

LA Times NFL Speaker Series

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Terrell Davis

Q. The great Terrell Davis. Good to see you. I think you're the fifth player we've had in Hall of Farmer. But the first guy with not just one but two Super Bowl rings. And so you know what this is all about. You know what this takes. And I think there's a misnomer about those Broncos teams. A lot of people think back to John Elway, one of the greatest quarterbacks in the history of the NFL, and those being passing teams. Really they were run-based teams. Run-based and defense. And you represented that running game. That was great. I first want to ask you about this matchup. We were just talking about the Cincinnati-Rams matchup and thoughts about who has the advantage where. How do you look at this game?

TERRELL DAVIS: You know, first of all, I love the Hall of Farmer is awesome, brother. People don't know that you and I go way back to Thursday Night Football and doing that show. That was cool, the fifth quarter. Sam and I became really good friends there.

I see this game as, as much as I look at the matchups and try to figure out where the teams have the advantage, where they don't, and what would be ultimately the decision or the key factor in this game.

And I just keep coming back to the Rams defensive front. And it kind of reminds me of like the Broncos in Super Bowl 50, where they had Von Miller, DeMarcus Ware. They had Malik Jackson. They had this front that was just dominating. And they played the Carolina Panthers. And people thought the Panthers was a better team.

I was, like, I don't know, that front for the Broncos is really good, it's active. That's an example of the team that dominated that game. They won a Super Bowl.

We can go back to last year's game against the Bucs and the Chiefs. And the Bucs defensive front was fearless. They just dominated the game.

And the Chiefs, people thought, okay, there will be a 30-point game, 45-point game. The Chiefs scored, what, nine points in the game? And so you have a unit that can

dominate and change the entire trajectory of the game in the Rams. So, I've seen -- again, Brady when he played the Giants. I've seen that in numerous Super Bowls.

So I keep coming back to that as my kind of key to the game. Do I think the Bengals have a chance to win? Yeah. If they came in and played it well. I think a guy like Joe Mixon, who could be a problem for the Rams because he can catch the ball. He's a strong power runner. And it would allow Burrow to have a left and a right, kind of a left and right punch.

If they can go into that gaining, the Bengals, remain two dimensional, it could cause them problems for the Rams where they have to defend the run first. Which, if you defended the run first, you can't just pin your ears back and go after the quarterback. And teams who have beaten the Rams have figured that out. The Niners, for example. The Niners, they don't drop back a lot. So the Rams are always constantly catching and trying to defend the run.

Then you go into pass mode. Then it's too late by that time. They obviously did beat the Niners in the championship game, but the previous six times they've struggled with that kind of offense. So there's a lot of different matchups that I'm looking forward to seeing.

My gut tells me, or I guess it's more my wants, I'm rooting for the Rams. I'm just rooting for the Rams. Listen, my kids were born in LA. It was fun to see the Dodgers win the World Series. It was cool to see the Lakers win. It wasn't a Mickey Mouse trophy; it was the real deal. They won that trophy. To see LA teams have success is really cool.

And then the Rams. Listen, this team has been, you come here to Los Angeles, you're playing in the beat-up stadium. And now you have this gorgeous stadium right here in Los Angeles.

And, so, to me, I'd love to see Los Angeles bringing that Super Bowl back here. And it will be fun. We only had, what, one instance in the history of the game where a team played the Super Bowl in its hometown. That was the Bucs last year. It worked out pretty well for them.

Q. It did, and your college career began, Los Angeles adjacent at Long Beach State before Georgia?

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TERRELL DAVIS: I'm a California kid, by the way. San Diego.

Q. Any philosophies on how the Rams built this team, an all-star team? We saw the '94 Niners do that to great effect, but we've seen many more teams sort of fall apart when you build all-stars. But they obviously made the dramatic trade for Matthew Stafford. They got Von and O.B.J. A lot of times it's hard to hold that chemistry together and win that way. Any thoughts on that?

TERRELL DAVIS: It's tough. It's tough. But I believe it's the new way of football now. It's starting to become the instant -- let's plug and play, grab guys that we know can fill a void. Get guys who are willing to sort of defer to other stars on the team.

O.B.J., for example, I didn't think that this would have worked for him. I didn't. He was in New York. Obviously they shipped him off to Cleveland. Cleveland got rid of him. He comes here. And he's used to being the number one receiver. He's used to being the guy.

Well, you got Cooper Kupp here. So he fits in. Robert Woods gets hurt. He says, you know what, I don't need to be the number one guy. I can be the number two guy. I can be effective. I'm going to support the role I'm in. I'm going to play it well.

You haven't heard a word from him all year long, and all he has done is produced. And so the Rams got that.

You traded for Von Miller. Which I live in Denver now and that was tough to see Von get traded, because to us we thought trading Von meant we were tanking the season. But it really wasn't.

It was more based on Von's contract was coming up. They can get value for Von right now. And it almost freed up the younger guys in the locker room, because Von as a leader, sometimes the leader, you're in his shadow and you can't blossom.

It's almost like the analogy would be the tree in the shade. A tree in the shade can't grow. So once you cut down the big tree and you remove that, now it gets sunlight. The younger guys are starting to blossom. They got value for Von, and now the Broncos have a different way of trying to win.

Von has come here played extremely well in the playoffs. I like what the Rams are doing. Sam, it's hard to pick guys in a draft now and count on them being what you drafted.

It is difficult now. You can't count on a guy you drafted in the first round to be a first-rounder.

We've seen so many guys who just don't pan out anymore. I much rather go with a proven product, somebody I've seen do it on this level, versus gambling with a teenager and saying once I give this guy a contract for millions of dollars, I'm going to get the same player on this level.

That's just my philosophy. I'm different. I prefer the proven commodity over some potential player coming out of the draft.

Q. Just the philosophy of Les Snead.

TERRELL DAVIS: Yeah.

Q. Look at what George Paton is doing with the Broncos. You're in Denver now and they're obviously building for the future. They like their receivers they need a quarterback, an answer at quarterback?

TERRELL DAVIS: We got Aaron Rodgers, by the way.

Q. Tell me about Aaron Rodgers. What are the chances that Aaron Rodgers winds up in Denver?

TERRELL DAVIS: I think they're really good. They're really good. Everything I've heard for the last year has all been Aaron Rodgers is coming to Denver. I've heard from insiders and guys that I know who has covered the Broncos for many years, guys who covered the NFL, guys who have been involved in actual details of that trade who say that it is basically going to happen. Like, Aaron is coming to Denver.

Q. Was Nathaniel Hackett a precursor to that?

TERRELL DAVIS: I don't think Nathaniel was necessary -- put it like this. He was coming regardless. I don't think this -- obviously this helps, this kind of -- doesn't hurt that Nathaniel Hackett is in Denver now. Aaron was coming regardless of Nathaniel. But I think this actually, to me, when I saw that move I said now it's a done deal.

Q. That franchise rolled out the orange and blueprint, if you will, by having Peyton come, play the end of his career, win a Super Bowl, got to two Super Bowls that way. And so you can envision them doing the same thing with last night's MVP?

TERRELL DAVIS: Yeah, I do. I see it. I see it happening. Because they have -- you just said it. They've already seen it. They've done it. They went down that road before. They got Peyton Manning.

Here's the only caveat. When they got Peyton he was a free agent. They didn't give up anything for him.

Q. And everybody had written him off. Or a lot of people had written him off.

TERRELL DAVIS: He was injured. In all likelihood, he wasn't going to play football anymore.

Now it depends on what they give up for Aaron Rodgers, whether it's just draft picks or whether -- are you throwing players in the mix?

Q. And as I mentioned earlier, those Peyton teams were not based on the quarterback play, necessarily. Those were sort of like the end of John's career with the Broncos. It was really relying on other things, Peyton was the face of the team, if you will.

TERRELL DAVIS: In 2013 it was all Peyton.

Q. Right.

TERRELL DAVIS: But when they won the Super Bowl it was -- Peyton had dropped off dramatically. He didn't have the arm strength anymore. So you can see him starting to slide. And then the team had a really good defense. They had a running game and enough of a passing game, because it's Peyton Manning; you still have to remain honest on defense. You can't go to sleep and think, all right, it's Peyton Manning. His arm is beat up. We'll bring safeties in a box and play man. You still were playing coverage. So it allowed the running game to work. But, yeah, different kind of approach.

Aaron is -- it's about that. We witnessed last year Tom Brady leaving the Patriots going to Tampa Bay, a plug-and-play system where you take a quarterback, which it was unheard of before that, unheard of before last year.

Now, you've got Matthew Stafford. You just got him on the team. You're in a Super Bowl. So, Sam, you think this is not a model for the teams? You don't think they're sitting back, saying, why don't we build a franchise through the draft, which could take four to five years, or we can find that quarterback, bring him in next year and instantly be a competitor or be in contention for a Super Bowl. That's what I'm doing.

Q. You think we're transitioning from the time when the Seattle Seahawks built a Super Bowl team with a quarterback on a rookie contract.

TERRELL DAVIS: Yeah.

Q. Everybody tried to do that, to now going to the Rams system, potentially, where -- and other teams have done it.

TERRELL DAVIS: Yeah.

Q. The Bucs, Rams, where you take an established guy. You brought up Tom Brady. After this retirement rumba, is he done?

TERRELL DAVIS: He's done.

Q. He's done.

TERRELL DAVIS: Tom's not the guy, in my opinion, that says he's going to retire and then somehow has a change of heart. He's thought this through. This is not a decision that he wakes up and says, all right, I feel like retiring, I'm going to retire.

He's thought -- this was already kind of a process that -- to me this was almost the process that or a decision he made maybe a year ago that this was it for him.

What people don't understand is you look at Tom, he looks healthy. He looks great. But the mental toll it takes to prepare for a season is extraordinary. At that age you don't have -- it is demanding.

I mean not only mentally but physically. Even though he didn't have any signs of weakness in his arm strength. The dude led the league in passing touchdowns and passing yards. To him, he feels it.

And he's, like, I can't go back to the back, the bottom of this mountain, try to prepare again, go to training camp and try to climb this mountain again. I don't have the gas to do it anymore. I don't have the ability to rebound. I don't have the energy.

And it's tough. I remember in year -- I was in my fifth year in NFL. And I already contemplated retirement in my fifth year when I was playing. I remember someplace I'm in the game, and I'm, like, I can't keep doing this. I'm just beat up. And like this game, this is not -- this is not an old man's game. This is a young --

Q. Particularly your position.

TERRELL DAVIS: Yeah, and people look at you and say, you look great; you look like you can play tomorrow. No, I can't play tomorrow. No, like you are disrespecting what it takes to play on that level.

So I think Tom is done. And I will be shocked if he came out of retirement, to be honest with you.

Q. What more can the league do to address the lack of diversity in head coaches?

TERRELL DAVIS: I think we're all trying to figure that out. It's the obvious. It's the elephant in the room. You know what's happening. It's hard to -- it's difficult to say how do you fix it.

I've heard people say the NFL has a problem. Okay, we recognize that. But how do you fix it? The Rooney Rule was the first attempt at trying to create an environment where you had to look at other candidates, minority candidates.

And I love the spirit behind the rule. I love the fact that the NFL recognized that they need to get more minorities in as coaches. But how do you enforce it? How do you tell a billionaire owner that he has to hire a person that he may not want to hire? You answer that question.

Q. I think the only ideas that I would have would be lowering all the impediments, in terms of coaches interviewing, where a team can give a coach permission to interview with another team. And you allow them or allow coaches to interview with other teams and not have the team say, come to that team and say, can we interview because of that formal process. Guys might be intimidated to do that. But I think beyond that, it's a real quandary. The spirit of the law -- having people go to the letter of the law but not the spirit. Not what they're trying to achieve.

TERRELL DAVIS: It just seems crazy. I had an idea. I don't know if it would stick or not. But you would have to have, let's say you have this coaches portal. You have this thing where coaches have to apply, they have to enter this portal, they have to be qualified coaches. And you make sure that that pool of coaches has at least 50 percent minorities in it.

And the owners can only hire from this pool of candidates. You can't go outside of it. And you have this outside firm that qualifies the coaches. Because every time we hear -- we hear that phrase, right? We've got the best qualified candidate. That's how they get around it. It wasn't about skin color.

Q. Very nebulous.

TERRELL DAVIS: We have the best qualified candidate. If you have this coaches portal, and you rate the coaches on qualification and you give them a score -- you say, all

right now we have 20 coaches, half are Black, half are white. And then you watch how the hiring practices come out of that portal over a period of time, that will give us an idea of what's going on.

Now, you have to pick, at some point, if it's 20 coaches in there and ten are Black and ten are white, you're hiring the white coaches, we know there's a problem.

See what I'm saying. It's very subjective on that. We don't know what these interviews are like. We don't know whether they go in ask the Black coaches the most difficult questions. We don't know what they're doing in those meeting rooms.

We don't know if they're going in and they have a preconceived notion about the candidate or whether they already have -- most of the time they already know who they're going to hire before they even interview them. You know that, Sam. They already know.

Brian Daboll gets hired --

Q. Check the box.

TERRELL DAVIS: Yeah, so now they bring you in and ask you stuff that has nothing to do with coaching. And they just go through the process, look at the clock, four hours, interview, sit there and talk.

So I don't know how you fix it. That's my little suggestion. I think you definitely have to have -- if we don't have the portal, your intake of candidates have to increase meaning your quality control coaches, your position coaches.

You have to have a feeder system of minorities into the NFL so that when these candidates are coming up through the ranks, you have more to choose from. Because there's not a lot there.

But what's preventing you from coming in as a coach? You've already got your boy already. You already know who is going to be your next OC. You might bring your son in. You might bring your best friend's -- so it becomes a good old boy system within the system. That's what's happening.

And they're not looking outside of anything else but the people they know. So what's going to force you to hire somebody other than the people that you already know? So it's a problem. NFL knows it's a problem. How you fix it, I don't have any idea.

Q. 2017 hall of fame inductee, why does it matter to you? Why does -- what does it mean to you, why do

guys care so deeply about that?

TERRELL DAVIS: Well, when I played I didn't care about it, to be honest with you. I didn't think about it. I started thinking about it only when people brought it to my attention that I was being considered to be in the hall of fame many years after. But prior to that I didn't think about it.

After you retire, you kind of watch the game and you start -- but then you start seeing other players going in. And you start to wonder, like, wait a minute. I mean, I respect the game. But was that guy, did he have a bigger impact on the game than me, you know what I mean?

You start to see that. So then you slowly but surely start to want what they have. And you try to fight it, say I don't care about it, I don't care about it. Then, of course, you come to the Super Bowl and every interview they're asking you about the hall of fame. The question is do you deserve to be in the hall of fame?

And first time, first couple of years I would tell them that I wouldn't even answer the question. I don't know. Like, whatever, it's up to you guys. But after a while I started telling myself, if I don't tell them I belong in the hall of fame, what the hell, why would they put me in? Why would they put me in if I'm sitting there and I'm not sure about it?

So I started changing my tune. When they asked me, do I belong in the hall of fame, the answer is. Yeah, I do. I would back it up with facts. Do you want me to tell you why? I got my notepad right here. You want to go through this? So I started doing that.

And then being with the NFL Network, it kept my name on the tongues of the voters because they have so much to worry about. If you're not there and you're not being -- not relevant, but if you're not outspoken or if they don't see you, they tend to focus on what's in front of them. And, so, by being on the NFL Network, I started getting calls from these reporters or voters.

And they would ask me questions. And I'll go on their talk shows. I started knowing, like, I'll get a call from the network. They'd say, hey, we have this reporter on the phone. And I say, are they a voter. And they're like, yes. All right. Get that interview.

If they weren't, okay, well, push that back to next week. But I was getting every interview that they asked me to do that came from a voter, I did.

And I wanted to challenge them on the hall of fame. I asked them the question. If they said do you belong in the

hall of fame, I say you tell me what a hall of famer is. Give me a definition.

And they'd go through the list -- somebody that played the game for a long time. That's not me. Somebody who impacted the game. That's me. Somebody that had their percentage of the team's success rode on their shoulders. I think that was me. Guys who played big in big games. That was me.

So I started challenging them to, like, you tell me what a hall of famer is. If a hall of famer is you had to play 15 years, I'm not a hall of famer. I'm not.

Q. Neither is Lynn Swann?

TERRELL DAVIS: Neither is Lynn Swann. Yeah, Gale Sayers is not one. Tony Boselli, who just went in, is not one.

Q. I don't think Jim Brown would be one.

TERRELL DAVIS: It's not about how long you played. If you took my resumé -- by the way, I'm not saying me -- to me when I say "me," I'm saying us. I'm saying my offense that I played with. It's not just me. It's the guys I played with. Obviously I can't do it by myself.

But my offensive line, my wide receivers, guys that I played with, we all were a part of that. But it's a team game. It's not tennis. It's not golf. You can't ask me to do something for 11 guys and then say, well, you didn't do it by yourself.

Of course I didn't. I had a bunch of guys helping me do it. So all I'm saying is when I did those things -- I played in the biggest moments, the biggest games, I came through in those moments, and I did my part to help our team win championships. And so you can't ask for anything more than that.

Q. Quickly, something behind the scenes, when you were waiting for that knock, knock at the door. Because we see the other side of the door. What was going on inside the room?

TERRELL DAVIS: I hated it. I ain't going to lie to you. I think that's when they stopped doing it. It's torture because I don't know if you guys know how it works. What they do, they have the top 15 finalists and they bring to you the site of the Super Bowl.

They make you wait -- you wait in a hotel room. You bring your family down, you bring your loved ones, your best friend. My agents came down. And you wait there.

And then if you go into the hall that day, they knock on the door and tell you, congratulations, you're in the hall of fame. If they don't they send another guy to your room knock on the door and they tell you sorry, you didn't make it.

Q. We don't see that one.

TERRELL DAVIS: You don't see that one. But it's torture. And it's, like, are you kidding me?

Players have gotten upset over the years because they have flown in town anticipating that they can get into the hall of fame.

I did it three times. Yeah. And first time I did it, my wife called me. I'm in the room waiting with my buddies and my brothers. My wife calls me, she said the hall of fame is trying to call you, because she wasn't there at the time. She said I think you're going in, sweetie -- answer. I'm, like, slow down. They just called. Call them back.

I called back. And instead of getting the congratulations, I got the, sorry, you didn't make it. So got my wife all pumped up that I was making it. Didn't make it.

And then the other two times, there were knocks on the door where I'm thinking it's David Baker. And it's not David Baker.

So, they changed the process. And so when you say what was it like, it was torture. And then the year I went in, I did feel a little different about that year for some reason. I did. I felt like, okay, the running backs who had to go in, they were already gone.

In my mind, I thought that if it was going to be the year, it was going to be the year I went in. But LaDainian Tomlinson was in that same class. And typically, in my opinion, they wouldn't put LaDainian in the same class as me. He's a first-time, first ballot hall of famer, I was the guy that was kind of, I'll say, kind of a special case type of back.

I didn't think they would put two backs in there. I thought everything was pointing to me going in except LT was coming in. But that year happened.

And fortunately I had my wife, my kids were there. My good friends were there. Both of my agents were there. And I had most of the people that were in my circle there in that room when David knocked on the door.

And you think you know what it's going to feel like to hear that knock. But it's totally different. I mean, I had a rush of

emotions that I never thought I had.

I'm serious. It hits you like a ton of bricks. You're just like -- you're so excited, you're relieved. You have closure. It's all this stuff that's running through your body.

And it gives you that final stamp that the chapter of your -- the chapter of your career is over, finally. Because I didn't have that final chapter. It was constantly open.

So to get that confirmation that I was in the Pro Football Hall of Fame, it was like it finally happened. Then you feel validated. You feel like, okay, this is -- and the gravity of it, once they tell you that you're, out of 300 -- it's probably 370 now -- 370 members of the Pro Football Hall of Fame -- out of 40,000 men, women, who have coached, administered or played the game -- do the math on that. It puts it in a way where you're like, you've got to be kidding me. Only 300 some people --

Q. Microscopic grain of sand on the beach. You close that chapter. Tell me about your next chapter.

TERRELL DAVIS: I've done some stuff. I've been an entrepreneur for many years. Right now I'm working on this, a company called Defy. It's a performance brand. It's really built for the every kind of athlete. We have our formulations that are specifically formulated to give you energy, allow you to perform and then recover.

We have three different products. We have a pre-workout, which is called Boost. Caffeine in it, but it's a better for you product. It has caffeine in it.

It has L-citrulline and taurine, an immunity blend in there. And it has electrolytes. Only 15 calories. No sugar. We try to make a better for you product. And then we have a water, which is 9.5 ph alkaline water. I drink it all day.

And alkalinity is really good for your body. Helps flush out your organs. Helps you hydrate on a cellular level. It's a phenomenal water.

And then we have Recover, our CBD drink. We have a couple of products. We have tinctures. We have gummies with CBD in them.

And for me, CBD really changed my life, because in 2017, physically I was about 25 pounds heavier than I am now and I wasn't working out because every time I would work out, the pain -- it just wasn't enjoyable.

So I have bone on bone in my right knee. I've had over 30 procedures playing football. I've got constant inflammation all over the place. I kind of thought that that was it for me.

Like, that's the way I'm going to feel for the rest of my life.

After I started taking CBD, it became like the game-changer, the power of CBD was phenomenal. Dropped 25 pounds in about a year and a half. And I'm working out every single day. I've got more flexibility in my joints than ever before.

So I'm a product of the product, as I tell people. We're nationwide, growing every single day. We're expanding our company hiring. We're a Black-owned company, minority-owned -- Black-owned, woman-owned and veteran-owned company, small business.

And we give back -- every bottle sold from the water we give back proceeds to three organizations that we support. One is called The Center for African-American Health, the National Association of Women Business Owners, and Disabled American Veterans.

We're just trying to raise money make a difference and compete in a space that's very competitive. But as you see the name on there, Defy, that's our mentality. We're going to defy the odds.

Q. You've defied the odds in your career. And really appreciate you coming to Hall of Farmer.

TERRELL DAVIS: That's dope.

Q. Thanks so much.

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