

# LA Times NFL Speaker Series

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## Andrew Siciliano

**Q. Andrew Siciliano, my good friend off the field, if you will, but a guy I watch -- every time I'm at home I'm just glued to Red Zone Channel, DirecTV, and I think you do a spectacular job. I've been there, I've been in the studio, I've watched you do it, and I still don't know how you do it. I mean, it's a unique job, was a unique job when you got it. You were the pioneer there. It's remarkable. Tell me a little bit about that job.**

ANDREW SICILIANO: Well, you're way too kind. Thank you for the kind words. I'm going to give a standard cliched answer, but it is so very true, that I could not do it -- we could not do it without an amazing crew. I know that sounds like I'm just going, give someone else the credit. We need a great crew, and you're juggling -- I can't physically watch and process 10 games at once, so we have a control room that has been together for years and years and years, and I have spotters and researchers there who have been there for years. A lot of our crew has been there 14, 15 of the 17 years.

We all kind of think with one brain, and we're able to figure out where to go. The biggest thing for us is if we have good games we're going to have a good show, and we want to make sure that the viewer at home never does have to pick up his remote and never does miss anything of any significance.

It started as -- hence the name Red Zone Channel, a show where if somebody was in the red zone we would go to the maybe 20-, 30-, whatever yard line. It is kind of morphed into these days like an instant action kind of show where you don't -- I want to make sure you don't miss anything, so if there's a 4th and 1, if there's a record about to be broken, if there's anything of any significance that your friend may tell you about or that you may see on social media, we may try to get that moment live, and if we don't get it live, we turn it around as quickly as possible.

It's honestly the greatest job a guy could ask for. Right before we started it and launched it, certainly wasn't my idea, I would be like everyone else sitting on the couch on Sunday with this group of friends and beer -- well, usually not beer, 10:00 a.m. start, coffee early and then eventually

beer in the afternoon, and then I think if not for this job, I would probably still be doing that, and I'm pretty fortunate that I get to scream at the TVs but do it as a job.

**Q. And it's dovetailed beautifully with the rise in popularity of fantasy football, sports betting, all those things. There's really no other way to watch, to consume the NFL and have it curated for you. You wonder how those things have sort of helped the product --**

ANDREW SICILIANO: I think it's certainly driven the growth. I'd like to say we didn't invent America's short attention span, but I think we came along right at the right time when everyone started getting a phone. It was long before tablets, but the idea you could get the internet on your phone, that you could always get -- we started in 2005, so back then that was kind of -- we still had flip phones and no one really had that kind of data capability in the palm of their hand, and it was before really social media had taken off. I think MySpace was around at that point. I think -- I don't remember when Facebook launched. But the idea that you might be missing something, the whole FOMO concept that we now live in, that anxiety that you're missing something, wasn't as bad then as it is now.

We just came along at the right time, and I think people have now, through fantasy football, kind of just learned to watch the game this way, and especially here. We had, what, 20 something years without a football team here, and we have a whole generation, and I think LA is a perfect example, of young people in this city that grew up without a team, so they turned to fantasy football. You have so many young people around the country where that's the only thing they like, and they can hop on NFLshop.com and buy a Dalvin Cook jersey tomorrow if that guy happens to be their favorite player and they live in Orlando, and then we now have a channel where they can follow those guys as opposed to following the hometown team or maybe the team like -- I'm assuming you and I learned sports when we were kids, our dad or our mom or our family would say, here, this is the team you're rooting for. This generation still has that, but it's totally, I think, been taken over by fantasy, and gambling is a whole 'nother thing.

Watching NFL Honors last night, to think that Jimmy Kimmel is coming out there and making jokes about -- that



was pretty -- we've gone zero to 100 pretty fast, from we can't talk about gambling whatsoever, can't even acknowledge that a team is a favorite a couple of years ago, to now making prop bet jokes on NFL Honors.

I'm all for it. We just got there pretty fast. It remains to be seen how I think we would incorporate that into the Red Zone Channel. We are more comfortable mentioning things now, but I'm not yet ready to go, let's go to Miami, the Dolphins are down 10, but the line is 4, right, where the advice -- you know what I'm saying. There's 12 seconds left, the game is over, but let's go there to see if they can hit the number. I'm not there yet, but I don't think that's too far away.

**Q. No, it's remarkable.**

ANDREW SICILIANO: Think about it. I'm sorry, when fantasy football -- I started at NFL Network 2011. A couple of years earlier, fantasy football was banned for network employees. It was gambling. You literally couldn't do it. In 2003 at FOXSportsNet when we launched a fantasy channel, you could not use as a rightsholder moving pictures because you only use stills because live video or video replay was banned for gambling channels or gambling shows, and the league deemed the Ultimate Fantasy Football Show with Warren Moon, Patrick O'Neill, Eric Kramer and yours truly as a gambling show.

**Q. Wow, I did not recall that, but that's amazing.**

ANDREW SICILIANO: No one recalls that show except my mom.

**Q. Tell me the preparation that goes into a typical Sunday, because you're so good, so nimble and glib in a situation where you're landing 10 planes at once. Again, your staff, the production crew are so instrumental in this, but what kind of preparation goes on during the week?**

ANDREW SICILIANO: I'm very fortunate in that my day job, for lack of a better description, which is hosting NFL now and NFL Network like the afternoon news program for a couple hours a day, my day job prepares me for my Sunday job. I'm really lucky that way. So by the time I get to Sunday, I feel like I've talked all the relevant stories and information on the air for eight hours, 10 hours on the air that week.

So Sunday you kind of have it all bouncing around in your head already. You can reference that this guy was -- didn't practice on Wednesday and was limited Thursday, but they didn't give him an injury designation Friday even though he's barely practiced. It's all in your head because you've

reported it all week. I'm really fortunate.

Also NFL Network gives me about a 100-page research packet every week for the shows obviously on the network, DirecTV and Stats, Inc., the same, so there's a lot of reading, and normally I will fly home from Thursday night football on Friday morning, and no matter how exhausted you are, how late the game went the night before, I pretty much try to cram the entire flight and make -- take all my favorite notes of the week from each game and all that research stuff, and I put it all in one email, so maybe you have about 15 bullet points that I think are relevant notes or storylines from every game, and then I go over them Sunday morning when we get there, DirecTV -- in that building over there at 7:00 a.m.

**Q. Did you study that hard at Syracuse?**

ANDREW SICILIANO: No. Sam, I am -- I was a last-second paper writer and a -- honest to God, in four years there, I never started a paper before 10:00 p.m. the night before it was due. Any paper of any kind.

**Q. So trained you for this job.**

ANDREW SICILIANO: Ever. And I got decent enough grades, I think, but no. I was the guy that did just enough to get the B, B+.

**Q. Isn't it funny when you're procrastinating like that? You'll do your roommate's laundry before you'll start your paper.**

ANDREW SICILIANO: No, I would never do my roommate's laundry. I would never touch that.

But yeah, it's -- I don't know, it's -- I somehow pulled it off, and I do often look back and go, you know, if you had done more homework in high school, maybe your life would have been different. I like how it turned out for the most part but if you had actually done your homework -- I live in the past.

**Q. You've got a very familiar relationship with the audience. There are unclenched sort of -- this open sort of almost feels like a conversation, even some inside jokes or comments or holdovers from the last week. Do you feel totally relaxed in that situation?**

ANDREW SICILIANO: I do. I also -- you always want to make it inclusive, and you never want to go too far inside where someone isn't getting what it is you're talking about. I also -- I don't want to be too snarky, and sometimes I try to pull back a little bit because I think a couple of years ago I was -- there's so much snark on social media that people pass off as analysis. It's not analysis. It's just you being a

jerk. You think you're funny, you want to jump to Twitter, and I've been guilty at times with the best and fastest one-liner for whatever it is we're all collectively watching whatever game it is that day, and I think sometimes I used to do that a little bit too much as well on the air. I'm trying to pull back a little bit from that, as well.

At the same time, there are a million things that happen every Sunday. It's the world's greatest reality show, where you know this, you may drive home from SoFi on Sunday afternoon or wake up Monday morning and go, wow, maybe not the Rams game but the Chargers game, but I had no idea -- like if you had told me that was going to be the storyline today, like this team rallied from down 20 or that team blew a 20-point lead or that coach got fired or how the heck does that guy that's never dropped a pass dropped a pass in the end zone with the game on the line, there are so many of those every week that there are going to be natural reactions in the moment that we would all have sitting on the couch. So I want those to come out because I know the people watching are probably having the same reactions.

At the same time, you have to stay professional, and I'm thinking what would Joe Buck say if he was calling the game? Would he be that snarky? Or what would Costas say, or what would Michaels say? They're calling the game professionally; don't be ass over here just because you have every game on and you think that you could be a stand-up comedian, which you're clearly not.

**Q. You talked about the unpredictable nature, particularly of this season. We've got a 4 seed Rams --**

ANDREW SICILIANO: Two 4 seeds.

**Q. And I wrote off the Bengals every step of the way. Here they are in the Super Bowl. It almost seems scripted that you have the Rams in their own Super Bowl, first year with fans at SoFi stadium. Is this astounding to you when you walk by? Just talking to Kevin Demoff, he sees the Rams logo at Super Bowl and I think he still finds it surreal.**

ANDREW SICILIANO: I think everything with this weekend, it does kind of scare me a little bit, is setting up so perfectly well for the Rams. Even last night with Andrew Whitworth winning the Walter Payton Man of the Year Award, Cooper Kupp winning the Offensive Player of the Year Award, third-round pick, 69th overall pick. Cooper Kupp was a guy that ran horribly at the combine and the Rams were thrilled, as you know, you've told this story, that he ran slow and that everyone would pass on him, and here he is. Didn't play in the previous Super Bowl, now he's ready to play, his teammate Robert Woods blew his

knee out, did play in 53 but can't play in 56.

There are so many forces coming together, I hate the cliché, it's a Hollywood script, but it does seem that way.

At the same time, Joe Burrow has never lost a postseason game, ever, and they have rallied back so many times that part of me, in full disclosure, I am biased, I have worked for the Rams for a decade in other capacities. I am full Rams here, but little bit anxious because Joe Burrow is that good.

**Q. Yep. And Matthew Stafford, tell me your thoughts on how he's come along. There was that mystifying three-game stretch where he had the three pick sixes. He's so accurate, pinpoint accurate so much of the time, and yet a few of those interceptions seemed really sloppy.**

ANDREW SICILIANO: The Titans game comes to mind in primetime. They were 0-for-November, they figured it out. The thing, I commend this team and that coach and that quarterback for -- it all turned when they went on the road on that Monday night with all those COVID cases, and they beat Arizona, a team that had come here and beaten them obviously earlier in the season, really physically beat them that day at SoFi, and when you saw, was it Jalen and Odell --

**Q. Higby.**

ANDREW SICILIANO: Higby, like the list of players, that's when Omicron was hitting and they were one of the first teams that were just devastated, there was no way they should have won that game, but they got through that game, then they got through the next one, again, with a short bench, and then all of a sudden, it snapped. Like it clicked rather, and they were there.

He's a huge part of it. Like if not -- think about it: If not for that three-game stretch, he could be the MVP last night, statistically at least. If they win two out of three and he doesn't throw those picks, he's the MVP, I think.

**Q. Yeah.**

ANDREW SICILIANO: I think they're validated just getting here, but I know that the narrative will instantly change if they don't win on Sunday.

**Q. Earlier today Andre Reed was saying he thinks it will be an unknown who steps up, like we see under the radar players have a big Super Bowl and really help their team in a huge way. Who might that unknown be, if it were the Rams? Might it be a Blanton or a Van Jefferson? Who do you think has that**

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## potential?

ANDREW SICILIANO: It could be either of those. I think A'Shawn Robinson or Sebastian Joseph-Day are good picks on the D-line, as well. A'Shawn has been an unsung hero all season. Last year with COVID it all kind of got messed up for him. This year he's exactly what they thought they were getting when they signed him. And Sebastian Joseph-Day, when he got injured, and it should have been a season-ending injury, but the season hasn't ended, when he got injured he was as good -- the PFF grade, as good a run-stopping interior D-lineman as there was in football, the numbers would show. So if he gets in the backfield, if he strips Joe Mixon, I think he could be that guy.

But I love the Kendall Blanton pick because he is why I love this team. It has so much star power, but it has so many other guys that were mid-round picks or late-round picks or in his case an undrafted free agent that have stepped up late. He's been cut three times, so training camp '19, '20, '21, undrafted guy out of Missouri, all three training camps he was cut on the final cuts, released on the final cuts. Came back on the practice squad, and has been basically on and off the practice squad, signed, released, signed, released, activated, back on the practice squad, COVID related, back on the practice squad, for three years nonstop, and all of a sudden he scores a touchdown in the Bucs game, he gets a big 3rd down late in that game, as well. They ran a flea flicker to him. Now, it was like the last option check-down, right, in the NFC Championship game, but he caught five passes in that game, and now with Higby out, I mean, what a story.

With all the star power, if you don't have those guys, they are not here. It's like, you had Shaq and Kobe but you needed the other guys. You had LeBron and AD but you needed the other guys. All those other guys deserve a lot more respect and attention.

**Q. How about a couple other stories. Eric Weddle, coming off his couch two years. Clearly wasn't on the couch, metaphorically he was --**

ANDREW SICILIANO: He was coaching pee-wee, right?

**Q. Yeah, but he kept himself in shape, clearly.**

ANDREW SICILIANO: Yeah, and when they signed him, I didn't think he was going to play. I think when they signed him, they assumed they would get Taylor Rapp back from concussion protocol that first week and wouldn't have to play him. It was emergency. Well, they played him and he played 19 plays, and then the next week he was playing 69 plays.

It's an amazing story. I don't know if you could find another story like it. Can you think of anything comparable?

**Q. Guy coming back --**

ANDREW SICILIANO: Two years off, showing up for the playoffs, right, and then potentially winning a ring. He had a great career before.

**Q. Cam Akers.**

ANDREW SICILIANO: Yeah.

**Q. That's another remarkable story, tore his achilles right before camp. When did you get rumblings that he might be coming back?**

ANDREW SICILIANO: I guess mid-season. I thought -- so I had originally been told the reason they hadn't -- there was someplace they could have put him, some list, where there was a service time issue and they were trying to do him a solid, and then you're, well, maybe he can come back. Nobody comes back from an achilles in mid-July, like a week before camp. It's remarkable. Again, I'm not Dr. ElAttrache here, but I can't think of anyone who's ever done that.

And then they give him five carries week 17, and all of a sudden the next week he's getting 23 carries. So they haven't shied away from using him.

**Q. Andrew Whitworth wins Walter Payton Man of the Year last night, very stirring speech, and that's a guy that you've known well and worked with. What are your thoughts on that?**

ANDREW SICILIANO: It's so well deserved, and it's more than just everything he does here in LA. It's like 20 years of community service in his native Louisiana and in Cincinnati and then here with the Rams. He doesn't want the attention. I know we say that a lot, oh, don't bring the cameras. He was reluctant from what I understand to even be put up for the award. He got put up for the award, he won the award. He had been nominated in the past.

He is as selfless a guy as you will meet, and that Derrick Barnes story about the rookie linebacker for the Lions was great.

**Q. Is this like jet fuel for the fan base in terms of growing the fan base in Los Angeles? Obviously getting that foothold has been difficult for both franchises, but you see the Rams winning the championship game here, obviously what happens in**



**the Super Bowl will really matter, but the stadium, do you feel like it will get that boost that they've been looking for?**

ANDREW SICILIANO: I think it does really matter if they win. I think the opportunity -- Robert Woods said this a couple of days ago, Gardena and Serra High School, SC, I feel horrible for them that they -- it's not just a home game, it is a home game for him, but he's out with the ACL, and he said that we're a city of champions, we're a city that only wants champions. We've all heard this before, but he thinks it is their moment to get as many fans as possible, that this is their moment to connect and to lock these fans in, especially the young fans.

I do think, and Josh Palmer the Chargers wide receiver who's great, just a rookie Canadian kid living in Los Angeles, he even said on NFL Network last week, he's like, well, trouble finding Charger gear in stores now; you're never going to find Charger gear. A little bit of an exaggeration, but I think I understood what he was saying, like you win a Super Bowl, you're going to have a lot of people following you.

**Q. Can you imagine how torturous it would be to the Rams if it were the Chargers in the Super Bowl right now winning the first Super Bowl in SoFi?**

ANDREW SICILIANO: I mean, obviously there's a little bit of a rivalry here, but you want both teams to succeed, clearly. Obviously, it's great that we have two teams. It's fantastic that we have a game -- that building deserves a game every Sunday. We have more than enough people that live in Southern California to support those two teams.

Next year we get them in the regular season at SoFi, a charger home game.

**Q. Lastly, I just want to ask about your Super Bowl week because I've seen you everywhere around town. You are pulled in every direction now.**

ANDREW SICILIANO: We all are, Sam. Come on.

**Q. It's very busy, but you do a remarkable job.**

ANDREW SICILIANO: Thank you.

**Q. Tell me about these last few days. How do you prepare for the game and -- what's your week like?**

ANDREW SICILIANO: Same thing, great NFL Network research staff certainly. I think what's cool for us like the league and the NFL media group, is that this is a home game like with our building and everything is right there.

So NFL Network moved from Culver city as you know down to Inglewood this year, and that building opened up late in the summer around training camp, and I sit in a newsroom every day where outside my window is SoFi, maybe 50 yards across the patio if that, probably less than that.

It's been a circus because after the NFC championship game obviously the security perimeter goes down, a little bit of a hassle to get in and out of the building, but we're thrilled to show off our office, if you will, and our workspace. I've done a bunch of shows there, did a show downtown radio row last week, or yesterday rather.

We did a show today that was kind of cool, that lake, it's not very shallow, but that body of water there on the southwestern corner, for NFL Honors last night they built like a plexiglass stage on top of the water, so Brian Baldinger and I did a three-hour show. It was hot as Hades on top. We had a desk or chairs or whatever on top of the plexiglass with the water underneath our feet with the stadium in the background. My job is awful, I hate it.

**Q. I heard there's a shark in that.**

ANDREW SICILIANO: Well, that was the running joke; our director said, if you screw up I'm going to hit a button and you're going to drop into the water and there's sharks down there that are like laser beams. Thankfully that did not happen. Last night went to Honors and tonight just bouncing around seeing some friends.

**Q. Thanks for the great work, and I really appreciate you coming on the Hall of Farmer.**

ANDREW SICILIANO: Do you know Sam has water bottles with his name on them? This is just -- the kitchen is fantastic the by the way. Sam, for you, always hopefully you get some time to breathe Super Bowl weekend.

**Q. You, as well.**

ANDREW SICILIANO: Thank you, sir.

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