

NBC Sports Group Media Conference

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Pete Bevacqua

Fred Gaudelli

Al Michaels

Cris Collinsworth

Mike Tirico

Tony Dungy

Press Conference



circumstances.

For us, certainly a good moment. It looks like we're very much on pace to be our 10th year as the number one show on prime time. That literally has never been done before. So that again is both exciting and a real testament to the great work of our team that you'll hear from.

As we head into this Sunday, we're so excited about this Super Wild Card Sunday and the two prime time matchups we have. When you think about the quarterbacks we have, Tom Brady, Alex Smith, Roethlisberger, and Baker Mayfield, I don't think we could ask for better matchups.

We're not only excited to have these two great games on NBC, but we're also really excited for Sunday night for the first time ever to stream an NFL game, a wild card game, on Peacock. We're also going to have it on Telemundo. We think we're set up for what should really be a great weekend of NFL football.

With that I'd again like to thank all of you and turn it over to a good friend and a colleague, Fred Gaudelli.

FRED GAUDELLI: Thanks. I'm going to echo a little bit of what you said. I'm really grateful to be here, having made it through 19 regular-season games this year with just a few hiccups along the way.

I think when we talked back in late August, we talked about adapt and adjust. That certainly happened pretty much on a weekly basis this year.

I just wanted to say thanks to our engineering, operations, production, our emergency health and services department for all the constant adjustments that had to be made throughout the season to put the show on the air, in my opinion, with little disruption to the production of the show.

It's great to be in the wild card round. It's great to be in the NFL Playoffs. The league did a phenomenal job. I don't think many people thought we'd get to the end of the season on time, and we have. Hopefully a lot of excitement yet to come.

Al?

DAN MASONSON: Thanks for joining us on today's call.

This weekend we're excited to present a pair of prime time games as part of the NFL Super Wild Card Weekend. We have Tampa Bay at Washington on Saturday night, which will be called by Mike Tirico, Tony Dungy, and Kathryn Tappen. Then Sunday night it's the Browns and the Steelers, called by Al Michaels, Cris Collinsworth, and Michele Tafoya. This also marks the first ever NFL game streamed on Peacock and the first NFL playoff game on the Telemundo broadcast network.

Joining us on today's call are the chairman of NBC Sports Group, Pete Bevacqua, our Sunday Night Football executive producer Fred Gaudelli, and our two announce teams in a group for this weekend, Al Michaels, Cris Collinsworth, Mike Tirico, and Tony Dungy. Each will have an opening comment and then we'll take your questions. We'll have a transcript later on this afternoon on nbcgroup.com/pressbox.

With that I'll turn it over to NBC Sports Group chairman, Pete Bevacqua.

PETE BEVACQUA: Hello, everybody. Happy New Year.

Certainly an exciting week for us as we head into this weekend. I just wanted to start by thanking Fred and Drew and our entire production, engineering, and announce teams. To think about what everybody has gone through this year, it's been a trying year, a difficult year, and we want to salute the NFL and all of the teams for pulling off a very successful year under, as I said, very trying



AL MICHAELS: I think doing the Browns' first playoff game in 18 years to me is both very cool and now totally full of mystery. Stefanski, Joel Bitonio, and others out of commission, but you still have Mayfield and Chubb and Hunt and Landry against that Steelers defense in a really good matchup.

The Steelers of course had that swale period after the 11-0 start. Seemed to get it back together when they had to against the Colts in week 16. Once again, Mike Tomlin has really done a superb job. It gets sometimes lost in the shuffle. Here is a guy who has been there since 2007, has never had a losing season.

You have two cities within driving distance, a good rivalry. As my pal, the late great Keith Jackson would say, they don't like each other very much. It should be a good watch.

CRIS COLLINSWORTH: You talked about the mystery of the Cleveland Browns a little bit. How about the mystery of the Pittsburgh Steelers this year? Just got finished watching them on offense against the Colts. Of course, they had been struggling and trying to work their way through some things.

First half, honestly I don't think I've ever seen the Steelers look worse on offense. Second half they looked like they could beat anybody in the league, and they were the team that went 11-0.

This is a mysterious team. The constant is on the defensive side. On the offensive side I just don't know what we're going to see in this game. But I do know the history of this franchise. It's a proud franchise. So many times when you start to think you might be able to count them out, they just make you look foolish and come back and do it all over again. That's what I expect. I expect their best out there on Sunday night.

What do you think, Michael, about Mr. Tom Brady?

MIKE TIRICO: It is pretty cool to see Tom Brady play a playoff game for the first time not in a New England uniform. It will be very different. The Buccaneers and their fans have been waiting since 2007 for a playoff game, haven't won a playoff game since back in Super Bowl XXXVII. When they signed up for all of this, this is what they hoped to see, Tom Brady leading them to the playoffs.

I'm sure we're going to have a very interested fan base there in central Florida. Obviously very interested in Washington and the DMV surrounds with the Washington football team winning the division at 7-9, which a lot of folks didn't expect anybody to emerge in that NFC East division

with a chance, but their pass-rush certainly will give them one.

I'm sure we'll also have a lot of interested viewers up in the six states we call New England. For the Patriots fans over the years who got used to January evenings and late afternoons watching Tom Brady in the playoffs, they'll be watching, but with very different emotions. I think you put all that together, we've got a really fascinating end to the Super Wild Card Weekend.

Tony, just in talking with you about the game Sunday night, as we were back in the studio together, and early this week, you're really excited to, one, get to see Tom Brady in the playoffs but this time from up in the booth instead of across the field on the opposite sideline.

TONY DUNGY: You're right. It's going to be much more pleasurable. I'm actually at the Tampa Bay practice right now. You talked about that excited fan base. I live here in Tampa. It is totally fired up and pumped up for Saturday night.

I had never seen Tom Brady, these last four weeks he hasn't played any better, I don't think. It's been awesome to look at. His team is fired up around him.

But Washington, it's going to be a great matchup because they have the antidote. They have a very strong defense, they have a great front four, young, fast, aggressive people. It's going to be great to see. I'm looking forward to calling my first NFL playoff game.

With that I think we can turn it over to Dan for questions.

DAN MASONSON: We will start with questions.

Q. I believe it's the Sunday game you're simulcasting on Peacock. Going forward, do you see simulcasting things on Peacock? Is that a one-off thing?

PETE BEVACQUA: Appreciate the question. You're right. Our Sunday game is the one that will be on Peacock, obviously as well as NBC. When we talked to the NFL, when the additional wild card games became available, we negotiated for one of them, it was important for us to also acquire the rights for Peacock. Peacock is obviously a major part of our future. We are seeing that sports on Peacock really does have great success. We've seen success with the Premier League, with the US Open. We'll continue to chart that success.

We have made no decisions necessarily about the future of additional games on Peacock. We're just excited about this first game on Peacock this Sunday. We're looking



forward to seeing how it is received by the fan base.

Q. For anyone who wants to answer it, Boston's hometown team, the Tampa Bay Buccaneers. Everyone talks about Tom Brady, but I'm curious about the other guy, Rob Gronkowski played 16 games this year, numbers were a little bit down, but he did catch seven touchdowns. What have you seen from Gronk and how important is he to the offense?

TONY DUNGY: I think he's very important. He has rounded into form. Obviously when you don't play for a year, it takes a little while to get back. I think he's done that. At first it was more in the blocking, then he got more comfortable, and now you see him kind of back to his old form. I think he's going to be very much a force in the playoffs. He's someone that Tom has looked to in this final stretch of the year. He's looked more like the Rob Gronkowski we're used to this last month of the season.

CRIS COLLINSWORTH: I agree. I know when we were getting ready for our game with Tampa, his shoulder just was not right. I've watched Gronkowski block for hundreds of games, and he simply wasn't right. I think now that's getting healthier, I think his legs are getting under him. You throw in Antonio Brown into that mix, starting to round into form, they're starting to look pretty good.

Q. Pete, how would you describe your level of interest in keeping Sunday Night Football?

PETE BEVACQUA: I would say it's tremendously high. The NFL partnership for us is obviously of extreme importance. When you talk about how I started the conversation that we've been fortunate enough to have the number one show on prime time television now for hopefully 10 years in a row. We all know what a great property the NFL is. So it is an absolute priority for us to retain our partnership with the NFL, 100%.

Q. Al and Cris, on Sunday, did you get any feedback from either the NFL or the Eagles about your stance on how they played the quarterback position on Sunday?

AL MICHAELS: I can answer first.

I haven't. We're doing it in real-time. That's what we felt at that moment in time. I thought it was appropriate considering what was going on to reflect what I think most of the fandom felt, not only New York but the rest of the country.

No, I haven't heard anything. Have you, Cris?

CRIS COLLINSWORTH: Nothing. No. Sometimes I do

(laughter). Sometimes I do. This is one I didn't.

Q. Fred, I think last I've seen there won't be fans in Washington, there probably won't be in Pittsburgh. If that is the case, is there anything you can do differently in the booth, on the field to create or display that playoff atmosphere that won't be there from the fans?

FRED GAUDELLI: Well, I know Washington already said they won't have fans. Pittsburgh I think will have 2,500. I think they're hopeful that there could be 6,500. I'm not sure where that stands. 6,500 people in 70,000-seat stadium still looks empty.

I think we do what we did the entire season. We had for different games some fan component, whether it was fans virtually or bringing back shots that people could relate to. When we did the game in Buffalo, we talked about the Bills Mafia. When we did the game in New Orleans, we rolled in a package of all their fans. There wasn't a way that Aaron Rodgers would have been able to operate the way he did that night if it had been a typical game in the Mercedes-Benz Superdome.

We met this morning, our production team did, and we talked about the Browns fans, what this means for them. Obviously you're talking about two very passionate fan bases when you talk about Cleveland and Pittsburgh. There might be an element or two in this game regarding the fans.

But in terms of shooting or covering it, I don't expect we'd be doing anything differently.

Q. Pete, to follow up on your answer regarding NBC's interest in Sunday Night Football, philosophically would that interest extend if somehow the NFL wanted to parcel out a different package to NBC? I don't want to put words in your mouth, but is that presumption you're interested in being in the NFL business, you want some NFL football, if it turned out to be another package, NBC's interest remains the same?

PETE BEVACQUA: I would tell you again, we think the NFL is a special property. Obviously from my role in our sports group, it's a priority for us to retain that partnership. But I would also tell you that we are very much singularly focused right now on retaining Sunday Night Football. It's worked incredibly well for us really because of the power of the schedule, the power of the matchups, the power of the NFL brand.

Quite frankly, it's because of the people on this phone call starting with Fred and Al and Cris and Michele and the



great work they've done. We've seen how Mike, Tony, Kathryn, and others, Rob Hyland, all the great work we do with Football Night in America. It's a time slot and a platform that has worked so well for us on NBC, I think we have a real ability to make big, important events bigger and more important. I think we've proven that with Sunday Night Football.

Our hope is that we can continue to do that well into the future.

Q. Fred, talked to a lot of producers and broadcasters about the Zoom calls you guys have done in lieu of production meetings. There's a lot of thought this may become the norm for teams, particularly in the NFL where instead of meeting with people in person, you end up doing these on Zoom. Do you have any thoughts heading forward, if you think what's been so standard for you guys, production meetings at a hotel or facility, will still happen, or do you think teams will adapt what's been going on in the post-COVID university?

FRED GAUDELLI: I hope they don't adopt what's going on right now. I think the thing I miss more than anything the entire year, the NFL plays into it, is just the human touch; shaking somebody's hand, slapping them on the back, whatever you want to say. There's value to that. You get to know people by sitting in a room and talking with them through the years.

Tom Brady, Drew Brees or Peyton Manning games, you're going to lose something if it's just Zoom. Now, I can see Zoom being used in situations where it's a tight week or the team is getting in late or something like that. But it's funny, two quarterbacks this year bemoaned the fact we were on Zoom, Aaron Rodgers two weeks ago, and Drew Brees early in the season.

I'm not going to say every player misses it, but they expressed the fact that they wish they could be sitting there. There is no way I'm a proponent for doing it this way going forward.

Q. Tony, could you shed some light on the decision Ron Rivera has for this weekend with his quarterback, Alex Smith has taken them this far, but I'm also sure you saw the game, he's not 100%. How do you manage that as a coach, communicate that with the players?

TONY DUNGY: It's really a difficult call. You know your team responds to Alex, you know he's the best option for you to win, but you don't want to put him out there if he doesn't have a chance to be himself. That's what you try to

gauge during practice. You're going to give him every opportunity, even if he's not 100%. If he can win the game, you want to let him do that.

The question becomes how effective is he going to be. That's always a difficult call. But I can tell you any head coach is going to give his starting quarterback, his ace, every opportunity. He's going to bend over backwards to make that happen. It's only going to be a situation where you say no, Alex really is going to struggle if we put him in.

I expect to see him out there at least starting the ball game.

Q. Tony and Cris, what does Washington have to do to pull off the upset here?

TONY DUNGY: They have to deal with the tempo of Tampa. Tampa wants to get big plays on offense and they want to pressure you on defense. It's going to be up to their front to get pressure on Tom Brady so they can use seven guys in coverage and take away that big play, the quick strike from Tampa.

Then on the other side of the ball, they're going to have to handle the pressure. Todd Bowles is going to bring heat. They've got to deal with it, not turn the ball over, then make a big play here and there. I don't think they're going to have to put up 40 points to win, but they're going to have to take advantage, make some plays.

They'll have an opportunity to do that.

CRIS COLLINSWORTH: I think the health of Terry McLaurin is going to be really key in that game. Tony is dead on. I remember the Green Bay game earlier this year. You almost never see Aaron Rodgers (indiscernible) blitz. Green Bay jumped out to a 10-0 lead. I'm not sure they scored another point. They blitzed them relentlessly. Green Bay had no answer. It was amazing to watch it.

This is a first-class blitzing team. I think they're missing Devin White in the game. So big plays have to be had. Terry McLaurin, you have to hope that he's even healthier than what he was a week ago.

Q. Fred, how do you mix stadium sound with no fans, which is probably going to happen in D.C., and with some fans that you'll have for the Steeler-Browns game? What have you learned from the setup this year you might be able to incorporate moving forward as things improve?

FRED GAUDELLI: Well, in terms of answering your first question, it won't be the first time we have fans at a stadium this year. We did two games in Kansas City. I

think we had fans in Arizona, maybe a couple other places. It's really just a mix. You're obviously going to play up the real fans. You will backfill with some of the artificial sound that all the networks have been utilizing this year.

The one thing we leaned into in the second half of the season was the sound coming off the field. Because there's little or no one in the stadium, those sounds were heard in a way, I'll reference the game in Vegas with Mahomes and Derek Carr, we were hearing things that you would never, ever hear before.

As it got colder, we know that's more conducive to sound, getting natural sound off the field. It's really just a mix issue, how you want to profile the different sounds that you're getting and prioritize them.

Obviously Al, Cris, and Michele, number one priority. The other part of it is really leaning into the field with the opportunities that no fans provided this year in that regard.

Going forward, there were a lot of lessons learned this year. I know I've made quite a few notes, I'll probably take a look at that once this season is over.

Q. Al or Cris, even Tony, when it comes to Steelers-Browns, it's hard to ignore how tilted this rivalry has been towards Pittsburgh recently and historically. Some people don't like to call it a rivalry, at least not any more. Is this maybe finally the era of Browns football, they can get over that hump that's two hours to the east?

CRIS COLLINSWORTH: You know what's kind of interesting about it is that now the Cleveland Browns are the power football team. The Pittsburgh Steelers are the throw-it-quick, passing kind of team. Forever you always thought of the Steelers as being this really going to thump you, get down to the fourth quarter, they have a four-point lead, they're just got going to give up the ball, they're going to run it right down the field. They're going to play renegade, all the different things that go with it (laughter).

Now the Cleveland Browns have some ability, bad weather, multiple backs, catch-and-run kind of situations, a mobile quarterback. So I think they bring a good bit of it. Really this Browns offensive line going against the Steelers defensive line is going to be one of the real highlights for me. I wish Joel Bitonio was going to be able to play in this thing, one of the best guards in football.

It's power against power now. It's really made the rivalry a little bit better for me.

TONY DUNGY: I'll speak from my experience as a player

and a coach. It's always going to be a rivalry. I think there was a time when the Browns had never won a game in Three Rivers Stadium or hadn't won in years and years. They were still knock-down, drag-out dogfights. Every time we went to Cleveland, it was a dogfight.

That is going to be there. I think you're going to see the same type of game Sunday night.

AL MICHAELS: I'll weigh in. Nothing lasts forever. Even though it's been a one-sided rivalry, I think it's the dawn of maybe a new era here. Pittsburgh is annually good and Cleveland should be pretty good for a number of years when you have a really good quarterback, a lot of fun. You have a great runningback, a great offensive line. You have a head coach who did a hell of a job this year.

I think Cleveland-Pittsburgh is one of the better rivalries going forward.

Q. Fred, Mike, and Tony, what kind of conversations go on before the game talking about how much you talk with the name change throughout the broadcast for the casual viewers tuning in for the first time? Mike and Tony, what is it like calling Washington just by 'Washington' or 'the team' rather than their former name? Is that something you have to stay conscious of throughout the broadcast?

MIKE TIRICO: The whole calling them the 'Washington Football Team,' obviously it's an adjustment because we've called them something else our whole lives, our whole careers. I found doing it in studio for the 17 weeks of the year, you know, sometimes you get close to saying it but kind of correct yourself or catch yourself beforehand.

You do your best. We're all only human. You do your best during the week to practice that, make sure when it happens on Saturday night that it happens naturally.

Certainly in terms of the football stuff, here we are in the playoff game. There's been a lot of stuff that's happened with the organization during the year. Here you are at a playoff game, which is one of the most significant moments of the season. You want to keep your focus on the game. Certainly the team has been on plenty of times during the year for all of the conversations that have taken place.

That's at least how you approach it. But you come prepared for everything because you never know when something could become a significant topic on short notice.

FRED GAUDELLI: I would just say it's a playoff game. We know what's at stake. But even last week one of the things that we were talking about, whether it be the name change,

the league's investigation, the strike within the ownership, none of it is new. It's pretty much been happening since the beginning of the season.

Other than using it the way, I know Al used it the other night at the top of the show, forced to change your name for the first time in 87 years, turmoil with the ownership, it paints a picture, especially as it relates to Rivera, along with the fact that he was battling cancer, what he had to overcome, Alex, what he had to overcome, but I don't think it really warrants any deep inspection because there really isn't any news at the moment. It's something that, as Mike just said, has been ongoing really since the summer.

Q. Al, during the last telecast, you said people said the NFL's TV ratings are down. They went from number one to number one, which is a pretty good line. My question about ratings is this: When did ratings, which is this arcane measurement that nobody outside the business cared about, become this political football where everybody wants to weigh in on the NFL's ratings, good, bad or indifferent?

AL MICHAELS: That's a great question. I think a lot of it has to do with -- oh, how shall I put this -- entertainment websites and the rest. We're always talking about box office, this movie, that movie, the whole thing.

Ratings, they're in this mix. I only say this because even all the people I know who are not in the business say to me, We heard the ratings are tanking. I mean, to me, the reality is, if we're tanking then the whole world is tanking. I just threw that out there the other night. It's a line I've used privately with a lot of people.

I said, Yeah, we went from number one to number one. It's still the number one show on television. It's still I think appointment television for a lot of people. Even though the ratings are down, I think we live in this world right now where we're measuring everything against what took place in the past. When I have to see a headline that says: Sunday night ratings get sacked, I'm thinking, Excuse me? Sacked means we were No. 15 or 20.

Anyway, that's the way I look at it. Like I say, as Pete mentioned at the top of this conference call, 10 years in a row being number one on television is pretty good. I don't want to say it's painful, but it's a little frustrating to read about our ratings are getting sacked.

FRED GAUDELLI: I want to add on here, obviously it was the most unusual of years in a number of reasons. The political environment, COVID, sports playing out of season, major events happening out of season. It affected everybody. It affected every sport, every network.

Next year you might be writing, They're up, like, 25% or 30%. To me it's always a cyclical thing. The context that Al used there is the perfect thing. You're still number one. There's nothing to be ashamed of being number one.

Q. Cris and Tony, could you talk about the effect it's going to have Baker Mayfield not to have Kevin Stefanski? Do either of you know Alex Van Pelt very well?

CRIS COLLINSWORTH: I know Alex has called a few games in the past. Those guys are going to work so closely together even this week. Tony knows a lot more about play calling and how all that works within the coaching staff. For the most part I think the game plan is going to be put together virtually like it's been all season. Kevin will have a lot to do with that.

Then Alex is going to call the plays on the field. But the NFL has also evolved to the point where so many of the calls are actually made by the quarterback. They give you an option of plays, audibles out there. The fact that there's no crowd out there to disrupt the communication for an offensive football team, I think you'll lose a little bit, to be perfectly honest with you. I think you'll lose a little bit of having potentially the Coach of the Year on the field.

But as far as the pure play calling, other than the fact it's the biggest game in the last couple of decades for the Cleveland Browns, it's going to add some pressure to the whole thing.

Maybe in some ways it takes a little pressure off. They're going to be running the same plays, still be turning around, handing it to Nick Chubb, throwing it to Kareem Hunt, getting Jarvis Landry involved. They're going to be doing the same stuff.

Every once in a while it's nice to look over at your head coach, get a nod or a pat on the back and that will make a difference, too.

TONY DUNGY: No doubt, Chris, they're going to miss Kevin Stefanski not being there on the sidelines. The actual mechanics of it are not going to be that difficult. They're all in the process of formulating the game plan and the calls. What Alex Van Pelt wants to know, what Kevin Stefanski wants to know, is what play is Baker Mayfield really comfortable with. It's that crucial third and five, what does he feel good about. Alex will have a good feel for that.

I sat on the headphones for seven years with Tom Moore, he called every play. There was never a play that he

called that I was surprised. I didn't think we were going to call that on third and six. I would have never thought that. Everybody is on the same page. It's just those critical moments when that play-caller and the quarterback, they're in sync. He knows what the quarterback wants.

I think also they will have that to a great extent, maybe not like Kevin would, but it's going to be close.

Q. A quick thing about Baker, on such a hot streak, now he hasn't been throwing for 300 yards the last couple games. Do you see anything there?

CRIS COLLINSWORTH: The only thing I'd say about Baker, man, his runs had a lot to do with that game the other day. They clinched it, a quarterback sweep, almost fell out of my chair. It was a great call. Got the extra blocker out in front.

Baker was running hard. I mean, he probably ran the ball four or five times, but he was running like a fullback. He was running like he was born in Cleveland and it meant something a little bit extra to him.

I think that he has really become sort of the embodiment of that fighting spirit right now of the Cleveland Browns, that poor fan base that doesn't get to go to the games right now. I just got to feel like the people in Cleveland are about ready to explode to get back into that stadium and cheer with a packed house the way that they used to do back in the day I can remember so well.

I think, if anything, Baker has even kind of risen here a little bit lately. He's made some big throws. He's doing most of it without Odell Beckham. They miss Odell when they get into some of those single-coverage situations. It sort of galvanized the rest of the team, too, forced some people to move forward with that receiving corporation. Probably Donovan Peoples-Jones, the number one person on that list.

They may be a better team going into next year once Odell comes back.

TONY DUNGY: I would say, too, it's not always numbers. It's what you have to do to win games. If Baker has to put up big passing numbers, I believe he'll be able to do that.

His focus is on winning the game. I think he's played well in spite of the fact that the numbers maybe haven't been what they were earlier in the year.

Q. (Question regarding Tom Brady, coaching, and familiarity with that.)

TONY DUNGY: As far as Tom and Clyde?

Q. You said the thing about the quarterback, the sort of relationship, the respect, the humor that you guys maintain.

TONY DUNGY: The whole Indy-New England thing, we had great respect for them. We played a lot of big games against each other. I didn't know Tom that well when he was playing for New England and I was coaching, but got to know him through some of his ex-teammates, Adam Vinatieri, guys like that, then Rodney Harrison for the last 12 years.

We have a lot of love and respect for each other. He sent my son Jordan a Tom Brady jersey, probably the biggest Tampa Bay fan in the city. Very sweet of Tom to do that.

It's all in good fun. Tremendous respect for one another.

Q. Cris, you mentioned Joe Bitonio a little bit. How much do you think that affects the battle you're looking forward to see?

CRIS COLLINSWORTH: A lot. I think it impacts it a lot in part because of who they've got behind it, between Nick Harris and Chris Hubbard, the guys that were supposed to take his place. Who fits into that guard position now? Especially when you're going against the likes of Tuitt, Hayward, Alualu, you're a power running team anyway. The pass protection being such a key component part of it.

We talked about it a little bit on the broadcast the other night. 5/11ths of the football team are offensive linemen. The strength of your team, which I think the strength of the Cleveland Browns, is their offensive line. When one of those key guys gets taken out of it, that can be a little bit of a tough go for a football team.

They've been through it before. Wyatt Teller didn't play the last time we called the game. They survived that one pretty well, so I presume they'll survive here, too.

Q. Coach, you mentioned the Browns-Steelers rivalry. You were part of it for a bit. What is your favorite memory from your time playing against the Browns?

TONY DUNGY: Well, I can remember the first time I played them in 1977, going to Cleveland, Zach Lambert told me, Whatever you do, once you come out of the dugout, don't take your helmet off on the field because these fans don't like us, they're crazy. As a rookie, I put that in my memory bank, I never took my helmet off.

He got thrown out of the game for taking his helmet off. I

remember looking at him and saying, What did you just tell me (laughter)?

It was that type of game. We had some back and forth with those guys. They were always tough games. Healthy respect. But it was pretty strong, no question about it.

Q. For Cris and Tony, obviously from Washington's perspective, pressure on Tom Brady is going to be key. That seems easier said than done. What is the key for them to do that? On the other side of the ball, what have you seen from Scott Turner this year that suggests he could have success against the Tampa defense?

TONY DUNGY: I've been watching them. You're absolutely right. Jack Del Rio, Ron Rivera, this defense is built around rushing with four guys and covering with seven. They've got five tremendous rushers. They've got to alternate those guys in the defensive front. They got to pick their spots to blitz and create pressure.

But those four guys have to pressure. That's their style. If they don't pressure Tom Brady, it's going to be a long day. If they are able to, they'll have some success.

Tampa's protection has been excellent this year. That to me is going to be the battle and the key to the game.

On the other side, we talked about it earlier, Todd Bowles is going to bring heat, things from a lot of different directions. Scott Turner is going to have to dial up some plays to beat that blitz.

There is pressure on him to do that because that's what's going to happen. It will be great to see how it plays out. I think you're right, for Washington to win, Scott Turner is going to have to have a good game and that defensive front is going to have to have a good game.

CRIS COLLINSWORTH: It's interesting with Scott Turner, he comes from a family and a background that running the football is important. You can sense that. They move their offensive line a lot. They'll get blockers in front. They have really versatile backs with Matuszak and Gibson. They kind of give them the ability to look like they're running, then throw the ball, or vice versa.

They can use that, but I think the one thing with the blitzing team that maybe people don't think about so often is that sometimes you can wash down one of those blitzes and pop a run, slow a blitz down, too.

I think with Alex Smith, obviously going through what he's going through with his leg and the calf, the whole thing,

there's a chance that you'll see Washington pop a couple good runs in this one and slow that blitz down.

Q. As noted earlier, number one for the 10th straight year, going from number one to number one. My question is, given that number one position, which is not in question, there are still fluctuations, challenges this year, when you look to the long-term, to what extent do you think you can further grow that audience? If so, how do you do that as far as certain demographics or audience groups, parts of the country? How do you think about the long-term audience growth?

PETE BEVACQUA: I'll hop in and turn it over to Fred for his ideas.

Again, I think it starts with the power of NFL programming and the power of the sport. I mean, there's a passion for people to watch their NFL teams play great games. The fact that you were able to tune in to NBC prime time on Sundays is just a fantastic experience.

I think what we found over the course of this last nine months, if you go back over the time period, I think back to March where I was at THE PLAYERS Championships, part of our PGA TOUR partnership, over the course of 36 hours, sports came to an absolute standstill when we think about the cancellation of the PGA TOUR events, the National Hockey League, the NBA. I think that time period was a real reminder just about how strong the passion level for sports is in this country, how people miss sports so desperately.

I think as Fred said accurately, this fall and summer with sports coming back, sports being played, at times they're not normally being played, you think about the U.S. Open in golf that we had, which is historically played on Father's Day weekend, all of a sudden we were doing it in September. I remember our Thursday night NFL opener, I think it was the first time in the history of sports where you had the NFL, PGA TOUR golf, Major League Baseball, the NHL, the NBA all played on the same day. There was kind of this mass swarm of live sports coming back.

But what's so powerful in sports again is the passion and how people want to watch sports as they're happening. They want to watch sports as it's live. We think the NFL will continue to be a dominant property. We know that the effort that we put into the partnership, granted I'm biased, with the best people in the business like Fred Gaudelli, Al, Cris, Michele, our full team out front and behind the scenes, you couple the power of that team with the power of the property, and we just think it's an absolute recipe for continued success.



Fred, from your perspective, I don't know if you have anything to add.

FRED GAUDELLI: I would just say from day one, the magic of Sunday Night Football has been the schedule. I think first promotional line was the best team, the brightest stars, the best games. For 15 years that's pretty much what it's been.

Then when something we thought was going to be great fell apart because of injury or for whatever reason, it was the first time we had flexible schedule go ahead where you could get out of a game that didn't turn out to be as good as you thought it was going to be back in the spring, get into a more meaningful game.

To me the growth of Sunday Night Football is going to hinge on what it's hinged on for the previous 15 years: getting the games that people want to see, with the players that people want to see, and the matchups that people want to see.

Q. With everything that's gone on through this year, do you think Ron Rivera should be in the Coach of the Year situation?

MIKE TIRICO: I'm happy to hop in.

Absolutely. Just personally with him, what he's had to deal with and overcome, obviously everything with the team. You're still looking at a team that's four quarterbacks during the year, the breakout stars not as abundant as other teams. Yet his steadiness and leadership...

I got to do the first playoff game. I had a chance to do play-by-play for was Ron Rivera against Bruce Arians. It was on a foggy day in Charlotte against a Carolina team that was 7-9. A lot of these same conversations were had about that team at that point. It speaks to Ron's steadiness over the years, what he's been able to do to get this team to the post-season.

It is 7-8-1, the Carolina team, not 7-9.

Absolutely he deserves to be in that conversation for what he's done this year, not just the personal story, but the team on this field and amidst the tumult in the organization.

Q. Al and Cris, something you said earlier, it could be the dawn of a new era in Cleveland with the Browns. As you look at this franchise, what makes it potentially different this time that they finally had success and sustained it down the line?

AL MICHAELS: You're always talking about a coach and quarterback combination. When you look at it right now, I know Stefanski has only had one year, but he's done a heck of a job obviously. Baker Mayfield, after maybe last year, wasn't a great year for him, but I think Tony summed it up perfectly, maybe the numbers aren't fantastic, but when you watch him play, you understand it.

When you have a coach and a quarterback situation like that, which appears to be highly promising for the future, great offensive line, Cris talked about that, a great runningback in Chubb, another runningback in Hunt, Myles Garrett on the other side, all these guys. They've got a lot of stars as well. Landry, you put him in that mix. A lot of players who are well-known now not only around the league but for the viewing public.

I think that's why when you look at this team, clearly this is a team very much ascending.

CRIS COLLINSWORTH: Yeah, one of Al's favorite subjects, this is a team that's based on analytics, as well. They spent a ton of money gathering a group of really smart people, I mean, really smart people. I know a bunch of these guys and ladies.

I think they're all in. They've attacked this from every front. They've got a great stadium now. The fan base is amazing. Analytics are great to keep Al happy (laughter). Hopefully I know they're thinking they've got their quarterback and coach now. A lot of things going in the right direction.

TONY DUNGY: I'm going to go away from the analytics, tell you why they're going to be good. I talked to Kevin Stefanski a few times. He's changed the attitude and the culture. Nothing to do with analytics. They chart on offense the number of times they knock a defensive player off his feet. They keep track of that. They're doing it at a very high rate. The leader in that category is Jarvis Landry.

When you get everybody on the team buying into that's going to be our philosophy, we're going to be tougher and more physical than the other team, that's going to go a long way.

When you put those great players, exciting guys together with that mentality that Kevin has taken there, I think that's why they're going to be good for a long, long time.

CRIS COLLINSWORTH: That's analytics, though, those cut blocks (laughter).

TONY DUNGY: Very analytical, yes (laughter).



Q. Fred, you guys always have a massive show every week. Are we going to see anything new in terms of production elements, added cameras for this weekend's games we haven't seen before?

FRED GAUDELLI: I don't think so. I mean, we're at Super Bowl levels for every Sunday, practically. We feel really good about our complement of equipment. Just going to go in there and try to cover the game as well as we always do, with the pizzazz that is Sunday Night Football.

Q. Some of the stuff that's been really cool this season that you're most excited about, putting the 4K camera has been really cool, some of the virtual graphics. Anything that sticks out in your mind that you've been super excited about this year?

FRED GAUDELLI: I think that 4K camera has a lot more potential, something that I really plan to spend a lot more time in the off-season working with SkyCam and Sony to figure out how we can get more out of it, stabilize it more while still being able to use it live in a regular type of replay. That was one of the things I'm most excited about for the off-season, getting to work on that.

Then you mentioned the virtual graphics. Again, I think there's more to gain in that particular area, as well. Definitely will be a focus for the off-season.

Q. Fred, you just mentioned pizzazz, Super Bowl level production for the games on Sunday night. Will there be some different elements for what we might see on NBC versus Peacock versus Telemundo?

FRED GAUDELLI: I mean, Peacock is taking I believe the entire NBC feed. I'm sure they'll have some different commercial integration. Maybe Pete can answer that better than I can. The promotional will be probably very much tailored to Peacock. Telemundo I would probably say the exact same thing for.

All the special elements in this game will be about the two teams in the game, the star players, the history of the teams, their season histories. That's where all the special elements will get added for this week.

Q. Pete, the different commercial integrations for the various telecasts. Peacock has a lighter ad load than the NBC network for sure. Telemundo reaches a different audience. Speak a little bit about that.

PETE BEVACQUA: I think Fred kind of nailed it. Obviously the game will be the same both on Peacock and Telemundo, obviously in a different language on

Telemundo. The game on Peacock will be simulcast. It will be good for us. We're looking forward to seeing how it comes across on Peacock, obviously also very excited about Telemundo.

In our conversations with the NFL, I think it's a goal of theirs to reach as broad and as diverse an audience as possible. With our Telemundo station and the audience that it obviously captures, we think it's a great move for us and a great move for the NFL.

It should be a great, interesting and successful Sunday.

DAN MASONSON: Thank you, everybody, for joining us today. We look forward to our two prime time games this weekend.

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