

# NBC Sports Group Media Conference

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**Mike Tirico**

**Cris Collinsworth**

**Melissa Stark**

**Rob Hyland**

Press Conference



sure anything was more formative in my career than the three years I spent on Sunday Night Football, starting with the show's maiden voyage back in 2006.

I worked as a tape producer under Freddie Gaudelli and Drew Esocoff, and the lessons I learned really laid the foundation of who I am as a producer.

I am so looking forward to starting the next chapter with this team on the call today, and I'm going to throw it over to Mike Tirico.

**MIKE TIRICO:** Thanks, Rob. Hi, everybody. I know we make the most time possible for questions on this call, so I'll keep it brief. I've been waiting a long time to get back in the chair and looking forward to the full season.

Drew Esocoff is not on the call, our director, but I've known Drew forever and he's the best in the industry, and his warmth and his attitude makes 20 straight weeks on the road something to look forward to.

You heard all of Rob's headline accomplishments. Rob and I have been kind of attached at the hip in my six years now, seven at NBC. From the Triple Crown to Notre Dame Football we worked together the last six seasons and the last 34 nights of primetime coverage of the Olympics, so we know how the other one thinks.

There's nobody better than Cris. 17 Emmys; year after year after year he is the standard, and what an honor it is to sit next to him for these 17 weeks.

We kind of stumbled over this fact a little bit ago, Melissa and I actually worked together 20 years ago on a primetime made-for-TV golf show featuring Tiger Woods.

So we all know each other. We all have spent some time together here in the off-season, and can't wait to get this thing going with the best schedule in the NFL TV package, that Sunday night schedule.

With that I'll pass it over to Cris.

**CRIS COLLINSWORTH:** I've never really thought about it before, but that makes me the newcomer to this group, which is great. I think that's fantastic.

**THE MODERATOR:** Hello, everyone, and welcome to today's Sunday Night Football conference call. A week from today we begin season 17 of NBC Sunday Night Football with the NFL kickoff game on NBC, Peacock, and Universal.

Joining us on today's call are the new play-by-play voice of Sunday Night Football, Mike Tirico, who kicks off his 17th consecutive season calling NFL games which began on Monday Night Football on ESPN in 2006.

Since joining NBC Sports in 2016, Mike has worked 22 NFL games with our next speaker, analyst Cris Collinsworth, who begins his 14th season on SNF.

And the newest member of the NBC Sports SNF team is the sideline reporter, Melissa Stark. She made her NFL broadcast debut on Monday Night Football on ABC in 2000 coincidentally in the season after the Rams last won the Super Bowl. Melissa spent three years on the sideline for ABC, and in the past 11 years has been with NFL Network.

Finally, we have coordinating producer Rob Hyland in his first year as a lead producer for SNF. Rob produced Thursday Night Football, Notre Dame Football, the Kentucky Derby, and various Olympic sports since joining NBC Sports 25 years ago. He is also currently the primetime producer of NBC's Olympic coverage.

Each of our speakers will make an opening comment and then we'll get to your questions.

**ROB HYLAND:** Yeah, this is my 25th year of working at NBC, and time has truly flown. When you're having fun it goes by very quickly as you know.

Truly, for all the shows I've worked over that time, I'm not



I've had a chance to go visit a couple of the teams from opening night, and no matter how many times you do this first game, it never gets old. There is a buzz knowing that not only are millions of people watching, but the entire league is watching, and everybody wants to know what opening night looks like. You know, the championship banners and the fans are going crazy, and it's just a special, special night.

I know that we've loved covering it over the years. I don't know how some of our production team feels about having to do a championship moment, because it does take a little bit of effort on their part for a few days before, but I know for them it's a thrill to be part of it. And it's so weird to be right back same stayed in the same stadium. For the second straight year we had the championship team play in their home stadium.

But to get to see right off the bat on opening weekend three of the four favorites, there's no question about it in the NFC, and to get a good look at the Rams and Tampa and Dallas.

But the team that most people would say is the team to beat this year I think would be the Buffalo Bills.

As we looked at some of the games that were possibilities for opening night, of course I have no say in that whatsoever, but I knew which games I was cheering for, and I went two for two.

These are my two favorite games of the opening weekend, and can't wait to get started and can't wait to get Melissa going, who basically interviewed 17 people on opening night for Hall of Fame, and of course she did it perfectly, as she always did.

MELISSA STARK: Thanks, Cris. I am thrilled to be back on the sideline 20 years later. As Dan said, I started Monday Night Football in 2000, and that's when I worked with Fred Gaudelli and Drew Esocoff, who we've talked about is incredible and is still on the show. Al at the time and John Madden. I worked the Olympics with Rob in Athens, so Rob and I go way back, as well.

I left Monday Night Football to start a family and cover news, so I actually went to NBC News at the time and MSNBC, and then I realized you cannot really have a family and cover breaking news.

So I took a little time off and then went to NFL Network. Sports was always my passion, so now here I am coming back four teenagers later, and so excited to work with the very best in the business, everybody on this call, and excited about all the new resources that we have on the

sidelines. Big difference from 20 years ago.

**Q. Cris, you're always so good on this topic, but I have to ask you, the Dallas Cowboys made some pretty dramatic changes in their roster from last season to this season. I wanted your thoughts on whether you think this is an improved team and ultimately has a chance to be a legit Super Bowl contender as their owner always believes they are?**

CRIS COLLINSWORTH: Forever with Dallas. I think of Dallas as being an offensive team, and I certainly think they've got some great players on that side.

But this team is a little bit different for me right now. As I look around, and you start thinking about what they were able to do on the defensive side and getting DeMarcus Lawrence back and Micah Parsons as sort of that X factor, and Anthony Barr, I think they have a real chance to be something on defense this year.

Travon Diggs is sort of that ultimate wildcard, like a Marcus Peters kind of guy, that he's either going to pick it off or give up a big play. But there's that X factor to the defense that not all defenses have.

I'm really anxious to see what the approach is. We saw Dallas against Tampa in the opener last year, and offensively, even with sort of their line intact, and it was Dak Prescott who was just coming back, they chose not to run the ball at them.

When they were sitting there in their base defense they threw it, it felt like every time. I think it was almost 90 percent of the time, and the throws were all quick throws and getting the ball out of their hands.

Now with some of the -- with Tyron not being in there, you wonder how that strategy is going to play out. You know in their heart and soul, the Cowboys want to be able to run the football. That's who they've been.

But I'm really curious to see how this game plays out from the beginning and whether or not it is that same sort of approach.

Dallas wasn't the only team that didn't even try to run the football, and yet when you've got Ezekiel Elliott and Tony Pollard sitting there in the backfield, you feel like you're wasting talent if you're not taking your shot there.

A very intriguing match-up, a big match-up, two of the favorites in the NFC. But to answer your question today, would I say they're a more talented team than what they were to start last year? I don't think I can, just because of



the injuries that they have at the receiver position and the people they lost.

**Q. Rob, you're obviously walking into a show that has had a lot of critical success and certainly viewership success. At the same time, you're a new coordinating producer, and generally people in your position want to put their own sort of individual stamp on a broadcast. From a viewer, how similar will your production be to last year, and what might be different under you versus Fred Gaudelli?**

ROB HYLAND: Well, beginning with the people calling the game, three of the five people on this call are new from last year, but that doesn't mean there's going to be major changes in the show. This is still Sunday Night Football that the fans know and love, and the same Sunday Night Football that's been the No. 1 show for a historic 11 consecutive years.

Beginning next week, the show is going to have a new look with a new graphic presentation. There's a couple new camera angles. I think for the TV fan and the TV production fan you'll notice some slight tweaks, but what has made Sunday Night Football the gold standard in sports television is best-in-class storytelling and coverage of the football game, and those two things will remain the same.

But as I said, the presentation might look a little different. Some of the camera angles may be unique and new to this season. But what has made the show so successful will continue moving forward.

**Q. Rob, it was outlined in the beginning the huge platforms that you've been a part of and the huge events that you've done. What does it mean for you now to be sitting in this chair on Sunday Night Football, and then specifically as you get into the real nitty-gritty Xs and Os as you jump from let's say Notre Dame to the NFL and you look at these first two games? How do you prepare for the speed and the pace and what are some of the unique challenges that come with producing an NFL game?**

ROB HYLAND: Sure, well, to begin, I'm a former Division III football player. I've loved the game of football since I was five years old. I remember my first game, and it's been a dream of mine to someday have the opportunity to produce a Super Bowl.

To be given the opportunity to lead Sunday Night Football, I pinch myself every morning I wake up, and that's the truth.

Specifically I want to kind of go back to Richard's question, as well; I'll talk about preparation in a minute, but there's a new reverse X-mo/position camera that we added from last year's show. It will provide intimate shots following the ball from a new perspective.

We have pylon cameras this year, something Sunday Night Football did not have. A line to game camera, which is coming back. Those are a few of the camera changes.

In terms of how you prepare, our last game was, what, August 4th? It's a Hall of Fame game in Canton, Ohio, which is really a celebration of the Hall-of-Famers that went in that night, and the football game kind of takes a backseat to the storytelling week one or week zero, excuse me, of the preseason.

We go from that to games that move a lot faster with a heck of a lot more equipment.

Drew and I will spend a significant amount of time on that Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday in the trucks reviewing the monitor wall, looking at every camera position. In the lead-up to the last two weeks I've met with our replay operation team and gone over the specific isolation plans for personnel that are on the field.

But really nothing will prepare you for that opening kickoff. You plan for it, but then it happens. I know we've got the team in place to showcase the game and tell the stories and answer the whys, but it's a lot of preparation that goes into that.

But like I said, having a preseason game five weeks removed from the real thing is a lot of preparation in theory versus practice.

That's the best I can answer that.

**Q. For Mike and Cris, last year you guys didn't have any Eagles games on your schedule. This year you have two. There seems to be a lot of buzz about the team. I was curious what you guys thought of their chances entering the season and if you guys are looking forward to coming back to Philly.**

CRIS COLLINSWORTH: I always look forward to coming back to Philly. Always. It's always one of my favorite trips. I know a lot of people there. I have a lot of friends. I take a lot of good-natured stuff in Philadelphia, and it is very good-natured. I'll say that.

Now talking about the football team, I've got to tell you I'm excited about them. They just seem like a team to me that has kind of added some people in the right places, and

you're going to get -- just defensively, to get Brandon Graham back, to get Reddick, some of the guys from -- Nakobe Dean is a good young player coming in there.

Jordan Davis is a unique player, like a Vita Vea kind of player down on the inside.

But from my old playing days, and I know that we're going to talk a lot about Jalen, but, man, there's some weapons on this team. I mean, there just really is. AJ Brown is fantastic; Devonta; Dallas Goedert. There's some real players on this team.

The offensive line, especially what most people talk about the two tackle positions, fantastic. Lane is as good as it gets. Jordan Mailata. My God, he's really turned into something.

I think the Eagles -- and if you sort of follow the odds in the NFL, the team that probably has risen the fastest over the past little bit has been the Philadelphia Eagles.

Now, that puts a lot on the plate of Jalen Hurts, and ultimately in this conference it comes down to you've got to be able to play with the Tom Bradys and the Aaron Rodgers and the Matthew Staffords and all the different rock stars that are in the NFC in order to come out of it.

But you want to just talk about a football team as a whole? I know it's quarterback driven and that's always going to be true, but the whole of the Eagles looks really good to me.

MIKE TIRICO: Yeah, and I'll tack on just a couple of things. I love coming to Philly. Eagles games in the Monday Night era, the Sixers and the Flyers in other sports that I've covered, coming to Philly, the fan base is knowledgeable, demanding, and passionate. What more do you want out of folks who set the atmosphere and the tone for games? So you start there.

Then the games that we have on our schedule there. Dallas coming in, Dallas at Philly. You don't need to say anything more than that. Then Green Bay on the Sunday after Thanksgiving with Aaron Rodgers.

The games will be some of the big platform games to let us know how important that last month of the season is going to be.

If I look at the Eagles in the off-season, that AJ Brown acquisition was very clearly, let's get the people around the quarterback and let's see what we have. Knowing the draft capital that's down the line, a chance to fast forward the process, and good for Jalen for being named a captain of this team here today.

Darius Slay is also a captain. I got to see Darius play Detroit. He's a heck of a player and a really good leader to go with the other names that Cris mentioned on that side of the ball.

I'll leave you with this on Philly: You go back to the Tampa playoff game, right, and it's 31-0, but in that fourth quarter they made a couple of plays, they got back in the game, and you just sensed that the guys who had not been around the playoffs got a chance to see what it was about and understand where do we need to be next year to be a team that doesn't just get in but can do something.

So it really felt like a building block step for the Eagles last year and towards the end of that playoff game. I'm very excited to see how this first month goes, and then we'll catch them week 6 when the Cowboys come to town.

**Q. Starting with Melissa since you're the newest member of the team, you all worked your first game together as a full team in Canton at the Hall of Fame game. What did you learn in that game?**

MELISSA STARK: Am I the newest member of the team?

Let's see here. Okay, so what did we learn in that game? Well, that was a big game for me, as Rob just addressed. The game is sort of secondary at that point because I was interviewing all of the Hall-of-Famers, interviewing players in game, and we learned a lot.

I was sort of running around. We had a lightning delay. There was a lot going on for me in particular.

For me, like I said, a lot has changed in the last 20 years in terms of not necessarily just the standard, but the support. You have the monitors down there. You have -- I do have a lot more support.

We've talked about this; it's so incredible, we have a former head athletic trainer down there, and of course the job of the sideline reporter is to be the eyes and the ears on the sideline, and injuries are a huge part of that. So that is incredible, and it's an incredible resource.

I think I just learned that sort of the sky's the limit in terms of what we can do and the resources that we do have because this is such an incredible show.

I think I also learned about this group. This group, like you just said, I'm the newest member, but we've all worked together in some sense. I haven't necessarily worked with Cris, but we've talked on the phone a number of times; we've done a ton of dinners. We all have an incredible



camaraderie right from the start.

Hopefully that translates -- it's definitely off the field, but hopefully it's on the field, as well, and I think it definitely will.

I'm so excited to work with this team just because it just feels like we've all known each other forever, and we're going to travel so much and spend so much time together that it is like your family because we have so many dinners together and we are on the road so much together.

I think I learned that we all get along really well, and I'm really excited about that, and the camaraderie.

MIKE TIRICO: I'll hop in. Very similar to the answer Melissa just gave. If I learned anything in Canton, it's that my instincts are to be trusted. We're going to be fine. Everybody communicates. Everybody connects, gets along. Similar-minded folks.

Sometimes when you look at sports TV, I think the most valuable thing is putting together a group that fits and works well together. We haven't done a, quote, regular season Sunday Night Football game together, but I know what Drew Esocoff thinks and does, certainly Rob.

Cris, I don't have to look over and see, hmm, what is he thinking. I've listened to Cris. I've worked with Cris. I have a sense of exactly where he's going and what he wants to say, and the same is true with Melissa.

So it's all first nature, and that means we don't have to worry about the artificial stuff. We can just worry about doing our jobs because the connectivity of the group working together is going to take care of itself and already has.

**Q. This is for Cris and then for Mike. Cris, you worked with Mike before on various NFL games. I'm just wondering the chemistry you have in the past and how he differs from Al Michaels. Then for Mike, what is it like stepping in a chair that Al Michaels held down for many years and now he's moved over to Amazon? What is it like stepping into that role?**

CRIS COLLINSWORTH: You know, it was one of the first conversations that all of us had together. We had a great run with Al and Michele and Fred and Drew. It was great. We had, whatever it was, 13 years together. A lot of times it was like falling out of bed. You just knew what each other were thinking, and it just falls into place.

It really is hard to believe that it doesn't feel like a new team. I don't even know if that makes sense or not. But I

know these -- you know, I just know them. I've worked with them. I know exactly who they are.

Mike and I communicate very easily. We've done a full season's worth of games plus together. We're all friends.

That was the obvious part from my standpoint. I went out -- the only rule that Al Michaels had for me was that I had to go out to dinner with him on Friday and Saturday night.

Back in the early days, I would take an either-or because I wanted to stay in my room and do homework.

But he was right in that he said, it becomes about the partnership on the air. It becomes about the relationship on the air. You're going to know plenty of football for this game. You need to know more about me and us and what makes us tick.

I thought it was some of the great advice that I ever really got because I started doing that, and we really became fast friends and communicated very easily.

I've got the advantage of when I first came in, I was taking over for John Madden. It wasn't like I just walked in and they all of a sudden went, you're a whole lot like John Madden. That just wasn't the case. We did a whole lot of things differently.

But to me, I'm not the person coming into it at this point. It just doesn't feel like a hard transition.

Now, I'm sure when we get into the first broadcast there's going to be communication issues and we're going to all have done things in a different way. I understand there's going to be a transition period of time.

But we've already spent a lot of time together, obviously, getting ready for this season, and I don't know who it was that said it before, but there's a real comfort already to just being a part of the group and being friends and being able to tell jokes about each other and on each other that typically don't come until you've known somebody a couple years at least, and it's just like a group I'm used to hanging out with already.

I hope that's what comes across on the air.

MIKE TIRICO: To the second part of your question, for me, I've done this already at Monday Night Football. Al had done Monday Night Football for 20 years, and Monday Night Football moved to ESPN.

But obviously as you well know, being in that unique slot, the only game that night, the music, all that, there's a



legacy to Monday Night Football. And after Keith Jackson did it the first year and then Frank Gifford the next 15, Al had done it for 20, so for many people the only person they associated with Monday Night Football, the only people were in the play-by-play care were Frank Gifford and Al, because they did it for a combined 35 years.

So I followed Al on that and had that run for 10 years. That's something that doesn't even factor into my mind or my approach here now.

I'm very different at this point. I'm significantly older, 16 years older than I was then. I've done a couple hundred primetime NFL games and been the primetime host for three Olympic Games.

For me, it's an assignment that I've worked for, I feel like I'm completely prepared for, and surrounded by the best people.

For me, there's no angst about being that next person in that chair.

THE MODERATOR: I think that's all we have in terms of questions for today.

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