

NBC Sports Group Media Conference

Wednesday, October 12, 2022

Cris Collinsworth
Tony Dungy
Rodney Harrison
Jason Garrett

Press Conference

CHRIS McCLOSKEY: Thank you everyone for joining us. Thank you for your patience. We have our call today to preview Sunday Night Football's Cowboys-Eagles matchup, the 5-1 Eagles versus the 4-1 Cowboys. This is actually the best combined record for Sunday Night Football for a week 6 matchup ever, for NBC Sunday Night Football.

Joining us on the call today, we'll have Sunday Night Football analyst Cris Collinsworth and Football Night in America analysts Tony Dungy, Rodney Harrison, and Jason Garrett.

Before we begin, we'll have opening remarks from each of our participants followed by a Q&A from the press. Also, just a quick reminder we will have a transcript of this call available shortly after the call is over. You can access that by contacting our NBC SPORTS communications department or by going to NBCsportsgrouppressbox.com, which is our media dedicated website.

We'll now begin with opening remarks, and we'll start with Cris Collinsworth.

CRIS COLLINSWORTH: Hi, everybody. Good to be back. It means it's a big game if we're doing one of these, so that's good.

I guess, if you hang around long enough, you see everything come full circle. For the NFC East, which has always been sort of the main driver of the National Football League in many ways, as far as media markets and everything else, TV ratings, whatever you want to talk about, that this is coming full circle. They're back on top, not just these two teams, but the New York Giants as well.

And then you get the special rivalry that is the game



between these two teams. I've had the good fortune of doing one, sometimes two of these during the course of a year, and there's really nothing like it. There is such passion with the Dallas Cowboys fan base. We saw it in L.A. They probably had more fans out there than the Rams did.

But when they show up in Philadelphia, they get a warm welcome there. So it is a fantastic setting. It's a fantastic game. And can't wait to get to Philly.

I don't know who's next. Tony, you want to go next?

TONY DUNGY: Yeah, I believe I am, Cris. This is Tony Dungy.

I'm very excited about this. Obviously two teams with great records who are playing good football, division rivalry.

I think I'm so excited because of the defense. I see some young, aggressive, fast, speedy people out there. They're playing well. They're well coached.

And even though we've got some dynamic playmakers on offense, I think it's going to be tough to move the ball consistently, and I think big plays on defense are going to turn the game.

So looking forward to it. Should be great. I'm definitely fired up. I will turn that over to Rodney Harrison.

RODNEY HARRISON: Hey, Coach, thank you.

Just like Coach, I'm extremely excited about this game. There's nothing like playing a divisional game for first place. I look forward to seeing both these great defenses continue to play lights out.

And there's nothing like having the Cowboys and the Philadelphia Eagles both relevant. I'm just really proud of Jalen Hurts and the maturity and growth he's shown as a quarterback, and looking forward to seeing if Cooper Rush can continue his record. Should be a great game. Looking forward to it.

JASON GARRETT: This is Jason. I've been involved in this game a lot of years, both as a player and as a coach. I think the guys described it perfectly. There's nothing like



the NFC East and nothing like the rivalries within the NFC East. This one goes back a long way, well before I showed up.

There's always tremendous passion among the fan bases, both the Cowboys and the Eagles. Nothing like going to Philadelphia if you're a Cowboy player or a Cowboy coach or a Cowboy fan, few places like it, and when so much is at stake early on in the season.

We've said it a number of times on the show on Sunday night, Philadelphia is playing as well as anybody in the league. They're one of the most complete teams. They can run it. They can throw it. They can rush the pass. They can cover on the back end. They play really well throughout their whole team, and they feed off of each other.

They're doing all the right things. They're taking the ball away on defense, and again they're a balanced attack on offense.

For me the Cowboys defensive front is just off the charts. It might be the most impressive unit that we've seen all year long. The impact of Micah Parsons paired with guys like DeMarcus Lawrence, it really is transformative for their team.

To see that matchup on Sunday night in front of the whole world, I'm awfully excited for us to be a part of it.

CHRIS McCLOSKEY: Thank you, Jason. Thank you to all of our other speakers. Now we can begin with questions.

Q. Hi, guys. I'm sorry to start with your game a week from Sunday in Miami instead of this week, but since I have you all on a call. Cris, I know from talking to you at the owners meetings, you're excited about a rare game in Miami. In your mind, is it good for the league for the Dolphins to be relevant again? And what do you think their ceiling is based on how they played against Baltimore and Buffalo? Tony, same thing. What is their ceiling after watching them win with Tua? He could be back for that Pittsburgh Sunday night game.

CRIS COLLINSWORTH: If it's good for the league, it's good for me to get back to Florida as much as I can. So I'm happy about that.

Yeah, it's really too bad because what we saw from Tua, and honestly from Teddy, when he came in, he threw that one long pass way down the field to Tyreek, and he probably has the arm for some of those deep than what Tua has.

This is a team that is extremely exciting. They have the big play capability. They also have a really good (indiscernible) that seems to be getting better as we go on too with some good young players on that side of the ball.

I think as far as intriguing to watch, maybe put Buffalo ahead of them as far as just watching offensive weapons, but the Dolphins are right there in that next group of two or three teams that you just want to turn on the television and you want to watch them play. To watch them play against a defense like Pittsburgh, I'll take that all day.

CHRIS McCLOSKEY: Thanks, Cris. Coach?

TONY DUNGY: I think the ceiling is very high from what I saw early on. They're doing a lot of creative things on offense. Obviously brought some playmakers into the fold.

Then defensively they were excellent last year, and they're continuing that.

So I think it really depends on getting their quarterback situation healthy again. Tua or Teddy, I think can lead this team a long ways.

Q. I'm curious to see what have you guys seen in the maturation of Jalen Hurts in terms of becoming a passer?

JASON GARRETT: There's no question, that's the right word. He has matured greatly as a passer. He was such an interesting player to evaluate coming out of college, well documented his time at Alabama. Tua shows up, that whole situation, goes to Oklahoma.

What was so impressive is he handled that so well, both when he was at Alabama playing behind Tua and then the success he had at Oklahoma.

But a prevailing question, I think, for anybody evaluating him, was his ability as a drop-back passer. What happens oftentimes for these guys who are such great athletes, they have the ability to throw the ball, but when things break down, they're so dynamic running with the ball through high school and through college, maybe they don't develop those skills to progress through pass patterns like some of the other guys who are more pocket passers.

And that's not a bad thing, that's a good thing, but you often wonder can he do that other thing? Can he be that NFL pocket passer, who stands in there and reads defenses and goes from receiver to receiver based on the coverage he's getting?

I don't think there's any question you're seeing that in Jalen Hurts now. He's still dynamic. He makes a lot of big plays with his arm, throwing to the first option. Makes a lot of big plays with his feet getting out of trouble. But you see him standing in and making throws and processing what the defense is doing and going from guy to guy to guy and throwing the ball on time.

I think there's been a ton of evidence of that early on in his career and certainly this season so far. He's such a dangerous player because he's showing everybody that he can do both. It's a credit to him and a tribute to him how hard he's worked on that, and it's showing up.

Having DeVonta and A.J. certainly helps, Goedert. There's a lot of good weapons around him. But he's knowing how to execute his system against the defenses, he's seeing and throwing the ball on time, consistent throughout the game. It's been impressive.

RODNEY HARRISON: Jason, to add to that, it's not just a physical aspect that's impressive to me. But it's the mental aspect. It's the leadership. I love his no nonsense kind of demeanor. I love the professionalism.

Even when he came out this weekend, he talked about, hey, we shouldn't be happy at 5-0. We've still got work to do. To me that's setting an example. That's the quarterback standing up and saying, guys, we've got plenty of work to do.

To me, I've been impressed with his improvement as a quarterback, but I just love the leadership and the professionalism. Those guys in the locker room, they respect him, they trust him, and they fight and claw for him. So I'm excited to see that this week.

TONY DUNGY: I would say from a defensive standpoint, I just think his numbers are going to continue to get better and better. He is improving. His corps of receivers around him is better.

But the style of play that Philadelphia has on offense, it really limits you on defense. Because of their RPO game, you can't play a lot of zone coverage. You have to play man-to-man because of their ability to run and his ability to be a runner. You have to bring the extra safety up to account for him.

So he's seen a lot of straight, man-to-man, one-on-one, and he's got receivers that can beat that, and he is making the throws. So I just think the combination of his development and their offense, he's going to put up some lights out numbers.

CRIS COLLINSWORTH: I'll be surprised if we see a lot of drop-back throws out of Jalen Hurts this weekend. Their offense is unique. I think a little bit like Lamar Jackson.

But more importantly, this is not the defense that you want to get in and drop back in with. When they put up five and they drop Micah Parsons down there, I don't care who you have pass protection up front, it's going to be a long night.

So I think you'll see the full complement of what we've seen out of Philadelphia's offense in the past, which is they're going to play action RPO, run. They're going to do the whole thing, I'm sure.

Q. This is mostly for Cris, but for anybody who wants to answer. It's kind of a great time in Philly sports. You've got the Phillies in the playoffs. You've got the Sixers looking to move up in the NBA rankings. I'm kind of curious what you guys think the atmosphere is going to be like at The Linc and how Eagles fans are going to be during that broadcast?

RODNEY HARRISON: I played them plenty of times in the regular season and in the Super Bowl, and those fans are absolutely crazy. One thing about Philadelphia Eagles fans, they always got their team's back. It's going to be wild.

Hopefully there's no fighting or no one gets hurt or injured in the stands, but it's going to be a wild one. It's definitely going to be a wild one.

JASON GARRETT: Here's what I know. At 8:12 on Sunday night, the scoreboard is going to show Rocky running up and down the stairs. It's been a tradition there for a long time, and the Philly crowd will be in a frenzy about their team and rightfully so.

They have a lot to cheer about. They have no love for the team that they're playing, and if they get off to a good start, it's going to be a challenging environment for these Cowboys all night long.

Q. Want to take you back a couple days to the game you just did in Baltimore and ask you did you feel like you saw the Ravens defense kind of come around in that game? How much of that is Marcus Peters and the big play ability he brings and also the emotion that he brings to it?

CRIS COLLINSWORTH: The funny thing about it is that was such a different looking Baltimore Ravens defense than I've ever seen. That was pretty straight zone, drop back, occasionally get a man and then take a deep shot. I think philosophically we're seeing a big change, and I'm not

so sure that it wasn't a little bit of a result of what the Bengals did to them last year, putting up 41, a lot of sort of man-to-man situations, the great Marlon Humphrey getting beat on some deep balls by Ja'Marr Chase.

In this game, the Bengals sort of looked befuddled by sort of a classic two-deep shell coverage. So I can't imagine that -- a couple of things. That the Ravens aren't going to be doing that quite a bit here in the future, especially as they start to get some of their pass rushers back in Houston and Bowser and some of those guys.

But then the Cincinnati Bengals almost become the Kansas City Chiefs of this year. I can't imagine that they're not going to see this now almost everywhere they go for the rest of the season too.

RODNEY HARRISON: You've got a big problem with the Ravens. They had a bunch of miscommunications back there when they tried to play a lot of man coverage, and they had a lot of breakdowns.

For me, I've always been taught, and I've always taken the responsibility, hey, if I'm the guy in the secondary, whether -- and it has to be Marcus Williams, the free safety -- you've got to make sure everyone's lined up, everybody gets the right call, everybody's on the same page.

I've always been taught make one call and make sure that it's a universal call where everyone can get it. To me, like Cris just talked about, they kind of went away from the man-to-man coverage because of the lapse in communication and went to more zone.

Zone is pretty much easy, like, hey, don't let them get behind you. I think as the season progresses and they start to kind of build that confidence in their secondary, I think they'll do more, some more man-to-man or integrate some more blitzes in there.

But at the end of the day, the most important thing is you can't give up 40 and 50-yard bombs because of miscommunication, and that's something that really kills the morale of the team.

Q. What do you guys think about Marcus Peters that affects that, that they did not have last year?

RODNEY HARRISON: Marcus Peters brings that attitude. He brings that swag. I don't like the fact that he's yelling and screaming at his coach on the sideline. To me, if I'm on that team, I'm grabbing him and saying, you're tripping, man. We have to stay focused on what we need to stay focused on and can't be yelling and screaming at the coach.

But he's a heck of a player. Last week I was really impressed with his tackling, and I thought he did a really good job of competing with Ja'Marr Chase and just being at the right spot.

But he brings that energy. He brings kind of that no nonsense attitude. I like both their corners. Very competitive.

CRIS COLLINSWORTH: Marcus played a great game last week. He's the best of their zone players because, even if it's man-to-man, he's looking at the quarterback. I mean, he's crazy. Not many people can do that.

If you let him be in the zone and truly drink everything that the quarterback is doing and the route combinations, I think he could end up having a monster year, I really do, if that's going to be their strategy.

Q. Just a real quick question. What do you guys make of the New York Jets so far through five games? I know they're sitting at 3-2, second place in the AFC East. Not a lot of people envisioned them being this successful this early. Obviously they're a pretty young team at a lot of key positions, at quarterback, at cornerback, running back, wide receiver, things of that nature. But do you guys view this team as a team that could possibly make a run at a Wild Card spot this year?

TONY DUNGY: I think they could because I think a lot of teams are in the same boat. People are trying to find themselves. As you mentioned, they've got a lot of young talent. They're starting to believe. They've won a couple games that they probably shouldn't have won.

If the Browns don't run out of bounds in the four-minute drill and recover an onside kick, they win that one.

But when you start to win those games and you believe, it carries over. Yes, I think they will be in competition for a Wild Card spot going down the stretch.

RODNEY HARRISON: Whether not this year or just in the future, I like where they're heading. And Robert Saleh, he's done a great job. He's come in. They've got a lot of really young players that don't really know or even care about the history of the Jets.

They know that they look to the side, and they see Sauce and they see Williams and they see all these other different guys, and they say, you know what, we've got some players out here. We can compete against anybody.

The big question is going to remain Zach Wilson, how well he plays, how he continues to develop as a young quarterback. The defense will continue to get better and be aggressive. And they've got those pair of those young running backs. So I say the future is bright for the Jets.

Q. This is for Coach Dungy and Coach Garrett. When it comes to Nick Sirianni, what have you noticed from him as being from a first time head coach last year to being a guy that's 5-0 with this team right now?

TONY DUNGY: I think we're seeing a guy who's getting more comfortable in the role. He knows this team a lot better. I think he's got a great relationship with this quarterback, and that is always helpful. I think he's bringing out the best in Jalen Hurts.

But I think his team believes in him and the way they do things, and you can see that from the way they play.

I've actually had a couple of conversations with Nick about, we talked about protecting leads and game management and fourth quarter and those kinds of things, and this is a guy that's growing. He loves his job, and he is engrossed in it and wanting to get better, and I think his team sees how hard he works and it's rubbing off on them.

JASON GARRETT: I'll piggy-back on what Coach Dungy said. The other thing that I think is interesting about the Eagles -- Coach and I have talked about this a lot -- the idea of alignment in an organization is critical. There are 32 teams in the league, and not all of them have alignment as to what ownership wants, what the general manager wants, what the head coach wants, what the assistant coaches want, all the way through, and there seems to be a disconnect.

I don't think there's any disconnect in Philadelphia. I think Nick Sirianni's done an outstanding job, and I think Howie Roseman and the personnel people there have done an excellent job continuing to try to make that team better.

To me, the personnel people and the coaching staff, they're aligned. They're on the same page. The improvements they made, the additions in free agency, A.J. Brown, Haason Reddick, how those guys are going to come in and fit into the systems that they have in place, how they're going to use the quarterback, the environment they need to create around the quarterback, both from a personnel standpoint and from a coaching standpoint.

That's one of the most impressive things to me about this team. There seems to be a harmony throughout the organization. They're a complete team. There are not a lot of holes on their team. And everybody seems to be rowing

the same direction, and that's huge for everybody. Give both Howie Roseman and Nick Sirianni a lot of credit for that.

Q. One last one for Cris. When it comes to A.J. Brown, DeVonta Smith, Quez Watkins, is there something they're doing very well that not many people are talking about when it comes to wide receiver play?

CRIS COLLINSWORTH: They're doing a lot of things well. I think the body type of A.J. Brown has really helped this team. There's RPOs and slants and balls over the middle sometimes aren't the most fun thing to do as a wide receiver. And yet he is such a physical presence in there that -- if you want to take him on and tackle him, you put yourself in trouble a little bit.

One of the issues I think they have, though, is just some of the pure size. DeVonta Smith, obviously, not a big guy. Quez, not a big guy. And a lot of their offense, you need blockers that are playing wide receiver. They do a lot of the quick throws outside, and they do a lot of the bubble screens. They do a lot of different things.

It's tough in this league to ask somebody that weighs 170 pounds to take on some linebacker flying up the field to bust up one of those screens.

There's always good and bad, but I think that the pure speed of Quez, DeVonta's always been one of my favorite players to watch just because he's just so athletic and fearless for a guy that's his size, and I think A.J.'s physical component of this offense has really made a difference. It's like having another tight end on the field that runs like a wide receiver.

So the big three, and you've got to put in Dallas too. Dallas may end up being their best at the end of the year anyway.

So that is quite a complement, especially when you have to stop and run first in this offense, and then you've got to deal with those four.

CHRIS McCLOSKEY: This concludes our call for the day. Once again, thank you for joining us. We will have a transcript of the call available in a few hours.

Coverage of Cowboys and Eagles begins at 7:00 p.m. eastern on Sunday night with Football Night in America. We'll see you then. Thank you.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports