

CBS NFL Today

Wednesday, September 1, 2021

Jim Nantz

Tony Romo

Tracy Wolfson

Jim Rikhoff

Harold Bryant

Sean McManus

Hosted by James Brown



home.

I think that that's something that you've got new receivers sometimes, you have a new offensive line, you have a new running back, whatever it is, you have new plays and you have new verbiage on how to change plays and you try to streamline it and make it simple so it's just one word or one hand signal.

To me I always wanted that. I think that's going to be something that -- can he overcome it? Sure. It might be a drive or two. You might have perfect plays called and you might score on the first drive or two because you had the perfect scheme set up.

But ultimately everyone is trying to get through the preseason healthy, and your best players, you're trying to get them to week one and survive the season, and I think that's the most important thing.

I do think there will be a slight adjustment when the plays are difficult and everything doesn't go perfect. I think when you've played a little bit, that speed, it's hard to duplicate, like I said. But I think Dak will be fine. I think it's just a period of time trusting himself and slowly getting back.

JIM NANTZ: We only get a couple of cracks at the Cowboys on most years, and that's why if you went back and looked at Tony's games on CBS when he was a player, it just happened, whatever, serendipity, he was brilliant on CBS as a player or as a broadcaster. He had a six-touchdown game, a 500-yard passing game. He had a couple of 400-yard passing games, on, again, the limited number of times that we broadcast the Cowboys games.

Transitioning now to the booth, obviously a part of what I think you're asking is what was it like being in these production meetings having Dak there and Tony sitting on the side of a broadcaster, and there was nothing to me that felt awkward about it in any sense.

In fact, there was a tremendous amount of respect between Tony and Dak, and right back each way. He has that presence about him. You don't see it with every quarterback in the league. We're fortunate enough to see almost every one during the course of a season, and they walk into the room, just as, again, outsiders, you can read pretty quickly if this is a player that the rest of the team can

THE MODERATOR: We're going to welcome in our game crew. We'll welcome back Sean McManus and Harold Bryant and be joined by Jim Rikhoff, the lead producer for The NFL on CBS, and we'll also welcome in Tony Romo, Jim Nantz, and Tracy Wolfson.

Q. Jim, Tony, and Tracy, you all were at AT&T Stadium last October when Dak Prescott suffered that injury. I wanted to get your thoughts on how he's responded and come back and set himself up for this season. Tony, do you think the way the Cowboys have protected him in the preseason, will he be more rusty than ready? And Tracy and Jim, just your impressions of the way Dak has presented himself in your pregame meetings.

TONY ROMO: Well, I think for me, the pregame meetings he's always exemplified what you want from the quarterback position, a leader of the football team. He's always trying to protect what Julian was talking about, distractions and keep the focus on the field and on the players and on football.

Obviously after any injury, when you come back there's a period -- you always feel like you're good and you're practicing and you feel good, but nothing can duplicate actually being in the game.

I always wanted to play in the preseason. I always told Coach, I said, I want like just -- even if we're being smart, okay, we don't want any injuries to happen, let's say, no one wants that.

But I always wanted personally at least one series at home and one series on the road because they're different. From a quarterback perspective, when you're on the road, changing a play is very different than changing a play at

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rally behind.

Dak just has that presence and command about him. We wish him well. Obviously everyone does. It was just almost freakish, not the injury, which wasn't itself, but just the fact that when he did suffer the injury, that, again, it happened to fall on a game that was on our watch.

We're calling the game; Tony is in the booth; it just happened to land on that week.

You know, those are always tough situations when you're the broadcaster sitting on a gruesome injury. I've had several in my career, and that one right up there is on that very short list of ones that are just stunning and take your breath away and really gets you -- it's a challenge to get your mind back to calling the broadcast after you see something like that.

Tony did a terrific job, I thought, of handling that situation and showing concern and empathy for his teammate, for his former teammate.

Q. Sorry to ask a local question, but Tony, wanted your thoughts on the cast Miami has put around Tua, adding obviously Waddle and Will Fuller to Gesicki and Parker. Is this to you potentially a fringe playoff team again as they were last year, maybe a little better than that? Tua as you've seen has improved in preseason.

TONY ROMO: There's no question, yeah, he's improved. I think you're going to see him take that step. The biggest thing, it's always like the teams around you matter, as well. So it's not just your team.

So I do think that Miami, what they've built over this last three, four, five years to get to this point, you're seeing a team that had a plan and they've had a lot of draft picks. I think they've drafted well.

I think they have a very good coaching staff. I think Flores was a great hire. I think he really does a great job of creating a culture where the team believes in him and the system, and you're going to get the best out of each player.

I also think, though, that division is about to become really, really one of the more dominant divisions, I think, in the National Football League. It's early, right, but there's signs right now. Buffalo with Josh Allen is probably the frontrunner because of what they did last year and Josh's improvement. But I think Bill Belichick needed a season with all the opt-outs, with everything. You've got to remember, they've had how many draft picks in the top 15 in 20 years. It's like you can count on one, two, three

fingers, I think.

I think you're going to see them come back very quickly. I think they're going to be right there.

I'm convinced the Patriots are for real, and they're going to -- no one wants to play them. I don't care who you are. I think they're better than people are even realizing right now.

I think that Miami has a lot of talent and ability, like I said. I think they're definitely a playoff team.

I actually think Zach Wilson with the Jets is going to turn that franchise around him, and the coach they hired from the Niners, I think he's unbelievable. I think that was a great hire. I think this division is loaded.

I think Zach Wilson is going to be in the discussion as one of the top three to five quarterbacks very quickly within the next couple years. I think you're going to see him rise and just -- I think he's unbelievable. His ceiling is so high. It's rare for me to say someone has the ability to get in the stratosphere of a Mahomes, but I think this kid actually has that ability.

When you have a quarterback like that, I think there's no telling how good you can be. He can make up for a lot of weaknesses in a lot of areas for a football team.

I understand that they haven't had the ability and the talent of some of these other teams they've gone against, but he'll make up for a lot of that and fast, and we'll see how quickly he can do that because the division is going to get tougher and tougher.

I think you're seeing a resurgence there, and I think there's a lot of really talented quarterback play in general in the National Football League. I counted 18 to 20 teams that I would have been as a coach, I would have been like, I'm good with this quarterback, he can win a Super Bowl. Not with like, hey, we have the '80s Bears defense; we don't have the Giants with Taylor.

Or it's lie, no, you have a quarterback that can actually help lead you to wins in the playoffs, and that's a lot.

Usually I wouldn't be able to get to 10, so this is probably the deepest I've seen in the National Football League as far as quarterback play. I think it's going to be a great season.

Q. Tony, what do you like best about Brian Daboll's scheme in Buffalo and how he's made things as comfortable as possible for Josh Allen?

TONY ROMO: Well, I think he's done a great job. I think it goes hand in hand, the coordinator and -- sorry, the head coach, the offensive coordinator and the quarterback, they're all tied together. Each one's success, the other person has so much influence on the success of the other one.

To have someone like Josh Allen is a real gift, I think. For Josh Allen to have someone like Brian is a gift. I think everything is made easier. I always relate this to Gregg Popovich and Tim Duncan. If you get one of the top guys in the league, and Duncan was right there, every time he played he was in the top five in the NBA every season he ever played, for 15, 18 years, whatever it was, and I think you're seeing that with Josh.

He has a great coaching staff. Sean McDermott is incredible. I think Brian is incredible; puts him in good situations. He knows the development. Josh's development in that scheme has been shown, and he's been rewarded with a contract.

I think that's a no-brainer. I think he's one of the really gifted quarterbacks in the National Football League, and I think he's just going to continue to improve.

I think when you have a scheme that's not random, I call it, it's -- you're trying to always attack the defense's weaknesses, but you have a blueprint, you have something that you're always going back to that you know we can rely on this.

I think a lot of coaches sometimes just throw darts at the board and they're just saying, Okay, this week we're going to do this, blah, blah, blah. What you do is you have your scheme, and we live in this world, and we just morph and say, Okay, this is our scheme, but we're going to live a little more over here in this 20 percent this week because this team does this.

Instead of saying, We've got these brand new plays; we're going to do all this stuff. It's like, no, this is all our scheme. We're just going to live a little more over here this week because this team does this. I think Brian does a really good job with that.

I think you're seeing just the ability of a bunch of really talented people come together. And when you have a Duncan and Popovich together, they're going to compete year in, year out, and I think the coaching staff, like you talked about with Brian, having him, McDermott, and Josh together, they're going to be hard to beat year in, year out.

Because they're good in coaching, they're good in scheme,

and they're good with talent at that position. That's why I think the Spurs were really good for a long time, and I think the Bills are going to be just like that.

Q. Sean, I'm going to ask the COVID question. I'm curious what you can say on the vaccination status of the travelling crews, and then also just how, quote-unquote, normal you expect week one to be in the booth, and Tracy, what your expectations are in terms of sideline access.

SEAN McMANUS: I think we'll be not back to what we were pre-COVID, but we're getting closer. Our crew will be vaccinated. The mobile units to a large extent will be back to their normal configuration. The announcers on the field will not have to be in the moat. They'll be able to be on the field, unlike last year. There will not be as much social distancing as there has been in the past.

I think we're slowly getting back to where we were pre-pandemic, but we're not quite there yet.

TRACY WOLFSON: I'll follow up also with what Sean talked about. Looking forward to getting back on the field I've got to admit. We learned a lot from being up in that moat. We had to do things very differently, so I think there's a positive side of taking what we learned there and utilizing it on the field.

I think we'll still, as Sean mentioned, get the chance to have a little bit more of that personal feel with the players and coaches on the sideline, whether it's pregame, halftime or postgame, socially distanced still, as well, but I also think it's going to be determined week to week, what happens in the world, what happens in these individual states, what happens with these teams, and certainly each stadium and each team has their own rules.

Once again, we're still just going to have to adjust.

SEAN McMANUS: The plan right now, unlike last year, is to have our production meetings with the coaches and the players in person as opposed to being on a Zoom, which I think just from an eye contact standpoint I think will be beneficial.

Slowly but surely we're getting back to a degree of normalcy.

Q. Tony, had a quick NFC East question for you. Jalen Hurts is now officially the starter in Philly. I just wanted to know what your thoughts on him and the Eagles are going to be this year.

TONY ROMO: Well, I know we heard in the off-season the



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owner Jeffrey Lurie talk about how they were, after last season, having to like start over, guess you could say.

I actually think this team has a lot of talent. I think they hired a great coach. I think Jeffrey Lurie is one of the best owners. I know that not a lot of owners have their, I guess, footprint in everything, just their hands in everything.

I think that he really knows football at a pretty good level, and I think obviously he loves being a part of it.

I think that this organization is really well built. I think that he's very smart at the top, and he makes decisions -- they're just sound. I think you're going to find the Eagles are going to be just fine.

I think this year is a transition year a little bit, but I think Jalen Hurts obviously has an opportunity to show his ability. I don't think you're afforded that many in the NFL, but I think that he showed a lot of flashes of good things last year, and he has a chance to be very good.

I think the Eagles are going to be a surprise team, honestly. If you go in and you think that they're just really not ready, they could shock a lot of people and go 10-6, 11-5 very quickly.

I think that's an uphill battle right now, but I think they have a lot of talented players and the coaching staff is good and the ownership is sound. I wouldn't be surprised at all if the Eagles have a great season this year.

Q. Harold, what are the production highlights in terms of cameras for the first couple of weeks, and kind of piggy-backing, if you could put a percentage on what number of games will be produced remotely for the first couple of weeks.

HAROLD BRYANT: I'll start off with the first part. We are not producing games remotely, as Sean mentioned. We are getting back to somewhat normalcy, and we will have all of our crews on the road back in the booths and the production trucks.

Some of the highlights this year and for our lead crew here, you'll see the Atlas camera come back. We used that -- or Venice camera. There are different names. It's the cinematic camera that we had on the field last year for a few games, and we'll have that all year.

We've got our line-to-gain technology. It's an RF camera right on the line. Again, that was for selected games. We'll have it all season long.

We've got the Hawkeye system, and the 4K Zoom is

another one that will be deployed all year long. It just gives you that clearer view when you need to zoom into a foot on the line or a ball going over or a hand out of bounds or something along those lines.

A couple other things. We have a new graphics package this year. We debuted it at the Super Bowl, but we enhanced it and adapted it for regular season, so it's more refined. Just a very classic looking style for that.

We're also working with a company called Second Spectrum. They do tracking data. Second Spectrum takes that next-gen type data, game analysis information to help out, just tell the story at another level. It's an overlay, and it's a real-time type of graphic that you'll see.

So those are some of the enhancements. All of our games we've added some more super slo-mo cameras, as well. That's key across the board. Everyone knows -- everyone loves the super slo-mo look. So we've added those across the board.

Q. Tony, 10 years ago you lost two games to the Giants. They win the Super Bowl in 2011. For the last 10 years they've been mostly terrible. Half the time as a player and the other half of the time as a broadcaster, what do you think has gone wrong with that franchise to be in that consistent a trouble for the last 10 years?

TONY ROMO: Well, I'm not there so I can't tell you exactly, but I will say this: I really believe -- just talking to let's say an owner calls and says what do you think, Tony, about blah, blah, blah. I'm like, well, the first thing is this league is built for parity, so everything is going to be even across the board for everybody.

So how do you find advantages to win? So it's like, I think there's about three or four ways as an organization that you can actually have the ability to win and have an upper hand guess you could say.

One is you get a top-5 quarterback. Right away that makes up for so many things. It's like, if you have a Mahomes, a Rodgers, a Brady, it's like you're already ahead of everybody else as far as just winning. Everyone looks better, everyone does a better job, just by having that.

So it's like, okay, you've got that, great. If you can't get that, then you've got to look at the other ways to figure out how to gain advantages.

One of those is your ability to evaluate talent. So the draft. Well, if they're drafting correctly and they're drafting the



right guys, well, you can pick better players over time, you're going to have more talent than another team, other teams. That's another way.

Another one is your coaching staff and your scheme. I think that your scheme is huge. I think that in a lot of ways, it's undersold as far as the ability -- I always say, if an offensive coordinator, you could have the backup come in and he could do what the starter does and all of a sudden it's like, Oh, this is pretty easy.

It's like, Well, people are open for a reason. Somebody designed a play, came up with how to defeat a defense. Well, that's another advantage. You want to get ahead of the curve with scheme.

So whoever came up with Tampa 2 when it was first invented, well, they had a huge advantage.

Pittsburgh Steelers in the '70s, people don't realize that's new. When the Seahawks came up with a new version of cover three, that wasn't just cover three, that wasn't your high school cover three. It was a complete different version of it, and they were the first teams to press, and the responsibilities for everybody were just slightly different than a normal cover three.

Well, that gave the league fits.

Now, obviously they drafted well and they had some players that were good, but the scheme also mattered and made it very difficult. I mean, even on quarterbacks like Peyton Manning. They could make them struggle with something as simple as running one play for 80 percent of the game. That's impossible in the modern game.

But the only way you can do that is because the scheme is so advanced, it gives you an advantage.

I believe that any of these, those three right there really set you apart. I do think they found a coach that is allowing them to have advantages. I think Joe Judge is really good. I think that that's a start. I think that sometimes you can't tell about the draft picks until they're more than a year old, two years, but I think they hired a good one in Dave, and I think that that will play out.

We'll see. It's right at that point where we need to see that this year, but I think he's done a good job. Like Phil said earlier, the offensive line is a huge way to make everything simple. Like if you have a good offensive line, you can make this game so simple. It's almost like saying an offensive line in football is like having Kareem Abdul-Jabbar. It's like having him in his prime. It's like, Yeah, we're not that great.

It's a different way to say we have a great quarterback. We can just run simple plays, and we're going to just mash you for four yards and stay ahead of the chains and always put ourselves in an advantageous position.

I think they've tried to allocate the resources to that. We're going to find out if that's actually been something that's improved or not, but I think in a lot of ways those are the reasons you win.

There's one other one that I'll keep to myself that I think you can win as an organization, but that's how you do it, and I think right now you're seeing they need to find one of those things.

Q. Tony, when you look at current players or coaches, can you identify one or two you think could make good analysts after they're done playing or coaching?

TONY ROMO: Oh, Jim will tell you this. Jim, go ahead.

JIM NANTZ: Listen, I'm sitting with the best -- I believe when it's all said and done will be viewed as the best of all time, so I couldn't be happier.

TONY ROMO: We do think, though, that Mike Tomlin would be a guy -- of coaches or players, Mike Tomlin would be a guy you thought.

JIM NANTZ: Tomlin has a way with phraseology that nothing is ever stated the same way twice. I do think he would be outstanding if he wanted to do it, but he's still young. Even though he's so accomplished he's already built a Hall of Fame resume.

But Mike would be brilliant.

Ryan Fitzpatrick, you could almost bank on it. He will be broadcasting. After he plays for his 32nd NFL team, he'll be a great addition to somebody's broadcast crew.

Q. When you look at younger play-by-play or hosts, are there a few who stick out to you and why, who you think are really good and have big futures?

JIM NANTZ: There are a ton of them, but I'm not going to name anyone, and here's why. There was a really prominent broadcaster early in my career who got asked that question, and it was really early in my career and put me in one of the top-10 guys of all time. So my name happened to be in his answer with others. It meant the world to me.

But there was another occasion where another broadcaster

got asked something similar and he didn't mention my name, and it hurt.

I'm not going to put anybody on a list right now. Trust me, this is something I'm very involved in, and I take a lot of pride in trying to mentor young broadcasters. In fact, the College Sports Broadcaster of the Year Award is named after me, and it's one of the great honors of my career, is to see that young person recognized every year at the National Sports Media Association banquet. It's just a tremendous thing.

I have not only been involved in it with those who have won, I'm not in the voting process, but have reached out to them every single year, and I've kept a relationship with virtually every single one of them. I look at their tapes constantly. There is a running dialogue with feedback, et cetera, et cetera.

I will say this: There are so many more young people that are involved and wanting to get involved in the business than it was when I was coming out of college. It's a completely different world. There are so many people that want to get into this universe.

I don't blame them. It was a dream job for me. It's always I've ever wanted to do since I was 11 years old was to work specifically for the CBS Sports television network. I mean, I count my blessings every day that I've been given that chance.

Again, but when I was starting out, there were three networks and a couple of independent stations and then ESPN rolled along in 1979 and opportunity started increasing, and we all know that there's so much content out there now, there are more jobs, but there are definitely 10 times more people that want to be involved in the process.

So we have a lot of great ones. We have great young people, including right here at CBS I'm proud to say. I've tried to avail myself to anyone that is looking for some feedback about what they're doing.

It's an honor to be this many years down the road happier than I've ever been in my career working with the people I want to work with trying to produce great television and have a good time while we're doing it every single week.

Q. Invariably every broadcaster I've spoken to, maybe with the exception of one or two, Sean, hate, literally use that word, hate, remote broadcasting, and they fear that it is here to stay. As such, they take another turn. They wanted to be play-by-play people, but that's not going to be very much fun if you can't travel with a

club, be on the field and do all that. My question is really to Sean and anybody else who would like to butt in, I would say this, that those guys don't like it; is it going to be here in some version going forward?

SEAN McMANUS: The vast majority, and I'm confident in this, the vast majority certainly at CBS and I believe at other networks, also, of announcers will continue to be on-site. We did some of it primarily for COVID precautions during the past year, but it is without question more difficult for an announcer, both a play-by-play person and an analyst not to be on the court or in the stadium or in the arena, it's really difficult. There's no way you can make the argument that announce teams are as good sitting in a studio as they are sitting live in the arena or the stadium.

I think you'll see a little bit of it down the road. It's cost effective. But it's not incredibly cost effective. What you're basically doing is saving T & E for the announce crew and the statistician and the spotter.

But I don't look at it as a wholesale change in our industry; I think it'll be done relatively few times and far between. We have no plans to do it in our NFL schedule this coming year. We may do it a few times at CBS Sports Network, but I think generally speaking our announcers will continue to be on-site.

JIM NANTZ: I worked two different broadcasts where remote was part of it. One was a playoff game where Tony was remotely announcing and I was on-site in New Orleans. It was the game a lot of people talked about, the Nickelodeon game. We had 30 million people watching our broadcast that day without Tony on-site.

I mean, because he has such an amazing ability to do that, he had access to a lot of replay monitors, et cetera, et cetera, didn't miss a beat. But I sure didn't love it. It didn't feel like it normally does. You're not quite for certain when your broadcast partner has finished a sense. You can't have the quick by play. It was different.

And I had one golf event which was squeezed in between the AFC Championship and the Super Bowl, the Farmers Insurance Open, which I broadcast from a studio in Monterey. The magic of being on-site, you said it so well, you can't ever replace that, which made me think when you were asking the question, no one has asked they this and I've been doing a lot of radio and other interviews here lately, but we had a whole season where we didn't have the chance to play against crowd noise.

I thought that might be -- maybe somebody else has one in queue here, a question coming up. But we're going to go into the booth on September the 12th and we really haven't

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called a game that feels like a game with the presence of a game in two years. That's a big story.

That's one that I don't think is going to take us a whole lot of adjusting. I've been busy every single week since the Super Bowl virtually every week, I've been on the air doing something, and the crowds have returned in those sports, particularly golf over the summer.

But I'm just anxious for -- not how we're going to do it; Sean has got a nice firm belief in what he's doing. He's doing it right as he always does, and we're going to be on-site, we're going to have a chance to mingle as a team.

Our team that you're seeing right here in this Hollywood squares configuration, we didn't have a meal together last year. We did 21 weeks of the NFL together, including the Super Bowl. We had absolutely zero socialization.

That returning is a big deal. It's way bigger to me honestly than meeting with the players in person, which I'm overjoyed that we have that chance. We still met with the players by Zoom. But I never met with Tony in person for five months.

The nuance of the broadcast is what comes out of the time that you spend with the people you work with, discussing things face to face over a dinner, over a production meeting in person. Those were not conducted in person last year. We sat in our rooms, our meals were delivered to our door, and we did nothing but isolate.

I'm excited about getting to know my team all over again, because it's an awesome group of people to spend four or five months with, and we're close, as you no doubt can tell, whether you're watching this or watching on the air, this is a close-knit group. We know each other's families, we know each other well, but we had a year where we did not spend any time together.

And then moreover, the excitement of returning to a stadium with people in the stands and modulating your voice against that energy wave. You can't see but you can hear it, and you're playing your voice, your voice levels against that, it's going to be, to me, a whole new ballgame, and I just can't wait to get it started back to normal in some ways here in a couple weeks.

Q. Sean, a ratings question. Obviously we know ratings were down modestly for NFL games last year. The NFL held up a lot better than a lot of other sports but they were down. Are you expecting a rebound? This season obviously there won't be any NBA or NHL games competing. And I had a quick clarification question on the Nickelodeon game. How is that

working contractually because I know the new deal allows you to air two wildcard games a year in '24 and I think '29 and another year. Other than that, you only have one. I was curious, in that one gap year, there's this year, then there's next year, then the deal goes into effect in '23, will you have that same Nickelodeon late Sunday wildcard window next year, as well?

SEAN McMANUS: Good question. I'll take the second one first. Nickelodeon plans right now are only for this upcoming season. We'll see how the game does. We'll see what the reaction is, and then we'll talk to the NFL about possibly doing another game, whether it's a wildcard game or another playoff game. But those decisions really have not been made yet.

Going forward in most years we'll only have one wildcard game without a specific time period delineated.

Know what we're doing this year; the future is still to be discussed.

You probably know I never try to predict ratings, but if I were to look at the quality of our schedule, both with AFC teams and with NFC games that we have, I feel really confident. As always, it'll come down to how close the games are in the fourth quarter, and if you get a barn burner, double-header game, going right down to the wire, it's going to do a better number than a 21-point blowout. But I feel great about our schedule. I said earlier today that it's the best one that I can remember since we brought the NFL back in 1998.

I feel good about the season. Our sales are remarkable. If we get really good games, we'll do outstanding ratings.

I know this, that the NFL will directly produce the highest-rated games -- excuse me, highest-rated content in all of media. We had a presentation yesterday from our sales team, and I think it's 82 out of the top 100 programs last year were NFL related.

We may have been marginally down last year, but it's still the most important and the most highly rated content on any kind of television.

I think we'll do just fine, and I can't wait for the season to kick off.

Q. I know you've mentioned it frequently throughout the past year, and you mentioned it earlier. What do you think it's going to be -- and Jim and Tracy and Tony can chime in on this, also. What do you think that first production dinner is going to be like in Kansas City, just after not being able to do it last year,

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first time in nearly two years? And then for Tony, you guys in week 2 get Dallas and the Chargers, nearly a year to Herbert's first start on literally one minute notice on kickoff. Just wondering the progress you've seen from him.

JIM NANTZ: Well, the dinner, we already know the site because Jim Rikhoff who's munching away and already having a little appetizer as this has gone on, he's already made reservations. Should I tell them, Jim, where we're going that night?

JIM RIKHOFF: Absolutely. Outside.

JIM NANTZ: Yeah, we'll be outside at Capital Grill. We'll reintroduce ourselves to one another again.

Hey, I don't mean to make light of it. I really do after all these years, I've come to appreciate how much the chemistry, the camaraderie means to the success of a broadcast.

You can have your nose in the notes all week long and you can study film and be in production meetings on Zoom and all this and go into the booth and you think you're prepared, but it really isn't about what you're just bringing to the table.

It's not about your little window. It's about everybody in this orchestration feeling like they fit in. There's a thread through it. There's a chemistry that goes right through it all. That's the magic of television. That's not just the announcers, that's through the production and everything, as we all together telling a story. So much of that has to do with the time that you spent with the individuals you work with.

I value it. I know that it has tremendous worth. Yep, on September the 10th we'll come back in without -- I don't know, maybe we'll have name badges on. I don't know, I look forward to seeing what it's like to sit down with these folks and break bread again, and we'll do it again on Saturday night and we'll do it again the next week and we'll be outdoors having our dinners.

We're going to have a great season. I know that. The schedule has Sean alluded to, he and David and our team behind putting the schedule together and trying to make sure we're protected certain games. I mean, it has never seen anything like it.

Some of the match-ups are -- Buffalo and Tampa, Josh Allen and Brady. We've got three Tampa home games. Figure that one out, for an NFC team that happens to be the Super Bowl champs with Tom Brady. We've got Dallas on Thanksgiving. We've got Pittsburgh at Green Bay early in the year. We've got Pittsburgh at Kansas City. It goes

on, every single week. We've got Dallas at New England.

That extra week that the NFL added, the 17th game, created a nice little pool, a nice little reservoir to divide up a lot of ways to put in some double-header windows for both CBS and FOX, and that's basically, I think, part of the reason why the schedules are looking so loaded, particularly ours. Our guys did a heck of a job. Best ever.

TONY ROMO: Yeah, I've got to just say that I'm -- I'm looking forward to just like literally getting back and hanging out because I mean, our crew really does enjoy each other, and me being able to spend time with Nantz, Rikhoff, Tracy, our whole group, Mike Arnold, it's something I missed last year, and obviously we had to do that, that was the right thing, but I do think we've all -- we're all looking forward to it.

I do think there's something to be said for talking, communicating about what we saw, what we think, what we heard leading up to it, and hey, we need to think about this; boom, these little things just happen, and sometimes the best moments are because of that.

Anyway, that's something I'm definitely looking forward to.

I would also say based on the Chargers that you asked about with Herbert, I was so impressed. There's certain things that impress me with quarterbacks, and for him to come in and do that in his first game, he did -- first he started playing, and I was like, wow, that was very quick to get to that spot on that read against that coverage, and then it was like -- and it was pretty accurate. Now look at him stand in and do that, wow, look at that.

Then all of a sudden he made one or two throws where I was like, oh, my gosh, that was not just impressive for a young guy, that was like, wow, that's like the best throw I've seen this year. That was the best throw I've seen in like a year or two. That's a Patrick Mahomes throw. That's like Aaron Rodgers. It was like, whoa, how good is this kid.

I tried to tell people during that telecast last year when he came in in his first game just how special -- because I'm like, he just did like five things in a game that I'm like, guys who are 10 years into it who are amazing don't do. I think their ceiling is very high, and I think that Herbert is going to be really fun to watch. I really think that team is such a coin flip right now as far as are they a monster or are they still who they were, because they lost a lot of close games.

Now, they're changing their defensive system, and their defensive system was built on one-gap fast speed everything, and now they're going to be very technical as far as they're going to give quarterback fits. I don't think

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

they're going to lose games late because their defense -- their scheme is going to be very difficult to comprehend. But they could also lose a game here and there because their guys are learning the scheme.

So it's kind of like give or take here, which one is going to be better early on. But I'll tell you, this kid is a monster and he's going to be awesome. He's going to be fun to watch.

Jim doesn't live near LA, so he's not excited at all about being in California for any games, I can tell you that, but I enjoy getting out there and seeing the Chargers play this year. It's going to be fun.

TRACY WOLFSON: Well, I can't wait. Tony has already said he's going to pick up the check for everyone, so that's good. I'll leave my wallet at home. But I do agree. We really missed out on that.

You know, part of the fun about being on the road, it's always hard for all of us to be leaving our families, leaving our kids, but we've got this family on the road, and when we weren't able to be around each other and to have those laughs, and actually it's a distraction for us, also, being out, not sitting in our hotel room thinking about what's happening back home that we're not there for or whatever and the juggle of all of that.

Being together at these dinners, it lightens things up for us. It allows us to kind of take a break. It allows us to really enjoy, get to know each other more, get closer, and as Tony and Jim both alluded to, we learn so much, we really talk about the game half the time we're sitting there, and we feed off each other. We're like, wait, I've got a really good idea or I've got a really good graphic or let me text this person and get this feature going, whatever it might be.

I really can't wait to get back to it. I miss my crew. I think I saw them maybe five times, it was whether we were running into cars at the end of a broadcast or we randomly ran into each other in an elevator. So we certainly missed it and can't wait to get back to that part of it.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, everyone, for your time. Again, we can be reached all season long if you have any questions. Have a great season, everyone, and we look forward to kickoff on the 12th. Thank you.

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