

Carolina Panthers Media Conference

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Dave Canales

Weekday Press Conference



DAVE CANALES: Shorts weather. It was great out there. Guys had a good time getting back on the grass, focusing in, getting ready to take on the Bucs this week. So a lot of good attention to detail today in the walk-throughs.

Practice, we started off with good energy, got after it and then kind of brought the tempo down, and the guys kept the intentionality, and that's the challenge. That's the challenge late in the season as we get into these modes where we have these combo practices for guys to stay connected, gathering the information, and seeing how we're trying to test our principles, test different things against the Bucs' style of play.

Q. Bryce seems to be getting out of the huddle a lot quicker than he did previously in the season. How did that come about? Like how do you, I guess, coach that up to get quicker? How do you see the benefits of that?

DAVE CANALES: Just comfortability. It's not just Bryce, it's the whole unit. Guys knowing where to line up, how to initiate the first parts of the motions of the formation, different things like that.

The chemistry with the center. Talking to Cade, stacking up these things, so that they get things ID'd properly quickly. It's really the whole thing, but it's his job to drive that, and it really starts in the walk-throughs.

It's making sure the scout team is doing a good job getting lined up so we can push the tempo of play, get up at the line of scrimmage, get the information we need. So it's a collective effort, but he certainly has to be the voice driving that, and he's doing a great job of that.

Q. To follow up on that, when you get to lined up quicker, how much is that benefitting him in particular in the film and in the dialogue that you're having?

DAVE CANALES: It's the whole group, right? But the sooner you can get up there with time on the play clock, you can gather information. The sooner you start to

engage your body language as if we're ready to go, then it just -- it gives you a lot more information, and it puts a little bit more strain on the defense.

I've been around different coordinators where they say, hey, the average snap is around this time. Hold your disguise until. So if we can get up there and play ball, then that allows for the defense to show their hand earlier knowing we can push the tempo and things like that.

Q. You named Bryce the starter for Sunday. Barring any injury or unforeseen circumstances, can we expect him to be the starter going forward?

DAVE CANALES: As he continues to show us the progress we're looking for, as he continues to earn those moments, then yeah, he'll be in there. That's what I've been most excited about is there's a weekly growth that's happening.

Again, we're just taking it a week at a time. I know that's been my language, but he's really taking the responsibility of it and pushing us that way. The bottom line is he's giving us a chance to win in these weeks that he's been playing.

Q. I know you've been there for one year, but you have in taking on Tampa a team that you were with for a season and you know a lot of their personnel.

DAVE CANALES: There's some familiarity, but knowing Coach Bowles, he's got a really sophisticated system, and he attacks each team kind of with a specific game plan. So there's some principles that carry over, but I know he's going to have some things up his sleeve, and I fully expect that.

The premium is for us to execute and to know what we're doing, play fast, to make sure that we put the pressure back on them.

On the flip side of it, Liam Coen is doing a great job with Baker and the whole group and just mixing up the different things that they do under center, in the gun, a lot of variety, a really cool offense to watch, as we've watched a lot of



crossover tape.

There's a bunch of good stuff coming out of Tampa. We know we have our work cut out for us this week.

Q. To follow up real quick, what are they doing differently than what you did, if you could say?

DAVE CANALES: I don't really want to get into specifics of the scheme.

Q. Coach, I haven't asked you for a while, but you mentioned 2.7 as a goal target speed in getting the ball out. How close are you to that, and have you been monitoring that closely as the season progressed?

DAVE CANALES: I think, when I say that, that's a generic term for certain types of dropback passes, but as you know, our play passes take longer. There's certain concepts that require that. I think it's probably the decisiveness that I'm looking for within that timeframe. Sometimes the ball is out at that time. Sometimes it's you've got to go around that time, given the protection of the offensive line, and they're doing a really good job.

I've just seen Bryce being really decisive back there, whether it's getting the ball thrown away, whether it's completing it, whether it's taking off and running or extending the play, but it's just kind of training the whole group around that.

Q. How would you assess the rookie group as a whole at this point in the season?

DAVE CANALES: I would say just a group that's really into it -- engaged, focused, taking coaching. This is a group of guys that they understand the rookie coach comes in with this rookie class, it means something. This is important for all of us as we build this team and we become us. It's capturing that play style.

So I put myself right in that group with those guys, and we all take pride in building something and connecting with everybody, and those guys have taken -- made the most of their opportunities, which is what I'm really proud of.

Q. All those guys had extended kind of reps in training camp because of some injuries. How much did that benefit some of those guys in particular?

DAVE CANALES: That's huge. You talk about guys like JT Sanders, who had to take a ton of reps because of Ian and Tommy really dealing with injuries. It was Shaq and Josey. So Trevin got a lot of reps. It was Chau Smith-Wade getting mixed in there, but not as much. He

was kind of in a deeper group there in the cornerback position.

All these guys, they got a bunch of exposure in camp, which does pay dividends along the road.

Q. Questions about Bryce's size and whether he could see over the line and downfield, et cetera. Sunday seemed like one of the best examples of his career where he had guys in the face and he was still making the completions. What do you think about that particular aspect of his game?

DAVE CANALES: I think it's a tribute to the whole group. It's trusting the guys running the routes. It's Thielen, it's D-Mo, it's Xavier, it's Ja'Tavion, Tommy, DT when he gets in there, who's had familiarity with our system.

So I think the trust factor allows you to play anticipatory quarterback, and he showed that. There are a couple of times where they had a better pressure than we had protection, and Bryce got a quick solution with guys being exactly in the spots they needed to be in. So it's a real tribute to the whole group.

Q. What have you learned about yourself in this process with Bryce?

DAVE CANALES: I think this is just for me the challenge has been to go right back to the basics and the things I've been doing for years working with quarterbacks is going to the footwork, going to the progression, talking about the weeks and making sure the quarterbacks feel involved with the solutions to the problems.

I think Bucs, Tom Moore, one of the things he's like, one of the things a quarterback always wants is you've got to have answers. Have answers for the different things that a defense can do. So I think that process has been great, just all the conversation that's we've had over the season.

Just, I guess, if you're asking me, learning that is just continue to stay with the things that have worked over time and apply those things to Bryce, to Andy, and these guys.

Q. With the familiarity with the Bucs obviously, are you a little more involved in the defensive meetings this week?

DAVE CANALES: Just a couple things, but I think they're seeing some similarities in terms of the concepts we've thrown at them. There's wrinkles they have that are specific to the Bucs. So just a little bit early on in the week, but again, the focus is on us. The focus is on taking last week's game and improving the things that we didn't

execute well, taking the things that worked for us and seeing if there's different ways we can apply those things.

So that's really been the challenge for me. It's a great question. It's just like, as I know a bunch of those guys that I got to work with, the discipline for me is to just be focused on here, what are we doing, and how are we progressing. Then what are the new challenges that this particular opponent poses for us?

That's been the challenge for me, but again, it's a good reminder. It's like, okay, it can't be about them, it's about us. That's what we talk about.

Q. We saw J.T. at practice watching. What's the latest on his neck injury, and what's the latest on Jalen Coker?

DAVE CANALES: A bunch of great news about his injury overall and where he's at, but just the recovery of just the real high impact play that happened. I wouldn't anticipate J.T. playing this week, but he's feeling better and better every day.

Today we weren't able to get him out in practice, but we'll see if we can do something with him tomorrow.

Q. What about Coker?

DAVE CANALES: Coker is still working through a quad. We weren't able to get him to even test him on Sunday, so we put him right into a return to play protocol following the game on Monday. So he'll remain there. We don't expect him to be playing this week.

Q. Hubbard is generally a reliable receiver. He had trouble on Sunday, 1 for 5 in targets. Is his thumb giving him trouble?

DAVE CANALES: I don't know that. I know that he works on it. He's one of the first guys out there, last guys to leave on the jugs with different goggles and different things that he does to get himself ready for the game. So I would expect Chuba just to continue to work through this.

Q. You were so positive early in the season when maybe there wasn't a lot of things to be as positive about from the outside looking in. Now that you have seen some buy-in, some things change, I'm curious, is that sort of the mantle of the momentum building being taken on in the locker room or is that you sort of leading from the front as well?

DAVE CANALES: It certainly is the players. I think that, first and foremost, we're getting to know each other. I can

talk to them about the scheme and the philosophy and the style of football that we want to play all I want through camp, through the off-season and all that.

Until you start facing real challenges in games, until the stakes become that way, then all of a sudden, it starts to make sense. I preach about the ball, and we've grown so much in terms of our ball security and just like the way we finish plays when we have the ball. Defensively striking at the ball, trying to make those attempts.

So for me it's about the guys taking that ownership. Just what I've noticed is the guys just lingering. They're just around a little bit longer. They're here a little bit earlier. They like working with each other. To see that is huge for me because then it's like, okay, we have this foundation. We know what we're trying to get done from a football standpoint, but it's the relational part, guys playing for each other that's really happening, and that's the part that I'm so excited about.

Q. You've had a chance these last three weeks and your staff to coach a very close one-possession game that are more typical of every Sunday in the league. How valuable will those reps be to you as a head coach? You seem calm. I'm not sure what's going on inside. But where does that demeanor kind of come from?

DAVE CANALES: I have great help. I've got George Lee upstairs, and we have these conversations all through the game, different situations, should we take the penalty here or not? What's the clock look like? How are we managing this situation or that?

Between that and just having the guys, offensively at least, that I'm talking to as far as play selection and all that, just people that I trust, that gives me a certain element of calm. For me, it's just about seeing what we're good at, seeing what we're confident at, and where are we playing fast? How can we draw that up a little bit different and do it again?

That whole process has been great, but to your point, every week is a lesson for me. Every week is getting back together, talking to analytics, talking to George, talking to the staff and second guessing every single call that I made. Oh, man, I wish I would have called that in this situation and not this one, or hey, this was really good. This is good feedback, guys. We hit it exactly at the right time, and we had some success there.

So just kind of living those experiences, being humble enough to take the criticism and the things that we need to work on and fix, it's not just the players, it's the coaches as

well as far as the accountability goes. So all those things have been really valuable.

Q. Any thoughts on picking up James Houston?

DAVE CANALES: Not right now. I'll talk to Dan about that.

Q. The defense has been through a lot with the injuries and the like. The last two weeks, I know the sample size is small, but is there any way to quantify the impact on the overall defense that D.J. Wonnum has made from the front and the back?

DAVE CANALES: I would say it's a whole group that's been trending towards good football and communication. Our tackling improved last week. We got a few tackles away. We missed it more than we're used to, but I think -- so specifically to D.J., he jumps into a group that was trending in the right direction in terms of growth and communication, and then he brings a bunch of experience played in the scheme before.

Then the way he prepares, just his professionalism and all that, it's great. It's great for guys like Josey, for guys like Jordan Fuller, Xavier Woods, A'Shawn Robinson, Mike Jackson, guys that have played a lot of football, he's just another guy that's comfortable out there talking, communicating, working through things on the sideline.

But for the younger guys, it's really cool to have a guy show them how to prepare and be meticulous about your rush plan, about playing the run and the discipline that it requires to play football in this scheme. And just all of those things and just a good story, right? Just like overcoming adversity and then having his opportunity and really playing with a bunch of gratitude. So he's been huge.

Q. Has he kind of been, though, a missing piece? You guys went into the season, and there were questions on who's opposite Clowney and who's going to bring that pressure? Now he plugs in, and suddenly it feels like everything -- they've been trending that way, but like it all clicks?

DAVE CANALES: He's a great addition because it gives you balance. When you have Clowney and you have D.J. Wonnum on either side, it allows you to play stout in the run game, and it allows you to rush the passer on both sides.

Q. What are you thankful for this Thanksgiving?

DAVE CANALES: Thankful? I got to start off with my wife. I got to start off with just she's been a part of this journey

since I was coaching JV football, and to be here in Charlotte and to just immersing our kids in the community and the way she's involved herself in this football community but also just in our neighborhoods and in the sports world.

After that, just everybody in this building, the men and women that work so hard seven days a week. We're all here. We're sick of each other, but in a good way because it's all hands on deck and we're all pulling in the same direction trying to make this football team become the identity that we're chasing after. So I'm really appreciative of all the people that have been working so hard.

Q. You mentioned working with analytics. I'm just curious how has the analytics department impacted your operational nature?

DAVE CANALES: It's been great just kind of having -- making sure like I don't have any blind spots. That's where it's been most valuable. I don't want to start saying what those blind spots are, but they just kind of say, hey, did you know that this is happening in this scenario or we're having a lot of success when you pair these couple plays together or things like that? That's been really -- Eric Eager -- that's been really valuable information.

Brandt Tillis works with Eric, and they're always having these conversations. I'm sure they have way more conversations, but they kind of filter it down to something I can digest because that's not my world, that's not my background, but that's an area that I want to continue to grow in and make sure we're applying it to our football.

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