

Carolina Panthers Media Conference

Sunday, December 17, 2023

Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

Head Coach Chris Tabor

Postgame Press Conference



Panthers 9, Falcons 7

CHRIS TABOR: Injury-wise we came out pretty good, so we'll assess guys tomorrow. Really happy for the guys. Proud of them.

You know, the defense getting two turnovers, I think we got six points off of that. Then the last drive, 17-play drive with a will to win and saying that we are going to win the game and setting it up right there at the end.

Really just proud of all parties. I couldn't be more proud of the kids obviously, the coaching staff. It was fun, and those were tough conditions.

I think that the area that I was really pleased with obviously I talked about the defense and getting the two turnovers is we didn't have any turnovers, and I thought just trying to play field position out there and then taking advantage of opportunities when you get them.

So in a better mood than where we were last week. Enjoy it tonight, and then get back to work tomorrow and go from there.

With that, I'll answer any questions.

Q. Coach, obviously it work out, but the decision to take the knee and kick the field goal at the end as opposed to going for the touchdown, what was behind that?

CHRIS TABOR: They elected -- I think they still had one time-out left, but when they did not take the time-out, no reason to go down and try to score there.

We've got a lot of confidence in our kicker. 2 yard line, 3 yard line, ball right in the middle, I like our chances, and that way you end the game.

Q. You are a guy with special team coaching experience there. Was this kind of a dream game for you for field goals and punts and strategy and all that

kind of thing?

CHRIS TABOR: No, it was fun. We talked about it all week. We talked about it right in here starting on Wednesday of what the day was going to look like from everything: The weather, the wind, how we were going to have to play the game.

At the end we just kept saying, we are going to win this game, and that's what they did. Any time you have a 17-play drive at the end of the game to get a walk-off field goal, I think that says something about your kids and your guys. I couldn't be more proud of them.

Q. What does it say, do you think?

CHRIS TABOR: It says we just keep going. I know we're not where we want to be. I understand all that, but based off that tape, you can't question who they are, and I was really happy for them that they were able to break through.

Sometimes you knock at the door all the time, and no one answers, and then sooner or later you have to kick it down, and we did it tonight.

Q. Can you speak to consistency of Derrick Brown and Nick Thurman in the second half?

CHRIS TABOR: Boy, those guys. We talked a lot about we went with six defensive linemen up because it was going to be that type of day. We talked a lot about our defensive line and what I'm going to call our running group, our offensive line and our receivers getting in there blocking to say, hey, guys, let's be real estate agents after we get done with this game, which really means we're acquiring land during the game and trying to change field position.

So really proud of our defensive line, no question.

Q. What do you see for the wideouts on that final drive? That's a group that's been kind of much-maligned publicly at least this year. Mingo looked like had a pretty good route and then Chark's catch.

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CHRIS TABOR: The guys made plays. I'll be honest with you. Those weren't easy catches out there, and I was really proud of our guys, really concentrating and making those plays.

The thing that I saw today that you can't argue with is that there were plays that needed to be made, and they made the plays. So you can say, hey, did they take a step? Based off of that game, I'm going to say they are.

So now next week that's the standard, and now can we move it forward and push it forward?

Q. Speaking of making plays, Smith-Marsette was more involved in the passing game today. Can you just speak about that because I know you are familiar with him on special teams, but...

CHRIS TABOR: His number got called today. Did a really nice job. They did some of the jet-sweep stuff and some of the inside handoff stuff.

He just has a knack for kind of sliding through there. It gave us another little wrinkle in the run game, which he needed today.

Q. You said on the radio pregame you watched all the fumbles with the App State game yesterday. Leading up to the game, how much was ball control and even during the game a focus?

CHRIS TABOR: It was huge. When I watched that game yesterday, I was thinking the same thing. I thought going into the game -- obviously you preach 100% ball security, but if one popped out -- for example, on Smith-Marsette on the punt, we had a muff there. Was I shocked by that? I wasn't because of the conditions, and I think mentally you already know that, but the kids did a good job of bouncing back, and we protected the ball, and that was big.

Then even with regards to I think early on I think we popped the time-out right there, what was it, the end of the first quarter. We had the wind at our back with an opportunity just to make sure that we had the wind so we could pin them down there and try to maintain the field position to make them go long drives.

Q. Especially that last drive about Bryce the way he has hung in there this year after all he's been through.

CHRIS TABOR: He's a winner. Guys, think about that drive he put together, that all those kids put together in those conditions, and people might say, hey, with nothing to play for. There's a lot a lot to play for because whatever

is on tape, that is who you are.

So I was really proud of him. I thought he took another great step. I thought that he threw the ball well for what the conditions were. You know what I mean? I was really proud of him. The kid is a winner.

Q. What went into the decision -- I'm sorry if you addressed this -- to have Kamu take a couple of kickoffs?

CHRIS TABOR: We thought about that earlier in the week. That kind of goes a little bit about when you coach up north and then you are playing Cordarrelle Patterson back there, and you are talking about field position.

Eddy obviously can kick off for us, but that wind out there, what we were trying to do is Kamu -- really teams don't account for the kicker and coverage. So now we're getting obviously a better tackler out there, so that's why we did that when we were going that way.

Q. The point was those were going to be squibs and --

CHRIS TABOR: Those were going to be squibs anyway because squibs, I mean, depending upon -- I think, what, did they get it to the 29 or 30? I'm okay with that on this type of day because it was about field position. The way our defense plays, I thought it was good.

Q. On the conditions, any interesting kind of behind the scenes anecdotes, what y'all did to endure that or anything you tweaked or changed?

CHRIS TABOR: On Thursday we just practiced with the wet ball all the way around. It was a beautiful day here on Thursday. We'll all take that Thursday, but we sprayed the football down all the time and played football with a wet football all day.

Q. Xavier Woods, that setup...

CHRIS TABOR: It's a big-time play. I mean, X, obviously crafty veteran. I'm really happy for him. Actually a little under the weather, fought through it. To be able to make that type of play right there, that's big-time. Kudos to our defense and the defensive staff. Outstanding job.

Q. Chris, Miles Sanders didn't really get a lot of reps at back this game. What would you attribute that to?

CHRIS TABOR: I think that's kind of how the game flowed. I thought when he was in there, I thought he did fine, thought he played well. We're going to be a running-back-by-committee ball squad, and that's what we

are. It's just kind of how it worked out today.

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