

Seattle Seahawks Media Conference

Monday, January 12, 2026

Seattle, Washington, USA

Coach Mike Macdonald

Weekday Press Conference



MIKE MACDONALD: Good to see everybody. How we doing?

Q. We know there is an advantage when you have familiarity with an opponent; what's the challenge of facing the same team back-to-back games?

MIKE MACDONALD: I think it's what you make it. In classic Seahawk fashion maybe we probably overthink some things. Try not to, you know. But I think it's like maybe an accelerated time frame than you normally would from another divisional game that you play twice with not quite enough sample in between to see where they're going.

So you're really going off how you felt like you played the game, things you did well, maybe where you think they might take things. That's probably about it.

Q. What was the weekend like? Did you get together as coaches to watch the games?

MIKE MACDONALD: Couple of us, yeah, one-off type things to watch them just to hang out. It wasn't anything like super organized. I told the team today, it's weird watching like full games all the way through. You find yourself rooting for teams and you're like, why am I rooting for this team? It's the dumbest thing ever. And then five minutes later you're rooting for the other team.

So I'm glad it's over. I'm glad we're back to regular scheduled programming here.

Q. Given what you've experienced throughout the year playing Rams and 49ers, it's any surprise that three of the last eight teams standing come from the NFC West?

MIKE MACDONALD: No. That's a great point. We got a great division. All three of us have earned to be in this position, so I think it's pretty cool actually.

Q. Regardless of the result, is it a natural inclination that if you play a team this quick you're going to change for the sake of changing?

MIKE MACDONALD: I wouldn't say we're going to change for the sake of changing.

Q. Is that general, that it's not going to look the same schematically or...

MIKE MACDONALD: Yeah, there are things in the game plan that we didn't get to. I'm sure there are things in their game plan they didn't get to. To use the whole game declaring itself type thing, you don't know how these games are going to go.

So this game is going to play out about a 99.999 percent chance it's going to play out way different than the last one, and you got to do a great job recognizing is and making the adjustments and doing all that type of stuff.

Q. You guys obviously played really well on defense last time. Both games against 49ers you guys scored 13 points. What do you have to do to up the point total?

MIKE MACDONALD: I think the games against the 49ers really all three phases, like the things that determine games it's kind of magnified in these games. Situational football; how you take care of the ball; how you finish in the red zone; third down is a big time; two minute. That's a cliché answer, but really the teams that have kind of won those situations I felt like has really had the nod in terms of outcome of the game.

So but like I told -- again, I told the team today, these are the things we been working on for all of our opponents, so really nothing changes in terms of our process and the things we're trying to do.

Q. You kind of went through in this '22 with the Ravens; is that right?

MIKE MACDONALD: Yeah, yeah. We played the Bengals. It was a little different because the week -- whatever the last week number was wasn't really much at stake in that game.



I think both teams were in the playoffs at that point and I think the seedings, bunch of stuff had to happen for the seedings to not be the same going into the next week.

Yeah, played them back to back.

Q. You mentioned you talked to some other coaches that had experience with bye weeks to get advice. Curious who is on this call list? Is Mike Holmgren someone you ever check in with?

MIKE MACDONALD: Yeah, I'll kind of leave those guys anonymous I guess because just to respect their positions, but people that have done it at a really high level. Kind of the same spirit of understanding what's out there, understanding what the options are, and then ultimately we made a decision that we felt like was best for us.

And Coach Holmgren and I talk regularly. Maybe not regularly, but often. He's been a great resource. But he's been very, very supportive throughout the whole thing. It's kind of a pinch-yourself type thing that you got a relationship with Mike Holmgren. It's pretty cool.

Q. We didn't talk to you at the end of last week. How do you feel like practice went, and what were you hoping to accomplish with those two practices?

MIKE MACDONALD: Really just wanted us to go out and play great football, and so we had different periods that meant different things and all that. I was just really happy with our guys' intent throughout those two days. We got our play speeds up and got some good competitive work. That's about it.

When I was in Baltimore we practiced for four days; almost did a simulated week. There are different ways to do it. I just felt like that was best for us. Then the guys can go get fresh and be ready to go today.

Q. How did Elijah Arroyo look?

MIKE MACDONALD: Elijah is looking good. He's a possibility about coming back for this game.

Q. When you look at the actual schedule it feels like you've got a lot of experience on that short week, condensing your schedule. Does that come into play? I realize you're coming off the bye, but will you squeeze those days together?

MIKE MACDONALD: Yeah, the way we're treating it is just like tomorrow is -- I'm going to be talking about this all week. Today to me is a Tuesday. I don't know what day it is, but to me it's Tuesday because tomorrow is Wednesday

and the game is Sunday. That's how we treat it. It's really not a shortened schedule for us. It's a full week's worth of work for us.

Q. We've been asking about your run defense all year. What can you say about the guys up front in particular over the course of 17 games to do what they did, and then just how that opens up everything behind it?

MIKE MACDONALD: Yeah, well, the guys up front have been playing tremendous football, and to play the way we play you can't go one for one all the time. You have to take care of your responsibility and then get to the ball.

That creates where you can actually cover all gaps and things like that. So they've done that. I will say it's really the team defense that makes it come to life. How we play at the second level; how we kind of fit runs at the third level I thought has been tremendous as well.

So we wouldn't be here if it wasn't for how our D-line has played; it's also we wouldn't be here if the whole team didn't play that way on defense in terms of stopping the run.

Q. With Klint having interviews for head coaching jobs over the weekend, how does that work logistically?

MIKE MACDONALD: Well, there is stuff that you need to do -- it's not a work intensive week coaching-wise because you're really trying to get ahead. We did a lot of work on the Packers and that didn't get us anywhere. So that's what we were working out the beginning of the last week, some self-scout stuff, and it worked out well that they had the two days off and they could kind of shift their focus. Once it's over, then that's over and we're able to move forward.

So really fortunate we had the bye. The teams that are going into to this week with interviews, I think that's significantly tougher that you have to kind of shift your brain in the latter part of week and then still be in tune with what you're doing game plan-wise.

Q. Back to the run defense and the 12 is one, like everyone doing their 1.09, where did that come from? Is that something you came up with? Something you brought with you?

MIKE MACDONALD: I mean, that was my idea. I mean, like it really felt like we toss around the term 14 or 15 guys, but, you know, the 12, the number 12 is a sacred number around here and it felt like that was a great fit.

And then just try to paint a picture with the guys as nerdy



as possible. That's where the 1.09 came from and guys liked it, so we stuck with it.

Q. Staying with the run defense, Ernest Jones just as you say, ball finds him. His energy and also his instinct, can you talk to that?

MIKE MACDONALD: Ernest?

Q. Yeah, Ernest Jones.

MIKE MACDONALD: Yeah. He has a great feel for the pace of the play and the runs, so he's never really out of whack. He can stay square. He's got so much power where like when he does make contact ball carriers go backward. That's way easier said than done, to really man the middle of a defense. Especially as much split safety as we play, that's a tall task, but he's nailed it and he's been great.

Q. Five interception and 100 tackles.

MIKE MACDONALD: Yeah.

Q. He's got to be an asset.

MIKE MACDONALD: Well, he's made some tremendous plays to create interception. Some of them have been tips. That's a ball-finds-energy type thing.

So to me it's like I'm psyched he has five picks, but more excited about what he does every day to get ready to play and how he plays every play being in position to let our defenses be productive on that play.

And then if everybody else is doing what we're supposed to be doing, that's when the ball comes to life and when it finds you.

Q. What stood out to you about watching the 49ers yesterday?

MIKE MACDONALD: I think just watching it live, it was just an incredibly resilient win. I mean, the team has a lot of the character. They're really tough. You know, but really it's nothing new with these guys. It's what you know.

But it's a heck of a win. Tough place to go and play and get a win.

Q. What's your philosophy on striking the balance between taking advantage of the rest of the bye week and staying sharp and not losing the edge?

MIKE MACDONALD: Yeah, that's kind of the million dollar

question, right? How much do you do? How much do you rest? I thought we felt like we tried to keep it on cadence as much as possible in terms of what their body rhythm would be, and then just trust the guys that they were still going to take care of their bodies and get the proper amount of rest over those three days.

You know, we've had some longer weeks throughout the year where we have been pretty work intensive, and I felt like it was just kind of like mentally draining for us. I think we proved to ourselves we can -- in a week's time we can put together a great plan and get ready to play a game, so we wanted to keep that cadence as close as possible.

Q. Mike, you saw a number of players across the league go down this weekend. When you look at the fact you guys didn't have to play, how beneficial is that when you see Kittle, Ekwonu, different pieces go down?

MIKE MACDONALD: Yeah, the injury thing is really just stinks. There is no other way to put it. You feel for those guys. I look at it through the terms of like we won a wildcard game, you know, by what we earned in the regular season.

That's what gets you excited that we've -- the position we put ourselves in. But now we're on level footing with everybody else. We got to go play.

Q. A few weeks ago you were asked about Sam's throw to Kupp in overtime. You had said that if you just tell him not to turn the ball over he doesn't make throws like that. I feel like you made similar sentiments, mostly about young guys, coaching them not to just go out there and make mistakes.

MIKE MACDONALD: Right.

Q. Is that something you developed over time, kind of philosophy of coaching guys...

MIKE MACDONALD: Yeah, I think that really came -- became really clear this offseason as we were really honing in on what we wanted our team to be like and how do we message it.

What does everything mean? Like what is it like to -- what does it mean to go practice every day as a Seahawk? What do you want that to look like? You have to answer those questions.

If I'm Joe the Rookie, I want to know what the team expects of me on a daily basis. So I think that really helped. And applies now. Yeah, we're in the playoffs, but

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

you can't be saying like plays matter more. I'm not going to play that way.

Plays matter the same. It's still a football game at the end of the day and we want our guys to play the same way that they played all year and then go trust the result.

Q. Specifically with Sam and how often he touches the ball every snap, have you seen that being beneficial for him, telling him to go rip it as opposed to not mess up, if that makes sense?

MIKE MACDONALD: Yeah, I mean, that's why we coach him that way, is because he does have the ball all the time and that's where the style is going to come to life. That's when Sam is at his best too. I think any quarterback for that matter, but especially Sam. He's played great football when he's played like that, so that's why we coach him that way.

Q. You had coached against Devon Witherspoon and seen him a lot before you became coach. Did you have an impression of him then, and has anything changed coaching him the last several years being around him every single day?

MIKE MACDONALD: Well, I would say the biggest experience I had with him was when he came can on a visit during the draft process and the energy stood out, like the excitement. Sometimes it's hard to tell if it's, hey, is this a thing that like you're just doing or, is this a thing-thing that this is who you are?

And so in the visit in the time you had him, yeah, of course you're excited. You see the player on tape in college. I didn't have a lot of exposure to him throughout the year because you're not really watching other team's defenses.

So that's what -- you know, getting to know who he is as a person and that's just him all the time, his passion for the game, passion for his teammates, the team, the process, he's eager to learn, grow, he wants to be great. All those things are 100% true, which is what makes him so special.

Q. He's getting some awards. He obviously missed five or six games. What does that say about his impact?

MIKE MACDONALD: Yeah, I haven't thought of it through that lens of the time he's missed. Shoutout to the people making the votes. As many times as you're upset about guys that probably earned their recognition, I think they nailed it here and 'Spoon about what type of player he is.

It's an every-down thing that you have to account for this

guy. It's on record how we feel about him. Glad people notice it.

Q. The Tush Push, you guys are 9-10. I think you got four first downs with the hard count. What have you thought of just how effective that plays been for you guys this year?

MIKE MACDONALD: It's been great. It's going to be something we're going to need probably in this game and moving forward. We got to stay sharp with it and keep doing the things we're doing. I'm sure there are some wrinkles off it that we build off as well.

But it's an important part of our short yardage package.

Q. Evolved at all from the yard is a yard?

MIKE MACDONALD: I mean, do you really want me to answer that right now? (Smiling.)

Q. How has that play evolved? The hard count is one way, but how is that play different than may be when you first installed it?

MIKE MACDONALD: I mean, the play has been around for a minute. You can look around the league and you understand what teams do. If you're going to pack everybody in tight, you know, you have the option to go around. There are things you build off. It doesn't have to be a sneak the whole time.

Q. The talk about how the game is still a football game. The things around the football games do change as the playoffs go on. You bring other people in, players, other folks to talk to the team about the distractions outside?

MIKE MACDONALD: I think we talked about it today, but the distractions really are leading up to the game in my opinion, and so our focus is about all the things we can do throughout the week to keep our process the same as it's been the whole year.

From a young player, just having a plan, understanding how I want to attack the week, and making sure I'm doing the things I can control every day so that we can go play football when the ball is kicked off. It's really that simple.

These are the things we've talked about throughout the season, is at some point in our program we're going to under up in a place we want to be and it's going to be a first for us. Why would you make it any different than what got you to this point?

Q. A lot of teams were very aggressive on fourth down throughout the playoffs this weekend. You guys, for variety of reasons, ended up last in the NFL on fourth down attempts. Curious your perspective on fourth downs, how that's evolved, and what you thought about some of those decisions?

MIKE MACDONALD: What's the decision you can make in independent time that's going to give you the best chance to win the game? That's how we look at it. We have a model and a plan going into games, and then every time there is a decision to be made, then we make that decision.

But it's not like we're just -- like we don't go for fourth downs. It's just we're not in the situation where we feel like it's worth it in some of those situations.

Q. You going bring anybody else back off injured reserve this week, George or anybody?

MIKE MACDONALD: There are some guys that are eligible to do that, yeah, that are possibilities. Everybody but the guys we said are out for the remainder of the season.

Q. And Jax getting first team all pro. You're thoughts on that?

MIKE MACDONALD: Yeah, it's great. Again, same thinking with 'Spoon. I mean, the stats back it up. The tape backs it up this year with Jax. He earned it. Really happy for him. I'm sure if you asked him right now he'd say he's excited but we got work to do and we can celebrate it later.

Q. With the Tush Push, the teams that run that play, generally do they all block it the same up front?

MIKE MACDONALD: There is not much variation in the front, but aiming points and things like that, it changes on some of the teams on what they're shooting for, yeah.

Q. On Sam, what's the idea -- I believe Sam has been in on all those plays. What's the idea behind keeping him in there?

MIKE MACDONALD: Well, we could use him. (Smiling.)

Q. Okay.

MIKE MACDONALD: Yeah. I mean we don't have to be in that formation either. It's a personnel group we use all the time. We run other plays out of that personnel group, too.

Q. How is Coby Bryant progressing?

MIKE MACDONALD: All the guys except for the two are eligible to come back this week and should be practicing.

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