

# NBC Sports Group Media Conference

Tuesday, February 8, 2022

**Maria Taylor**  
**Tony Dungy**  
**Carol Ko**  
**Chris Simms**  
**Sam Flood**  
**Rodney Harrison**  
Press Conference

CAROL KO: Thank you for joining us today for our Super Bowl LVI Pregame Show conference call. This Sunday, February 13th, Super Bowl LVI and the Winter Olympics converge across NBC Sports to create Super Gold Sunday, the biggest day in sports media history.

Our Olympic coverage begins at 8.00 a.m. Eastern. Super Bowl coverage begins at noon Eastern with the Road to the Super Bowl. At 1:00 p.m., the Pregame Show kicks off leading into the Super Bowl at 6:30 p.m. on NBC, Peacock and Telemundo.

We're joined today by NBC Sports executive producer Sam Flood and some of our Pregame Show team, including Maria Taylor, who makes her Super Bowl hosting debut; analysts Tony Dungy, Rodney Harrison, and Chris Simms; and NBC Sports insider Mike Florio.

SAM FLOOD: We are very excited, a five-hour Pregame Show, it seems like a lot of time but with all the great stories that are coming out of this Super Bowl, we could use ten hours. So we're trying to figure out how to get it all in.

We've got great content. Had fabulous feature shoots with both teams who were welcoming and gave us incredible access as we got to know the players and tell some of the great stories of the players.

We also have a number of elements that will lean into the location, the history of LA and the Super Bowl and some more serious content as well.



But it's a great mix of content that builds and focuses on the game as we get closer to game time. We start more general, move in and focus as we get to the players on the field as they warm up for the big game.

So, we are thrilled to be doing this. We've got a great team that's been out and about collecting information, stories and we're ready to roll with this thing. And I know Maria Taylor has got a big night ahead. So she's hosting Primetime and the Olympics on NBC. So in the short time, let's tee it up for the Super Bowl, Maria. Have at it.

MARIA TAYLOR: Thanks, Sam. I really appreciate it. Yes, my Super Bowl coverage starts tonight in a way. We've got Chloe Kim, Shaun White and Mikaela Shiffrin and the Winter Olympics taking center stage in Primetime. I couldn't be more happy to go from superstar student-athletes in the Winter Olympics to the Super Bowl. And I can't believe we're less than a week away from kicking it off.

It's been so much fun leading up to the Super Bowl. We've been on feature shoots -- myself, Chris Simms and Rodney Harrison are in L.A., sitting down with interviews with the Rams. We have some amazing stories coming your way. I sat down with Matthew Stafford and his wife Kelly Stafford, and the journey they've been on to make it from Detroit to LA, and for him to be playing in his first ever Super Bowl, it's going to be a story that everyone wants to hear.

I'm so excited. I've never been able to cover a Super Bowl, nor did I believe that it was going to be possible. And for the first one to be in L.A. and it's the first time in over three decades since the city has hosted and they had their hometown team playing, I don't think you can rewrite or make up a script as perfect as this.

It is a Hollywood script. It's taking place in Hollywood and we're going to have a blast covering it from pregame to postgame. And I think that our crew is really having a lot of fun throughout the season and we're ready to kick it up a notch for the Super Bowl.

I hope everyone is excited, ready to rock and roll, as I know our coach, our fearless leader, Tony Dungy is. So let me kick it over to you, Coach.



TONY DUNGY: Thank you, Maria, and Sam mentioned we've been out doing features. I normally go to the NFC, but this year they sent me to the AFC. And I was in Cincinnati and it was a wonderful experience seeing the energy and the town and the stories. This young team who is playing with great confidence, and I think we're going to have not only a great game but some great stories to come out of both teams.

But some people in Cincinnati that may be the nation is not familiar with. And we hope to tell that story. For more on the other side, I'll turn it over to Rodney.

RODNEY HARRISON: I'm really excited about this opportunity that we have. I know for Coach and I, this is our fifth Super Bowl coverage of NBC. And just extremely excited. No one could tell me that they picked this match up, the Rams versus the Bengals. Absolutely nobody could tell me that.

That's what makes it so fascinating to me. Two teams built completely differently -- one through free agency and one through the draft and free agency. I'm excited to see Joe Burrow, young star quarterback, how calm and collected he is. I refer to him as being a better version of Brady, when Brady was at this point in time in his career.

And just I know being at the NFC and spending time with the Rams and getting to know a lot of their players, having face-to-face conversations with Odell and interviewing Aaron Donald, it gave me a chance to really see inside that team and just really excited. They have a great team, a great group of veteran players that hold each other accountable. And really excited about this weekend.

CHRIS SIMMS: Of course, dream come true. I wish I got to play in a Super Bowl, certainly, like a Rodney or coach in the Super Bowl like Coach Dungy, but to me this is the second best thing, the fact that I'm a part of the NBC network, we have such a great group of people.

And here we are in the L.A. Super Bowl. L.A. is a special place for me with the Super Bowl. I don't know if I would be here if it wasn't for the L.A. Super Bowl, my dad's Super Bowl XXI. It's cool to be here in on a personal level. The game itself, I echo what everybody else says. I think there's so many awesome storylines and really the NFL should be proud.

The fact that you have the Bengals, what, year two Joe Burrow. They were stinky two years ago, here they are with all these stars, the turnaround, the way they run their team more economical with the Rams. It's more through the draft, value free agents, showing the ways you can build a team a hurry in the NFL.

On the flip side you've got a team like the Los Angeles Rams who are the exact opposite of that. They just said, oh, the heck with it, we're going stars and we're going high-end football players, and we're going to do it a totally different way and still get to the Super Bowl. I think that's really cool.

And how could you not love like the quarterback matchup. We know Joe Burrow is the man, but Matt Stafford, again, here we are seeing more evidence that you need a team. It's not all about the quarterback. Here's a guy that's been constantly criticized throughout his career. Even though he's played phenomenal, people blamed him for the Lions who have nobody on their team ever but they blamed him.

And here he is with his first year with a team, good coaching staff, and he's in the Super Bowl and quieting a lot of the haters. I love some of the storylines for this game. For that, I'll throw to my friend, Mike Florio.

MIKE FLORIO: Being back in the Super Bowl host city after last year when most people didn't attend the game, most reporters didn't cover the game, it's a reminder the NFL is the ultimate America sporting event and the Super Bowl is the crown jewel of that.

As somebody who has been covering the NFL actively for 20 years now this just reinforces why people can't get enough of it year-round -- offseason, in season, off days. There are no off days, the NFL is always generating interest in some way. And there's no interest more than on Super Bowl Sunday.

And this is number four for me. It's great to be a part of it. It's a great team. And Chris and I are here all week long just talking to as many people as we can and trying to get ready for this game. And it should be a great one. And it is great to be part of this team.

**Q. Obviously the Brian Flores lawsuit brought a lot of attention to diversity in coaching. Why do you think this is still an issue that the NFL hasn't been able to solve and what can be done to improve this?**

TONY DUNGY: The issue is there because on the head-coaching front there's 32 owners that make the decision. You can put in a lot of policies. You can put in a lot of things to help. But at the end of the day those 32 owners make the decisions on who they want to hire. And there's only 32 jobs. So it's a pretty closed shop. And to get progress, that's what it's going to take. Those men and women stepping up and saying we're going to look in every direction.

15 years ago Lovie Smith and I coached in the Super Bowl against each other. There's some really, really good minority candidates on both of our staffs. And you thought that NFL was headed in the right direction in minority hiring. Mike Tomlin had just gotten hired by the Steelers days before the game. It was an exciting time. We had some progress. But in the last years, the progress dissipated. We've got to do some things to prick the conscience of the owners. That's my opinion.

**Q. Chris, I was intrigued by what you said in your introduction about how you don't think you'd be here today if not for that game your father had in Super Bowl XXI. What did you mean by that in terms of what impact that had on your life and your family's life?**

CHRIS SIMMS: I think really just that that's -- without that day, I mean, again, that put the Simms name on the map. I think that's where I look at it more, less than the comment as far as what I was making. That took my dad from a, wait, he was a good quarterback, and you know, we don't know, we haven't been to the playoffs to, wow, he was justified in being drafted in the top 10.

Of course, yes, the performance he had -- I just think all of that it put the Simms family on the map. And of course it made him more of a household name. It of course was increasing my love of football, and I was young at the time, six and a half. But just another boost in the direction of, wow, I want to be a part of this. I want to play football. I want to be a part of the NFL.

And just really I think that was a moment that was a jump-off spot for me, my family, everything. That just got me on this career trajectory where it was, yes, I tried to be a player. That worked out okay. But because of my name, the fact that I was a player, my lineage from my dad, that's how I look at it and. The fact I'm here with NBC and what my dad was a big part of that.

**Q. Were you at the game?**

CHRIS SIMMS: Oh, yeah, at the game. Still remember it. I was a kid that was literally, when I was four years old I could tell you every number of every guy in the NFL. I was obsessed even though I was six and a half I was aware of the magnitude of the moment.

Signed my first autograph walking into the game that day. Took me about four minutes to write my name, Christopher, in block letters there on a Super Bowl game day. But I was there and totally aware at the moment, too, of how it was a life-changing thing. I remember my mom and dad always discussing the Super Bowl even before they were in the game itself and how important it was for

the quarterback's career.

It was a great moment. Some nail biting in the first half at 10-9 but then they blew it open. And dad got to go to Disney World, which was a cool thing, too.

**Q. Sam, how will you determine if this Super Bowl Pregame Show is successful?**

SAM FLOOD: Good open-ended question. We'll want to entertain the audience. We want to inform the audience. And we want to tell the stories that make people care more about this game. That's our job.

**Q. Regarding the pregame, will there be any Olympics, either features or reference to the Olympics during those five hours, or will it strictly be Super Bowl based?**

SAM FLOOD: We're one network searching gold on Super Bowl Sunday and there will be some cross pollination and supporting each other, pushing and making people aware of the stories on both sides.

It obviously is a football show dominated by football. But the Olympics are a really important part of what we're doing for the 17-day period. So the Olympics are part of it, and rightfully so. There's some great stories to tell.

We'll have some fun with that. And obviously the closer we get to game time will be 100 percent focused on the game itself.

**Q. Sam, can you provide any more details or just a bit of production philosophy when it comes to the set at the Santa Monica Pier and also the on-field set, what can we expect on those?**

SAM FLOOD: The Santa Monica Pier, where Maria gets to start the show with Chris, who I'm sure is going to be signing plenty of autographs -- I still have the one that he signed back from that Super Bowl with his dad. I kept that football. That was very special.

The set at Santa Monica Pier is a sense of place where we're in L.A., we'll lean into that and get where we are, what it means and why it's special to be here. And we have a set outside the stadium called the Lake Set, which gives that big sense of place with that beautiful structure called SoFi.

And inside we have multiple set places. We have a primary desk. We have a clicker area, which is a signature part of the NFL on NBC and Football Night in America. We have that set as well. Then we've got a field desk because

as we get closer to game time we'll have folks down on the field and leaning into that.

**Q. Do you see a key to this game much like last year in that the young phenom AFC quarterback behind a rickety offensive line going against a world-class pass rush? And, Chris, what do you see in Joe Burrow that allows him to not get flustered (indiscernible) against the Titans.**

TONY DUNGY: I think you hit the nail right on the head in terms of the big matchups. The Cincinnati offensive line against the Rams defensive line, that's something we're going to be focusing on in the Pregame Show and during the game. And that will tell a lot of the stories. (Indiscernible) they did last year. Kansas City couldn't block the Tampa defensive linemen and it was a long day for Patrick Mahomes. That's going to be the challenge for that Cincinnati offensive line.

RODNEY HARRISON: It's funny, we sit back and we talk about this same storyline, the last month of the season. And they're in the Super Bowl. We keep talking about how bad their offensive line is. The right side of the offensive line but at the end of the day they've done some things to adjust, quick passing game, running the football, the screen game with Mixon, taking shots down the field.

It's not like he has to hold on to the ball all day because they have such an array of their passing arsenal, I would say. But at the end of the day I think they're going to be fine. They haven't really had a pass rush like this outside of Tennessee and the Rams. But Joe Burrow is really really good and he knows exactly where the pressure is coming from. And I do believe that he'll get rid of the ball.

CHRIS SIMMS: Joe Burrow, he's phenomenal. What can you say or what can you say negatively about the guy. There's no weakness to his football game. Specifically to the question when you talk about how does he just stand in there and constantly still perform at a high level even though he's got pressure a lot.

Even last week in the Chiefs game. There was pressure around him a lot he doesn't blink. First off, he's a natural. He really is. It's something that jumped out at me when he came out of the draft was his ability to go through reads and process, and then within that gather his body to throw the football was as quick as anybody I ever saw coming out of college. So he is really smart, to Rodney's point.

And the other thing I think that's fascinating with the young group of quarterbacks, right? And I think if you went back to my day of playing, Rodney, Coach Dungy, a lot of the times you would teach quarterbacks, hey, don't look at the

rush; look down the field.

But Burrow, being the amazing athlete he is, being extremely mentally tough and smart, I think the fact that he has a knack like Mahomes and Josh Allen where they can peek down and look at the rush and gauge it just for a little bit and go, oh, wait, what's around me? Okay, wait, I've got a little time. They can look up and read coverage and really never miss a beat that way. It's a very special attribute he has.

And he just has a great feel for how to move within the pocket and do that. But he is one tough sucker. I think that's the first thing that allows him to be just so tough within the pocket throughout the game even though he's getting hit.

He has great self-belief and he's really looking to be aggressive and make plays. He's got that great fine balance of, yeah, I can be surgical and I can be patient but I know when to step on the pedal and take a chance and get a ball down to tight coverage 25 yards down the field. He's amazing. He really is. And he's officially one of the five best quarterbacks in the NFL, no doubt.

RODNEY HARRISON: That's what stands out to me is the point that when he's under pressure, he's under duress, how cool he is. And even if Ja'Marr looks like he's covered, he will still give him an opportunity to go up and make a play. And that's what I love about him, just the confidence he has in his guys. And it just doesn't matter how much pressure he's under, he's going to get rid of the ball and he's going to give those guys an opportunity.

It's just really amazing for a guy that hadn't played a lot of football in the National Football League to be so calm under so much pressure and duress. It's just pretty amazing.

**Q. Mike, from your perspective, how covering Super Bowl week differs from a, quote/unquote, normal week during the regular season and offseason?**

MIKE FLORIO: It's different for me now because Chris and I are doing our show every day and then we get into a situation where we've got one interview after another as the week unfolds really into Wednesday and Thursday.

I'm blessed to have a great staff of writers who keep an eye out for everything that's being generated by all of the various press conferences. And there's so much media availability from the teams involved, the players and the coaches.

And without them, the whole operation would implode upon



itself this week because with each year that I do this, and we do more and more during the week, I feel like I neglect the thing that brought me here. So I'm just very happy that we've got five folks who are really working hard to keep up with everything.

But one thing we've seen, especially this year, the Super Bowl teams and the news they generate does not take over the way it used to. Because there's always something going on in the NFL. And with the hiring cycle being delayed this year, you've got coaches being hired. You've got other issues that are crowding out the Super Bowl news.

And that's okay. It's just another reason why the NFL is as big as it is. Even when 30 teams aren't playing, they're still generating news.

**Q. Tony, I was curious what you thought of Bill Polian being tapped to help with the Bears coaching search. And given your Colts connection what you thought of Eberflus and his new defensive coordinator?**

TONY DUNGY: I thought it was a really good move on the Bears part. I actually talked to George McCaskey a little bit and kind of recommended that he seek out somebody who had done this. And Bill Polian picked several coaches and taken a lot of teams to the playoffs and different things. I felt he was a natural.

It's a coincidence, I believe, that Matt Eberflus from the Colts ended up getting the job. I don't think that was the intent or Bill had any Colts bias in there. I think he did a good job, from what I understand, of directing them to a lot of different candidates, looking at strengths and weaknesses. And I was really delighted to see Ryan Poles get an opportunity. Coming from Kansas City, he's done a super job there, in a winning environment around some really good people. And I think the Bears have a good team in place right now.

**Q. Coach and Rodney, NFL honors coming up on Thursday, Mike Vrabel among the candidates. Tony, could you speak to the job Mike Vrabel has done at Tennessee? And, Rodney, could you weigh in on what you remember from Mike as a player, not surprised with his success.**

TONY DUNGY: Mike did a fantastic job. When you lose your biggest weapon and you still end with the No. 1 seed and the best record in the AFC, that tells you how well-rounded they are, how tough minded they are as a team and I thought he did a phenomenal job of changing things up, keeping the expectations high, even losing Derrick Henry.

So, I thought he did a fabulous job. It doesn't surprise me at all that, with his mentality over his playing career and his coaching career, and Rodney could speak to that even more.

**Q. Tony and Rodney, Zac Taylor in his third year has already gotten the Bengals to the Super Bowl already. What have you guys seen from Taylor that could be used as a blueprint for other young coaches that are either in their third year or fewer or less?**

TONY DUNGY: I saw two things when I was there in Cincinnati. Number one, all the players talked about Zac Taylor and his philosophy. They talked about his energy. But they talked about him bringing unselfishness to the team and bringing commitment and bringing winners. I think that's really a big thing -- guys with winning attitudes, winning character, and that's what you just notice being there.

And the other thing, I have to give a shout out to Mike Brown, the owner. I competed against Mike many times when I was with the Steelers. It's a bitter rivalry, Pittsburgh-Cincinnati. I've gotten to know Mike over years. But I think what he did is probably a lesson for the other 31 owners. He hired Zac Taylor because he believed in him and they won two games their first year. And then they won four games.

And everybody outside the building, outside the atmosphere is saying, oh, I don't know if we've got the right guy. Maybe they should make a change. And Mike Brown said, no. This is our coach. We have a plan. I believe in him. They stayed with him.

And after six wins in two years, the third year they're in the Super Bowl. So there's something to be said for perseverance, sticking with your man. And I have to commend not only Coach Taylor but Mike Brown and the management of the Bengals as well.

**Q. Sam, you mentioned so many amazing stories in the Pregame Show. Can you name a couple? And it was previously announced that Halle Berry will be part of the pregame or host or something. Can you describe what she's going to do? And the third question is how much gambling will be discussed. If I could ask that. Since Halle Berry is going to be there...**

SAM FLOOD: Halle Berry's role as host?

**Q. It was mentioned in a previous call that she was going to be involved in pregame or introducing the Super Bowl or something like that?**



SAM FLOOD: She has a role in (indiscernible).

CAROL KO: We're working on an announcement about that, which we'll have in the coming days. So could Sam answer your other question?

**Q. The other question, could you name some amazing stories.**

SAM FLOOD: We have a mix of stories from players. Maria spent times with Staffords, Tony Dungy spent time with Zac Taylor, tells a wonderful story about being in the stadium and in Cincinnati, finding about a change in his life and where it's at today. It's a remarkable journey.

Rodney has a great element in the back end of the show with the dominant defensive player of the game. And we have some other stories that we're not going to put out there in the water yet because we're just still working them through.

But they tell stories of a group of people at the Super Bowl last year and the trip they went on and how it impacted their lives and others. And then we've got Dale Earnhardt, Jr. and Rutledge Wood doing their Southern California adventure where they take us around the city doing various activities including Junior stopping off at the LA Coliseum and getting in a car race with three NASCAR legends.

So, it's a lot of fun, a lot of cool, different elements that both entertain and inform.

**Q. Is gambling going to be mentioned since it's a big sponsor in the NFL?**

SAM FLOOD: We'll have some fun with it. Steve Kornacki is part of our group, and he's going to do some analytic work that's going to show you insights on the numbers and what different games you can play. And there's certainly some involvement on the sports betting side. It will not dominate the show, but it clearly is not being avoided anymore in the NFL.

**Q. Rodney, could you speak to what you remembered from Vrabel as a teammate and how you think he's done as a head coach?**

RODNEY HARRISON: Mike was a tremendous teammate. He was very smart. Worked extremely hard. And he worked really hard not just on the physical of his body but really the mental aspect of the game.

That's the thing that really separated Mike from everyone else. Mike was so smart, and he almost felt like he was

the smartest guy in the room.

And we would give him a hard time. He would just keep asking questions and answering stuff before the coach would give the answer.

And I knew Mike would be a heck of a head coach. I thought he would be eventually the head coach of Ohio State, but Mike's done a phenomenal job. The players love him. He understands the players because he played. He has empathy for them, but at the same time he holds them accountable. Doesn't allow them to make excuses.

I think what you're going to see, they'll add a couple players this offseason. They'll continue to get better. I think at the running back position, maybe you add a little bit more depth just in case something happens with Derrick Henry; but overall, man, he's come and done a really great job.

You see Jeffery Simmons playing on a high level, Denico Autry, those guys. Harold Landry, playing at a high level, man, and a big part is because of the influence of Mike Vrabel.

**Q. Maria, what does it mean to you to see more women getting honor and recognized in the higher position in sports organizations at the executive level? And what does it mean to you to cover your first Super Bowl?**

MARIA TAYLOR: I'm blessed to actually work in an organization with a woman who is an executive with a lot of power. Her name is Molly Solomon. And honestly, that's part of the reason why I love being at NBC, because it's a very inclusive environment. And the idea of having as many voices and different people sitting around the table, making a difference and making decisions, and I think that is what makes a good environment. It allows people to grow. It allows people to learn.

And we certainly have that. So I'm happy to see more people getting opportunities, and that's something that I certainly stand for.

And as far as working my first Super Bowl, like I said earlier, I never imagined I would have the opportunity to do it. But I will say when I started my broadcasting career I just wanted to be there on the day that the season ends. That was my goal.

So in every sport, so far I've been able to do that from college football, and basketball, and now being able to do it for the NFL, be there when the season ends, and everyone's hard work officially pays off and they're having

the moment that they will relive for the rest of their lives  
and share with their kids and their kids' kids. It's something  
that's very special and an honor to be part of.

CAROL KO: Thank you all very much.

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