

PATRIOTS HEAD COACH

MIKE VRABEL

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Q. I'm curious, what have you seen from Drake this week in terms of preparation and just his ability to maybe stay even-keeled given the higher media attention and the bigger stage?

MV: I think we try to make it as normal as we possibly can, knowing that it's not going to be. And we try to stay on the same routine and try to keep the meeting times the same, the treatment times.

And I think that these guys were able to work on Monday, have yesterday off. There was a lot of activity around the hotel, the meeting rooms, and guys are getting together and watching tape. I think that's what everybody has to do to make sure that they're ready.

And I think the next 48 hours will be critical for us, as we kind of get back into our normal routine here of a Wednesday and Thursday, and then the families come in and things just start to ramp up.

Q. We see teams every year spend big in free agency and a lot of times it doesn't work. You guys have a lot of success with what you did in free agency this year. Was there something about your approach that you think going into it as an organization that led to that success?

MV: I think you just have to be very intentional with the people that you're bringing in. I think sometimes free agency, you have to be able to use it. People use it in different ways. It's a part of our business.

It's another way to acquire players and player acquisition. Understand that you have to be convicted on the person that you're bringing in as a player and also the impact that they're going to make in the locker room and around the building and in the community.

So I appreciate what everybody did and their efforts, and Eliot and Ryan and Stretch, I appreciate what they do to help us steer us in the right direction as it relates to the players that we're going to try to acquire.

Q. You guys ended up drafting three rookies this year that made significant contributions on special teams.

Can you speak to the contributions of those guys throughout the season?

MV: Well, we did have some significant changes in that department, and when it relates to Andy and Julian, being able to come into this league and handle that.

Again, it's never going to be perfect. Kickers, every kick isn't going to be made, but when we've needed Andy and he's really settled in, Julian's been consistent. And Bryce has been, you know, our punter has been pretty much the veteran of the group that's kind of handled those guys.

So we've made big kicks when we've had to going to Miami and Buffalo and on and on through the playoffs. So those will be critical that if this game comes down to a field goal, I'm confident those guys will execute.

Q. You mentioned the word "critical" these next three days. You mentioned this last three days you were going to install things. What's the process like for you in getting these next three days and getting the most important things done?

MV: We felt we just needed to make sure they were engaged and that there wasn't stuff that was just repetitive, and they were sitting there looking at us, like, we already covered this, we went through this.

Want to make sure now that they're stimulated, they're engaged, locked in, moving forward here, first, second and third and red zone and situations. That's why the next 48 hours, I think, will be really important.

Q. I'm curious, why do you think the Seahawks are so effective defending the run with sometimes just four down linemen?

MV: Again, they play with great technique, they play with great effort. They're talented. Different skill sets. May look at Murphy and he has one skill set. You look at Leonard Williams, different skill set. Both play square. They play with their hands.

The edge guys set sometimes vertical edges, sometimes they mix in some movement. They don't get moved off the line of scrimmage. If you don't move the line of



scrimmage, it's going to be hard to run the football.

Q. There's perception and reality when it comes to the Super Bowl and the experience. With a lot of these young guys, when you reflect back on your first time, what is something that you wish you knew that first time around that you learned after all of those visits to the Super Bowl that you've passed on to this team?

MV: You know, I didn't really -- again, every game is different, and don't anticipate how it's going to go. Whether it comes down to the end of the game situation or a kick or a two-minute drill. Try not to predict what those are going to be.

Make sure that each and every situation is covered and understand that each of them is critical, whether that's a short-yardage early in the first quarter, or that's a red-zone stop late in the game to give our team a chance to win.

So, just understanding, having watched all these Super Bowls in the last few years and the ones I've been a part of, try not hard to predict how it's going to go and you will have to see how the game is unfolding. But understand each situation that we're going to be asked to execute, we've been through since April.

Q. You didn't have any overtime games this year. Coming into this year, did you and your staff have any general viewpoint on offense versus defense first? And did that attitude, that philosophy change at all when you saw the overtime games unfold in the regular season and in the playoffs?

MV: We have conversations, and we'll continue to talk about it. Whatever the philosophy ends up being, the players have been explained what that is or what that will be and how we'll try to attack it.

A lot of this depends on their kickoff return, where the ball goes on touchbacks, how good the field goal kickers are. There's just a lot that goes into it.

They'll understand that the overtime rules is just like starting a new game. It's not sudden death. Both teams will get an opportunity to possess the ball. We'll get to the end of the first quarter. And if there's 30 seconds, it's not the end of the game; we're just going to flip it over and go to the second quarter.

We've explained all that. And we'll just have to be ready if this game goes to overtime.

Q. We talked a lot about how you support Rhamondre through the passing of his father in the spring. What

do you remember about your specific conversations with Tony Dews when he went out to Vegas, and what was the best course of action then?

MV: I think there's things that come up that you're not really prepared for, and to have Rhamondre have something that traumatic happen to him and his family and him not know us as people was hard. And to try to support somebody that -- he doesn't know where we're coming from; he doesn't know Mike Vrabel; he doesn't know Tony Dews -- other than taking some faith that we're looking out for him as a person and we're looking out for him and his family and what's best and how they handle it, and try to do everything that we could to get him in a place that he could come and do his job and perform and glorify his dad.

He's done that every single day. I'm proud of him. I can't imagine how that felt and what that still feels like.

And we're lucky to have people like Tony Dews who care deeply about not only his position but everybody on this football team and coaches and staff. And Tony -- he would have gone the second that I told him. It was just, like, give him a little bit of time. Let's just wait. And finally it worked out for Tony to go out there and be with Rhamondre and his family. Obviously very appreciative of Tony.

Q. You talked about Terrell yesterday and him being here. I'm curious if you could maybe describe what impact he was able to have on the team even through battling his cancer, and how Zak's maybe stepped up as a unique situation as the player caller?

MV: We've always talked about the impact the team makes on not only the defense but throughout the football team, his ability to connect and reach with every single player at every single position, young players, veteran players. That's a skill. That's something that I can't necessarily teach or instruct them on. Kind of just that's something that comes very naturally to Terrell.

So I would say his humility through all this has been something that I've really appreciated. Never wanted to be a distraction -- even if I told him a million times that he wasn't. And even if the players told him that he wasn't, his humility was always about the team. He just kept saying, I don't want to mess anything up, I don't want people worrying about me. So I've always appreciated that. And I'm glad that he's here with us.

Zak has been fantastic. I think that, much like players when given opportunities, coaches sometimes have the same thing. When they get more opportunity, they take advantage of it, and then turn that into something else.

Q. Will shared a story with us yesterday about one of the early times that you guys met in Baton Rouge. He said he took you to barbecue for a 4-hour meal. What do you remember about that meal, and what kind of growth have you seen from him in this rookie season?

MV: Well, I think Will is a great teammate. I think, again, each and every day he's grown, he's improved as a person, as a player, as a teammate. He's comfortable in his own skin. He's around a lot.

The meal was excellent. A lot of those local establishments take care of the boys down there in Baton Rouge. It was a big spread, a great meal, and I hope to go back there and hang out.

We had a good time. I've said this before, Will wanted to make it known that he wanted to be here by that visit. Not when he visited our place, but when we visited there. It was clear that this was the place that he wanted to be.

Q. The Seahawks, a lot of their big plays have come from play-action. Conversely you guys have been one of the best defenses against play-action. What's made Seattle so effective with they use run fakes? And what's made you so effective on those plays?

MV: You have to be able to transition if you don't pressure and you don't time up the pressure with the play-action. Again, they're trying to get people blocking at the line of scrimmage. They're trying to marry their run actions with this system, which as far back as I can remember in this system, and Clint's done a great job of marrying their run actions each week, it's difficult to prepare for.

So you get linebackers that are now coming up to the line of scrimmage, opening up passing lanes at the second and third level, and usually finding ways to protect the quarterback with seven guys in there.

So big thing for us has always just been about transitioning and making sure that we're able to get back, we're able to panic when we're not pressuring and that we're able to get into those throwing lanes.

Q. You said that the next 48 hours are so important, so critical. What do you remember about when you were a player, these 48 hours that you can convey to your football team, the advice that you got or the approach that you got when you were a player in these 48 hours?

MV: I mean, it seems like forever ago. So, I don't know if there was anything specifically that I would take. It's a whirlwind. On the first Super Bowl we didn't have the week

off.

I just felt like being in this game with a week off, trying to be very intentional with the schedule, what we were doing, when we were working and not just going eight days straight. Felt like that was important. So trying to be intentional with the schedule.

But also just trying to keep them engaged, keep them locked in and get them to believe that something that we do at practice today is going to come up in the game, and how we handle that or how we execute that could make the difference.

So that's how we've tried to approach all our practices, is that something that you're going to do today is going to help us win. I don't know which play it is. I'm not sure which correction that it will be. But there's going to be a play today that somebody's going to make or not make that's going to make the difference in the game on Sunday.

Q. You have a roster which turned over half the players a year ago, and of course you have holdovers and draft picks and free agents. A lot of times that takes multiple seasons to come together. To what do you attribute the ability of your team to come together so quickly in one season to be here?

MV: I think getting the right people in the building. We were intentional about trying to make sure when the players returned, there was a program in place that they could look at, that they could believe in, that they wanted to be a part of and that they wanted to protect.

That's what we set out to do much before the players were even into the building. Felt like we were intentional with what we did in the offseason about building a team, bringing guys together from every background and every different experience.

And I didn't think that it was important to go out on the field in mini camp. I felt it was more important to spend that time getting to know each other and trying to build that before we went out and tried to run plays.

Q. With Drake Maye, was there a moment this offseason or season that you realized he was special and had special abilities?

MV: I think I probably realized that before I got here. That's a large part of the reason that I wanted to be here. There were plays in training camp and things that he did, whether his -- I think the thing was the accuracy outside of the pocket or on the move, I touched on it, the way he plays the position, he has an athletic nature to the way that

he plays the position.

And so I think that's somewhat unique. I think that everybody has a different skill set, and he's comfortable in the pocket. I think his ability to transfer up into the pocket to make moves, to make throws off platform and different angles has been impressive.

Q. You've led the Patriots to their first Super Bowl appearance since 2019 in your first year as head coach and you're on track to become the first person to win a Super Bowl with the same organization as a player and a coach. What would a win on Sunday mean to you personally and to the organization and to the entire team?

MV: Well, the organization has set a standard. The Patriot organization, Robert and Jonathan, have set a standard for this organization that this is what the expectation is. We understand that, we embrace that.

For me personally, again, I've been through this. I want the players to experience this with their families. I want them to experience this with their kids. I want Morgan Moses to experience this with his three boys. He's been such a great presence on our football team. Not talking about his play on the field, which has been superb, but just his presence and demeanor. He's a wonderful father, the way that he cares for his boys and does his job is something that I appreciate. So I want them to experience that and that feeling. I'll be excited watching them enjoy it.

Q. You mentioned Zak Kuhr for a second. What made him the right choice when adversity hit to be the guy to step up? You've got a lot of great positions on your staff. What made Zak the right guy, because I don't think he had defensive play-calling experience other than in college a long time ago?

MV: Zak's just grown from the time that I was with him at Ohio State to the time that Stretch spent with him offensively, to us bringing him in in Tennessee and watching him grow defensively and understand the concepts that what we're doing defensively, why we were doing them, suggestions that he made to try to enhance some of those things, continue to grow. I think he really can adjust quickly, and he has an ability to not get hung up.

We sub and we make different calls and I'm always trying to watch and make sure that we're coordinated in what we're doing. And he's done that. He did a great job in the offseason. He's a good teacher, good communicator. He's really helped us.

Q. When you're playing in the snow like you were last

week, do you attack certain patches of grass with the play calling, look where maybe things are a little bit more, like, trodden on and trying to get some footing there?

MV: No, I don't think -- we're good, we're just not that good. I mean, hopefully the kickers have the ability to put the ball where they want it. But I don't think we can be that specific. It's a little too difficult to be able to do that.

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