

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Good morning, everyone, and welcome to today's Sunday Night Football conference call. This is the 15th season of NBC Sunday Night Football on football night in America.

We kick it off next Sunday night in Kansas City with the Chiefs hosting the Texans in the NFL kickoff game. Then on to Los Angeles where the Rams open a new stadium against the Cowboys on Sunday Night Football.

Joining us on today's call are our team of Al Michaels, Cris Collinsworth and Michele Tafoya, along with executive producer Fred Gaudelli.

Over to Fred Gaudelli.

FRED GAUDELLI: Well, good morning, everybody, or good afternoon. Year 15 of Sunday Night Football. It's been an historic decade and a half at NBC, but obviously this season will be one like none other. We spent a tremendous amount of time planning for and discussing how we produce this show at the level we have in the past in the era of COVID.

We feel like we have a solid plan to start the season, but know full well that we'll be adapting and adjusting as the season goes on.

Definitely excited for next Thursday. We've expanded our pregame show a half hour, so it'll begin at 7:00 p.m. with our Football Night in America crew, and then we'll take it over when we drop the banner, the championship banner in KC. Get ready for a tremendous quarterback match-up between Patrick Mahomes and Deshaun Watson.

And then on Sunday night we open brand new SoFi Stadium, which I toured yesterday and is truly magnificent.



Al will give you a lot more on that.

One note. Next Wednesday night, the night prior to kickoff, the NFL is taking an hour of primetime on NBC for a show called Inspired Change. It's a platform for the players and the league to discuss the work that they are doing together to advance social justice and equality.

Year 15 for Sunday Night Football, year 20 for me and Albeano. Happy anniversary, Albeano.

AL MICHAELS: Well, Fred is our head coach, and he just said we'll have to adapt and adjust. So it's almost like we're going in at halftime and trying to figure out what to do as we move along.

As Fred said, obviously this is the most unusual season not only for us, but probably in the history of the National Football League, so many different things to talk about.

But it's very exciting to know we're on the dawn of the season right now, and the way we begin is fantastic, Houston and Kansas City. You wish that Arrowhead could be full, but they will put some fans in there that night. It's special, Kansas City winning its first Super Bowl in 50 years last year. Mahomes is probably the biggest star in the league right now.

Come back to LA on Sunday night. That stadium is off the charts. It has a roof, but the light comes in through the roof. And I was there the other day for the Rams' scrimmage, and if you don't sit there with sunscreen on the east side of the stadium, you're going to get a sunburn. It's very different. It's very special. The Cowboys come in on opening night there.

And then off to the following week is in Seattle against New England, so everybody wants to know what about the Patriots minus Tom Brady.

So we have a tremendous way to start the season. Off we go. As we say, it's a little bit of trial and error. It's adapting and adjusting, but it's very exciting right now, and everybody I talk to right now can't wait for football to start, much like Cris Collinsworth.

Go for it, man.

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CRIS COLLINSWORTH: I think that was my introduction right there. You kind of broke up on me. But I am more than a little bit excited. I can't remember a year in which I've been more excited about the start of football than I am this year.

This has been, by all accounts, a very strange year in 2020, and to get something back to normal, to get anything back to normal and to watch the world champion Kansas City Chiefs and Patrick Mahomes going at perhaps the second most exciting quarterback in the league in Deshaun Watson, it just feels good.

For somebody who just loves the game of football, who just loves his job and the people I work with, just to get a chance to go back to something normal just feels fantastic.

Now, we all understand there's a lot going on in the world. There's a lot of things that we're probably going to be asked to make comment about here today. But first and foremost, we're excited about football. We understand the issues. We talk about the issues. We care about the issues. But we're also very excited to go back to football and get a chance to see two great teams start it off.

With that I'm going to turn it over to my political consultant, Michele Tafoya.

MICHELE TAFOYA: Well, it's interesting. I remember being interviewed back in April I believe it was and being asked what it was going to be like to return to football. At that time I envisioned, well, it'll be great. We'll be over this thing. We'll have crowds. It'll be phenomenal to get back to normal.

Now, we're not going to have the crowds, so it is going to be unusual. This thing didn't go necessarily the way we wanted it, but at least we are going back, as the guys said.

My role is going to be hugely different in that I'm not allowed on the field, so I'll be working from an area that's called the moat, basically the first row in the stands, and that's going to provide a lot of challenges. We love challenges on Sunday Night Football.

I'm eager to see how it all works out. Different for sure. But you know what? Like these guys have said, this is going to be a memorable season for a lot of reasons, and so just looking forward to the challenge.

Q. Cris, you guys are doing Dallas pretty quick, and I know nobody has seen anything that they've done since Mike McCarthy has taken over. Do you have any clue what to expect with this team with the new staff that has not been able to do anything really in a game

setting?

CRIS COLLINSWORTH: You know, I'm actually a little bit more curious about what they're going to do on the defensive side than I am the offensive side. On offense you have to assume that it won't be that much different with Kellen Moore. There will be introduction of a few new schemes or whatever.

I'm going to take a guess that we might see a little bit of a role for Tony Pollard this year. I thought that he could give them -- he's such a different-feeling back and maybe a little bit of a receiving threat coming out that potentially could make this a little bit different.

But my gosh, they are putting Kansas City Chiefs-like wide receivers on the field this year. CeeDee Lamb was my favorite receiver coming out. There certainly were plenty of other great ones in this draft, but he was my favorite.

And you pair him up with Omari Cooper and Michael Gallup, I think you're just going to see them go wide open.

And Dak Prescott has so many skills. I went through -- what the hell else was I going to do? I watched like every game this past year, you know, that the Cowboys played. He has so many things going for him. A, of course he's the charismatic leader of the football team; but B, this is a guy that can run. He's physically strong, has an ultra quick release, and now has all these weapons.

If they get production out of the tight end, as well, this is a team that really looks to be explosive to me on the offensive side, especially with the continuity with Kellen Moore.

Q. I've got one question for Cris and then one for Fred if that's okay. Cris, new era here in New England. We don't have Tom Brady as the quarterback anymore, and now it's Cam Newton, a completely different style of quarterback. What do you expect the Patriots' offense to look like with Cam Newton now running the show?

CRIS COLLINSWORTH: You know, we did the game last year with the Ravens, and we watched Lamar Jackson go through -- if you remember at the time, they were 8-0, I believe, and we were talking about this was the greatest defense in the history of the NFL, right.

They had given up like no points through the whole thing. And then Lamar got him and just went through him like a goose. That was almost stunning.

I remember Al and I kind of looking at each other like, What

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the heck is going on here? But I think somewhere in the back of every defensive coordinator's mind is this little thing that says, If anybody really knows how to run the option -- because I was an option quarterback in high school and my freshman year of college. If anybody really knows how to run this thing right, there's no way to stop it, because basically you have the quarterback now as a run threat, so you've added a blocker to the mix. You're leaving at least one guy completely unblocked and just reading him with the quarterback, and it can create some real issues.

And so it never surprises me when defensive-minded head coaches, when they get a chance to pick a scheme or a style, they like that running quarterback option style of play. And so somewhere in my mind this doesn't surprise me at all, because Cam Newton and Bill Belichick and Josh McDaniels together, it just makes for a really interesting dynamic.

In many ways I think the Patriots are going to be the most interesting team to watch for the first few weeks.

Q. Fred, my question for you, how is NBC going to handle no fans in the stands? Is there going to be ambient or fake crowd noise in the background? What other differences in the broadcast can we expect this year?

FRED GAUDELLI: Well, you know, that's something I think every network spent a lot of time on, like what are we going to do to fill the void of no crowds from the sound standpoint.

I think the NFL has done a really great thing here. We were all discussing this over the spring and the winter, but NFL Films had natural sounds from 30 of the 32 stadiums over four years, so obviously SoFi and Allegiant there wasn't any natural sound to be had because they weren't built.

And what they created was they created a sound loop that's authentic to each stadium, and they've hired an audio engineer in each city to basically score the game as it's going on. So you'll hear -- when we're in Kansas City Thursday night we will have an Arrowhead sound, and then there will be an operator that will add the accents for touchdowns or turnovers or sacks or great catches or drops or things of that nature.

So I think it'll be as authentic as it possibly can be. And then inside the bowl, I think what they're trying to figure out with the competition city is just to have a constant sound of presence. So there will be no riding the emotional swings of the game. It'll just be one constant levels so the players get a little bit of energy.

That's what I think the NFL as they consulted all the different networks, I think we all thought that was the best way to go if we're not going to have fans. I did say Kansas City. We're going to have real fans in Kansas City next week, so you're not going to hear enhanced audio.

But in SoFi obviously on Sunday night and probably for the foreseeable future, that's what you'll hear and that's what you'll hear on all NFL broadcasts that don't have NFL fans.

Q. I know there's other issues here, the racial justice and whatnot, but as we head into the second century of the NFL, you mentioned we have a new stadium in Las Vegas, the Denver Broncos have a trio of new sponsorships, partnerships with gambling interests, and I'm wondering if you guys could just speak to the evolution of -- it used to be a taboo industry; the league didn't want to touch it with a 10-foot pole. Now the league has embraced the gaming industry. Could you just speak to how that's kind of evolved?

AL MICHAELS: I think it's evolving, you're right, and we had a call with the NFL last week going over some of the things that will take place this year, rules changes and whatnot. I said to the person we were talking to at that point in the league office, It's evolving, but it appears to be about the same thing as it was last year in regard to what's happening in the gambling world, and they admitted that it's about the same.

We're all on a path to we don't know exactly where, but I'm as curious as anybody. I don't know what the end game is here. I don't know that anybody does. But I do think that it's pretty fascinating that yesterday DraftKings announced that Michael Jordan is going to be part of their operation and on the board, and the stock went up about 10 percent.

So I don't know what that really says. It's a fascinating dynamic that's developing right now, and I wish I could predict what's going to happen here.

But clearly everybody feels that they want a piece of the pie, of the gambling pie. People are interested in putting down a couple of shekels during the game or even inside the game, not just the end result and how many points will be scored and all of that.

But this is a mystery. It's a mystery right now. I don't know where it goes. I do know that the leagues are very excited to be a party to what could be a gigantic industry.

CRIS COLLINSWORTH: It's kind of interesting, with PFF I have a lot of people who are from Europe that work here, and that's where the company was actually started.

But they laugh at us with all of this because it's been such a part of their culture for so long that you could bet on anything, and when they see the gnashing of teeth and everything that we're going through in this transition period, they just find it very, very entertaining.

For the rest of the world, I guess this is just sort of status quo, but it is very different for us.

Q. Cris and Al, how surreal is it going to be to call an NFL opening-night game from a mostly empty stadium? And number two, what do you think the experience is going to be like for the fans who are there, the few thousand fans who are sitting around in a mostly empty stadium?

AL MICHAELS: Look, it's going to be very, very different. The other thing that's going to be vastly different, even though we have fans in Kansas City next Thursday night and they plan to put in I think 22 percent of the capacity at Arrowhead Stadium, which is probably around 18,000 fans, everybody is going to wear masks.

So it's going to sound different than it would, obviously, if people were up and cheering and yelling and screaming and doing whatever they do during the course of the game. So that's going to be extremely different. It'll be like one fifth of the stadium.

All I can tell you, and I've told this story before, when I did the San Francisco Giants in the '70s I got used to doing games with no fans because the crowd would be like 3,000. One night they handed me the attendance figure and I started naming people, who was there. I've got a lot of experience with this. It'll be very, very different.

But as Fred said, it's going to be embellished. I was at the Rams' scrimmage at SoFi last Saturday and they were piping in some noise, and if you didn't look around you would think that there were fans in there. Hopefully we'll strike the right balance and it will sound like a real game.

CRIS COLLINSWORTH: Yeah, I've been in multiple stadiums where I had no fans anyway, so I'm used to it. It's no big deal.

Q. Fred, it's very much a macro question that obviously a lot of people in your position have had to answer; what in your opinion are the biggest challenges of broadcasting the NFL this season?

FRED GAUDELLI: I'd say the biggest challenge is that everything that was routine for the last 15 years, at least for Sunday night, is no longer routine, and everything you do

or have done has had to be rethought. Even just walking into the stadium.

But as it relates to the broadcast, if you're talking about not having fans in the stadium, well, there's certain things you're going to try to avoid to try to keep reminding people that there's nobody here, and it looks really empty.

I would just say the biggest challenge is that routine that you've been in and really didn't have to think about is no longer there for you. On our end, we've probably had about a dozen people opt out because of their concern of traveling during COVID, and camera people, replay people, a few production people, which I totally understood and supported their decision.

These are people that have been on the team for 15 years, and there was a lot of unspoken language that could occur and things would happen. That doesn't happen any longer now because it's new people. And I'm sure they're talented, but they've not been in the system and they've not done it our way, and there's going to be the growing pains that come with that, as well.

I'd say the last thing, just not having preseason to kind of get your feet back underneath you, look at the 65 monitors for me and more for Drew or the cadence for Al and Cris, this is when I say this, this is what I do that. Because there is that little awakening that we all go through usually in Canton that we're now going to go through in a very, very meaningful game next Thursday night.

I would say the combination of those things are the biggest challenges aside from the biggest challenge of all, which is how do we keep everyone healthy.

Q. Cris, this is an Eagles-related question. They struggled on pass defense last year, as you know, and they gave up 27 passing TDs. They really couldn't stop elite receivers. They added Darius Slay on the back end and they've added Javon Hargrave on the front end to fortify what looks like a pretty good defensive tackle rotation. I'm curious what your thoughts are on the improvements they've made and the impact it might have on their pass defense.

CRIS COLLINSWORTH: I was just talking about Darius Slay being the A player. He's legit. He didn't have a great year last year. He had a good year, not a great year. But he is a guy that can take away that No. 1 receiver. He's going to give Jim Schwartz some options that maybe he hasn't had in the past.

They've had sort of equal cornerbacks. They didn't have that Stephon Gilmore back there that could really be that

guy. Darius Slay is used to being that guy for Detroit for all those seasons.

And the other guy you mentioned is Javon Hargrave. Now, Hargrave, he's almost a forgotten guy, but there's very few people in this league that can have an impact rushing the passer from the inside, Aaron Donald at the top of the list.

But Javon Hargrave had a lot to do. Now, there was always a lot of rushing weapons in Pittsburgh to be able to -- obviously you can't double team everybody so maybe he benefitted a little bit from that, but this team is not a whole lot different than that, either. So there's rushing threats all the way up and down that line, and I think putting him next to Fletcher Cox is going to just add another layer there.

And you know what you're going to get out of Schwartz. He's going to take chances. He's going to play cover-zero. He's going to go for it. In the biggest moments of the game, he's going to go for it. And when you do that, you'd better darned sure have some guys that can cover on the back end.

So Darius Slay to me is one of the big additions in the league this year.

Q. Fred, obviously unlike the NBA and Major League Baseball there's no natural backdrop of fans in a standard shot. Did you give any thought to showing virtual fans in stadiums as cutaways in stadiums that won't have fans there? Was that considered? And for Cris, sorry to ask you a Dolphins question, but with Byron Jones, Ereck Flowers, Van Noy, Ogbah, Shaq Lawson, all of their additions, could you see them on the fringes of playoff contention this year?

CRIS COLLINSWORTH: Man, I hope so. I'm so ready -- Barry, you've known me for a long time. I'm so ready to do games in Miami and Tampa and Jacksonville again. I mean, it's been unbelievable. This streak, the entirety of my career that I believe -- I think we did one Thursday night game in Tampa, but I don't think we've done a Sunday night game in the state of Florida since I've been a part of this for 10 years now.

Yeah, I'm sort of hoping in the back of my mind that -- and you know it's going to start with defense, right. It has to with Brian as your head coach and what he's been able to do.

But those guys bring a little juice, as well, that Van Noy and Roberts and some of those guys -- just knowing what the culture was of Byron Jones, knowing what the culture was in New England.

But for my money, if I were starting a football team, I can only tell you what I would do. A, you've got to have the quarterback; B, in my opinion, in this league today, you have to look at teams like the Kansas City Chiefs, the Dallas Cowboys, the Denver Broncos, what they've done, adding weapons at the receiver position.

But 1A and 1B for me would be build a secondary, and with Xavien Howard and Byron Jones and the guys they have back there in that secondary, I just think this team is being built the right way. I really do. I think that they're being built the right way.

I don't think there's any huge rush on Tua; Fitzpatrick can handle that thing fine. So I'm kind of excited to see where they're going. And a defensive first approach worked pretty well for the Dolphins back in the early '70s, so we'll see if it works again.

FRED GAUDELLI: Yeah, Barry spent a lot of time looking at virtual fans, and kudos to Fox for what they've done on their baseball coverage. Here's where I feel like virtual fans fall short. In football, we have 25 cameras that cover the game. You would have to instrument 25 cameras and then build virtual fans for every single one of those angles in a realistic perspective. The technical power you would need to do that would increase the compound tenfold. It's just not feasible financially or I would probably say technically at this point to have every single camera configured so you can have it.

And when you don't have every single camera configured, as when you watch some of these games that Fox uses, you see the pitch from centerfield camera, there's no one in the seats. You cut to the batter as you're standing in the box to put in his batting average or what he's done tonight and you see there's nobody behind him.

Then the ball gets hit and then you see fans because that camera has instrumented fans. So it becomes a little bit of a gimmick, and this is not a shot at Fox because I think what they've done is tremendous, but it's just not realistic. So you have fans, you don't have fans, and at the end of the day, it just didn't feel right to me.

I know we discussed it pretty extensively inside NBC Sports, and without the ability or the financial ability to instrument every single camera, it just didn't feel right.

Q. We saw during the playoffs last year that the Texans could hang with the Chiefs for a certain period of time before that game changed rather drastically. What can they do to compete with them over a period of 60 minutes? And second, today will be the 11th Astros game I've covered this year, and more often

than not I'm seeing someone get hurt in just about every game. I'm curious if the penchant or the possibility for injuries will be the same in football as it was for baseball given the unusual training period leading up to this regular season.

CRIS COLLINSWORTH: I suppose I should take at least the first one. What will they do differently? I think that the problem that everybody faces when they play the Kansas City Chiefs is how do you cover these guys, right, and at least last year Houston had one of the highest percentages of man coverage. They're a man coverage team. It's what they believe in. They want to get in your face. They want to get after you.

Typically what Kansas City wants to do is put three blazing wide receivers, the Tyreek Hills, the Sammy Watkins, the Mecole Hardmans of the world on one side, and then take Travis Kelce and the running back on the other side.

So last year it was Damian Williams and he obviously had a great Super Bowl, playoff run, and the whole thing. This year it's Clyde Edwards-Helaire. Not everyone is a fan of college football, but I can tell you nobody wants any part of covering that guy man-to-man.

Now you've got to make up your mind. Are we really going to try and play man coverage against all of those guys all the way across the field? Personally I don't think it's possible. The teams that can at least give them a little bit of a problem are teams that can get there with a four-man rush and play some zone defenses in behind there or double team and help.

So we'll see what the new-look Houston Texans are going to be this year on the defensive side, but I do think that with J.J. Watt coming back healthy, Jonathan Greenard, some of these guys coming back, Mercilus. If they can get the pass rush going and play some zone defense this year, I think they have a chance.

AL MICHAELS: That's an extensive analysis from my man, Cris. Let me put it to you this way: You don't want to fake punt from your own 20-yard line. It's as simple as that. With that, let's go to Michele.

MICHELE TAFOYA: I agree, Al.

CRIS COLLINSWORTH: One thing about the injuries, the baseball restart was chaotic, to say the least. It was not going to happen, it was going to happen. I think the NFL -- I'm not saying it's going to be any different, but I think they've had a more systematic approach. The first I think two or three weeks they were in camp it was all about conditioning, was all about getting their bodies right, and

then they slowly moved to helmets and pads, and obviously we've seen them the last week, these scrimmages that they've been having amongst themselves. Hopefully it won't be -- I'm like you, I watch a lot of baseball, as well, and my team, the Yankees, there's two guys getting hurt every single night, seemingly from nothing. But hopefully because of the fact that the NFL had a more systematic lead into their season, some of those things could be avoided. But let's face it, no one has played any football yet, so we'll see what happens.

Q. Guys, greetings from Tampa where the spirit of George Allen is alive and well. The future is now. My question is how rare is this kind of all-in philosophy to this degree, the sense of urgency? What's going on down here in Tampa? How rare is this in the NFL? And guys, is this grand experiment going to work?

CRIS COLLINSWORTH: I don't know, but I cannot wait to watch it. I mean, there's so many things this year that made this season so incredibly exciting. But for me one of them that I've never experienced -- like I've never called a game in which I haven't seen the teams involved in it on tape at least once, right, whether it be meshing together a preseason tape and at least get a feel for who's where and what and all that sort of stuff.

But this is going to be a team, an offense that we don't even know what it's going to be. I mean, the difference between Bruce Arians' offense and Tom Brady's offense is so stark that we just don't know what it's going to be.

Mike Evans and Chris Godwin are two receiving threats that Tom Brady, simply put, did not have anybody even close to that on his team last year as far as a down the field threat. Of course Julian Edelman is pretty good. And three tight ends that can really play on this team between Howard and Brady and Gronkowski.

One of the things I'm completely psyched and one of the things I like even more about it is I have not a clue what they're going to do in that game until they walk out there for the first time, and we don't know what they're going to try and do defensively with the Saints to try and play defensively against that.

It is just like the start of college football season, only you don't get to start with some team you're going to beat by 50. You're coming out playing in the NFL on week one and there are so many unknowns, it's just unbelievable.

Q. Could this be a spectacular failure down here in Tampa?

AL MICHAELS: I don't think so. I think Cris talked about



the guys that make up the essence of the roster. You've got the great receivers, you've got Gronk going down there.

As far as I can tell, Brady hasn't fallen off any cliff. Great respect for the coach, the coaching staff down there.

Yeah, if you tell me that five starters get hurt the first week, yeah, you can have that happen, but Cris I think summed it up perfectly in the sense that not only with the Bucs but with almost every team in the league we sort of have an idea what might happen because you do have some history with the teams bringing back all these guys that haven't played preseason.

But it's going to be fascinating to watch. I think Tampa Bay opens up against New Orleans, so right off the bat you're going to get a pretty good idea of what's happening, obviously, going up against the Saints on opening day.

But to piggyback what Cris says, this season is going to be so fascinating because there's more mystery, at least at the outset of the season, than any season than I can remember. But I don't anticipate a disaster down there.

MICHELE TAFOYA: Can I add one thing? Tom Moore is the offensive consultant down there. I think he might be a secret weapon for Tampa Bay just in terms of his past. He texted me recently that he is having the time of his life, which is a good sign.

Q. He's seen it all, right, Michele?

MICHELE TAFOYA: Yes, he has seen everything.

Q. Question for Fred: You kind of talked about the challenges logistically and everything, but in terms of the production elements, can you talk a little bit about the cool C360 camera and anything else you guys are excited about in terms of cameras, graphics, other production elements for Sunday Night Football this year?

FRED GAUDELLI: Well, that'll be the big-ticket item this year, and actually Drew and I are still in Los Angeles but heading to Kansas City today so we can rehearse with this tomorrow night inside of Arrowhead. Basically it's a camera that will shoot sideline to sideline, but it's an AK camera, you know, 8,000 more pixels than a normal camera, so it allows you to Zoom in to a great extent without any picture quality loss whatsoever. And not only can you Zoom in, you can pan the full 180 degrees from sideline to sideline.

It would have been great to have been able to experiment with this in a game or two prior to this Thursday, but I have a little bit of a vision in my mind, and I think it's really going

to help Cris illustrate a lot about what happens in quarterback play, a safety turns his hips, the quarterback goes the other way, where you can really manipulate the screen to accentuate what Cris is describing to the audience.

And then the other thing is because it rides on the SkyCam right below it, you're going to have some incredibly intimate replays of people like J.J. Watt or Chris Jones. Cris Collinsworth was preparing a tape about the Kansas City defense and he was commenting on Chris Jones' hands and how he uses them and how he'll grab the offhand of an offensive lineman.

Not only will we have a great view of that, but I'll be able to Zoom into his hand grabbing the hand of an offensive lineman with no picture quality loss.

You know, again, it would have been awesome to have a chance to play with this for a couple of games, but now we're going to come out of the box with it. So I think it might be a little bit slower to start as we kind of get our legs underneath us with the system, but we're really excited about it.

You know, as far as the other elements, obviously we've increased our virtual graphic presentation every single year. We do that -- we're doing that again this year, but again, had to account for these graphics without having the fans as a backdrop, without having a full stadium as a backdrop. We're redeveloping some of those to account for that.

And then we are going to have some -- we're going to hopefully have some -- for the games we don't have fans, and even in Arrowhead a lot of the fans who are home watching the game will do a virtual fan mosaic that we'll have in the broadcast from time to time just to kind of keep the fans engaged.

Q. Has the COVID situation changed the way the production team functions? Is anybody located back in Stamford that would not have been previously? How has that changed your work flow for games?

FRED GAUDELLI: Yeah, it's changed it pretty significantly. Before this year, every single person who worked on Sunday Night Football was at the game. This year our entire graphic operation, our edit operation, that will come from Stamford. It's not like that hasn't been done before with other shows or at other networks, so I'm not really too worried about that other than you don't get to see the people that you would see on a normal basis.

We actually had to add a track to our compound so we



could have social distancing among all positions. So everybody in a truck, and everybody will be wearing a mask. Everybody will be at least six feet apart. I don't know how much detail you want, but I know they upgraded the air filtration systems in the truck to operating-room grade.

So yeah, there have been a significant amount of changes due to COVID.

Q. My first question is for Fred. Fred, I joined the call slightly late and you may have addressed this, and if so I apologize to everybody listening. Have you gone to a stadium and heard how the crowd noise will sound?

FRED GAUDELLI: Have not. Up until now, no one has been allowed in the stadium.

Q. How do you imagine in terms of how it will play through the screen in terms of what the viewer hears? What's your understanding in terms of how much -- will it sound as natural as possible or what's your opinion on that?

FRED GAUDELLI: Yeah, I think it's going to sound very natural. I have heard -- look, I heard a demo from an Eagles game, and the Films people really did -- think about taking four years of natural sound and creating a four-hour sound track that you basically live score as the game is going on.

You should really talk to NFL Films because the system they've built is really fascinating. It's very simple and really kind of accounts for all the things that happen in a game. I don't think you're going to get booing for some obvious reasons, but you might get some groans.

But they have a set amount of buttons, and there's not a lot. There's about maybe like a dozen buttons that would be game-winning touchdown, go-ahead touchdown, visiting team touchdown, interception, sack, and that demo that I heard was tremendous. I mean, it was an Eagle crowd. You even got the E-a-g-l-e-s Eagles chant after they scored. I think it's going to sound good.

I've never seen NFL Films do anything that wasn't first-class, best-in-show. They're just excellent. And the system that they've built -- again, they had to do this for 32 stadiums. You just think about the tedious nature of that, but they did a tremendous job. I really don't have very many worries about that. I think it's going to sound great.

Q. For Al and Cris, in terms of calling the game with no fans, energy-wise, just how does that impact what

you do?

AL MICHAELS: I think that we addressed this I think before you got on about -- I think we're all used to working under different circumstances. I grew up doing baseball with no fans in Candlestick back in the '70s. I think that once the game starts we're just focused on the game itself.

It's not that we don't hear the fans, and we like to ride the emotion of the fans during our broadcast, too; I understand that. But I think with the sound that Fred just described and how it's going to be supplemented inside our telecast, I think we're going to feel as if the fans are there, and especially at least in Kansas City on opening night. We're going to get some percentage of the fans which will be in the stadium. That will help.

And after that I think we're so locked in to what's happening in the game and trying to go through the mechanics of the game. And as Fred has described, this year is going to be very, very different. We're going into uncharted territory in a way with some of the people working outside the compound at the stadium, et cetera.

So I think what we have to do is just kind of put the blinkers on like a horse, look straight ahead, and do the game. I'm not anticipating it being any sort of a problem, but you miss the fans, though, any time you're doing a game, and it's exciting and the place is full and all of that and there's a little bit of an energy there.

But I think we have to -- not trick ourselves into this, but just look straight ahead, go right down the stretch, call the game, and I think it's going to be fine.

CRIS COLLINSWORTH: I think you ask a really good question because for me, the hardest thing when I started broadcasting was the tone. You know, when do you get excited, when are you in a conversation, when are you down, when are you up? To me that was the hardest part. It sounds ridiculous, but it was for me the hardest part.

I'll give you one of my little secrets, that when I started working with Al Michaels, I just now play follow the leader. Wherever he goes, I kind of go, because I think that tone-wise he has mastered the art. He's figured out what the guy sitting at home is feeling.

And remember, it's Sunday night. People are getting ready. They've got to go off and go to work the next morning, it's the end of a long weekend. They're comfortably sitting on the couch, many of them with their wife or grandmother or whoever else is in the room, and that tone is really important.

So is it going to be different? I don't know. I don't know exactly how we're going to deal with it, but I can tell you this: Wherever AI goes you're going to find me, too.

FRED GAUDELLI: I think it's going to sound like a Sunday Night broadcast. I don't think there's any question about that. I'm very, very confident. As AI said, once the game starts you're into the game. I'm very confident in the soundtrack that's been produced. I don't think the audience is going to notice a big difference.

Look, even in the other sports I've watched, whether it be the NBA, the NHL, I've really not noticed that difference. They've really made it sound like a real game.

Q. This is for Michele. I was wondering if you could expand on how your job is going to change from a logistics standpoint during the game, and how you intend to sort of gather information when you're not on the field?

MICHELE TAFOYA: Yeah, it's going to be something. I said to Fred the other day, I can't believe I'm going to show up to a stadium and not walk on to the field. It's going to feel strange. I'm going to do a lot of my information gathering leading up to the game, obviously, and some of the things I normally do on the field I won't be able to do.

I don't know if it will evolve during the season, but I think it will. I think we expect a lot of things to change throughout the season. Maybe it'll get -- the access will change.

In the meantime, I'm bringing binoculars to the game for the first time in my career. I want to be able to see things up close like I usually can. We have some really creative communications set up for halftime interviews and postgame interviews and the like.

It's really going to be -- I'm going to need much more comfortable shoes, I think, because I'll be running around that first row quite a bit. But those are the things -- everyone has got to deal with it, and so -- but that restriction is really strange.

As Fred was mentioning earlier, even showing up to the compound -- normally I'd go right to the truck and meet with Fred for a while and we'd go through some things. Can't do that. And then I'd go to our little featherlight and maybe have some food. Can't do that.

We're going to be sort of isolated and in an office of our own or a space of our own. Communication, verbal communication is going to be -- it's always important, but I can't imagine -- the importance it's going to take on this year can't be overstated.

Q. How will you do halftime and postgame interviews?

MICHELE TAFOYA: I think it's going to vary team to team and stadium to stadium, but I think -- do you want me to expound on that?

FRED GAUDELLI: Sure, I'm fine.

MICHELE TAFOYA: So I think in some cases at halftime we might have a ring down where I'm actually on a phone with the coach. That may be the case in some. In others, it may be the case that we just -- the coach walks to where I am in the stands if I'm near a tunnel and we chat from an appropriate social distance.

Postgame it sounds like what we're going to do is have a camera down on the field with a monitor for the player so we can show the player highlights. The player will have -- will hear me through a headset or whatever mechanism they're going to throw on him and be able to respond in kind.

It'll be good. It'll be really a chance to maybe have the player look at highlights while we're doing the interview, which we haven't done in the past, so we're looking at it as an opportunity.

Q. My question is for AI, kind of along the same lines. Curious if you could walk through your weekend in terms of meetings, access, and any differences for you and Cris in the booth.

AL MICHAELS: Well, the slide first. The slide is on hold, I guess, at least at the outset of the season. I was thinking about -- I was watching a baseball game the other night and the guy was trying to steal 2nd and he comes up -- he goes to the ground and he comes up six feet short, so maybe that will be our slide this year. Hopefully we'll be able to bring that back before the season.

I think for us, one of the really great things that we've been able to do through the years is meet with the coaches and the players and be at practice, and there's a one to one that won't exist right now because what we're going to have to do, as all the networks will, at least at the outset, Zoom calls.

I'm going to miss the interaction, the kidding around. Some of the best stories that we've been able to tell on the air have come from those meetings or come from going down on the field. Michele talked about going to the field before the game. That was very valuable, and that's not going to happen right now.

So we have to adjust in that regard and find different ways to come up with the good stories that we come up with that we've only gleaned in the past by going down on the field.

So that's going to be different. Again, here we are. It's a new world. We're not crazy about this new world, but we're going to, as we said, adapt and adjust and do the very best we can and try to get as much information as we can.

Q. I have a ratings question for Fred. I know that obviously the NFL is probably going to be winning all of these ratings battles with all of these other sports coming up, but even as soon as next week, assuming the NBA games go on as scheduled, the opening game is going to go up a Laker game with LeBron James against Russell Westbrook, James Harden. Obviously the NFL will easily win that ratings battle, but is there any concern about these other sporting events, unusual competition maybe eroding the numbers a little bit?

FRED GAUDELLI: I mean, I think you'd have to say yes because we're looking at a sports calendar that no one has ever seen. We're going to see the Stanley Cup championship be awarded, the NBA championship be awarded, potentially a Triple Crown be awarded, the U.S. Open, the Masters, all these signature events that we all love to watch, and they're all coming down at the same time.

Will it be a factor? I don't know how it couldn't be a factor. But as you pointed out, the NFL is the ratings king and there's not even a close challenger. We feel really good about that. But I think there has to be some kind of impact.

Q. Was there any thought of having the announcers work remotely? And number two, can you tell us what we can expect from the vision, at least at home, of seeing all the signage down the field? I believe the NFL is allowing teams to sell signage, much the way you might see in soccer or hockey or basketball, because they are, of course, so revenue deprived at this point. If you can address those, I'd appreciate it.

FRED GAUDELLI: Sure. As far as the announcers calling the games from home, look, it's something that we've discussed and planned for in the event that no one was able to travel or someone wasn't able to travel or we all couldn't get to the game. We had those technical plans in place if that were to happen. Hopefully that's not the case.

Hopefully things are going to start trending or keep trending in a good direction and we'll be calling the games from site. But if it had to come to that, we would be prepared to do that.

As far as the signage is concerned, it's funny, you referenced some of the European soccer games and things of that nature. After a while it becomes wallpaper.

Now, the way I understand it, I believe from goal line to goal line the messaging is more NFL messaging and not commercials. I believe the end zones is where the teams can sell to sponsorships and things of that nature.

But I've always viewed it as wallpaper. You're watching a game. Yes, you notice it, but it doesn't really distract or detract from what you're watching.

Q. Cris, being a former wide receiver for the Bengals, what is your outlook with them getting Joe Burrow? What is your outlook for them for the future?

CRIS COLLINSWORTH: Is cautiously optimistic allowed in this setting? It starts to get a little close to home here. There have been some good years in Cincinnati and there's been some rough years. I know Mike Brown and the Cincinnati Bengals organization pretty well, and the two years that we went to the Super Bowl back in the '80s we had an MVP in Kenny Anderson and we had an MVP in Boomer Esiason, and the amount of draft capital that was thrown at them as potential trade bait for Joe Burrow this year lets you know that Mike Brown believes he has another one.

What we saw from Joe Burrow last year, was he on a great team? Yes. Did he have great receivers all around him and a great offensive line and all those things? Yes. But there's something about this kid's makeup that's pretty special. You can tell he is all business from the first minute he got drafted, from the first minute he won the National Championship.

I think the only time I've ever seen him sit back and smile a little bit was smoking the cigar after the game, and even then he seriously looked like he was on to Cincinnati, as Bill Belichick might say.

We're excited about it here. They've got A.J. Green back and playing again; Tee Higgins is going to be exciting. Joe Mixon signed now. I don't know, I think there's a lot of optimism in Cincinnati right now.

Q. Do you guys play Fantasy Football and is there a Sunday Night Football Fantasy Football league?

CRIS COLLINSWORTH: There should be.

FRED GAUDELLI: I don't.

AL MICHAELS: We wouldn't do any better than anybody else. It's funny, one of the things we love about sports is that you think you know but you don't know as much as you think you know, and I don't care who you are.

We have access to far more stuff than the average fan does, and we'll go out to the game and say, Well, this is the way it looks to us, and the game will turn out to be completely opposite. We would do no better than anybody could find on the street in Fantasy Football.

CRIS COLLINSWORTH: I really enjoy the Fantasy Football, but it is a completely different art than football-football. If you have a fullback who only plays 10 snaps a game that plays on the goal line and has 12 rushing touchdowns, well, that's a great fantasy player, but you wouldn't even think about him on a regular NFL team.

Yeah, it's an art form. It really is. And the people that know how to manipulate their way around Fantasy Football, it is amazing. I mean, they know wide receivers and running backs and quarterbacks and defenses and kickers better than I do. I love talking to them. Sometimes I don't even know what they're talking about. But it is definitely an art form.

It's a big part of the reason that people love watching primetime football games, because a lot of times it comes down to those last two games of the week, which is Sunday night and Monday night games. So it's great for us.

FRED GAUDELLI: Hey, just so everybody is aware, something that we've been working on for a little bit of time, we decided this year to minimize the cross country travel for Al. We give him a handful of byes so he didn't have to make those long treks from Los Angeles across the country.

His first bye week will be week 3 in New Orleans, and then after that we're going to take it month by month just to kind of see how the schedule shakes out. This is a longtime plan, as I said. Al has been a part of it.

I know a lot of you have speculated that Mike Tirico might be calling more NFL games for us. Mike will obviously call the game week 3 in New Orleans. As he's done four of the last five years, he'll call the Thanksgiving night game in Pittsburgh this year, and then the following Sunday in Green Bay.

And then we'll kind of look to see if there's a game or two that Mike might also appear. He will call -- as you probably remember, we acquired a second wild card game in the off-season. Mike will call that game. But just so everybody

is on top of what we're doing this year.

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