

Seattle Seahawks Media Conference

Wednesday, January 14, 2026

Seattle, Washington, USA

Coach Mike Macdonald

Weekday Press Conference



MIKE MACDONALD: Good to see everybody. Thursday for us, Wednesday for you. Off we go.

Q. Mike, I'm curious, how much of a difference does it make for the personnel that's on offense versus where they line up? Like if you have a receiver in the backfield versus different personnel packages.

MIKE MACDONALD: Yeah, it's week to week, who you're playing, what defense you're in. It kind of depends what world are you in on defense, and then how do you account for who's out there. If you're in some sort of man idea, normally you're trying to find your guy. If you're not, normally you're going off some sort of a count, and how you account for those things, and San Francisco does a great job with putting guys in weird spots and making sure you understand where everybody is.

Q. The last two games here, 3rd down conversion, we've talked about the 3rd and longs, but 3rd down overall has been over 45 percent. What have you seen either in communication, personnel, execution in those situations?

MIKE MACDONALD: I think it's just one of those examples of us just staying the course and just chiseling away at it. Really everybody playing good football. That's what we've gotten.

The challenge is keep it rolling and understanding what the next iteration is of what we're trying to achieve and how they're trying to attack us, and off we go. Today we'll be doing some 3rd down stuff out there, and excited to see how it looks.

Q. You've talked about kind of the progression of defense from week 1 until now. Offense was talking about how they've progressed. At what point could you truly start playing that complementary style of football that you envisioned on both sides?

MIKE MACDONALD: Well, I felt like we were on our way

as soon as training camp, OTAs. I felt like we were forging an identity in really all three phases, and when you're doing it against another team, that's kind of a reassuring sign. Then just what you see every day. It's not like we got to week 4 and we're like, oh, shoot, now we're going to be a complementary team. No, I think it's something that we've been seeing signs of really since the beginning of the season or beginning of the spring.

Q. When you're playing a team, like an offense that does such a good job of setting guys up for yards after the catch and the pass catchers do that so well, are the teaching points about tackling any different than they are in any other week?

MIKE MACDONALD: Well, I'd say it's kind of like a principles method, saying like the principles are the same. They're probably the best run-after-catch team in the league. I don't know how the stats back that up, but it feels like perennially that's the case with this offense. So it's just a really big emphasis on making sure that we're having multiple people breaking when the ball has declared. So trying to eliminate as many one-on-one tackles as possible. It goes back to eliminating space, so all those principles are at play with these guys.

Q. Seems like you did a pretty good job of that in the week 18 game.

MIKE MACDONALD: The guys did a great job. They really did. There's some plays where guys were in tough spots, but guys were playing with great effort, and when you do that, you can take some of those more aggressive angles to eliminate some of that space, and the guys did a great job of that.

Q. When you have a coach that wants hats to the ball and pursuit to the ball, every coach in the history of football says that. Why are these guys doing maybe more than other teams?

MIKE MACDONALD: I think it's probably a byproduct of their connectedness and the process that they've bought in on. It's team football. It's really what it is at the end of the day. If they decide they want to play that way, then that's the standard, and it's something you're chasing every day. It's nice when it's not just AD or me or CP just run to the ball. No, it's a team thing that we're trying to achieve every



day, and they understand the power of that, too, and the synergy behind it.

Q. Do you count hats on the film and stop the film and say, here's nine, here's ten?

MIKE MACDONALD: No, we're looking for like a feeling. Yeah, not every play is the same. I think it's unrealistic to say that you need X amount of people to the ball. It's really the feeling of like -- that we're there.

Q. When you have a nickel, corner, who is as big or bigger than some of the linebackers out there, what makes a nickel versus a linebacker? How do the responsibilities differ?

MIKE MACDONALD: Some of the things you're going to ask Nick to do than you'd ask a linebacker to do. But in terms of how you manage your roster, really he's playing a linebacker position. We're really kind of turning into like a 4-3 base team with a crazy athletic Sam is what we are. When we go to dime, we're really a nickel 4-3 team.

I think the cool thing that our front allows us to do, what Nick allows us to do is we get some front variety that normally you wouldn't get out of a true four-down team, and I think that's been pretty cool what we've been able to create.

Q. When you have two of maybe the best nickel defenders in football on the same defense, what kind of freedom does that give you as a play caller?

MIKE MACDONALD: I actually think we've been freed up more with Spoon's development at corner, where he felt like he can -- I know he doesn't have a lot of stats at corner, but he's playing great football out there, so you don't feel like his competitive advantage of where he's playing is that different. That's probably the first thing.

But it's two great players, man. Two great players in the slot. Like on 1st down, obviously you want Nick in there for run fits and things like that, and Spoon is great at that spot. But he's also great on the outside.

Q. This is the first time in five, six years that 12s have been able to see a playoff game at that stadium. How exciting is it to give that to them, and how exciting is it to think about what that atmosphere is going to be like?

MIKE MACDONALD: Yeah, it's one of those things that I think we're proud of it. We're proud of being able to deliver this to the 12s and to our city. We're excited about it. But it also is like in the future, so like right now it's on our

minds, but really we're focusing on doing the proper preparation so we're ready to go.

But it's great, man. It's awesome. It's not like one of your absolute goals throughout the year. Like having a home playoff game doesn't guarantee a championship or all those things you're really shooting for, but it really is part of the things that we do want to achieve or deliver to our fans is having these home playoff experiences, and it's part of the overall bigger vision of what we're trying to create. You're definitely proud of that.

We expect to do it a lot, hopefully.

Q. Is there anything particularly challenging about seeing a team for a third time, and then also about seeing them in back-to-back weeks?

MIKE MACDONALD: Well, I think the timetable probably drives that answer a little bit. Having played these guys the first week, having such a big break on the bookends of the season, you're really looking at it through the lens of how much can you discount some of the -- we've changed a lot since the first week. So have they. Probably more of the back to back thing. That just doesn't happen that often.

But don't make it more than it is. It was the last game. This is another game. Trying to keep our process the same.

Q. How have Charles and Coby looked to you since getting back out on the field?

MIKE MACDONALD: Yeah, there's a process to them getting back and getting in full swing, and they're doing the best they can. They're practicing in some capacity. We'll work through it the rest of the week, but the guys are doing a good job.

Q. Talking about that process, this is your first time doing this as a head coach. What, if anything, feels different about this week, knowing what's ahead of you?

MIKE MACDONALD: Yeah, this is -- how do I put this? This is the message, right? A, it's the playoffs, but this is week 19. This is week 19. This is the 19th week of the season for us. I think that's right. Week 19 and it's Thursday. I'm thinking about how we're going to play the red zone today and some of the early-down stuff we've got to fix from yesterday and how 3rd down game plan looks in all phases. That's what I expect our team to be thinking about is what can we accomplish right now within our power to get ready for our week 19 game.

Again, you start making it bigger and you start including all the other stuff out there, that takes you away from how we want to play and how we want to operate. That's how we approach it.

Q. Coaches who really know the Xs and Os but maybe are struggling to figure out how to teach that to their players and really convey their scheme and their idea, their vision, what advice would you give coaches coming up in that way?

MIKE MACDONALD: Need reps. You've got to put yourself out there. There's a lot of meetings in my past where it was not very good coaching. I still have meetings now where you leave the meeting and you're like, shoot, I wasn't good enough, I could have taught that better. Just keep attacking it and don't be afraid to fail, and then just come back at it.

It's like that chasing edges attitude. Just keep trying to make those incremental gains to make it better.

But ultimately, the satisfaction -- what makes coaching so great is you get to see other people do things they weren't able to do prior. That's the reward. It's not how much you know, it's how much you can get your guys to do.

Q. We've asked you a few times this year about kind of the path Riq's season has taken from week 1 to the way he's playing now. What do you learn about a player, the way they handle that adversity in season and kind of respond to it?

MIKE MACDONALD: I think this is -- I think those are kind of expectations you have for your guys. That's how we want to handle those situations. Sometimes it comes different ways and guys have different ways of reacting to it. But that's kind of the types of guys we want around here, and Reek is one of those guys. He's done a great job.

Q. Is there a danger of overthinking, and I don't mean because it's a playoff game, but because of the different looks that the Niners could give you on offense or where they're lining up on defense, with your players in particular?

MIKE MACDONALD: Well, for me, yeah. But that's every week. I'm overthinking everything. Right now I'm thinking about your question but I'm thinking of other stuff, too. I'm an overthinker. That's going to happen. It's also kind of like our job as coaches to make sure we're thorough.

But with our players, again, is there a danger of guys overthinking things in a game plan? Yeah, that could

happen. But that's part of one of the reasons why we build our game plans the way we do. We want them really clear. We want them simple. Make them as simple as possible but no simpler, and let's go rock and roll. If we're sensing indecision throughout the week, then probably not going to call that play. It's probably going to be out.

Q. You joke about being an overthinker, but have you had any experiences where an observation you've had the day of the game, the night before the game has actually been helpful --

MIKE MACDONALD: That's funny. I see Leo back there. We've installed stuff on Saturday night, Sunday morning, halftime, sideline. Yeah, it happens all the time.

Q. Is DeMarcus Lawrence okay?

MIKE MACDONALD: Yeah, yeah. The achilles is something that he's had. It's kind of not a new thing. It's just something we're managing.

Q. You're not worried about not having him Saturday?

MIKE MACDONALD: No.

Q. Ricky Pearsall didn't play the last game for them. How different do they look with him in there? What kind of skill does he bring to the game if he's out there?

MIKE MACDONALD: Well, they have a lot of talented receivers, but he's definitely one of them. He definitely complements the rest of the guys well in terms of what he does in his skill set and how they use him. But the other guys playing for him, as well, are really good players you have to account for. It's like, he's a great player, but it's not like it's worst offense when he's not out there.

Q. Going back to the red zone defense, what are some of those intangibles in terms of alignment, physicality, communication and feel?

MIKE MACDONALD: You're talking about red zone?

Q. Yeah, red zone defense.

MIKE MACDONALD: It starts with a mentality. There's never been a drive on defense that ends up in the red zone and you're happy about why it got there, so it's a mentality of hey, look, the drive is not over, we're defending a blade of grass and we've got to reset and go to the next play. Field shrinks so you've got to eliminate run game, pass game changes. It's really just understanding situations, what the formations are telling you, what the tendencies

are telling you, and going and playing ball. But it starts with a mentality that the drives is not over. We've got to go play football.

Q. You mentioned feel a couple times. Do you teach that?

MIKE MACDONALD: Feel?

Q. Yeah, talking about the feel of play or the feel of players at the point of attack. How do you teach that?

MIKE MACDONALD: I think what we're trying to achieve is how we play football as a team, and when you see it enough, it kind of feels -- you know what it feels like when you're watching it. It's something as simple as we just had a great walk-through. I felt like we had a great walk-through. I haven't watched it yet, but I feel like it was a great walk-through because of the intent and the communication and guys were losing focus and it was kind of right on the sweet spot of what we're shooting for in terms of what a walk-through wants to look like. We have a vision of how we want our red zone defense to look like, and when we're hitting that mark, that's when you feel that.

Q. Back to Witherspoon, Julian Love says he's probably your favorite player. Witherspoon is probably your favorite player. What is it about him that makes it so attractive for a coach --

MIKE MACDONALD: You're talking about Spoon? I could go on for a long time. But it starts with his passion for the game and the process. I think he's got a -- I think he loves his teammates, he loves his team, so there's not -- there's a selflessness behind what he does, as well. He's an incredible competitor, and that comes out with the standard of what he expects from himself and the rest of the team. I mean, he's a big, great, fun-loving personality, but at the end of the day, he expects us to play great football, and his actions back that up.

That's contagious in how he plays. You can't turn our tape on and watch 21 play and have any inkling or any idea that it's not okay to play with your hair on fire at 1,000 miles an hour every play. And he's incredibly smart, too. He gets it. He sees things. He's reactive. He's inquisitive. He cares about it. He wants to learn. Sounds like a guy you want to coach.

Q. Was it an intended consequence when you put Emmanwori in the roles that you have that Witherspoon would go back outside and be more of a corner, or has that kind of evolved?

MIKE MACDONALD: Yeah, we wanted -- our vision for

Nick on early downs was to play nickel, and the byproduct of that was Spoon going outside, and by doing that he's going to get a lot of reps outside, probably threefold more than he got last year, and I think his play reflects that.

But it's the same attitude, that he's just going to keep chipping away at it until he becomes great at that skill set, and I think that's what he's done.

Q. You said he's grown in terms of the outside stuff. What are some specifics you've seen there?

MIKE MACDONALD: Just technique, your day-to-day, what it takes to play outside corner. Yeah, I wasn't really thinking anything specifically.

Q. You used the phrase "losing focus." That's one we hear from you and from players a lot. For you as a head coach, where is finding the balance there of hey, we've got to be serious and get the football stuff done versus letting them have fun with it, too?

MIKE MACDONALD: Yeah, we've got to be us. Think about how would you want your experience to be at work. Do you want to walk around all rigid, afraid that you're going to get yelled at because you're not walking in the right direction or you said the wrong thing? Don't you want -- hey, I meant the right -- my intent is right. So work with me. That's what we expect from our players and our coaches for that matter. Then let's enjoy each other's -- let's get after it.

You're not, like, hunting for fun. You're hunting for the process and the feeling of what you do, and then the byproduct of that is fun. It is fun now to go to work every day because of how we operate. It wasn't initially fun last May, you know. But now it is.

DraftScripts by ASAP Sports

