

LA Times NFL Speaker Series

Thursday, February 10, 2022

Los Angeles, California

Carson Palmer

THE MODERATOR: Carson Palmer, so great to have you here, and what a happy accident that we have a Bengals quarterback, No. 1 overall pick in 2003, and the Bengals are in the Super Bowl. Not only that, but Joe Burrow, like you, is a Heisman Trophy winner, No. 1 overall pick and suffered a devastating torn ACL. What do you think of Joe Burrow and what you've seen so far?

CARSON PALMER: I mean, it's just been a magical run. I think when you look at the Cincinnati Bengals roster back in September, and if you would have printed out on a piece of paper and thrown it across the league to every NFL exec, I don't think there's one exec that would say, yeah, it looks like a Super Bowl contending team, this roster looks that good.

It's just been a magical run. They were 10-7 in the regular season. They won three more times than they lost. They found their way into the playoffs in a down year in the AFC North with Lamar Jackson getting hurt and the Steelers being down, but it's been a snowball. They've just slowly gotten better as the season has gone on, and they have some holes. They have some massive holes in their roster. But they go into Tennessee and beat the No. 1 seed getting sacked nine times in a game.

That right there illustrates everything you need -- to me, it illustrates everything you need to know about Joe. You can't fluster him. You can't rattle him. Getting sacked two or three times in a game is flustering. Your offensive line are turning around picking you up saying, hey, man, sorry I got beat; your defense is watching you on the sideline getting sacked. But when it happens nine times, it's demoralizing.

To not get flustered, to not lose their confidence, to find a way to win that game against the best team in the AFC in their home, on the road, Joe just -- you can't fluster him. You can't shake him. He just has this poise about him. It's Brady-like. It's Montana-like.

I'm not trying to heap those expectations and put those on him, but there's just something about his poise that you don't see, especially when you factor in he's 22 years old.

He's in year two. He looks when he's on the field like he's in year 12 and he's 33.

But the guy just has a way to block out all the distractions, block out all the negativity around him and focus on his job, and he's been unbelievable. I don't know if they have the magic to get past this All-Star team the Rams have, but they've got a lot of belief in Joe. They've got a lot of confidence in Joe, and Joe has probably the most confidence on the football field.

Q. Have you ever been sacked five, six, seven times in a game?

CARSON PALMER: I have not been sacked nine times. I've probably been sacked four or five, and I'm telling you, every time it's 2nd and 10 you get sacked, now it's 3rd and 20, and against an Aaron Donald, Von Miller pass rush, that is really difficult to overcome. It's tough to overcome on the road, the No. 1 seed AFC Tennessee Titans home. You continuously get sacked like that, it ruins your mindset, and it can change the way you play the game.

It's really easy, you start getting sacked four, five, six times, your eyes go from looking at the defense down to the rush and trying to figure out where the soft spot in the pocket is to move to. That gets you off your game, and you just don't see that from Joe.

I know I've been in that situation where I've been sacked three, four, five times. It changes your mindset. You start looking at the rush. You start thinking, I've got to get the ball out. I've got to get the ball out. The clock goes off in your head. It can ruin a game for you really, really quickly after you've been sacked three, four, five times, but once you get up almost into double digits, it seems impossible to overcome. I'm still shocked that they overcame that game.

Q. You think about that match-up, and you mentioned it, and you've got Leonard Floyd, too, coming off the edge. Is that a real advantage for the Rams when they're playing at home and you've got Aaron Donald, you've got Von Miller who's been a Super Bowl MVP against a line that's particularly in the interior been pretty vulnerable?

CARSON PALMER: Yeah, I mean, back when Joe got hurt last year, the Cincinnati Bengals organization was not

ASAP sports . . . when all is said, we're done.®

thinking, right, next year we're going to the Super Bowl. They were trying to plan for Joe's contract and plan for all the things that come up within the salary cap, and the offensive line was a big issue. It was something they were looking at going, we've got to continuously build this. We've got to draft, we've got to go in free agency.

That offensive line is in the bottom third of the league when you rank them against the rest of the league. When you rank that LA Rams' defensive line, they're the best defensive line in the league, and then there's a bunch of other guys in second and fighting for third.

You've got a very, very below average offensive line against the best defensive tackle in football. As you said, a former Super Bowl MVP in John Miller and Leonard Floyd, a top-10 pick. That pass rush is fierce. The offensive line for the Bengals is not built for this. The offensive line for the Bengals is built for the AFC North playing against Pittsburgh's defensive front, playing against Baltimore's big, physical, run-first defensive front. So they are not equipped for this; they are not built for this.

I think this is the biggest issue the Bengals have going into this game is protecting Joe against that pass rush.

Q. Can you discuss the difficulty of overcoming a torn ACL and how that might change your mindset in terms of stepping up in the pocket and doing those things for the rest of your career, because you obviously had that devastating injury in the playoff game against Pittsburgh, a Pittsburgh team that went on to win the Super Bowl, beat Seattle in the Super Bowl. You had dominated them in the regular season, you swept them in the regular season, and yet you came back and you also suffered a torn ACL in Arizona. How big a deal is it that Joe Burrow is a year removed from this?

CARSON PALMER: Yeah, that's probably the most impressive thing about all this that there's not a lot of talk about. Year one coming off of that injury, and as you said, I've done it twice, so I know what it's like. It's a grind of an off-season.

As soon as he went into the surgeon's office and was -- the surgery was performed, I believe in November, you start in December. There is no off-season. You're in the gym, you're at the rehab facility, you're going and getting checked by the doctor once a week. There is no, oh, I'm going to go and go to Hawai'i and sit by the pool. It is a grind from two weeks post-surgery all the way through the off-season.

Joe has had a long, long year, and it started back when he left LSU. You think about what he's done in the last two

years. You win a National Championship, you win the Heisman, you get ready for the draft, you train for all that, your season starts, you're starting as a rookie, you're thrown in the fire day one.

There was no welcome to the NFL, we're going to give you a couple weeks to figure this out. He started game 1, he got hurt, he went right into physical therapy, which is a six-, seven-, eight-hour deal every single day. Not six days a week, seven days a week. You're always trying to get back. There's no days off. There's no days by the pool.

You factor in the length of work, the duration, it's been two straight years, and then you get to the playoffs, you don't have another off-season when most of the league is not in the playoffs and their off-season starts, you're continually grinding and grinding and grinding. You're not seeing those effects on Joe.

I felt those effects, there's no doubt about it. Your knee is not where it needs to be. Your knee wasn't intended to be sliced open and pulled together and things to be tied together. It needs time to recover. Joe has not had that recovery yet. It's just been a constant grind since he got hurt the previous November. You're not seeing that wear and tear. You're not seeing the lack of confidence that you can have in that knee because it's not quite there yet. It needs really two years to completely heal.

Again, Joe is so poised. He's unrattleable. You can't get in his head. When you watch him play, he's stepping into throws. He's transferring his weight, getting velocity on the ball. It's that front leg and the throwing motion, there's a lot of torque, there's a lot of turn and spin on that ACL, and that's what the ACL is there for the knee to do is to let the knee do that.

I remember my first couple times just getting in the pocket in the game, and I wasn't quite transferring my weight. I wasn't quite getting into the throw because I was worried about that rotational pull on the ACL.

I watched the first game of the year, the Bengals played, it's like it never happened. It truly is amazing, and the guy is so mentally strong. He is so tough. He doesn't -- it doesn't bother him. It doesn't come in the back of his mind. It was in the back of mine for an entire season after each ACL tear. Man, I'm throwing to that guy, but I feel a presence coming this way and I'm worried he's going to hit my knee, so you just kind of take your eye off it for a quick second, and you don't see that.

Joe focuses in on his target, he knows where the ball needs to go, and nothing gets in his vision. He completely is able to block all of these other fears and worries and

concerns out and focus on the job at hand.

Q. You mentioned his career, amazing career at LSU, record-setting career. You had a great career at SC, particularly that last year, and really that second half of the last season. What was it like being Los Angeles's NFL quarterback when there was no NFL team in LA? There was no SoFi Stadium, you were at the Coliseum, but SC was the team in LA. What was that like?

CARSON PALMER: It was amazing. There's just something special about LA when the Trojans are good. Even when the Rams are good or if the Chargers are good, there's just something different. I'll never forget being on the field and being in the huddle and warming up before the game and seeing other teams come down to the stadium floor at the Coliseum, and you've been there when the band is going nuts, but there's Will Ferrell, there's Snoop Dogg, Denzel Washington, there's just all these -- these players come into the stadium, these are guys that they idolize and know every line from every movie or every word from every song. That was just normal.

We as players, when Pete was there, we saw them -- all these stars, all these Hollywood stars would be at practice. They'd come out and watch us practice, let alone watch the game. You could see other teams kind of get overwhelmed with it as they're coming in -- you're in there, you're getting warm, you've got the game, and you can see them pointing at each other and pointing in the stands and seeing different guys.

There's just something special about this city when the Trojans are good, and this city is great when the Rams are good and the Lakers are good, but there's just a special place in this city's heart for the Trojans.

Q. Pete Carroll really helped build that culture, and you were there at the ground floor with Pete Carroll, who was the third choice of SC. What did you notice about him? What was it about his personality that really jibed with LA and these players?

CARSON PALMER: Yeah, he embraced it. He came in, and I had come in under the previous regime in Paul Hackett, and there was this kind of -- there was a recruiting process that had been happening. It got really stale. We went to the same restaurants; we'd take players, show them this, show them this. And Pete said, no, no, no, we're not putting guys on a bus and driving down to Palos Verdes. We're going to be around LA Live, we're going to be right here in the heart of the city, and he embraced and realized the asset that LA was to attract top talent from all over the country, not just Southern California, not just the state of California. He was recruiting guys from Ohio and

Pennsylvania and Florida and New York, all over the country.

He took SC nationwide. He embraced LA. He used -- hey, Will Ferrell, please come out to practice. He was reaching out to these guys; Denzel, we'll give you tickets. He knew that that was an asset that other schools couldn't compete with.

So he embraced it. He exploited it. He used LA to show these kids that were coming in on recruiting trips but also going to Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and Tuscaloosa, Alabama, and showing them that this place is different. You have to have a certain appreciation for how special this -- this is not a small-time college town.

Just being around him for a couple short years and seeing the way he handles a team, seeing the way he leads, seeing the way he would get up in front of a team and respond to adversity and seeing the way he would get up in front of the team and congratulate success, it was eye-opening for me, and I learned lessons from Pete my junior and senior year of college that I used through my 15-year NFL career.

Q. With what happened on the field with USC, the success on the field that set a pretty high bar that USC has been trying to recapture that magic, how much do you know Lincoln Riley? Do you know the guy? Do you have any thoughts on how he's going to do there?

CARSON PALMER: I don't know him personally other than just congratulatory talk when he got the job. But what was so crazy about -- it came out of nowhere. Normally you hear there's like a rumbling, oh, I heard they're going after Lincoln Riley, I heard there's a plane going to Oklahoma. There was nothing. It was silent.

There was a lot of rumors, and all of a sudden like that, a switch went on and Lincoln Riley is the head coach, and he's actually in the air right now flying from Norman and landing at 7:00 a.m. or whatever it was. The excitement, the enthusiasm, the electricity is back, and it's been lacking for a while, and there was a lot of doubt in previous coaching staffs.

There was doubt in the hiring process. There was doubt -- like there was no big names available. There was no big flashy free agent coach that they were going to go after. So everything was kind of quiet and mellow about that process, and then the light went on, and it was Lincoln Riley, and nobody expected it, and everybody was like -- my first response was like, obviously, what a great target.

He's had success. He's a former player. He can recruit.

He's young. He's energetic, and what he left and what he went through to get to USC, you've got to be a certain type of individual to put yourself through that, to put your family through that. There was a lot of negative talk obviously surrounding that, and he knew it. He knew he was in for it. But he knew how special the opportunity was to come to LA and be the USC head football coach and the tradition and the excellence and the National Championships, all those things that USC is, the history of the school.

He wanted to be a part of that and was willing to go through some mud to get here, and that just shows you how special he knows this opportunity is and really how special of an opportunity being in the Pac-12, being at USC is to get to a National Championship, because staying at Oklahoma and moving into the SEC, you've got six, seven, eight, nine contenders you've got to worry about every single year.

Coming to USC, I think he realized that along with the greatness of the school and the university, it's a much easier path to win National Championships having to get through Oregon and UCLA. You don't have to worry about Georgia, you don't have to worry about Alabama. There's so many schools in the SEC that he was -- I think everything about this job excited him.

Q. There's been a seismic shift in college football, name, image, likeness, you can now market yourself. I can't imagine what your marketability would have been in LA as the NFL team, quasi-NFL team and Heisman winner. How do you think that's going to change college football for the good or for the worse?

CARSON PALMER: I don't think it's for the good. I don't think it's for the good for the player or for the game or for the universities. I was driving down from Santa Barbara this morning and I got a text message, and it was a group text from Troy Polamalu, Keary Colbert, Maleafou McKenzie, all my roommates in college, and they were making fun of me because yesterday I went on the Pat McAfee Show and I had a wrinkled shirt, and they were making fun of me, like, Did you get that T-shirt at the Slauson Swap Meet, because when we were students and we lived up by the school, we would go to the Slauson Swap Meet and buy T-shirts and underwear and socks because they were cheap because we didn't have any money. We were barely affording rent; we couldn't eat; we were trying to figure out where to get food, who had the hookup to go get some food.

But they were sending me this -- they were making fun of me on a text chain. We used to go to the Slauson Swap Meet every couple weeks and load up on the bare essentials because we just didn't have any money. We

didn't have money for gas. We were riding bikes. Troy ended up buying a van for like \$600 that we would all pile into and get to class. It's funny now because you're hearing stories about kids -- guys in college are making a million dollars and hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Just the purity of the game is what I loved, and the relationships I built with my teammates at USC, it was for the love of the game. There was no money involved.

Our school was getting paid for it, which is tremendous and a blessing, but we were scraping by in college trying to figure out the first time on your own. I can't imagine going back to 19 years old and having a name, image and likeness deal with whoever it may be and having another -- that other set of pressures that comes along with that. There's enough pressure on you when you're doing it just for your scholarship check and you're at USC in the heart of Los Angeles.

Now I just worry about the game is being tainted. I worry that from, on a larger scale, the USCs, the UCLAs, the Alabamas, those schools can compete. They have large endowments, huge endowments. My younger brother Jordan went to UTEP, University of Texas El Paso. They can't compete with Texas and Texas Tech and Texas A&M. There's just some smaller schools, the have-nots as we all heard Nick Saban say a couple weeks ago, those schools are going to be negatively affected by this, and I just think it's a tough spot to put an 18-, 19-year-old kid in with adding that amount of pressure when you've got a lot of pressure on you as is.

Q. You mentioned Jordan who played in your long shadow as a quarterback, and now he's the star of the family. He's the top quarterback coach in the country to prepare players for the draft. Did you see that? He's so inventive, so innovative in a lot of his pursuits, but now he's become the guy that everybody wants to get to. What did you see in him that might have given you that indication?

CARSON PALMER: Yeah, we were teammates for a couple years in Cincinnati. He was not the most athletically gifted but his mind saw it. You can't say that for even half the starting quarterbacks in the league. There's a lot of guys that get away with just being physically gifted, and they don't see the game like a coach, like a teacher.

I was fortunate to play for a lot of great coaches, and the best coaches I ever played for were great coaches, but they were great teachers. Finding a way to deliver your message to where it's absorbed by your pupil is a real difficult ability to have. You either have it or you don't. You can either break something down, and I can explain

something to you and the next guy and the next guy, and I may need to explain it three completely different ways because your mind works a certain way, you see the game a certain way, very different from the next individual and the next individual.

He has such a distinct ability to make sure each kid absorbs it and hears it and gets better from it. It sounds like a simple thing. It is not. I've been around so many coaches that didn't have that ability, and there's kids from all over the place and different backgrounds and different learning styles. Some people need to watch it on film, some people need to write it down on a piece of paper, some people need to experience it on the field and learn from all three of those different things, and he has such a unique ability, to -- however he does, he figures out a way, this is going to hit you to where you absorb this and learn this, and this is going to hit you, and he has a great ability to deliver that message to where it is best absorbed by each individual kid.

Now, I was at his latest camp. I was a dad in the stands. I've got a 13-year-old quarterback, and he does these satellite camps all over the country, and kids come from all over the country, and parents fly in and we flew in from Idaho, and that's -- I'm learning.

I played a lot longer. I have more stats than Jordan does. But I'm there listening to technique and fundamentals and hearing the different way than I've heard it from any coach I played for, and I played for a lot of different coaches in my career. I understand how important it is. I know how good he is at it. Being a teammate of his, being his brother, but now I'm one of the dads that's listening for advice and hearing different things on throwing motion and technique and posture and stance and all these different things that I wish I would have learned back when I was playing because I would have been able to avoid some inefficiencies in my throwing motion. I would have been able to avoid some injuries I had in my elbow and shoulder.

He's truly unique. He's really, really special and really gifted at what he's doing.

Q. He not only teaches quarterbacks all over the country, and with technology all over the world, people come to Jordan Palmer, and I wonder, if you can sort of list some of the guys that we would know that he has coached.

CARSON PALMER: Well, Joe Burrow and Stafford both come down and throw during his --

Q. Well, there you go.

CARSON PALMER: I mean, you name it. I feel like he's had the last No. 2, 3 picks that are all quarterbacks in the last 10 years. I mean, Josh Allen, Sam Darnold. He's got Ritter from University of Cincinnati this year who won't be a top pick but somebody he really likes. I don't even know.

Q. Just go right down the line.

CARSON PALMER: Name most of the starters in the league.

Q. Easier to list the guys he doesn't have.

CARSON PALMER: Yeah, even guys like Philip Rivers when he was playing, he would come down and work -- so he's training guys to get ready for the draft, but he's also created this environment and this facility where different starters that have been -- like Stafford has been in Detroit for a decade, a little more than a decade. It's an environment where they can come, they can learn, and he's got guys that are current players playing for a long time, guys that are going to be first-round picks, second-round, third-round picks. You're right, it's easier to name the guys that are starters in the league that have not worked with him than it is the guys that have.

Q. Let's talk about you and what you're doing now. I came up and visited you in Idaho, and you're really off the grid and you're just a regular normal guy. What was behind that decision because you could have gone any direction after your career.

CARSON PALMER: Yeah, I got done playing and had a bunch of different TV networks interested in going into some sort of media, whether calling games or in-studio stuff, and I went and interviewed and did it and had offers, and I've got four young kids and we're sitting with my wife and we're looking at different contracts, and I just -- something was uneasy about it. That was my wheelhouse. I have a Ph.D. in football. I can talk about it all day long, I know about it all, I can talk about any protection, any scheme, all that.

I was sitting there looking at the different networks and going through the travel schedule and going through all these things, and then talking about how much I want to coach my son's football team and play golf with my daughter and go hunting and fish and do all these things I wasn't able to do when I was playing for so long, and I just realized that my heart wasn't in it and I wasn't in a place where I needed to do something that my heart wasn't in.

I've always been extremely into real estate in one fashion or another, so I called the guys at the different studios and just said, I'm going to go a different direction, and that was



another couple week conversation. Why? Adjusting this, do we adjust this, and I finally was like, my heart is not in it, I'm not 100 percent into this and I don't want to do anything that I can't give my all and give my 100 percent because that's what I've been doing. That's what football was for me.

I started taking classes online. I took an MIT architectural class and passed that and just fell in love with that. Unfortunately I took, at UCLA, it's a great school, I took -- they have a great online, and SC doesn't have an online presence, but UCLA has a great site, so I took a couple classes, real estate classes on UCLA's online platform.

I fell deeper and deeper in love with learning about it and finding out more about myself and what aspect of real estate I wanted to get into, and then partnered up -- I think I introduced you when you came up to ski with me in Idaho, my partner, we're a two-man shop, it's just two of us, no employees, no -- we can focus on small deals, and we're in real estate development. We started a small company called Silent Water Real Estate, and excited about the future that's there for us.

Q. That might be the headline out of this, that Carson Palmer is a UCLA student.

CARSON PALMER: I can't believe I said that out loud. Sam, you got me.

Q. That's tremendous. But you are a regular guy up there, but you are -- people do the triple take, too. Wait, is that Carson Palmer? I recognize that guy. Often you'll have a beard. What was the story about the guy who saw you when you were fishing? You were in your hip waders fishing and a guy came by, I think he might have been a Bengals fan or something and said, is it you? Do you remember that?

CARSON PALMER: Oh, oh, oh, did we talk about that? I forgot about that. You know, we had been in Phoenix, which is the sixth largest city in the country, been in LA, been in big cities, Oakland, and we just wanted to raise our kids somewhere slower and really slow down the pace of life. You can't avoid your children growing up in your shadow forever, but we wanted some time away from it. So we moved to Idaho.

I was going to this super remote fishing spot with a couple buddies where there's big rainbow trout, big brown trout, so we're all pumped to go, and I'm with a couple buddies that if they heard I played football, they'd be like, oh, so when is your next game, and I'd be like, dude, it's March; football season is in the fall. They don't know anything about football. They don't care about football.

This guy recognizes me as we're putting our waders on and getting ready to get on the river, and this guy just won't leave me alone. He keeps talking, keeps talking. I'm with a couple other guys.

These other guys never really put it together what I did. They don't even know what a Heisman Trophy is. They don't know -- NFL Draft, when is that, how does that work. Totally immune to all that the NFL is.

This guy just, can I get an autograph? I think he pulled a Bengals jersey out of his car, and I'm in the middle of nowhere in Idaho where you would never think you'd see a Bengals fan. But the guys I was with, the buddies I had known for a while had no idea what my prior previous life was, and it was like an eye-opening thing, like oh, my gosh, you're a football guy, football player?

But that's what's been so great about Idaho. Coaching my kid's team, people don't care. People aren't interested in that. They want to be outside. They want to be on the river, skiing, fishing, hunting, whatever it is. So it's been a really nice reprieve for our kids to enjoy these last four or five years not in my shadow, not in the spotlight of a big city.

Q. Well, we in LA care. We love you, Carson. Thank you so much for being the first guest at Hall of Farmer, and it was terrific. Which way is this game going to go? Last thing.

CARSON PALMER: Yeah, as special as it would be for the Bengals to take this title home to Cincinnati, I can't imagine that city on a victory parade Monday or Tuesday. I just don't know. There's so much star power, there's so much firepower. That defensive pass rush the Rams have, the best corner in the game, Stafford, there's so many All-Stars, Andrew Whitworth, the left tackle, there's just great, great players. They've been there before. A lot of these guys have played in the Super Bowl previously in 2018. I just don't know if the Bengals have enough firepower to keep up with the Rams.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports