

NBC Sports Group Media Conference

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Michele Tafoya Fred Gaudelli

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Welcome to today's conference call with Michele Tafoya and executive producer Fred Gaudelli as Michele heads into our final three games with the NBC Sunday Night Football crew.

She will finish with Super Bowl 56 in the Los Angeles area not far from where she grew up in Manhattan Beach. That will be her fifth Super Bowl and 327th NFL game on the sidelines, a stretch during which she's won more sports than any awards than any other reporter.

Michele and Fred will make some opening remarks and then we'll take your questions and as a reminder we'll have a transcript of your call later this afternoon at NBC Sports Group pressbox.com.

FRED GAUDELLI: Usually I start out by saying this is bittersweet, but I'm trying to find the sweet. I hired Michele back in 2004 to be the sideline reporter on Monday Night Football. Unfortunately we only had a couple years together is and then I was able to persuade Dick Ebersol to bring her back to Sunday Night Football in 2011 and Michele has just done outstanding work on Monday night, on Sunday night.

I said this a few weeks ago, in my lifetime, I feel like she is the best sideline reporter the NFL has had. Really looking forward to these next three games because they are all big and Michele always performs her best when the games mean the most and I know she's going to be great in whatever she does next. Like I said, I'm trying to find the sweet, Michele.

MICHELE TAFOYA: Fred, now I was doing so well all day, and now I just suddenly got misty because as anyone on this call knows, whenever you get praise from Fred Gaudelli, it's like, you know, unparalleled. I have been so fortunate to work with Fred for all of these years minus those five between Monday and Sunday.

Today all I want to say is how thankful I am to NBC Sports

for all of their support. It really starts with Fred. If anyone asks me, who catapulted your career, it's Fred Gaudelli for me. It's a no-brainer. I just feel as though he's champ beyond me and supported me and coached me for so long now, and we're kind of like family.

And I do want to thank Dick Ebersol for listening to Fred and bringing me along when he did and Dick Lazarus has been a great friend; Pete Bevacqua, and of course Al Michaels. I believe in miracles because I got to work with Al Michaels. To me, sometimes I don't even realize like how lucky I am to do that.

John Madden, of course, for those two years at Monday and Cris Collinsworth who just turned into a great friend and Drew Esocoff, our director, there's just no one liked him.

And I just feel very grateful today. It is bittersweet for me. The only "sweet" in it for me, Fred, is that I'll get a little more time with my family and I'm going on to pursue, and this is something I wanted to do for several years now, to pursue some other opportunities that are really meaningful to me, and I'm not going to talk about those today; that will come at a later time.

But I just want to thank everyone at NBC Sports. Also the Olympic division, Molly Soloman, Rebecca Chapman, Tommy Roy, Dan Hicks, Rowdy Gaines, for all those fun times I had doing swimming the past two summer Olympic Games. It's just been an enormous privilege, a great honor and so much fun and so professionally gratifying.

If I wanted to stay in sports television, I wouldn't be leaving. This is about opening a new chapter for me, so that's really all I can say, and I guess open it for questions.

Q. I have to ask, how is this decision going to affect whether or not you stay in Minnesota?

MICHELE TAFOYA: It won't affect that at all. Right now, Minnesota is my home. It's where I'm raising my kids. My kids love it here. They love their school and so as long as, you know, until they go to college, we are planted right here.

Q. How did that affect how you did the job and the challenges being based out of Minnesota rather than,



say, L.A. or New York?

MICHELE TAFOYA: Traveling from Minnesota is a lot easier than traveling, you know, across the country from New York or L.A. As you know, we're right here in the center of the country, and it's made travel pretty easy for me, I think, relative to others on the crew who are mostly East and West-Coast based.

You know, I will say I have a lot of friends in the Minnesota Vikings organization that did not make me a biased observer by any means but on that note, I wish Mike Zimmer all of the best. He was one of our favorite coaches to have in production meetings and one of my favorite coaches to talk to at halftime. I'm sorry to see him go, and I'm sure he'll get snatched up in a jiffy by someone.

You know, when I first started here in Minnesota, I was a Vikings sideline reporter for KFAN, so I've known that organization for a long time. Again, it's never influenced the way I covered the team. It just has been sort of a fun -- there have been some really interesting times with the Vikings, that outdoor playoff game against the Seahawks in subzero temperatures, I can remember that. Certainly thanking the Lord that they built a dome, or built a new dome. So all those things, you know, I just have -- I used to do the Cris Carter show on KFAN radio. So a lot of memories that involve the Vikings for sure.

Brett Favre's first game, I should say, or his game when he beat Aaron Rodgers and the Packers at the Metrodome, another great memory, I appreciate it.

Q. I don't know if you've thought about this one at all, but when you look back on your career, specifically with either Monday Night or Sunday Night Football, do you have an experience for you that stands above the rest; that means a great deal to you more than any other?

MICHELE TAFOYA: I hope this doesn't disappoint you, but the experiences that top them all were the times I spent just with the crew. In particular, on Madden's bus on the way to practice or on the way to games with all these knuckle heads has just been phenomenal. Those are the moments I will never forget.

You know, I think certainly every Super Bowl has provided a great memory, chasing down Malcolm Butler after he intercepted Russell Wilson at the goal line to beat the Seahawks; standing behind Bill Belichick in that moment, seeing his arms go in the air as high as they possibly could, that was a great moment, at least a memorable one. It was a lot of fun.

There have been countless. I will always point to that game as I said earlier at TCF Bank Stadium outdoors at 7 below at kickoff and just battling that weather with a group of people that, you know, it was us against the weather and it was just something that you never, ever forget something like that. You just don't. It's seared into your memory or I guess should I say frozen into your memory.

Tom Brady beating the Patriots this year, that postgame, it goes on, Peyton Manning, Brett Favre; Brett Favre beating the Packers when he was with the Vikings, that postgame interview was just -- again, I'm so grateful for these opportunities. They just provided me challenges and incredible moments in sports. And I think, too, I don't want to overlook the Olympic Games, covering Michael Phelps fifth and last Olympics was a treat, a treat. It was absolutely a blast.

Katie Ledecky, just an incredible job thing to watch. There have been quite a few but I would say, to me, what I will miss the most is our time together as a crew and just the phone calls I have with the players every week when I get to talk to them one-on-one, running into coaches and players on the sidelines before and after the game. The moments you never see on TV are to me the most precious.

Q. The last two years have obviously been hard for a lot of sports journalists because of COVID and restrictions and this, that and the other. Did anything happen over these last two-plus years that led to you the decision to pursue something else or was it just a matter of timing and opportunity, you thought now is the right time to leap?

MICHELE TAFOYA: This plan has been in the works for a few years and you know, actually COVID made me want to commit more to this team to get through those hard times. And so without going into a ton of boring details, when COVID struck and we didn't know what 2020 was going to be like, I just said, whatever we've got to do to get through this, I want to help.

Nothing specific about these last two years has made my decision any different. Like I said, this has been in my mind for several years, and you know, I would say on the whole, no.

Q. Looking ahead to Sunday's game, everybody thought that the Ben Roethlisberger farewell tour was going to wrap up the last couple weeks with the last home game in Baltimore and now you have a Sunday night in Kansas City and just looking ahead to the Super Bowl, kind of a full circle moment for you, growing up nearby in Manhattan beach in your final



game on the sidelines?

MICHELE TAFOYA: Yeah, that is so interesting, I think it probably means more to all than it does to me because Al loves the home game. And it is, it's going to be an electric environment. I am really looking forward to that.

Yeah, it's kind of funny that Ben is still going for another game. I'll look forward to seeing them and really seeing all of the Steelers, Tomlin, as most people, is just a joy to cover and so is Andy Reid.

So I'm looking forward to this weekend. It's going to be a lot of fun. The Super Bowl being close to home, I don't know, I haven't lived in L.A. for so long now, I think I've almost lived half my life in Minnesota; that that isn't quite as meaningful as you might think it would be, but it did give me a chance to see my mom and my brother and my sister and my relatives out there, which is always a good thing, always a plus. I think I will be hosting my brother at his very first Super Bowl, so that will mean a lot to him.

But you know, yeah, it's just -- the timing's great.

Q. And what was it like being on the sideline for that game this past Sunday as far as, you know, Week 18, going down to the final play where who knows if it was going to end in a tie or not; is that one of the craziest games you've been on the sidelines for?

MICHELE TAFOYA: Undoubtedly. Honestly I could think of words here for you to describe that game but I'd be sounding like everyone else. There's nothing original that I can say about that game. It was astonishing. And it was one of those where toward the end when you thought it might tie, you thought, you know, maybe this is okay and appropriate. These teams have battled. They both deserve it.

And so, yeah, the ending was crazy. All of it was -- it was almost exhausting to watch because the players looked so exhausted by the time regulation was over. You didn't know how they were going to continue. To a certain extent, you thought, how can they even drag themselves back out there? Especially the Chargers offense and the Raiders defense. I thought that they had nothing left.

Clearly I was wrong. It is one of the most incredible games I've ever witnessed. I don't know how Fred produced it except with a smile on his face is what I'm assuming. I wasn't in the truck. But those are the kind of games you pray for and we got it.

Q. Will you still have a presence on Minnesota media? You've on the radio, lot of different formats here; will

that continue?

MICHELE TAFOYA: I don't know yet actually. I think, like I said, the announcement of what's to come will come later.

It's funny, because as I'm sitting here with you, I get a text from WCCR radio (ph), hey, can you come on with us. Those kinds of things will certainly be there. I know the studio does some good fundraising, and I always like to contribute to those days of radio funds (ph) for hunger, and I will certainly commit to that. But as far as plans for something full-time or part-time, I'm just not going to say right now.

Q. Will there be anything special for your send-off that we can anticipate on Super Bowl Sunday?

MICHELE TAFOYA: I hope not. I really hope not. You know, one of the things Fred and I talked about going into this season was when we would make this announcement, when it served everyone best. And I did not want that kind of farewell tour feel to my season and so that's why we waited until now to say anything. That was by design and I really -- this isn't about, I mean, this press conference, I realize is about this moment and me and leaving and going on, and that's fine.

But I don't have want the games to be about me. The games are about the games, and I really hope there's, you know, I'm just fine with that. This is as far as I need to go.

Q. What are you most looking forward to? Super Bowl game is over, you take your earpiece out and leave the field.

MICHELE TAFOYA: Probably like, I don't know, just being able to walk into my house and not have a deadline for the laundry and the mail. Like knowing that I can spread it out over the next six weeks if I want to that I don't have to be somewhere. Honestly, it's stupid stuff like that. I'm a total homebody. You know, I'm going to love being around my kids and my husband, and then the adventure is going to begin.

You know, I'm very excited about what's next. You know, whatever transpires, I'm super excited. I really am. This is hard for me. This is sad. These are my best friends in the world, this crew. I know for a fact I'm going to miss them and certain little moments tremendously, but you know, this has been in my mind for long enough that I'm really ready.

Q. I know you said several times that you're not going to talk about what's in the future, which kind of destroyed the question that I was going to ask, but I did want to ask a few months ago, you had a much



publicized appearance on the View, and I wanted to ask generally what you took out of that experience.

MICHELE TAFOYA: Generally what I took out of that experience was an opportunity to go and flex some other muscles, and I didn't get to flex them as much as you'd want to because there was just two days' worth of appearance and in those two days, you know, you can probably count the number of minutes in which I spoke.

But it was an opportunity to just try something different and try something where I get to talk about other stuff. That was enjoyable for me and that was the biggest takeaway.

Q. I guess I have to try, even though you said you're not going to --

MICHELE TAFOYA: Try, try, try.

Q. Your role, especially on Sunday Night Football and the Olympics has been somebody who relays information that is empirical facts, and on the View, you mentioned getting to flex your muscles and do something different. Do you think going forward in these unspecified future opportunities that you will be expressing your personal opinions on those platforms?

MICHELE TAFOYA: I think the safest answer to that is yes.

Q. (By Michele's mother: When will I see you again?)

MICHELE TAFOYA: You will see me hopefully on President Day's weekend, Mom.

My mom is amazing. My mom, Wilma is on this call, she's 90 years old. We celebrated her 90th birthday last summer. She is a stud. She is the strongest woman that I know. She's been a great, great role model for me, an unbelievable support. I adore her. I'm glad you're on here, mom. You were with me when I won my first Emmy, do you remember that?

Q. I do. I do.

MICHELE TAFOYA: Oh, she's going to get emotional. Okay. I don't want to you get emotional.

Anyway, she is -- obviously she is just a great support, and so Mom, thanks for being on here. Now, no more questions.

Q. How has the broadcast evolved since you started working on Sunday Night Football?

MICHELE TAFOYA: I'll let Fred go first.

FRED GAUDELLI: You know, there was a time, especially in my career, where you could pretty much format where the sideline reporter was going to appear after speaking to the coaches at halftime, perhaps before the kickoff, and then if someone got hurt.

One of the things I realized with Michele is she was capable of so much more. She was really able to elicit not only information from players and coaches, but feelings, and she's obviously smart as a whip and the one thing you have to be a sideline reporter is really fast on your feet because I tend to change things up a lot pretty quickly and Michele was able to handle all of that.

You know, for me, I just kept looking for ways to further integrate her into the conversation with Al and John and then with Al and Cris. So we didn't have that -- yeah, could you expect to see Michele before the kickoff, you know and after halftime, but really began looking for ways to use her storytelling abilities and in many cases to set up the story so then John and Al or Al and Cris can take it from there.

For me, she just became a more and more integral part of the broadcast, not somebody who had just very specific detailed responsibilities.

MICHELE TAFOYA: And I've answered by saying, I never worked with a producer before who put as much weight on this role. That was so refreshing and so empowering and fun, and I think just for me over the course of time, honestly, it's about developing relationships with coaches, with players so that there's a trust factor that doesn't come right away.

You know, you've got to get to know these people and you have to get to know what you're dealing at halftime with each week and who you are dealing with. Every coach is so different and then just the player dealings that I have during the week. It just became every week, they became more and more comfortable, more fun and more fruitful because of the time spent, and the time invested in it and that is something that Fred has encouraged from day one.

I think it's just grown and grown, and believe me, we have a notebook full of stuff going into each game, the vast majority of which does not make of air, but it's there and we're always prepared and ready and I'm supported and I just feel like I hit the lottery of sideline jobs, honest to God, that's how I feel.

THE MODERATOR: Again, everyone, thank you for joining us today.



