

NBC Sports Group Media Conference

Monday, February 7, 2022

Al Michaels
Cris Collinsworth
Michele Tafoya
Fred Gaudelli
Drew Esocoff
Terry McAulay
Kathryn Tappen
Press Conference



Super Bowl for NBC since we acquired the Sunday Night Football package. We've had four beauties leading into this, and we're hoping Sunday will make it a fifth.

Either Al or the LA Chamber of Commerce dialed up a week of weather that is going to be unbelievable out here. Ideal playing conditions on Sunday, so we're just excited for a great game.

DREW ESOCOFF: I'm just happy to be here for our seventh Super Bowl that Freddie and I are doing together. It's a great honor. I think we have a great plan. It's a great venue. It's an event with tremendous scope and great athleticism. We hope to cover both.

It should be a terrific game. The Rams as the home team and the Bengals have made it -- they've been clawing their way back ever since Collinsworth retired, and they finally made it. (Laughter.)

AL MICHAELS: I can't remember a time when the NFL has been hotter. These last six playoff games have been so fabulous. It's a big part of the national conversation, and they know our gang is ready to go.

We've worked together for a lot of years. We've treated every Sunday night game like a mini Super Bowl. We're always overprepared, but then the game starts and we just fold ourselves into what's happening on the field.

As Fred mentioned, I live in LA. Supposed to be in the 80s all week, so it's a home game for me. But I have all the bases covered. Cris and I both have Cincinnati connections. I broadcast the Reds games in the early '70s and did the Reds-A's World Series on NBC in 1972, now ready to do the Bengals in the Super Bowl on NBC in 2022, which is crazy.

That was a dramatic seven-game World Series. I just hope the Super Bowl provides that sort of drama on Sunday.

Now over to the real Cincinnati kid with roots in Florida, of course. Partner, take it away.

CRIS COLLINSWORTH: I hadn't really thought about clawing my way back for the last 33 years, but you've been clawing your way back longer than I have. That's right, mid-70s, there you go.

THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon, everybody, and welcome to our Super Bowl 56 conference call. NBC Sports Super Gold Sunday, this Sunday, February 13 begins with Beijing Olympic coverage at 8:00 a.m. eastern. At noon eastern the football begins with Road to the Super Bowl, followed at 1:00 p.m. eastern by Super Bowl 56 pregame.

Then the team on this call will work Super Bowl 56 beginning at 6:30 p.m. eastern. We're joined today by Al Michaels, who on Sunday calls his 11th Super Bowl, tying Pat Summerall for the most ever by a TV play-by-play voice and.

Our analyst is Cris Collinsworth who calls his fifth Super Bowl, and fourth in the booth with Al. Chris is one of six players who played in both Cincinnati Bengals' prior Super Bowls following the 1981 and '88 seasons.

Our sideline reporters are Michele Tafoya who works her fifth Super Bowl, and Kathryn Tappen, who makes her Super Bowl debut on the game side. Our rules analyst is Terry McAulay for three Super Bowls. Our team is lead by executive producer Fred Gaudelli and director Drew Esocoff, who will work their seventh Super Bowl together.

We'll begin with comments from the whole team and then we will take your questions. We'll kick it off with our executive producer, Fred Gaudelli.

FRED GAUDELLI: Thanks, Dan. This will be the fifth



I'm obviously excited. I'm human; I can't help myself. It's going to be fun. I would have bought a ticket regardless to go watch this game. I just happened to get the best seat in the house and sit next to my partners, and what could be better.

I love the quarterback match-up in this game. I think it's arguably the best collection of wide receivers that you'll see on the field all season long. Terrific talent at the running back, and maybe the best stories in this game are all on the defensive side of the ball.

That makes for a fun broadcast, and I'm really looking forward to being a part of it with my partner, Ms. Michele Tafoya.

MICHELE TAFOYA: Well, thank you for that. I'm excited for you, too, Cris. No one would confirm nor deny if tears were shed in the Collinsworth household once they won the AFC Championship game.

I'm excited about this game because I talk to so many people who are excited about this game, people not associated with television, who are just friends, family, who are excited about Joe Burrow and excited about Matthew Stafford and all the other storylines that Cris just mentioned.

I just think it's intriguing... (conference call dropped.)

Q. Drew and Fred, just wondering technically how many cameras on Sunday and anything new coming?

FRED GAUDELLI: You know, we'll probably have in terms of cameras that shoot the game, that actually shoot the field and the play and the players, we'll probably have 40 cameras.

Obviously all those cameras will be recorded and be able to use for replay. We'll be debuting a brand new graphic look, a new score bug, a lot of virtual reality and augmented reality.

Obviously when Drew and I do the Super Bowl we just try to have all the angles that will provide answers to where his feet in bounds, was his knee down before the ball came out, the kinds of questions that coaches need answers to to challenge or replay needs answers to to stop the game and review.

So those will probably be the highlights of the camera coverage.

Q. Cris, I wanted to ask you about the Bengals and the

way they've built their roster. There was some question over who they should draft this year, and a lot of people felt they should take the offensive tackle because you've got to protect Joe Burrow, and that's the general line of thinking in the NFL. You've got to beef up your offensive line to protect the quarterback. But the Bengals and Zac Taylor said they wanted to draft another receiver just because it gave Joe Burrow so many weapons, that it almost doesn't matter necessarily who's blocking he can get rid of the ball so quickly. What do you think of that, and what do you think of the way the Bengals built around their wide receivers?

CRIS COLLINSWORTH: Yeah, Penei Sewell is a really good player, but he's not been what Ja'Marr Chase has been this year. Ja'Marr Chase in my estimation is already the best receiver that I've ever seen play with a Cincinnati Bengals uniform on, and I don't say that lightly.

Isaac Curtis is a dear friend of mine, and Chad Ochocinco was phenomenal during his run here.

But the number of times I've seen Ja'Marr Chase catch the football and five or ten yards down the field and score a touchdown without anybody tackling him obviously, first of all, but usually nobody touching him, his catch-and-run skills have just been so much fun to watch this season.

I had a chance -- the bizarre part about this game is I think for all of us to be doing a team in the Super Bowl that we did not do on Sunday Night Football. The odds of that are not very good at all, so I literally went back and watched all the throws, all the catches, all the plays.

This group of receivers is really phenomenal, and they are a balanced bunch, with Chase obviously being the explosive guy. Tee Higgins is a monster on the field; big, strong, contested catches. And Tyler Boyd is somebody that is just a bit of a street fighter, and all the big moments and all those clutch 3rd down conversions he's been making for this team all season long.

It was really a joy for me to go back and really get familiar with this group of receivers and this quarterback who I've told a couple of our guys already that I think he's followed by angels. Joe Burrow has escaped some moments this year that you just can't imagine, and you saw a little bit of it against the Chiefs and Chris Jones in that championship game.

They're a fun watch. I don't know how much America is familiar with them because there haven't been that many sort of primetime games, but they are definitely fun watch.



Q. Cris, aside from the -- you mentioned the personal meaning of this for you. Over this past week has this been kind of a chance to reconnect with former teammates, some of you guys on text chains sort of talking about what this is going to be like? What's that part of it been like for you?

CRIS COLLINSWORTH: Yeah, I'll tell you, I've been kind of holed up getting ready for this game. I don't leave the basement very often.

But I did go to the Bengals' practice, and it was tremendous. Mike Brown is a guy that in many ways I feel like gets the short end of the stick sometimes because he's not Jerry Jones, he's not a big PR guy, he's not out front and center all the time.

But I went away to go play in the USFL or sign a contract, never actually played, and when the league wasn't ready or was nearing an end I went back to the Bengals. He welcomes me with open arms in 1988. I was sort of at the end of my career. Started law school.

He let me miss morning meetings to go to law school classes, and could not have been more warm and gracious when I walked into that practice the other day. I really appreciate him. I always have. I'm happy for them.

But the bizarre part about this game is that we probably, or I probably had more relationships with the Rams than I did the Bengals. I had never met the offensive or defensive coordinator before. I had only met Zac Taylor a couple of times before. We hadn't done one of their games.

It was a weird week for me that I had to do almost all my preparation with the Bengals because I knew so much more about the Rams.

Q. For Cris and Al, because you both live there, can you speak to what the Bengals' success and specifically this run would mean to that city, because they haven't had a major championship since the reds won the World Series in '91? What do you think it would mean to them if they actually got this done?

AL MICHAELS: It's a great sports town. I don't have to tell you. When I was 26 years old I'd go in to do the Cincinnati Reds. It's the original major league team. I mean, Cincinnati is baseball.

And then when the Bengals came in in 1968 as an expansion team, had a lot of early success, and when I was there I got to go to a number of Bengals games.

The town was very excited, with football, with professional

football. The fact that they went to two Super Bowls in the '80s was tremendous, and then through the years it's been rough, even though they've made a lot of playoff appearances, and finally they get over the hump.

Having spent three years there, I loved every moment of it. A fantastic sports town. Here's the man who can answer that best of all.

CRIS COLLINSWORTH: Well, I don't live in Los Angeles, but I do know that this is a big story in Los Angeles, as well.

But in a few weeks or months or whatever, you're going to have the Academy Awards and you're going to have the Grammy Awards and you're going to have -- there's always the Lakers, the Dodgers, there's always something. There's always the next story.

In Cincinnati you can't imagine what it's like right here right now. The town is lit up in all the orange imaginable. You turn on the nightly news and it's the only story in some ways that is happening in this town.

I think for a Midwestern city, when they get this kind of opportunity, when they get the chance to go on the world stage in many ways for the first time in over 30 years, that there's a buzz and an excitement and a coming together for a city that can only happen when these sort of moments come along.

As happy as I am for the Cincinnati Bengals and their organization, I feel like I'm even happier for the town of Cincinnati, because it really has galvanized this place.

Q. Al, I know the first rule of fight club is never to talk about fight club, but the reality is this may be your last broadcast as a full-time member of the Sunday night crew. We know it is for Michele. Understanding that you're going to be circumspect here, are you doing any reflecting this week on your time with this group?

AL MICHAELS: Well, the truth of the matter is I reflect all the time, and I have through the years. I've had a fantastic relationship with Fred, with Drew and Michele, obviously with Cris, and before that with John Madden.

There's a lot to reflect on, but the one thing I have done this year with my contract ending at the end of the Super Bowl, and I know there are other opportunities and options out there for me, but I did not want to be for one moment distracted.

I know there are chances to continue. I'll assess that when this is over. But I vowed to myself to just enjoy every

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

moment of this year, and I have. It's been a terrific year. We've had some fabulous games at all ends with the Super Bowl, which is the perfect way for a season to end.

I always felt that the minute you start thinking about other things, it takes you away from this. I really wanted to enjoy this to the ultimate, this season, and I have.

I don't know what the future will hold, but after this game is over, I've got some very close friends and guys who really understand the business inside out and will talk about what's out there, what I might want to do.

But I do know one thing: I love what I do, feel great, and I'm not ready for any rocking chair or golf. I get to play enough golf, believe me.

Q. Last time we saw Von Miller in a Super Bowl we saw him take over and basically put rings on everybody's hands in Denver. I know he's not in his prime, but do either of you think that Von is still a guy that can take over a game and is going to demand sort of special attention from Zac and his coaching staff?

AL MICHAELS: Obviously he's still a really good player, and the great thing about where he is right now are some of the other guys he's playing with. When you're along a defensive front and you've got Aaron Donald there, that can only be very helpful to everybody. And the rest of the team obviously with Jalen Ramsey and Eric Weddle is back there right now, which is a story unto itself.

It's funny. We had a meeting before the Tampa Bay divisional game with the Rams, and we talked to Von about playing alongside Donald in effect, and Cris was in on the meeting, too.

He said, I just move him away. I give him all the space he needs. It's a great two-pronged situation for the Rams' defense.

CRIS COLLINSWORTH: The basic question was can he still disrupt a game and do what he did in that first Super Bowl, and one of Al's favorite answers that I give him all the time is, "Hell, yeah."

I go back to the game that we did against Tampa that basically they were trying to help so much against Aaron Donald and Leonard Floyd and the other guys they have up there that Von Miller got a lot of one-on-ones, and he won, and he made big plays coming off the edge.

It's a pick-your-poison kind of situation for the Cincinnati Bengals in this one. You have to pay attention to Aaron Donald. Typically he's inside, and that's the shortest path

to the quarterback, so you do have to settle that first.

But regardless of who Von Miller lines up against in one-on-one pass-blocking situations, that's a problem and a big problem to deal with.

Q. What's it been like working with Mike Tirico as he's juggled the Olympics and the Super Bowl this year?

FRED GAUDELLI: I mean, I've known Mike since the mid-'80s. We were both at ESPN at the same time, and the one thing I would say about Mike, his capacity to work is remarkable. You really can't throw too many things on his plate, and he handles each of them with great aplomb. He's just a real professional.

Obviously this is a rare occurrence where you're hosting the Olympics and the Super Bowl pregame on the same day, over the same weekend. Working with Mike has just been great.

Like I said, it's been a long time for me, and it's no easy feat what he's pulling off here.

DREW ESOCOFF: I mean, working with Mike, as Fred said, is very easy. I worked with him on horse racing, and hosting those shows is no easy task, especially the Kentucky Derby. He does it like nobody else can.

When we have to switch over, it's not a problem. He and Cris work well together. I mean, what he does is incredible.

Q. Drew, some of your technical folks, I know you have a new augmented reality camera with Steadicam, which allows you to do some different looks on the move for some of your AR graphics, and I was curious how you think you'll use that as well as any other new looks that you're looking forward to using through the game?

DREW ESOCOFF: Yeah, I mean, it is new for us. We have a virtual configuration on several other cameras throughout the course of the year. We have a very experienced Steadicam operator doing these kinds of things, and it's going to be something that we'll play with during the course of the week.

If it makes things better, we'll use it. If things are better the way we've been doing it, we'll stick with that. But we're not going to let -- these things are enhancements to the show. We're not going to let it drive the broadcast.

We spoke earlier about additional cameras. Most of those cameras are there to get better looks or more intimate

looks than some traditional angles, and like Fred said, to make sure we have defining looks of critical plays throughout the game.

The biggest trap I've found doing Super Bowls or really any event of this magnitude is the more you can stick with what got you to where you are, the better off you are.

It's cool to have all these new gadgets, and we'll work them in when applicable and if it makes things better. And I think in the case of virtual graphics off the Steadicam, I think it will make certain things better, and I hope to be able to work that into the telecast.

Q. Terry, were you bothered or even offended by the frequency of flags that were picked up or thrown after the fact all season, after getting help from above or afar? And Al and Cris, with all the coach and player retirements, Brady, Ben, maybe Rodgers, and this game with the young coaches and Burrow and Chase sort of representing the new superstars, does this game have a genuine changing of the guard feel in the NFL?

TERRY McAULAY: You know, obviously it's speculation as we watch to see whether flags were or were not -- whether there was help from above for a lot of those. It seemed like, yes, there were a lot of conversations that were involving not as much talk on the field as listening.

I think it's something the NFL is just going to -- the competition committee is going to have to work on and decide what are the exact parameters, because what the crews are doing, they want to get it right. That's their ultimate goal.

Sometimes we've seen it happen in the past. They may stretch it to look at the board or listen from above to get the play exactly right, and it's understandable.

But I think what has to happen is the committee has to decide what the exact parameters are, and we'll all adjust. Every one of us will adjust if we know what it is going forward. Coaches, players, fans, announcers will adjust.

It's the unknown that is making me and a lot of others a little concerned at this point to see how it plays out. I think -- I will say this: I think after about week 8, we saw a lot less of it than I think we saw in the beginning of the season.

I don't recall much at all even in the playoffs, so it may be a non-issue at this particular moment, and hopefully it won't be an issue this coming weekend.

AL MICHAELS: John, in relation to the changing of the guard, there's a changing of the guard every few years in the National Football League. Who's going to replace Johnny Unitas? Who's going to replay Joe Montana and John Elway and Dan Marino? Then along comes the 2000s with Tom Brady.

We all know that the new guys come into the mix. It's really always been the case. There's always a little bit of hang wringing when there are a bunch of good guys getting older and people say, What's next?

But we now know what's next, and certainly Joe Burrow is right at the top of that list right now along with somebody like Kyler Murray, along with Lamar Jackson. So you have all of these guys who are getting older and/or retiring, and yet there's always a new pipeline, and especially the way college football is these days with so much of a pro look and a lot of what the pros have taken from college just folds in perfectly to these guys coming in and being as successful as they have been early on in their career.

To me, it's just an evolving process and the National Football League is very fortunate, that I think it will continue for a long, long time.

CRIS COLLINSWORTH: Yeah, it's interesting for me, the question, because certainly with Mahomes and Herbert and Burrow and Josh Allen, and go down the list of these young quarterbacks, we're in great shape in the National Football League as far as our broadcasts are concerned with the stars that are out there.

But this is the first Super Bowl, and this is my fifth, that didn't have Tom Brady and didn't have Bill Belichick, which speaks loud and clear about exactly what those two have meant to the National Football League.

The idea that we're not going to see Tom Brady again, and we did end up calling that last game. So it is a bit reflective with Ben and with Drew Brees last year and you go right down the list. It's different, but it's just as exciting.

Q. Al and Cris, how much is the Brian Flores situation overshadowing this game? And Michele, your thoughts about this being your last game? And Terry, knowing how much you and I exchanged in tweets the other day about music, what would your ultimate halftime Super Bowl show be?

AL MICHAELS: Obviously there are a ton of stories out there, and there's plenty of time to engage the audience in those stories. I think Fred can speak to the fact of how this will be handled. Up to you, Fred.

FRED GAUDELLI: Yeah, it's going to be handled in our pregame show I think somewhat significantly and thoughtfully. I'm not sure how this comes up in the game unless the game was a really one-sided rout or something like that.

But I know that we've been discussing and planning for the pregame show, and that's where it's really -- that's the primary place it's going to happen, and probably the only place it's going to happen on Super Bowl Sunday.

CRIS COLLINSWORTH: I was happy personally that Roger addressed (indiscernible) is not good enough (indiscernible) you know, when you have Leslie Frazier and Todd Bowles (indiscernible) go down the list, it's frustrating.

I think as broadcasters, sometimes I think we get to know these great coaches more so than the other owners in the league because they are assistants and they're hard to get to know.

We get a lot of calls from owners about these guys and what are they like and what do you think and all that sort of stuff. Yeah, I know that those coaches are frustrated. I know a lot of players are frustrated. It sounds like the commissioner is frustrated, and I think I am, too, because those are very deserving people.

MICHELE TAFOYA: Thanks for the question. I don't really like to make the story -- I don't want to be part of the story necessarily, but I do appreciate, I think, more than ever this opportunity to do a fifth Super Bowl, to do it with this crew. I've worked a lot with this crew, and they are a family of mine.

That's the hard part for me, is knowing that the family is going to get a little shake-up here. When people ask me what I'm going to miss, it's that. It's my family, this second family of mine. While I'm overjoyed to have the opportunity to spend more time with my own immediate family, and I'm so, so excited about that, I will miss these people.

Oh, shoot, I don't want to get emotional here.

I think that's the biggest part, and talking to players every week, I've been talking to guys this week that I've known for so long and sharing stories and just talking about how that's going to be the hard part.

But I think I agree with -- we were all talking about how you get to a certain point, and you've chased what you wanted to chase, a particular arena in your life, and there are other things you want to chase, and that's how I feel, and I feel strongly about that. It's going to be hard walking out of there leaving these folks.

I thank God for Zoom and phones and all the accessible ways we have to access each other that I will be using because I can't say it enough, I love this group. I love these guys, and that's going to be the hard part.

Q. Michele and Kathryn, how does being on the sidelines for a Super Bowl and your prep ahead of Sunday differ from a regular season Sunday night game?

KATHRYN TAPPEN: I think the biggest difference for us is that the storytelling becomes less about the players and their lives and things behind the scenes that maybe we bring throughout the regular season a little bit more.

We become hypersensitive to what's happening right on the field there, right on the sidelines, and something as basic as maybe a guy is getting an ankle taped, and it might not be an injury at that point in time, but it might be something that's significant in two or three more plays that we have to circle back to.

We want to know, we talked to the backup quarterback. Things like that become more and more important that typically during the week we might not do. I'll let Michele chime in here, as well.

But less and less about the storytelling and more about what we're seeing on that football field at that point in time.

MICHELE TAFOYA: Yeah, I think that's a fair way of summarizing it. The game is the thing. The game is always the thing, and it dictates how we get paced in there or kind of -- you know, you really got to pick your spots, and that becomes more important.

I kind of like this stepping back macro approach we get to take this week and really just kind of look at this whole big event. It's just kind of like a wait-and-see, what's going to be important, where are we going to fit in.

I'm excited about it. Honestly, my hope is just we have a hell of a game, because the playoffs have been so good and you just want it to continue. My prediction is that we will, and I hope I didn't just put the kibosh on it.

AL MICHAELS: Michele and I have worked on about 300 shows together. I met her three hours before we went on the air in an NBA game Christmas day 2003 in LA between the Lakers and the Houston Rockets. Yao Ming was a rookie. She always hits the mark.

I've never had more confidence in anybody, leading to them knowing that they will be right there. Michele talks

about the family, and we're going to miss her desperately and dearly. She is as good as reporter as there is print or electronic as far as I'm concerned in the business. Just a joy to work with, and, sis, we're going to miss you, too. That's all I can say.

CRIS COLLINSWORTH: I am with you. I'm jumping on that, too. I never had a sister, but if you ever had the sister that was in the room with a roomful of boys that could more than hold her own, and in many ways lead that roomful of boys, that's who we had and have in Michele Tafoya.

She keeps us entertained. She keeps us laughing. She brings great joy not only on the broadcast, but in all the prep work and the behind-the-scenes. Some of the best memories that I'm going to have of working with this group of NBC people are just the bus rides and the car rides and just laughing hysterically, and so many times Michele Tafoya has been front and center of those discussions.

We're going to miss you, but I'm not treating it like that because we're going to be harassing you forever.

AL MICHAELS: Amen.

MICHELE TAFOYA: I'm so glad this is not on a Zoom where people can see me right now. That's all I've gotta say.

Q. Fred and Al, just generally, why do you think NFL ratings have been up this season?

FRED GAUDELLI: Look, like everything else in life, ratings are cyclical. Obviously the last two years we've been in a place in our country we haven't been in over 100 years with the pandemic, and that had a great effect last year.

The quality of play, especially in the playoffs, has been unbelievable. It's probably as exciting a playoffs as I can remember, and this is my 32nd year doing the NFL. The games were amazing. They were high scoring, and even the defensive battle in Green Bay between San Francisco and the Packers was just so compelling.

When you have events like that that more than live up to the hype, you're going to get people in the tent and you're going to get more people in the tent. They tell more people, and before you know it, you have increased ratings.

During the regular season I just think it was a combination of the country was coming back, people are learning to, unfortunately, live with what we're living with right now, but not letting it stop your traditional routines.

We've been able to adjust, and I think that played a big reason and was a big reason as to why the ratings were up this year.

AL MICHAELS: I'll piggy-back a lot of what Fred just said. I think it's unscripted television. There's a lot of good television out there these days, and there's a lot of pretty terrible television, scripted. Once in a while you'll find a good show.

The unscripted live presentation of the National Football League and sports in general, it's something different than anything else on television. It's exciting. You don't know what's going to happen. You don't know what the outcome is going to be.

I think through the years, too, and this is 36 years of doing the NFL in primetime, I'm even amazed sitting there and watching how beautiful this game looks, how fantastically well it's televised.

Drew Esocoff, he doesn't do take 20, you get one take. We all live in this adrenaline world where you want to be perfect, and we're always trying to pitch the perfect game, but the pictures are so -- they're just so beautiful, and the drama, of course, and what we've seen over the past six playoff games, you want to do a movie. You can't write movies like that and people know that, and they're watching it live and it's breathtaking in a way.

I think a lot of factors go into it, and I think you go back to the fact, football is the perfect television sport. Four or five seconds of action or less, and then maybe 30 seconds of perhaps inaction unless a team is playing hurry-up, and then replays, and every angle you possibly want. The way football is televised these days, I'm still -- after all of these years, I'm still amazed.

Q. Mr. Michaels, I have a question about this is your 11th Super Bowl you've been covering. Do you still remember your first Super Bowl?

AL MICHAELS: Oh, sure. It was Washington against Denver after the '87 season. The game was played in San Diego. It looked like -- a lot of Super Bowls to that point had been boring, snore-fests. This one looked like it was going to be pretty good.

You had John Elway going up against Washington. They took a 10-0 lead, Denver did in the first quarter, and the next thing you know at halftime it's 35-10 Washington.

It's the Doug Williams game. It's the Timmy Smith game running for over 200 yards. It was 35-10 at the half, so all of a sudden this great game we thought we had turned out

to be a game where in the second half all we're doing is telling stories.

That was number one. And of the ten I've done, six of them have gone down to the last several seconds of the game or the last play of the game, and hopefully I'll hit a lucky seven next Sunday.

Q. Cris, you were in the last Super Bowl for the Bengals against some guy named Montana. Does Joe Burrow look like a young Joe Montana growing up?

CRIS COLLINSWORTH: You know, it's funny you say that, because I've never said that out loud, but in my mind that's what it is, because we see so many of these sort of physically imposing quarterbacks that have these phenomenal skill sets, that they're either so fast, the Lamar Jacksons of the world, or have this incredible arm, the Josh Allens of the world or Patrick Mahomes or just great decision makers or whatever the case may be.

But what stands out for Joe Burrow is exactly what I always thought stood out for Joe Montana, and that was his presence, in the moment, when it matters most, when his team needs a play, when he needs to escape the rush.

He just has had a lot of that. He's taken a lot of sacks this year, more sacks than anybody else, and yet he will tell you that he will never let anybody know that he's hurt or hurting and gets up and he takes great pride in his team, his offensive line, and he's just that kind of leader, just like Joe was.

I had the good fortune of being around Joe a little bit at the Pro Bowl and in later life, as well, and as hard and as much as I would not like to like Joe Montana after beating me twice in Super Bowls, you can't help it. You can't not like the guy. He's just a magnet. And I think Joe Burrow has some of that, too.

Q. Michele, over the years that you've done this, what do you think is the absolute greatest on-field advancement of football? And Kathryn, do you believe that the running back position is over with, if you will, with the idea of Cordarrelle Patterson and all the other hybrids, Deebo Samuels? Do you think it's ending knowing Derrick Henry had an injury this year?

MICHELE TAFOYA: So when you say advancement, I'm not exactly sure what specifically you're asking about.

Q. As far as the game, the game is faster, the athleticism, all that kind of stuff. I wanted to see the differences you've found over the years as someone who's been on the sidelines.

MICHELE TAFOYA: Yeah, it definitely seems to get faster all the time. The hits seem to get harder. But I'm encouraged at one thing. I am encouraged by a lot of things, but one of the things that I'm seeing that makes me a little hopeful is that it seems like we're seeing some of that rugby-esque type of tackling being implemented.

So we want to obviously minimize head injuries and that's a big part of player safety, and just for the sake of the players and the sake of the game, you want to see that.

Now, we've seen some devastating injuries. We saw Ryan Shazier, what happened to him. We've seen these devastating hits that still I think can be eliminated.

But I do like seeing some of this wrap the guy up below his chest and just do it in a smart way, and I hope to see that continue, because that's one thing that has kind of sparked my imagination as to where the game can go.

I know people love the hits, but some of them are just flat-out dangerous and unnecessary really to accomplish the goal.

KATHRYN TAPPEN: For me, I don't think we've seen -- I'm actually surprised by the question, but I don't think we've seen the end of that position. I think it's a very valuable part to many of these teams' game plan week in, week out.

You always hear them talk about running the ball, running the ball, and in particular with Joe Mixon, just eclipsing that 1,200 yard mark in rushing for the season. I think only four other Bengals' players have run for more yards in a season that we've seen.

I don't believe that we've seen the end of the running back position. I think it's probably the less heralded one when you see guys making big plays like Cooper Kupp and you see Ja'Marr Chase, what he's been able to do at the wide receiver position.

But probably a better question for Cris, but in my own opinion, I don't believe that that position is going away anytime soon or will be less valuable moving forward, especially in big games like this.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks, everyone, for joining us today. We will see you on Sunday.

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