

# NBC Sports Group Media Conference

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**Rick Cordella**

**Hans Schroeder**

**Mike Tirico**

**Cris Collinsworth**

Press Conference

GREG HUGHES: Thanks, everybody, for joining us this afternoon. Welcome to our Super Wild Card Weekend conference call.

As you know, Saturday NBCUniversal will be the home of three Super Wild Card games on this weekend, becoming the first media company ever to present three games in a single NFL Playoff weekend.

The second of those games, featuring Patrick Mahomes and the Kansas City Chiefs hosting Tua Tagovailoa and the Miami Dolphins on Saturday night at 8:00 p.m. also marks an industry first for the NFL and NBC Universal. It will be the NFL's first ever exclusive live streamed playoff game, which we're excited to present on Peacock.

Joining us on today's call to discuss these industry milestones and to preview the games are NBC SPORTS President Rick Cordella; NFL Executive Vice President of Media Distribution Hans Schroeder; the voice and face of NBC SPORTS, Mike Tirico, who will call both of our primetime games this weekend; and finally our most recent Sports Broadcasting Hall of Fame inductee, analyst Cris Collinsworth, who will join Mike in Detroit on Sunday night for Rams-Lions on the NFC Wild Card game.

With that, I'll turn it over to NBC SPORTS President Rick Cordella to kick it off.

RICK CORDELLA: Thanks, Greg. First of all, thank you everyone for joining us today, and all of us on this call are excited about the weekend ahead, having three Wild Card games and one exclusive streaming Wild Card game. It's something we've prepared for for many months.

Our exceptional production and announce teams are ready to go including our incredible technology teams as well.



We're really looking forward to all three games. Obviously the first game, Noah, Todd, Kathryn on our exceptional Big Ten team is doing the Saturday afternoon game at 4:30, the Browns-Texans game.

And having Mike Tirico on the first ever NFL Playoff game on a streamer with Dolphins-Chiefs on Peacock was really important to us. He's our signature voice and has done numerous first time events for us, including the first Big Ten game this fall and the first Peacock exclusive game back in December. He's also worked closely with Jason Garrett a few times previously, so that made a lot of sense there. Kaylee Hartung will be on the sidelines. She's part of the Today show cast, as well as part of last year's NFL Wild Card game on NBC.

On Sunday night we have Rams-Lions, return of Matthew Stafford to Detroit. Mike, Hall of Famer Cris, and Melissa just finished their 13th consecutive season as the No. 1 primetime show. So we're ready to go there.

I want to say a big thank you to the NFL and Hans Schroeder for being such great partners in this. This is a lot of firsts happening this weekend, and it wouldn't be possible without their partnership.

Hans, over to you.

HANS SCHROEDER: Thanks, Rick, and thanks for having me today.

Before we dive into the Playoffs, just a quick look back at the regular season. It was a remarkable regular season. With starts with the game. Over 70 percent of our games were within one score in the fourth quarter. The season was really filled with a bunch of competitive games and fantastic finishes.

We couldn't be happier with the strength of the game, the quality of the game, the young stars, many of whom have made their way into the playoffs.

For the media perspective, again, another really strong year. We're fortunate to have just great partners, surely with NBC at the top of that list. 190 million people watched a game this year, some part of a regular season game, which is, I think, the second highest on record. Almost 18 million people on average watched a game. That's the



highest since 2015 and our second highest year all time.

So we're coming into the playoffs with a lot of momentum, a lot of excitement. As we think broadly at the NFL about our strategy and media strategy, we continue to be very focused about having the widest possible reach for our games as we can. That starts with a strong tradition we have to broadcast television and the reach we get there.

But it's been an important focus of ours for a long time to continue to grow and expand, and today as the media ecosystem evolves around us, a lot of that is continuing to expand on digital and growing our presence on the screens and in the places and platforms where we know our fans are spending their time.

That will continue to be a focus of ours, and that really was at the top of our list as we thought about the major media partnerships we did a couple years ago of making sure all our partnerships had broad digital distribution and that we are growing in that important place for our fans.

Nobody is really doing this better than NBC, and we have a long history with NBC of innovating and growing our presence and growing our distribution, going back to 2008, where they're a first partner that we streamed all our Sunday night games on, they're the first partner here in the U.S. that we streamed the Super Bowl on back in 2012.

So as we look to the Super Wild Card weekend and all the exciting matchups, we're really excited to continue that innovation and continue to grow our presence on the new platforms and on the digital screens.

The weekend overall, from the beginning with Cleveland-Houston, going through Monday night with Tampa and Philadelphia, we're really excited about all six matchups and the opportunity for our fans and those six games.

Obviously we're taking a big step forward here with Peacock. The game will still be on over the air in those NBC stations in Kansas City and Miami. It will be on NFL+. But we know and we're excited about this next step of making the game exclusively available on Peacock, but we do that with a lot of confidence and a lot of experience already behind us. We're on there every Sunday night all season long. We've been there for the last couple years. We've been there with the Super Bowl we had a couple years ago in L.A. and throughout.

We couldn't be happier and prouder of the experience NBC has built with delivering that game and those games in a high quality manner for our fans.

So as we look to this weekend and all the work we've done, with Peacock at over 30 million subscribers, but they'll reach over 70 million people here in the U.S. So we're really excited about the experience we're going to deliver, and we're excited about the brand we have in place with NBC to make sure our fans know where to go on Saturday night and find that first exclusive streaming game.

We couldn't be happier with the partnership. We're so appreciative of all the great work NBC has done and gone into this. We're certainly appreciative of Mike and the double duty he and Rodney and Tony and team are doing for Saturday night and Sunday night.

We're excited for the weekend and excited to take your questions.

GREG HUGHES: Thanks, Hans. Mike Tirico?

MIKE TIRICO: Thanks, Greg. Thanks, everybody. I'll be quick so we can get to questions.

I'm super excited to be part of all of this, not just the Peacock exclusive on Saturday night, and get to do another playoff game in Arrowhead. I just got to Kansas City today. They're expecting perhaps the coldest game the Chiefs have ever seen in their playoff history. So it's going to be one of those unique nights, especially with Miami, the team coming in for that game.

Then the next night, to head to Detroit for the first playoff game for the Lions at home in three decades. I've lived in Michigan for 25 years, and I can't tell you how excited the people who live there are. You put on top of that the return of Matthew Stafford, I think we'll have one of the greatest atmospheres we've had for a playoff game in a long time.

The other part of that equation, which is really a great bookend for me personally for the weekend, is that Saturday night we'll see Tyreek Hill come back to Arrowhead for the first time. They played Kansas City this year in the game in Germany, but for Tyreek and the Dolphins and for a guy who had such great success here, to come back into Arrowhead in front of this group of passionate fans.

Those two returns of very high level star players who were traded to return in playoff games for the first time in those stadiums -- Tyreek at Arrowhead, Stafford in Ford Field in Detroit -- just adds to the playoff atmosphere, which can stand on its own.

Look forward to all of that. Look forward to seeing my pal Cris. So here's Cris.



CRIS COLLINSWORTH: Well, as a veteran of the 1981 season Freeze Bowl game that was 9 below zero with winds of 35 miles an hour and a windchill of 59 below zero, I am very sad that I don't get a chance to be at Arrowhead with Mike and take on some of that weather again just to prove my manhood one more time. But I'll have to suffer through in Detroit in the dome stadium.

I'm with Mike. I'll be warmly having dinner somewhere with my cell phone listening to all my guys call the game on Saturday night. I probably have watched more television on my cell phone this year between Notre Dame and the Big Ten and the NFL than any human alive.

It's an exciting weekend for all of us and can't wait to get started. That's enough of us. We'll turn it over to you guys now.

**Q. Question for both Mike and Cris. Just your thoughts on not only Stafford's return to Detroit but Jared Goff going up against his former team; Brad Holmes and Les Snead, the two who got this trade done; and kind of McVay going up against Jared Goff too. Cris, also your thoughts on, when a team wraps up a playoff spot, should they rest guys in week 18? Because this is the second straight year with a playoff team coming in where there's been an injury to a major player.**

CRIS COLLINSWORTH: Yeah, you cut out a little bit in the beginning. Was all that for me, or was it somebody else?

**Q. For you and Mike. Just also the thoughts on Goff going up against the Rams. I know there's enough attention on Stafford, but just the whole Goff-Stafford matchup and what Goff might have to prove in this.**

CRIS COLLINSWORTH: I'll let Mike handle a little bit of that because he lived it up there with Matthew Stafford and the deal and the whole thing.

MIKE TIRICO: I'll start. On that one, first the Matthew part, I don't think that folks in Detroit appreciated Stafford until the end of his 12 years, and then they started to. I will always remember it because it was our NBC Super Bowl, and I had the chance to host the pregame that year, just the connection of how connected the fans of Detroit were in rooting for Stafford.

So there's a very positive feel. Matthew's wife Kelly has made a lot of comments this week about how Detroit helped shape them as people and as parents. So I think there's going to be the emotion of that. That's the non-football side, maybe on the football side as well.

But to your point, Joe, on Jared Goff, one, he took the Rams to a Super Bowl. His steadiness will help significantly in this setting with all the story lines that are going in. And you may blanch a say, well, he helped take the Rams to the Super Bowl. People point to the 13-3 Super Bowl game. Don't forget that NFC Championship game where they went to New Orleans and won to get there too. So Goff played well at times during that run.

I think Jared has said it himself, the experience of being trading, which hurt, built a different resilience in him. He feels like he's a stronger football player, stronger individual for what he's gone through.

Don't be mistaken, for as much as it's about Stafford coming back to Detroit, for Goff and for the people who are around him, it's just as much getting him a win over his old team as well.

I'll let Cris handle the other question you asked about week 18.

CRIS COLLINSWORTH: Yeah, there is no right answer to that question because we've seen it done both ways, and we've seen success, and we've seen failure with that.

It does seem like it fits the Detroit Lions, right? They go for it on all those fourth downs. Their defense plays and takes chances. It's an all in every play, every minute of every game kind of approach that I think, as a fan, has kind of turned on America to this football team a little bit.

The team that I found really interesting, we did not do a Rams game this year, almost unbelievably that we didn't. So I had a lot of fun studying the Rams this week. I didn't know a lot about them. I never really sat and studied this Puka Nacua, and you go, man, this guy is something else. Between what he does as a receiver and what he does as a blocker, he has a significant role blocking on this football team, as does Cooper Kupp, who was the Triple Crown winner of receiving just a few years ago.

Then you've got Kyren Williams, who's kind of come out of nowhere in the backfield, very exciting back that has a little Le'Veon Bell sort of cool qualities to him, take his time then be explosive in the hole.

Across the board -- Aaron Donald on the other side -- it's a game of stars. It's a great story line underneath the entirety of this thing with these two quarterbacks going at it. And they can talk about there's no extra juice to it or how much respect they have for each other and on and on and on, but we all know this one means a lot.

It probably means a whole lot to Jared Goff, right? I mean, Matthew Stafford had that moment. He won the Super Bowl in his first year out there. It was fantastic. It was exciting. We got to call that game, and it was in L.A. Now Jared Goff is playing on a team that's very friendly to him. Good receivers, maybe the best offensive line in all of football, explosiveness coming out of the backfield with their two backs in Montgomery and Gibbs.

So this is an explosive football game that has a lot of underlying emotion, and you can make that statement just about the fans that are going to be in the stands for this one. They say where else would you rather be? For me, this is the one I'd love to do.

**Q. Yeah, probably more hyped up after Michigan's win on Sunday. Thanks, guys.**

**Q. Hans mentioned how important some of the broad digital distribution is. Rick, could you kind of talk about is there any concern about abandoning some of the core broadcasting cable subscribers at NBC? And are you equipped to handle some of the expected viewership there as well?**

RICK CORDELLA: We had two Wild Card games as part of our NFL extension that we did from 2021. So heading into this season, the NFL made available another game into the market, in which we, working closely with Hans and the NFL teams, as a streaming package we put on Peacock. So it's not as if we shifted any games from linear to stream. This was an additional game that was available to us.

**Q. Right. But for subscribers expecting to see this game on a nationwide broadcast, obviously there's going to be some outrage there. Is there any concern from the cable standpoint?**

RICK CORDELLA: I don't know, Hans, if you want to jump in on here. This is not something for NBC. We bid on it for Peacock separately. I'm not sure if that game was destined for broadcast elsewhere or not, but it was a streaming package that we looked at that we decided to go for.

HANS SCHROEDER: Let me jump in. Thanks for the question. As I said at the beginning, we're still very committed to broadcasting. That is still and continues to be the broadest possible reach. The viewership we get, you can't reach 190 million people throughout the course of the year without having very broad distribution of your content, and that's always been a bedrock for us and I think a real differentiator for us versus other sports.

Every one of our games is on broadcast television, at least in their market, and probably 90 percent of our games is on broadcast as their core platform. But for us, it remains really important, while we continue to remain very strong there and have great partnerships with the broadcast partners that we do, to increase our presence across digital.

We know and we see the continued evolution in the media landscape, and we want to be where our fans are. We know they're increasingly, especially younger fans, on different screens. So that's why it's important for us, not just for this Wild Card game, but throughout the year, that we're on Peacock and Paramount+ and Amazon and these different digital platforms, and why our distribution is on somewhere like NFL+, which it sounds like Cris will be watching on Sunday night, along with Peacock.

Again, we're very focused and very committed on broadcast. For us, it's not either/or, it's both. We want to continue to broaden the distribution for our content. That's the way we think we engage the broadest possible fans, and that's what the driving strategy is for the majority of our content.

**Q. So we should expect more of this for next year as well too, next season?**

HANS SCHROEDER: You'll definitely expect it. Every Sunday night we're going to be on Peacock. We're going to have the playoff games on Peacock as well. As it relates to the Wild Card game exclusively, we're excited to continue the conversation. This is a deal for this year, but it's an NFL playoff game. I expect there will be a lot of interest in it.

We're excited to continue the conversation with NBC with what we do this year and seeing where those opportunities are for next year. But we're really focused on Saturday and the Dolphins and Kansas City as well as all the other games and the great matchups and a great weekend for our fans.

**Q. A similar question, but it's a little bit further on that. First for Hans, if you could walk through the how or why the Chiefs-Dolphins game ended up being the one that made the most sense in the Saturday night Peacock slot. Rick, if you could walk through what the ultimate goal or number one priority of Saturday night's game is at the end of the day for you and for Peacock.**

HANS SCHROEDER: Look, I think we spend a lot of time -- it's a busy last weekend of the year and an exciting one, if you thought about week 18 in general. A lot goes into





scheduling that and making sure we have a game that matters in every window throughout the weekend. Sunday was certainly fun with an elimination game almost in every window or a game with pretty high stakes in every window.

We looked across Wild Card weekend, and we're looking at how do we get the best games in each of the respective windows. This year was a great year with a lot of exciting stories, brands. Mike and Cris hit on earlier the Jared-Stafford dynamic, and Sunday night we certainly have McCarthy and Green Bay. And a fun one on Sunday with the Bills, they talked about on Sunday night having great coverage on NBC, going from 11 seed all the way to 2 in the last few weeks. To a really compelling 4-5 matchup on Monday night, and the compelling one with the one C.J. Stroud is in in the early window on Saturday.

So we look at it holistically. There's a number of different factors that we incorporate from competitive to fans to partners. So all those factors get sort of factored into how we end up with a Wild Card schedule. We're ultimately really excited about how it laid out, and we think the fans are the real winners with each of those six matchups.

RICK CORDELLA: To the second part of your question around the goals for Saturday night, the first goal is to have a great production. I have no doubt the team is ready for it. Obviously having Mike as the play by play man on that team speaks to the quality level that we'll see on that team.

Second is the technology, so making sure that we deliver a clean experience to the users across America. Look, we're in the big event business. We stream the big events. We've streamed Super Bowl in the past, World Cup, Olympics, Wrestlemania, Premier League each weekend, Sunday Night Football throughout the season. So this is not new territory for us, and I have confidence that our product and tech teams will deliver a great experience for the viewers Saturday evening.

Then overall, what we expect, we did this for a reason. It's not just to get people to watch on Saturday night. It's to get people to watch and experience all this various content that we have across the Peacock service, whether it's Universal Films or its library content like The Office and Parks and Rec. We're launching Ted this week with Seth MacFarlane, a show based upon the movie, and Traitors, an unscripted show. There's a wealth of content that people may be unaware it exists.

On top of that, we have a lot more sports as well. We had No. 1 Purdue get knocked off by Nebraska. We have Caitlin Clark happening tonight. We have the Royal Rumble later on this January, including the divisional game the following weekend.

So there's a lot of content on Peacock. There's a little misconception this is a pay per view for \$6. The reality is you're getting a lot of value for \$6 beyond just Saturday night.

So we look at Saturday night, the audience that came in for that, and what has that audience experienced a month down the road? This is not a success-failure Sunday morning. It's down the road did people behave how we thought they would behave once they get inside the platform.

We're excited what it's going to mean for our business and a long-term strategy for Peacock.

**Q. If I could squeeze one more in for you, Rick, you guys experimented with changing the commercial structure for the last Peacock game. Is there anything else that's going to differentiate this from the production angle from Saturday night to Sunday night that might feel or look or sound different on Peacock?**

RICK CORDELLA: We're doing that again. We learned December 23rd the ins and outs from that commercial-free fourth quarter, whether to go back to studio more or stay on the field. We're finalizing plans, but there will be updates to that moving forward.

It was a great learning experience on December 23rd, and that setup of having NBC at 4:30 leading into a Peacock game is something that honestly Hans came up with the idea early on in our negotiations, and it really did work for us. We're going to see that happen again this Saturday.

**Q. One for Hans and one for Rick. Hans, how much will viewership determine whether you would continue going forward with a game to a streamer in the postseason?**

HANS SCHROEDER: Look, it's absolutely something we're going to look at. This isn't new for us. We've been on Peacock for several years now, and we're excited with the plan NBC came back and came to us all the way last spring. We're excited with the continued growth that we're seeing across our digital distribution, certainly with Thursday Night Football on Amazon, where their weekly viewership numbers are approaching the last year on television with Fox and NFL network.

So we're continuing to see strong growth across digital, and when you layer that with the plan NBC's put together for both the game a couple weeks ago in Pittsburgh as well as the game this weekend in Kansas City, how we're going to make sure all our fans, all our Peacock subscribers



know where to find the game, that's what we're focused on.

And leveraging the unique aspect of taking an NBC broadcast game that's going to be on in Houston at 4:30 with more than 20 million viewers to promote the later game, all those elements gave us the great confidence to take this next step.

As we get through it and we come out of it -- and Rick hit on this a second ago -- they've already knocked the cover off the ball in the production and the experience. You watch on those platforms, you don't miss a beat. It feels just like another great NFL game.

As we think about it, we're going to take a lot of learnings from it. Certainly viewership will be one of them. That will be just one of the criteria we think about and look at the opportunities we have going forward.

**Q. Rick, I know you've -- you guys have obviously handled major events before, particularly on Peacock. Is anything needed technology-wise, given the potential audience here, to make sure you're in position if somehow the numbers are even bigger than you expect?**

RICK CORDELLA: We have alternatives and contingency plans upon contingency plans. I don't want to go into specifics on that, but we certainly have them whenever you have an event of this scale ready to go.

To a certain degree, we're lucky to have the experience around these big events and have planned for in the past and have learned from these events. We feel the utmost confidence in the technology and feel we're going to deliver a great experience on Saturday night.

**Q. This question is for both Mike and Cris. You both saw the Lions on opening night. When you look at the team now versus where they were then, just kind of how they've grown and things like that, is there anything that's maybe surprised you about the way they've gotten over the course of the season to get to 12 wins?**

CRIS COLLINSWORTH: Yeah, I think their defensive play a little bit, it's different and better. I mean, they attack the run now. They really do. Now I think it sets them up a little bit on the back end and makes their life a little tougher and some big plays.

But you can't help but appreciate the process across the board with the Detroit Lions. They're attacking on offense. They're attacking on defense. They've gotten some of their star players back to get Alim McNeill back in the defensive

line. I think Josh Paschal has been playing really well and is a dynamic pass rusher now inside.

Alualu is another one that's come up big. To get C.J. Gardner-Johnson back now -- all of those guys are having an impact on this football team.

But I think from the beginning of Dan Campbell, we have seen this -- we are all in all the time. We're going for it all the time. When he in the Dallas game got the five-yard penalty and he was back to the 7, we're still going for the two-point conversion. You just can't ask for a more compelling approach to playing football than what Detroit does.

They've even incorporated in -- I was just telling Mike they've incorporated in some of the exotic Brian Flores kind of blitz packages that we saw with the Vikings, where they'll play three deep and two under and blitz everybody else, which means there's some huge openings in there, but you'd better get that ball off. With the way they can rush the passer, it's definitely something that is another enhancement, if you will, to the defensive side of the ball.

So are they all the way there yet? I think they would tell you probably not. But when you take where this football team was and I started watching them when Dan first took over -- and there was a stretch in there when we had two or three of their opponents. We didn't have Detroit because they weren't winning many games at the time.

I remember telling Mike and some of our guys that these guys aren't winning games, but they're kicking some butt out there. They're making -- they are physically beating up teams then losing the football game because they just aren't there from a skill standpoint yet, but keep your eye on this team. Sure enough, eventually being the more physical football team wins games, and I think that Dan Campbell and the Detroit Lions are proving that.

MIKE TIRICO: Cris isn't joking about that. He told me that when we did a game at the end of the '21 season up in Green Bay, Green Bay-Minnesota. We'd just seen crossover tape of the Lions, and Cris made that point crystal clear, and he was absolutely, as usual, right on.

I'll just take it from a little bit different perspective. The boards I use to prepare for the broadcast I do on computer, so when I opened up the file back to week 1, I went back through some of the notes I made for that game. One of them was so how are these rookies going to do?

There was a lot of criticism of some of the draft picks that Brad Holmes made because in the analytics world drafting an inside linebacker and drafting a running back to start

doesn't project out as your best spend for value picks at the top of the first, top of the second. I'm not saying that that's wrong. Historically that's the way the stats have proven it out.

However, I counted that with the Lions were drafting to win now, and they were drafting for the places where they needed to put people in. After the Hopkins deal, they needed a stud tight end, and they needed to change up the running backs decision, so they needed a complement to go with Montgomery. Jahmyr Gibbs has been fabulous. Sam LaPorta has been fabulous. They've been top five, six rookies in the league this year on the offensive side of the ball.

On the defensive side, Jack Campbell's role has continued to increase in his best game against Minnesota, the No. 2 tackler, and Brian Branch has been right up there with the impact guys who play that nickel slot position.

I look at the biggest questions at the beginning of the year, you're putting rookies in big spots, how are they going to do? It's the two ones and two twos who absolutely hit.

On this whole familiar with the other guy week for the Lions and the Rams, the person who came over to run the personnel and the GM Brad Holmes, he came from the Rams is the guy who deserves as much attention as anybody for the moves he's made along the way and then the draft this year that has been a five star draft for the Lions.

**Q. This is another question for Rick. Obviously it's been reported that NBC spent \$110 million on this game. Is there a new subscriber target that you guys are shooting for that you're willing to reveal?**

RICK CORDELLA: No new subscriber target we're willing to reveal. Those numbers will be kept internal.

**Q. Thanks for doing the call. Rick, a quick question for you. Obviously you guys know a thing or two about doing big games, but three big games on one weekend, from a logistical point of view, how have you guys had to adjust to make sure that all three of these games get that Sunday Night Football big tentpole treatment?**

RICK CORDELLA: You mean from like technology perspective? Or like production-wise? I'll answer both real fast.

From a technology perspective, the three games are not happening simultaneously, so the same team that's the A-level team will be on it from 3:00 in the afternoon all the

way through Sunday night. So that really isn't an issue there at all.

From a production standpoint, again, we're lucky to have a great group of different football teams. We have the Big Ten team, we have the group that worked on the Amazon Thursday night teams, and we have the Sunday Night Football team. So we have first class teams across the board on all three games this weekend.

**Q. Mike, I spoke with you during the conference call for the NFL kickoff, and I asked you if that was one of the most important games played in Lions history being the stage they were on, all the hype surrounding them, and going into the season. Now they're playing their first home playoff game, so I want to revisit that question again. Do you think that as of right now, with this being the first playoff game played in the city of Detroit since the championship era, is this one of the most important games they'll play in their history?**

MIKE TIRICO: It certainly is right up there. We can't be prisoners of the moment or of, in your case, youth, or in my case, being middle aged. They've played championship games before, so it's hard to trump that. But certainly from what you're talking about, in the modern times, the last 30 years, let's say, absolutely, because it's a playoff game.

Now, they've played playoff games, and I think one of the things that should be done this week is, as Detroit builds towards the weekend, is to remember the work Jim Caldwell did and Jim Schwartz. Jim Schwartz took an 0-16 team, and they played the playoffs. I was in the Superdome, and they took on Brees and the Saints. That was a tough team to beat. It was certainly a worthwhile performance and a build of a good opportunity for Detroit to take a step up.

Then in the Jim Caldwell era, they got to the playoffs twice, which people seem to forget, and I thought Jim did a very good job.

But given the fact that this team has really caught everyone's energy, the style of play matches the city and the blue collar work ethic of the city, the fact that there hasn't been a home playoff game in 30 years and a couple of days -- and you hit on the big point I think that people nationally may not understand as much.

The team was up in Pontiac in the northern suburbs, which is a wonderful area and they were supported very well, but this kind of is the next step in that comeback story that is Detroit that those of us who live there have experienced firsthand for the last 20-some-odd years.

To see that city host a playoff game is something fans have long waited for. Kids who have gone to college, are out of college, and are gainfully employed have never seen it in their lifetime.

So when you put all those pieces together, it's right up there with one of those milestone moments. But then you've got to win the game, right? You've got to win the game to keep the story going.

While all of this is wonderful buildup, it will all be kind of pushed aside depending on what happens on Sunday night. Maybe it's a next conversation of another playoff game down the line.

**Q. I have two quick questions for Cris, if I may. Number one, as somebody who played in the Freeze Bowl, as you mentioned, how challenging is it going to be for both the Dolphins and Chiefs to have any sort of passing game in these conditions? Number two, what kind of chance do you give the Dolphins at pulling out an upset win given all their injuries and the way they ended the season?**

CRIS COLLINSWORTH: It's going to be tough. I grew up in Florida, and that Freeze Bowl game was my rookie year. So it was the first time I had ever played in any game below like 32 degrees.

I had no idea what I was doing out there. Luckily we were playing the Chargers, and they had no idea what they were doing out there. But some of our guys, Kenny Anderson and Dan Ross and some of those guys had played many games in those kinds of conditions, so a lot of those players, they didn't all grow up in Florida, though. A lot of those players come and get drafted from all over the country.

But still with Pacheco running the football against what Miami is going to throw at them running the football. Hopefully Mostert's back with them again. That will be an interesting challenge. This Miami Dolphins team, it's really easy to put them in the speed category and go that's what they are, and they're going to throw it with Tua and Tyreek and Jaylen and those guys.

But at their core, this is a running football team. We have seen them be very explosive against good teams running the football and winning games running the football. So as strange as it sounds, there's an argument at least to be made that the burden may be on Patrick Mahomes to have to carry that load in those conditions because the Miami Dolphins, if they are who I think they are in these types of games, will be a running team.

**Q. Two questions for Mike and Cris. First of all, aside from, say, the 49ers and the Ravens, which teams do you expect could make a perhaps surprising push deep into the playoffs? And then second of all, during our call the Seahawks announced that Carroll is out as head coach. I was wondering if we could get your response on that.**

MIKE TIRICO: I'll be happy to jump in first on the first one. I have started to be a prisoner of the last thing we saw in person, but Buffalo certainly has that ability. I mean, they've been in so many big games over the years and have a defense that's playing at a very high level.

You start to talk about these playoff games get lower scoring, they get tight, it gets down to who can make a play and who's not going to blink, well, they've got the quarterback that answers a lot of those questions on a regular basis.

Now, it is not a surprise team because they're the No. 2 team. You took Baltimore and San Francisco and gave us the rest, and I would certainly point there top of mind.

On Pete Carroll, just a remarkable individual as a coach. The record, the players, all of that. What I admire about Pete Carroll is every time you walk in a room with him or you watch him at practice, you feel energized and younger, and that was true at USC, covering those teams, and that was true every time you visited Seattle, including our trip out there a month or so ago.

He'll go down as one of the great coaches because very few have been at his level in college, made the jump to the pros and been at that level as well. Championship coach, a guy who stayed young of mind, young of heart, young of body.

I did read, as this was going on, that he's going to stay in the organization in some role. If that's the case, good for Pete. Nobody deserves to enjoy a last chapter like he does. I know I'm professionally sad that we're not going to cover his teams, but also appreciative that the time spent around him, I feel, made me a better person.

CRIS COLLINSWORTH: Yeah, that's a stunner. I did not know that news, to be honest with you. I just had not heard that.

I'll answer your first question first. I think for me the two teams that could surprise, one's the Green Bay Packers. It's a very young team. They have absolutely nothing to lose. They have explosive playmakers that are all babies. They're all in their first or second year, including a quarterback who seems to be getting hot at the right time



and under tremendous pressure having to follow up with two Hall of Famers and two legends, has quietly put together a really intriguing resume going forward.

And the Rams. How do you not look at the Rams? What is it now, 7 out of 8, and the only game they lost was an overtime loss to what is universally considered the best team going into these playoffs, the Baltimore Ravens, and that was in Baltimore, if I remember correctly.

So those are two teams to keep your eyes on for sure going forward here.

I'm a little befuddled by the Pete Carroll news. I wasn't even really considering that one. But I'm going to echo what Mike said. If you do what he's been doing as long as he's been doing it and you do what I've been doing for as long as I've been doing it, there are some tough moments that come between the two of you, and it's my job to give an honest assessment of what he does, and then he's not afraid to give me an honest assessment of what I do afterwards.

But we've been able to maintain a rock solid relationship because of the honesty. I don't know that I've met anybody in the history of the National Football League with more of a genuine enthusiasm for the game itself. Maybe John Madden would be on par with that. But he is an asset.

He is somebody that belongs in the Hall of Fame for what he's accomplished. But more than that, as a human being and as a person, it makes you proud to say, yeah, I'm associated with people like that.

So congratulations to Pete on an incredible career.

GREG HUGHES: Thank you, everybody, for joining us today. Thanks, Cris, Mike, Hans. Mike, I'll see you in Kansas City.

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