

San Francisco 49ers Media Conference

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Visitors Postgame Press Conference



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DAN CAMPBELL: Give those guys a lot of credit. We knew they wouldn't go away, and they made the plays today. Coach Shanahan is a hell of a coach. That's a team that, they've done it, they lived it, and they made the plays. So credit to them.

I'm really proud of all of these guys, I am. And it's hard when you lose that way, it's hard. You feel like you get your heart ripped out. But I'm proud of that group, and I'll go anywhere with that group. And you wish you could keep it all together, but that's not the reality.

So we did some really good things, but today we didn't do enough. And it's tough.

Q. Dan, you had two fourth-down decisions that were critical in the second half. Neither one was converted. Particularly the second one, why not take a field goal there and maybe stem the bleeding a little bit?

DAN CAMPBELL: I just felt really good about us converting, and getting our momentum and not letting them play long ball. They were bleeding the clock out. That's what they do. And I wanted to get the upper hand back.

And it's easy hindsight, and I get it. I get that. But I don't regret those decisions. And that's hard. It's hard because we didn't come through. It wasn't able to work out, but I don't, I don't.

And I understand the scrutiny I'll get. That's part of the gig, man. But just didn't work out.

Q. Dan, how do you process this? What happened in the second half, some of the self-inflicted mistakes, I guess, that didn't seem to come up much of the year for you?

DAN CAMPBELL: It's been very uncharacteristic of us. We've always been able to get our momentum back. And it's hard to say. I honestly, right now, I can't put my finger on that. That's not like us. We had plays to be made that

we just didn't make; we normally do.

Some of the things, third quarter, we came out. I thought we did a really good job defensively, man. Held them to three. And then got the ball back, moved it. But we just couldn't quite make those plays.

So third quarter, you know, we've been there before. And so fourth quarter, you feel like we're going to get it back, and we just couldn't quite get over the hump. And that hasn't been us all year, and it showed up today at the worst time.

Q. You did a lot of good things in the first half of this game. You got this far. I don't know if a lot of people picked you to come to the NFC title game. Disappointing end, but what did you learn from this experience? I am sure you hoped to get back here, expected to get back here, but what did you learn from the experience of making it this far to this game?

DAN CAMPBELL: I think one of the things you always tell everybody who has never been here, particularly the young players, is you don't know which play is going to make the difference, which one. You say that every game, but when you get in there with a heavyweight like San Fran, man, it is the difference.

And sometimes you can only say so much, you've got to live it, unfortunately. You've got to get your heart ripped out, which we did. And it's a lesson learned.

And I told those guys, this may have been our only shot. Do I think that? No. Do I believe that? No. But I know how hard it is to get here. I'm well aware, and it's going to be twice as hard to get back to this point next year than it was this year. That's the reality.

And if we don't have the same hunger and the same work, which is a whole nuther thing, once we get to the offseason, then we have no shot of getting back here. I don't care how much better we get or what we're at or what we draft -- it's irrelevant. It's going to be tough.

But in our division it's going to be loaded back up and you're not hiding from anybody anymore. Everybody's going to want a piece of you, which is fine. Which is fine.

But so it's hard. You want to make the most of every opportunity. And we had an opportunity, and we just couldn't close it out. It does, it stings. It stings.

Q. To go from that high of the 24-7 halftime lead to how it ended, what is your locker room like right now? I'm sure you weren't celebrating at halftime but you were obviously feeling very good. The level of crushing, I guess, for your players?

DAN CAMPBELL: Yeah, it's tough. It's tough. I mean, nobody's happy. They're very disappointed. It's disappointing. And I think I said it pretty vividly. It's like getting your heart ripped out. It's hard. It's hard.

We didn't come in at halftime -- we weren't doing back flips like, all right, we've got this thing won. They know better. We talked about it. We knew they would make a run in the second half. We talked about it. We knew we would have to weather the storm in the second half.

So when they started to make a push, we weren't surprised. We just couldn't counter back. And we've always been able to counter back. We just couldn't quite do it in this one.

Q. What is the message both in the moment and big picture to a player like Kindle, who is on the wrong side of a play like that on the Aiyuk catch?

DAN CAMPBELL: What we talked about, man, you fight every play, man, and you make him earn everything they get. He was in face, and he competed, and it didn't work out.

And you know what, that's life of a cornerback. It's the life of a quarterback as well. Those two positions, and, listen, it happens, and you go back for the next play.

And long term, you know what, that won't be the next time that happens, unfortunately. It's every corner gets put on an island at different times. And so you just keep going. You just keep fighting.

That's what I want. That's what I'm looking for. What I don't want is a player who is scared and doesn't get up there and challenge. But a guy who will go up there mix it up and ain't afraid of who he's lined up over. Give up a play, give up a play. Nobody feels good about it. Certainly a player doesn't, but I know they're fighting.

Q. You mentioned it a little bit in your opening comments, Dan, there's a lot of emotions at the end of a game but particularly at the end of a season. Could you expand a little more on just knowing that the locker room, your coaching staff might look quite a bit different for I guess the challenge of the finality of that?

DAN CAMPBELL: It's hard. I'm a firm believer in everything's got to be right. And everybody just thinks that it's just talent or it's just coachability. And the more talent you get and just the better coaches, the more well known, you're just automatically going to be good. And that's not the truth at all. It's not.

Does it help? Yes, it helps, as long as they're compatible, and there's a chemistry and teamwork and unselfishness, and you leave the egos at home. And that's hard. It's hard to do that.

So you set it up. Now -- it's just going to look different and it's got to be right. It's got to be right again, potentially some of the players, some of the coaches. And we've got to start over and we've got to find the right mix, the right balance. And it's got to be right because otherwise -- I'm just a firm believer, you don't have a chance if it's not. You'll become average, quickly.

Q. It's probably too early in the moment right after a game like this, but at what point do you think, if at all, you'll be able to appreciate what you guys accomplished this season, getting here, the amount of success you had leading up to tonight?

DAN CAMPBELL: That's tough. And I have said that word a lot tonight. And I hate it. I should not -- you're asking me right now, and I feel like we're no different than anybody else. And unless you're the Super Bowl winner, that's what this feels like. It's hard.

We did accomplish a lot, but there is just -- you know, there's a piece of me that I just feel like we're, you know, a little bit like everybody else who didn't make it and everybody else who lost. Unless you're San Francisco -- who won the other one, I don't even know -- KC, then you've got a pretty bad taste in your mouth.

And it's what's great about this sport, what's about the game. It's what's great about the tournament. And it's also what crushes you.

Q. Coming out at halftime, you get the Aiyuk catch and the fumble. Is that like a double gut punch you could never see coming?

DAN CAMPBELL: No. I mean, look, we knew they were going to make a play. You'd like to believe that it's not going to be that, but we knew they were going to make some plays. It was just a matter of time -- and I don't care how good you're playing, you know -- Aiyuk is a good player, and Purdy does a good job of giving those guys a chance to make plays. Kittle's a good player. Deebo's a good player.

At some point you knew something was going to happen. You have to be able to answer back and contain it. And we weren't able to do that.

Q. You mentioned the heavyweights like San Francisco, you referred to them that way. Do you think in the second half the fact that they have been there before, they played their before and your team as a team, even though you had some guys that have been there before, as a team had not, did that start to come into play especially when things started swirling around and going against you?

DAN CAMPBELL: You know, it's hard to -- I can't dispute that, but it's hard for me to believe that because we've been in big games all year. I know it's not the NFC Championship game but we've been in two critical playoff games. We've been in plenty of prime-time games, big-time opponents, where we've been able to -- we're always able to get the momentum back. And we just couldn't do it today.

And so I don't want to believe that. But at the same token it's there and we just didn't make those plays.

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