

LA Times NFL Speaker Series

Saturday, February 12, 2022

Los Angeles, California

Peter King

Q. The truly great Peter King, a legend in our business. No, really, a legend in our business. It's so great to have you, Peter.

PETER KING: I'm so happy to be in the test kitchen.

Q. The Hall of Farmer test kitchen.

PETER KING: It is really a cool place.

Q. Should we make dinner here tonight? It really is beautiful.

PETER KING: No, I have reservations somewhere in Venice. I really am falling in love with Los Angeles. I'll tell you, though, the two best signs that I have seen while in Los Angeles. One, the exit for the Museum of Tolerance. I really like that. I wonder what happens at the Museum of Tolerance. Oh, everything is okay, everything is fine.

But the other one that I really like, the Museum of Unicorns.

Q. The Museum of Unicorns?

PETER KING: It's about two blocks -- I'm sorry, the Unicorn Museum.

Q. Next to the dispensary?

PETER KING: Yeah, it is two blocks from the convention center. And so I park my car at the media center, I park my car there one day and I get out and I look up, and it's the Unicorn Museum, and I said, how LA is this? It's fantastic.

Q. The Unicorn Museum. It in fact isn't a unicorn because they're on every corner now.

PETER KING: Yeah, especially here. But you know what, this has really been a great -- this is a fantastic city to have the Super Bowl. It's not good, it's fantastic.

Q. Why?

PETER KING: Because there's so much to do, and look, the weather helps because there have been so many -- I don't want to say nightmarish, but so many crummy weather weeks at Super Bowls, and this just -- look, Sam, in my opinion, I'm going to write this in my column this week, if the Rams win, in my opinion the Rams are at the center of the two biggest decisions that were made in the last 10 years in the NFL. One is basically handing this market to Stan Kroenke so that he could build the biggest and best sports palace in the world that makes Jerry Jones green with envy when he looks at it. Jerry obviously loves it because Jerry is one of those rising-tides-lifts-all-boats guys, but handing the franchise and this market that the Chargers and Raiders could never have pulled this off, this stadium as gorgeous as it is and in the location that it is with NFL Network and all the development that is going to be happening there. It's just a very, very cool spot.

Even though there's a little matter of \$790 million that it cost them to get here, hey, what's \$790 million among friends, among Stan Kroenke and his good friends the NFL owners right now about who's going to pay that bill.

But the other decision is hiring Sean McVay, because think about it, how hard was it when Kevin Demoff, the president of the Rams, went to Stan Kroenke that night at whatever restaurant, Spago or something, went to him and he just said, okay, look, we've got a little choice. I know you like your veteran coaches on your franchises. I know you like the experienced guys. But I've got a 30-year-old guy who we think is really going to be good.

But I should tell you that if you really want Sean Payton, I think we'd have a chance to make a trade for him with the Saints, and luckily for Demoff, for Les Snead and really for this franchise and this city, they got this young, energetic ball of fire, this Energizer Bunny of NFL head coaches, and two Super Bowls in five years, I think everybody who questioned the signing and the hiring of Sean McVay can have some regrets about questioning that decision.

Q. If you look at a third decision on that list, would it be Matthew Stafford?

PETER KING: Well, not in NFL -- for the Rams, yes. But I'm talking about those two decisions in the last 10 years --



Q. Had a seismic effect on --

PETER KING: I think those are two gigantic decisions. The McVay decision has tributaries, because look at all the coaches that he's developed. A branch of his tree he's coaching against in the Super Bowl.

So I mean, there's a lot that comes from just the simple hiring, not just making the Rams good, but the fact that for better or for worse, and obviously the people who say that -- who wouldn't, there aren't enough Black and minority coaches in the NFL, because everybody is flocking to the McVay guys and the Kyle Shanahan guys. So far they've all been white. But he has had a huge, huge impact on the NFL.

Now, the Stafford move, that was bold, it was smart, and the reason why I really like that move, Sam, is that what was Sean McVay going to do this year? Was he going to go through the motions of loving Jared Goff? It was clear that he found major faults with Jared Goff. So why continue it just because it's tremendously hard to not continue it, which is what they chose to do.

That's one of the things that I really like about this Rams -- I like about the Rams' ethos. They've got a problem, they're going to fix it. They fixed that problem with a revolutionary almost like a sign-and-trade. It was almost like a mega-NBA, but they fixed it, even though obviously two years from now when they don't pick until 73rd in the draft or whatever it is, they're probably going to say, man, it would be nice to have some high picks.

But here's the one thing. You know this, and one of the things that I think that people who criticize the Rams for how they built their team, since the day Sean McVay took over, they have the second most draft choices in the NFL. It's just that none of them are in the first round.

But when you look at some of the players, the perfect example, Nick Scott, the safety. It took a bunch of injuries for him to come in, but he has been one of the highest rated pro football focus guys, period, in the last month or so. He's just playing fantastic.

Q. Nick Scott's hit on Deebo Samuel changed that game.

PETER KING: It changed the game, yeah.

Q. Can you think of a situation where one game has mattered more to a franchise than this game to the Rams? This has set up a Hollywood script. They come back, play the championship game, play the Super Bowl in their own stadium, first year they've had

fans in that stadium, in a city that needs a team to be a winner to really fall in love with it.

PETER KING: It's a great point. I honestly think that when we look back on this season, whether they win or lose the Super Bowl, everybody will know that these Rams are not kidding around. They're a threat for the next few years. And they're a threat for as long as Stafford plays, I think.

So I agree that if the Rams were to win and take on this mantle as the next championship franchise in LA at a time really other than the Dodgers is pretty needed in this city, because everybody knows that LA wants winners. Everybody wants winners, but LA almost like needs winners for them to fall in love with a franchise.

Sam, you know, we were at the NFC Championship game. What I found so interesting about that game, and I don't think it's a bad thing, everybody says, oh, my God, half the crowd was Niner fans and that's a terrible thing. There was more energy in that stadium than a game I've been to in years, because most of the time it's a cadre of fans, a stadium full of fans cheering for one team, and when that team is on offense, it's everybody quiet.

There was a competition between the Rams' fans and the Niners' fans at that game who can be the loudest. I honestly felt that that's what was going on at this weird, weird stadium experience. It was never quiet.

I just found that to be cool. I like that. If I were the Rams, of course I'd like 90 percent of the fans in the stadium to cheer for us. Of course you would. But I don't think it's terrible to have a boatload of fans from any other team coming.

One other thing. If I'm the Chamber of Commerce, I don't mind that, either, because I'm in the airport Westin the morning of the game and there were 9,000 fans in that lobby. Now, I have no idea if whatever the date was, January 28th, what their level of capacity, how many rooms they would have there, but it's got to be pretty good for business when 40,000 fans from the other team show up at the stadium.

Q. So you have Rams, 49ers. Which franchise is better equipped for the long haul of winning?

PETER KING: I think it all depends on whether Trey Lance is any good. If Trey Lance is good, I like the Niners a little better because the Rams are just older. You know, they're not older across the board, but their star players -- I mean, Odell is 49, Von Miller is in his 30s, Stafford obviously, this is his 13th year, I guess, and so if the quarterback for the 49ers plays well, give me the Niners.



Q. But the NFL and LA did what it had hoped to do, which is reestablish that rivalry between LA and San Francisco.

PETER KING: It's awesome. That was such a great day, I thought, for the NFL, because it's something that you really don't see very often or very much. Like even if -- like let's think of the other teams that are in close proximity in a region. Right now if the Eagles and the Giants play at the Meadowlands, because the Giants are total crap and the Eagles are a coin flip, it's not the way it used to be when it was Buddy Ryan and Bill Parcells.

You look at Baltimore and Washington, it's a "meh" rivalry. The only one that is still as fantastic as it has been for the last 12, 15 years is Pittsburgh-Baltimore. That thing will never die. There is some real, real hatred there.

I love the fact that you can take, whatever it is, a six-hour drive from here to Santa Clara and get to the game if you're a Rams fan and you want to go to the game. You just wake up at 4:30, get in the car and go up.

Rivalries like that are really good for a region and for the NFL.

Q. Terrell Davis sat in this seat yesterday and said it's all but a done deal, Aaron Rodgers is going to the Broncos. Is he wrong?

PETER KING: I forget what show I was on this week, but somebody said, okay, total gut feeling, Aaron Rodgers opening day 2022, where is he and blah, blah, blah, and I said, I think Denver.

But I've been exchanging some text messages with Rob Demovsky, the ESPN guy who covers the Packers who's very good, and we were just joking about it, and I said, I watched Rodgers' remarks after the MVP, and I said, I have no freaking idea where this guy is going.

Sam, I think there's one thing that people -- I wish people would sort of understand about this. I know that Aaron Rodgers is a polarizing figure, but I absolutely totally applaud Aaron Rodgers for how he handled two things this year. I sat with him on I think August 8th, and he basically said, Peter, you're not going to have any idea what I'm going to do at the end of this year. I'm not going to talk about it. Obviously he can't help think about it, but I'm not going to talk about it, it's not going to be a part of the team. The first thing, the first day I was here and Matt LaFleur asked me to break down the team after practice, and I just said, guys -- he said, I knew what everybody is thinking --

Q. Hang on a second. You broke down the team?

PETER KING: Aaron Rodgers did. I'm sorry.

Q. I was like, wait --

PETER KING: No, no, no, I'm sorry, I misspoke. Aaron Rodgers broke down the team, and he basically -- he knew that everybody was sort of looking at him, how he's really ticked off coming back and all that, and he goes, guys, this is going to be a fantastic year. I'm so excited about it. I am going to be where my feet are all season. No distractions, no anything. Let's everybody on this team focus on every day, blah, blah, blah.

It's what a coach would say to his team. LaFleur was euphoric when he heard what he said because Aaron Rodgers is iconoclast and who the hell knows what's going to come out of his mouth.

But I applaud that, and the other thing I applaud is that he doesn't have a bunch of people out there like agents, friends in the media, all that stuff sort of laying the groundwork for what might happen. It's just been a total iron curtain of idea/news blackout for him, which is exactly the way he should have handled it.

You can think whatever you want about the vaccine, he missed a game, should he be the MVP when that happens. All those are fair arguments. But as far as the player he was this year, the teammate he was this year, I thought he was great.

The reason I think Denver is that it just makes too much sense. I wrote about it in late December, that it's shaping up to make a lot of sense if, if, if Nathaniel Hackett were to get the Denver job. I had no idea at the time, absolutely no idea, but he loves Nathaniel Hackett, and the Broncos are the only team that can do the three things that the Packers would want in a trade: One, they would be willing, I believe, to give him three ones and a player who matters. Let's just invent the player. I invented him in my column. I said Jerry Jeudy. Good young wide receiver. Then the Packers could build around a receiving corps either if they signed Davante Adams or just have Jerry Jeudy coming in.

But the other two things --

Q. Do the Broncos wind up with Davante then?

PETER KING: It might be too rich for their blood, but obviously Aaron would want that, and it could happen because they've got cap room. That was the other thing, they've got cap room.

Then I think the experience of the Denver Broncos in the six post-Peyton years has been like debilitating for that franchise. This is the worst six-year run, five-, six-year run that they've had in a half century.

They've got to put a stop to it, and they also, Sam, are competing in a division with two great quarterbacks and a really good one in Derek Carr. Herbert, Mahomes. If you don't have a quarterback, it's like you're going to the rock fight with peas in your pocket, and that is the problem right now that I see and why Denver is going to be so motivated to be the team.

But just remember one thing, and people need to remember this one thing. Aaron Rodgers is going to be -- if he chooses to play with the Packers one more year, he will be an unrestricted free agent in 13 months at age 39. Tom Brady was an unrestricted free agent at age 42. You look at that, and you say, well, Aaron Rodgers is in great physical condition.

So I would only want to hear one thing from Aaron Rodgers, and that is, I vow to give you three years. That's it. If he says, I'm going year to year, I'm not making that trade.

Q. It's a lot to give up.

PETER KING: On the other side, you say, well, Green Bay has to do it. I'm not so sure. I talked to an NFL coach this week, and I just said, what would you do if you are Brian Gutekunst, the GM of the Packers, and he said, I would not take any offer for Aaron Rodgers, because you know that going into this year in a pretty weakened NFC, compared to the AFC, the depth of quarterback in the AFC, you know that you would have as good a chance as anybody in a lousy division and in a conference that's not nearly as good as the other one, you'd have a great chance for the last time that you have Aaron Rodgers to go to a Super Bowl. And you know that you're not going to have that chance with Jordan Love. It wouldn't matter how many draft choices.

I said, I had not thought of it in that way, but your whole thought about playing for today, playing for this one more year, I love that.

Q. Are we chasing ghosts on Tom Brady, or is he really done?

PETER KING: I think people are chasing ghosts on Tom Brady. Not to say he won't play again. When I was working for SI, I forget what year it was, but I think Brady was 34 years old, and that was the year that he said to me, I want to play until I'm 45, and I think I can do it. And he

didn't play until he was 45 technically. Maybe you could say that. He turns 45 in August. But anyway, he played a long time.

But it's a great example of how in life you can't -- it's silly to think 10 years ahead about making anything an absolute.

But I respect Rob Gronkowski saying he's going to play again. I don't have any idea, Sam. It also goes to one of the other things that I think you and I probably would both really agree with. A lot of times -- Tim Layton wrote about this at NBC last week. I thought it was beautiful, and it was a great point. Everybody thinks, oh, you know Tom Brady, what's he going to do, will he come back? I don't know Tom Brady. I talk to Tom Brady four or five times a year. Does that qualify as knowing somebody? I mean, I know him, but I don't "know" Tom Brady, and I certainly don't know his innermost thoughts.

But I do think that if he does come back, you know what it says to me? It says to me, he might have been tired of being the adult in the room in Tampa, and maybe that was part of why he left. If you see him sign with team X and play somewhere other than Tampa, that to me will be a pretty big --

Q. An indictment?

PETER KING: A pretty big clue that he might have had some problems with the way things were run in Tampa.

Q. Is there a way to give the Rooney Rule teeth?

PETER KING: I think that Tony Dungy has, I think, what is a pretty good idea. I've always favored no hirings of head coaches until after the Super Bowl. I think that's the only thing that makes sense.

This year, Sam, Leslie Frazier is the defensive coordinator of the Buffalo Bills. The Buffalo Bills allowed 30 yards less per game than any team in football. They routed everybody as the No. 1 defense in football. So Leslie Frazier, his team is getting ready to play in a divisional playoff game at Kansas City, biggest game of the year, and a huge game, how are we going to defend Mahomes, blah, blah, blah.

So that week on Friday afternoon, 2:00 or 3:00 in the afternoon, Leslie Frazier got on a multihour Zoom call to do an interview for the job with the Chicago Bears. That's the job that Leslie Frazier has always wanted, so of course he's going to take that interview. And then he was also asked by the New York Giants to do an interview. He got up early Saturday morning and he did it before they got on the plane to go to Kansas City.

This is just my guess, but after five or six hours of being grilled by the Bears and the Giants, how are you going to resuscitate our franchise, what would you do, all these questions. Here's a guy, it's not his fault, it's the way that the rules are written in the league, which are so stupid, and they're an insult to the Buffalo Bills, they're an insult to Leslie Frazier in this particular case that they have set up a system where people are racing to do coaching hires instead of just saying, hey, when our season is over, we'll worry about the coach.

So Dungy is going to say after the Super Bowl, my whole different idea is I think that Roger Goodell should issue an edict, and no owner worth his salt would go against Goodell right now in this climate in our society, and Roger Goodell's edict should be, every team in the NFL is going to have to have one, at least, minority or Black coach in position to touch the quarterback every day at practice, assistant quarterback coach, give him whatever title you want. Can't be quality control, can't be going to get coffee for the coaches.

In my opinion, that would improve the pipeline. That's the biggest problem right now, that there aren't enough offensive coaches who touch quarterbacks who are Black.

Q. How about relaxing or doing away with any permissions rules, like you have permission to interview our coordinator for a head coaching job and saying -- because when a team goes to another team and asks for permission, it puts pressure on that coach. Do you want to leave this team? Let them negotiate, as we would, if somebody came to us --

PETER KING: You know who says that's a great idea? Mike Locksley, the Maryland coach who was also the head of the National Coalition of Minority Football Coaches, which is kind of gaining steam, he believes that the solution to the NFL is to allow free movement of assistant coaches, because then you don't have to worry about, for instance, like Andy Reid hasn't wanted to lose Mike Kafka, his quarterback coach who now is the offensive coordinator of the Giants. He hasn't wanted to lose him, and so he can say what -- honestly, I don't know the inside story, but if I'm Mike Kafka two years ago after they win the Super Bowl, I think he could have got a coordinator's job. But he didn't leave.

My whole point is there are things that can be done, but in the long-range looking at this, unless the minds of the owners change even a little bit, there's only so much that Troy Vincent and Roger Goodell can do. There really is. Unless, unless, and I'm hearing a little bit about this now, that the NFL could say as soon as this year, you hire a

Black head coach, you're going to get a compensatory pick either in the first or second round. There's some discussion about that right now.

But to me, that's a Band-Aid. That doesn't fix --

Q. Discounts the coach, too. It's like saying you come with -- like getting two gifts for your wife, like saying this one isn't good enough so I'm going to get you another one.

PETER KING: Yeah, when that has been discussed in the past, Black coaches, minority coaches have really argued against it. But desperate times require desperate measures. I think the NFL feels like desperados on this issue.

Q. Pete, is this what you thought an LA Super Bowl would look like?

PETER KING: It really is. Fun places to eat, a lot of enthusiasm in the community about the game. I thought all along whether the Rams were in it or whether they weren't that the prices would be totally out of control. I don't love that, but also I don't buy a ticket, either. So if somebody who's very wealthy wants to pay \$12,000 to go to this game, who cares? I don't care. But it's sad for a lot of the real fans.

But you know, I broke into football writing covering the Cincinnati Bengals for the Cincinnati Enquirer, and I was there a week ago. I rode to work one morning with Zac Taylor, the head coach, and the city was just totally, totally different. There were stories on the news the night I got in about all these people who were on the news saying, I am going to Los Angeles. I don't think I can get a ticket, but I'm going anyway because my team is there.

Okay, would they say the same thing about -- I can't even -- I don't want to put any city down, but I don't know that they would say the same thing about every city that would host a Super Bowl, because who doesn't want to go to LA in February? I mean, it's just -- in most places in the United States, it's better than where you are. If you can go there and have fun and have four or five really nice meals and go to the game, how fun would that be?

I think LA has done a great job. I don't know anything about internal crap-ola, but I just know for me, looking forward to the game, I think LA has handled it great.

Q. This is unbelievable; I wish people could see the clock here. Peter's timing --

PETER KING: They want us out. They want us out now.



**Q. Impeccable timing, Peter. Thank you so much.
Hall of Farmer, thank you so much. That was great.**

PETER KING: You're welcome, Sam. I enjoyed it.

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