

Carolina Panthers Media Conference

Wednesday, December 11, 2024

Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

Dave Canales

Weekday Press Conference



DAVE CANALES: Good afternoon. A good spirited Wednesday. Guys are into it. Had a great presentation by Coach Caldwell today talking about the details, finishing in the details, and what a great message for us, for our group to find that all the way through these games where we see progress, but the goal is to win these games.

It was well received. It was an excellent presentation. I wanted to make sure Coach Caldwell got a little love there.

Q. I know Jim does a lot of mentoring for you and stuff behind the scenes. How helpful has he been during these pockets of the season where it feels like you guys are close but it's not showing up on the scoreboard?

DAVE CANALES: It's been every part of the process, from the off-season all the way through. His reminders are just stay consistent with your messaging, don't back off, continue to press in. He's encouraging. He gives me a bunch of just like little tidbits about different situations that come up. So he's been a wealth of knowledge that way.

Q. Two questions on defense. How is Horn? And the second, over the past month, can you speak to the efficiency of Ejiro's blitz packaging calls?

DAVE CANALES: First of all, Jaycee, his groin tightened up on him in the game, so we're kind of taking him day by day right now. He did a little bit of moving around but not much today. We're seeing if we can build him to get him out there on Sunday. Again, it's going to be day-to-day just on his process.

Talking about Ejiro, the different packages, different things, attacking the right way, getting the right combination of players out there in different situations requires a lot of work, a lot of focus by the whole group -- the staff, the players, everyone included. I've been really pleased with the production that's come out of that in the last couple of weeks.

Q. 13 sacks in the last three games, are you seeing

that as a result of the scheme, the effort, or maybe both or maybe something different?

DAVE CANALES: It's both. It's also the guys buying into what we're doing, being disciplined about their rush plans. All those things take a lot of work, as you can imagine. It's also the carryover and consistency of guys working together, the same groups talking to each other and working through those things.

Q. Bryce's plays when the pocket breaks down the last few weeks seem to be a pretty stark contrast to early in the season. I know some of it's scheme and rolling him out a little bit, but what would you say has been the biggest reason for him to be eluding those pass rushers? And not just that, he's making plays after.

DAVE CANALES: It's just Bryce trying to find a win for every given situation. His competitiveness showing up in these situations where we're ahead or right behind in these games and just trying to find a way to win.

Then I think the thing that I've been mentioning too is just his ownership of these concepts to know how much time do I have to allow this concept to develop? Is this the right coverage for this play? Are we attacking it right, or am I going to have to progress all the way through three and four?

So just being really decisive, can I hold, can I wait on this thing, or do I need to go right now and make a play. He's just operating quickly through those things.

Q. How much of the Alabama tapes did you watch after you were hired? These are sort of the plays he was known for in college.

DAVE CANALES: That stuff before he was drafted, just going through the process, looking at all the quarterbacks a couple years ago. Then as we've gone through this process, again, it's a good reminder to see these are the concept that's we can continue to build for him that he finds success with.



I think the things you see in college, like he's familiar with all those plays. So he knows how to extend it. If I can give this guy just a half second longer to make this throw, you look at Thielen's touchdown two weeks ago and just buying time in the pocket to allow him to come open on the opposite side in the void, giving Xavier a chance last year, just can I buy myself just a little bit more time manipulating the pocket, and those are great things that are showing up.

Q. What moment or game or practice did you see that clicking for him?

DAVE CANALES: I can't point to a moment. I know he's just been working on it the whole time and something he's really challenged himself and his skill players to continue to finish their routes, finish to me, finish to voids.

Q. I saw that Jalen Coker was a full participant today. Were there any setbacks with the quad injury last week that flared up for him as the week went by?

DAVE CANALES: He just didn't look ready last week as we got down to it. He had a great day today. We had our individual period, and he was aggressive, he was attacking his routes. That's what I wanted to see last week where he still felt a little bit apprehensive with it. He's got a different kind of focus and readiness physically and mentally this week. I'm excited and hopefully we can get him back out there on Sunday.

Q. In these late game situations, Bryce seems to be showing kind of being unflappable. How special of a trait is that to have for a quarterback? Is it promising to see that kind of returning in these moments?

DAVE CANALES: It is special. The confidence comes from all the hard work. I think Bryce gets himself to a point because of all the studying, all the challenges in practice, pushing himself to where, when we're in these situations in games and the call comes in, he knows what the call is, and he just has to do his part.

That's the cool part, but it's also just a part of what he brought before. I love seeing it happen over and over in these games. It's consistency, and I think that's something he'd be up here telling you like, if he prides himself on one thing, it's consistency. He's just able to continue to show up and do his one part in those situations.

Q. You've also been good in the late game situations in terms of clock management. I know you mentioned the role that George Li has, but did you learn a philosophy in terms -- was there a conversation amongst the group like, hey, this is our plan for this? It seems like there have been in the league some rough

late game situations.

DAVE CANALES: I appreciate you saying that. We work on it a lot. Honestly, I've got to give props to Coach Carroll. He challenged us to be involved in all of these situations. It was every Wednesday and Thursday for 13 years in Seattle in a walk-through.

We'd go through end of half situations on Wednesday with the little mini situation, put ourselves in the most difficult possible spots. We practiced another hard one today. Those things kind of get my heartbeat racing a little bit in these walk-throughs.

It's like, if you can take yourself to that game type of mentality and your players as well, we've got to be ready, what's the call going to be when we get into this situation? How are we going to handle it?

Tracy Smith's dad, Carl Smith, we affectionately call him Tater. Tater would take us through -- I was in that QB room as an assistant, and we would spend seven, eight minutes, just look at another situation that came up this week. Here's what happened, guys, in this situation. Here's where it kind of goes haywire. Here's where this team did really good. We just watched those things, grew, and studied.

It's just a lot of intentionality, and I've got a bunch of coaches who add their opinions about those things as we work through as well. It's a collective effort.

Q. You're 13 games into this now. I was wondering, looking back, what are the things that as a head coach maybe surprised you that you weren't expecting maybe or had to adjust to, and what things have you gotten better at as the season's gone on?

DAVE CANALES: I would say probably one of the biggest things is feeling how relationally connected I am to a lot more people now. I think when you're a position coach, you're really connected to your group and sometimes a guy here and there from another position. As a coordinator, you're connected to a few more guys on the offense and the coaches as well.

Then as a head coach, what I've found is Nola Scott was born a couple days ago. She's 9 pounds, 15 ounces, and Nick Scott, congrats to them. It's like the beautiful part of that. But then there's also loss of family members. There's tragedy that happens. There's personal struggles and all that. I didn't realize how much that was going to touch and affect me because you get a text, and it's like, hey, just so your head's up, this is going on or that's going on.

That was something that I didn't realize would be such a big part of it. I think just the sheer amount of decisions to be made on a daily basis and a weekly basis, it's all the way through it. And just kind of trying to find windows where I can like shut it down for a second, try to reconnect with like, okay, what's going on here? Where are we at? Before the next wave of decisions come up.

So that was something that a lot of coaches told me would happen. Todd Bowles said, hey, five things every day you're not going to be able to anticipate. Just know that's normal. I've been blessed to have help, to have Coach Capers and Coach Caldwell right here, to have people I can call to lean on in that regard.

Then I think also just from a practical standpoint of like calling plays. This is only my second year calling offensive football plays, but now having to be more involved with the replay situations in football or the defense, I'm available for Ejiro during the defensive series, talking to Tracy, all those things.

I love it, but I kind of feel a little punchy after games. It's kind of like so many choices, so many decisions happen. But I look forward to the challenges of it. It stretches me beyond really what I'm capable of sometimes. Then just have to like learn, have grace, ask questions, and grow weekly.

Q. The Cowboys defense with Micah Parsons in it. What do you see in establishing the defense that you've got to latch onto?

DAVE CANALES: Weekly improvement, especially over the last month. Micah is getting back to his form that he was before he missed some time.

Coach Zimmer, I have the highest respect for his system and the things that he does. He still has a couple of things that I haven't quite seen yet from the past, but they're adding things. Eric Kendricks, he allows them to kind of do those things, he communicates it all. Linval Joseph, a guy that's been in the system as well. So I see a group that's just kind of learning this scheme and adding pieces to it. It's a really, really challenging defense.

His style of play, like they run like crazy. They pride themselves on the physical and aggressive nature, the aggressive calls of it. I see it coming to life, especially over this last month.

Q. With Micah in particular, when you've got a guy like that that can play so many positions and line up everywhere, how do you best prepare for that?

DAVE CANALES: You just kind of have to look at it as the same kind of fronts. He puts himself in different spots. We've just got to be aware of where he's at. You can't just tilt your entire game plan. You just have to be aware and try to play the odds and try to play the percentages of where you think he's going to be at to try to help ourselves execute.

Q. Bringing Jones from the Jaguars practice squad and you guys have listed him as a running back. I'm just curious what's the process like when you're converting a guy from wide receiver to running back, and what makes you comfortable doing that right now?

DAVE CANALES: It's a challenge. I think it's an opportunity to have a really talented athlete, 6 feet, 200, can run like crazy. He's got some return value, all those things.

There's a lot that goes into the running back position. You've got to respect the amount of pass protection things that go into it, coming from receiver to running back. So that's one of the biggest challenges.

Then you don't just hand the ball off and run these runs. There's a way to run it. Fortunately, he's got Chuba to look at. He's got Mike Boone to look at, Raheem, who's day to day. These guys have had familiarity. We'll have to kind of bring him on and see if he can help us in some way, shape, or form.

Q. Had Andy not been in the car crash, what was the plan to get another look at some point this season of Bryce?

DAVE CANALES: I'm not going to get into that. I think it's pretty private in terms of how it happened. It happened the way it did, and Bryce got in there and took advantage of his opportunity.

Q. For the first time since 2022, the Panthers are favored to win in a game. Do you pay attention to that stuff? Does that stuff even?

DAVE CANALES: I try not to. Vegas is really good with the odds, so I really don't like to see what the spread is and all that stuff. I just try to make the focus about us, about what is our next step? Those things don't help us. I try not to use external things to motivate our guys.

The motivation for us and the story all along is can we find our best individually, as our groups, as the offense, defense, special teams, and then collectively as a team, can we find our best? Our best looks like finishing whatever it takes to win the games, and we haven't found

that yet.

I know our best is still out there for us, and I think that kind of urgency will allow us to stay in this mode where I'm proud of the progress, I really am. I'm proud of the leaps that we've taken in different ways in our different parts of our team and schemes that we've been really challenged with.

So I think that just having that approach for our guys to just keep our focus in here, it works at all times. So I try not to pay too much attention to it.

Q. It's not finalized yet, but all the momentum looks like Bill Belichick to Chapel Hill. What's been your experience over the years with Bill, and what would that mean to see him in a college role in the same state where you are?

DAVE CANALES: I've just always admired the system, the whole thing. I don't know all the details of what they were doing. I just saw the product of really good football, of teams that play together, teams that played with discipline, that were committed to playing tough football. You didn't see teams that over tried to be really fancy in all this. They just were so sound in their execution, great situationally -- end of games, four minute, two minute, they always seems to make the right choices.

They developed their roster, their young players, grew in their systems, and you see them kind of develop. Some of them, they were able to retain. Some of them went on to play other places, but I just have such an admiration, being in Seattle and really valuing the same things with two completely different personalities in Bill and with Coach Carroll.

To see that they cared about the same things, it was all about the ball for both. It was all about playing all phases and playing great situational football. That's the heart of great football. So it would be amazing to have him kind of close and to try to pick his brain at some point.

Q. The Cowboys, you weren't here, but the last time they were here, there was a Cowboys crowd takeover. There's obviously a lot of Cowboys fans out here. Are you guys doing anything practice-wise to prepare for that in case it is a primarily Cowboys crowd?

DAVE CANALES: We practice with the noise because we know people love to come to Charlotte. Whatever team we seem to play, there's a lot of red when the Chiefs came here and kind of a mixed crowd. We keep the noise going regularly just to kind of deal with potential noise in different situations.

We haven't had critical issues like being in a true road game, but there is a little bit extra. So we just kind of keep the noise going so we're -- from what I understand too, like the Cowboys games were televised here before the Panthers had a team. I just kind of ran it to people around town that said, I grew up a Cowboys fan because that was the one that showed up on TV. I woke up before the Panthers became a team in '95. So I understand that part.

Just looking forward to another week and another great challenge for us with a bunch of great players on that team that will bring out the best in our team.

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