

Carolina Panthers Media Conference

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Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

Frank Reich

Postgame Press Conference



Cowboys 33, Panthers 10

FRANK REICH: I'll just open up with an injury report. Bootle had the knee so we'll have to get him evaluated and go from there.

A difficult loss. Give the Cowboys credit. They played well. They're a good football team. I did think for three quarters we hung in there. In the third quarter we went down, had that long drive and scored and got it to a one-score game and felt like in spite of the fact that we had a few mistakes along the road, the game was well within grasp there when we got it to 17-10. But we weren't able to hang in from there, and then it got out of control obviously with the turnovers. I'll open it up from there.

Q. Frank, at what point do you guys feel like it's not about hanging in there but it's about putting up points because obviously you did get a different flow of plays, but you guys were --

FRANK REICH: You're exactly right, this game is always about points. We know that. That's the test. For us as an offense, that's a very good defense. We knew coming in statistically in every way, shape and form, that's a very talented defense.

I thought we ran the ball and dominated up front. That showed a lot of good stuff against a very good team.

We dominated at the line of scrimmage in the first half. There's just no two ways about it. That's what we did. That's on tape.

But what we didn't do was we didn't score points. We've got to be able to convert. When we're running it six yards a carry and our O-line is blocking up front on the run as well as we're blocking, those things got to get converted into touchdowns.

Q. Also something you discussed was being able to run first instead of play action. Only played five to ten passes in the first half. With that domination in the

trenches, where do you feel like it went wrong?

FRANK REICH: We had problems protecting. We had problems protecting in the first half, really the whole game, so they're very talented pass rushers. We knew that going in. Obviously Micah Parsons is a special player, but he's not the only good pass rusher they have. We knew they were loaded up front. We knew it was going to be a challenge. We thought the formula was run the football. Run the football, sustain drives, shorten the game like that, be able to throw some play action, take a few shots here and there, but we just weren't able to -- when we stalled running it on a few key 3rd downs and then in the red zone, we weren't able to make the plays in the pass game that we needed.

Q. What did you see on the pick six?

FRANK REICH: I've got to go back and look at the tape, but guy makes a great play. It seemed like the ball -- we got flushed in the pocket, so it wasn't the release pattern with the two receivers got -- there was a little bit of a miscue, not by them, but a defender kind of got in the way and blew it up a little bit. Mingo is coming over and coming up field a little bit, the guy just under cuts him and makes a good play.

Q. You mentioned the protection. That's been a recurring theme this season. Did this organization misjudge the effectiveness of this O-line?

FRANK REICH: No, I think that from a pass protection standpoint, we just have to keep working. This particular defense is as good of a pass rush team as there is in the NFL. That's just what they are. So I give them credit.

I thought we would protect better. I thought we had a good protection plan to try to double Parsons when we could. There's going to be some five-man protection stuff where the throw gets out quick. We had a variety of things in the protection scheme up, but we just weren't able to execute.

Q. Penalties, a couple of those on crucial 3rd downs. What happened? Was that just --

FRANK REICH: It was brutal. I mean, it was brutal. We had a chance at the end of the first half. Our defense has been playing great, so can't say too much about that. But we get the score, then we kick -- we get a penalty on the kickoff, we kick it out of bounds, so they're starting at the 40, and then we get two 3rd and longs and we extend drives, that turns that three points into seven so giving them four points there but not only giving them four points, we're losing an opportunity to have a two-minute drive, so who knows what we do on the two-minute drive. That was a bad sequence. That was a really bad sequence.

Q. The long touchdown drive, you convert three 4th downs. What was working on that and how frustrating is it that you can't sustain that?

FRANK REICH: I think we stayed in phase, mixed the run and pass. Bryce was sharp. I really have a lot of confidence and trust in Bryce when we get in those 4th down situations to make good decisions and put the ball where he needs to put it. That's really a credit to him.

It was, it was good execution. It was a long sustained drive.

Q. That's a good defense, but on the other 87 yards of total offense, what did you feel about what you called today, and what does that say about this offense in general that you guys just can't score?

FRANK REICH: You know, we've got to be better. We've got to coach better, got to play better. That starts with me as the head coach, as the play caller. Got to be better.

Q. Is there an element to complementary football you feel is missing with this team? Obviously you can't cook that up. It's not something that happens overnight. You've got to grow that. But to see this team throughout the season have good moments offensively like Bryce's drive and then defensively I know they're not happy what happened on the next drive. How much do you talk about that during the week and how would you assess that right now?

FRANK REICH: I often talk about that a football game is like an old-school boxing match. You've got to be able to in a fight connect in a lot of different ways, jab and move. You've got to be able to have conversations that can knock a team out. So to me, that's exactly what you're talking about. Those combinations with all three phases working together, bam, bam, bam, good drive, then a three-and-out or good turnover or then a good play on special teams. We've had good moments. Obviously we've had a lot of good moments on defense. We've had flashes on offense, and I think we've been pretty good on special teams

besides too many penalties.

But we just need to put it all together as a team more often.

Q. Understanding that this is your first year here, but it's six straight losing seasons now and you saw the crowd and how many fans gave up their tickets. I know you wanted to turn things around here right away, but how frustrating is this not to be able to do that?

FRANK REICH: It's very frustrating. When you work hard and you believe in the guys you're doing it with, and I believe in our coaches and players, not getting the results you want is frustrating. So I'm frustrated most of all for them, but I'm certainly frustrated for the fans, as well. I've been in this game a long time. I've had a great appreciation for fan bases wherever I've been, and what that means to a team and what that means to a city.

I understand the level of frustration by the fans. I mean, we had the change here that we had, and you set things -- you start to set things in place to make a change. You want it to happen overnight. Sometimes it takes longer than you want. But you have to keep your head down, be strong-willed, keep the vision clear, and come to work every day, and you've got to be able to fight your way through the tough times.

Q. With the protection issues and some of the penalties and even some of the playmaker stuff and the play calling changing, how hard has it been to get an eval on Bryce through these 10 games just in general, just from a quarterback standpoint?

FRANK REICH: Listen, obviously watching him closely, I'm very encouraged and optimistic about a lot of things and who he is and the player he is. He can make every throw, how he processes it, how he's handling a difficult season so far. I really respect the way he's handling himself and fighting through it.

Physically I see him every day working hard, getting better, understanding what we're doing, why we're doing it, being engaged in the process, him being engaged in the process more and more. He's great to work with. I love sitting in those meetings with him. We as a group, trying to figure out ways to get better, make this offense better.

Q. When you said you respect how he's handling it, with him being a young quarterback, do you have any concerns about whether the losing will get to him mentally and even the hits that he takes?

FRANK REICH: I don't, because of who he is as a person.

I just think that's one thing that was clear in the draft process, that his mental toughness and character to me is unquestioned. Nobody is perfect. We all have weaknesses. We all struggle at times mentally, all of us do. Even the most confident guys, the best players in the world, everybody does. I'm sure Bryce has his struggles. But I also believe that he's got an inner strength that has helped him get to where he's gotten to, even though we all know he's won a lot of games in high school and college, I think he's made to handle stuff like this, and I don't think he'll accept it, and I think he'll continue to elevate his game and elevate this team, and it might just take -- it's taken longer than we all wanted it to, but I can tell you it's not on his shoulders. We all have a part of it. Every person has a part of it, player and coach, and so we handle it collectively.

Q. Is there a concern about not just his mental toughness but his health with him being sacked this many times this season and keeping him healthy?

FRANK REICH: Yeah, that's a good question. I think it's actually contrary to one. One of the questions about Bryce coming in was with his size and weighing under 200 pounds and being 5'10", could he take it, and I think he's answered that question week in and week out. He physically is one tough dude. Never wants to come out, can take hits. I think that's a credit to his physical toughness and his tenacity. Yeah, that's been week in and week out. He doesn't flinch.

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