

# Carolina Panthers Media Conference

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## Dave Canales

Weekday Press Conference



**Q. What's the latest on the center position? How's Cade doing, and what did you take away from Brady's performance?**

DAVE CANALES: Cade's doing a lot better, first of all. That was a game morning deal that crept up on us. Brady, another great job of stepping in, this time in last minute form to hop in there and get us ready in the run game to face a really challenging pressure package that the Cardinals had and to get us ID'd properly and all that. So unbelievable job by Brady.

**Q. Dave, I was just going to ask, with this being Christmas, mechanically speaking, what's changing up in terms of the practice week and stuff like that, trying to keep guys focused when there's other stuff happening?**

DAVE CANALES: We'll get right to our Wednesday mode tomorrow, which will be Tuesday, and then Christmas Eve. On Christmas Day, the players will have their normal players day off so they'll be able to spend some time with family, whether it's in person or just calling people, to just be able to be available on Christmas Day.

Then we'll hop right back to it on Thursday and get right back on rhythm of our Thursday routine, Friday, and everything from there will be normal.

**Q. As far as the tight end position, Tommy made some big plays yesterday. JT has been back for a few weeks, but we really haven't seen him get targeted. Where are you at with that tight end position moving forward? Where has Tommy kind of improved as a receiver since he's come back?**

DAVE CANALES: The guys have done a great job with Tommy, with JT, and also Feleipe just being ready to go when we need him. It's just a matter of the opportunities, the way they fell, and Tommy has made the most of it. I'm really proud of the way he's worked his way back from the injuries and really given us somebody that we can rely on in the pass game.

It's not been by design the ball hasn't found JT. It's just kind of the rhythm and flow of when things have gone out there, where the ball has gone. JT has doing a really good job too busting his butt, and sometimes that's just the way it goes. Yeah, we've got to find a better way to get JT involved.

**Q. You had a transaction already today. What went into moving on from Jonathan Harris?**

DAVE CANALES: A bunch of different decisions. Jonathan was a guy that we released to make room for potentially bringing some other guys in to see if we can get some linebacker help.

**Q. You've got to get linebacker help outside, Dave?**

DAVE CANALES: Interior. We played the last game with three inside linebackers.

**Q. No, I mean from outside the building.**

DAVE CANALES: Yeah, we're looking around to see if we can bring somebody in to help us.

**Q. Last thing on that. Did you take another injury there that's making you look around again?**

DAVE CANALES: We did not.

**Q. I was curious if you could give us a snapshot of the running back room right now. Is Miles Sanders, are you still hopeful that Miles Sanders will make his return this season? Then also can you speak on Raheem Blackshear getting his first carry of the season this year?**

DAVE CANALES: We're just working through all that. Today there's some critical decisions we have to make between Mike Boone, who we used his last practice squad call-up for this past week. So we've got to make a bunch of important decisions going into this week to play the Bucs. Again, we're going to try to run the ball and do that, we've got to make sure we have guys available before that.



I was glad to see Raheem get in there. He ran hard, made the most of a couple opportunities that he had, and read the runs properly, finished with his legs driving. So it was really cool to see him in there.

**Q. One quick follow-up about Miles specifically. At what point do you have to make a final decision on him?**

DAVE CANALES: I don't know about that. I just take it day by day.

**Q. I wanted to ask you, the play yesterday where Bryce was in the pocket, they blitz up the middle with No. 7, and Bryce just got flattened. What did you see in that play and the way he handled that that maybe you hadn't seen before that kind of defines his growth as a quarterback.**

DAVE CANALES: It's kind of the same thing. He's shown courage in the pocket. He had an open receiver. We had an unblocked player right up the middle, and he was able to plant his back foot and throw an accurate ball to Tommy in that situation. We got a first down out of it.

I was really proud of just the way he was able to just play in rhythm and get it to the first guy in a timely fashion, especially because the guy was hot right up the middle right now.

**Q. How much have you adjusted your play calling this season to try to play to the strengths of these?**

DAVE CANALES: That's always the goal. Regardless of whichever quarterback comes in there, we fine tune things, talk through it, we watch film and see where do we play the most fast and confident and just try to continue to build those types of concepts that really fit Bryce and fit our group.

**Q. Is there one specific that wouldn't give away game plan stuff that you can talk about that switched up from what you did early in the year or last year with him?**

DAVE CANALES: No, there's a bunch of different spots. If you can imagine over the course of -- really over the course of the last ten years that I've been a part of this system and this offense formulating different concepts, we have so many things at our disposal, but at the same time, it's about finding what makes us more comfortable and where we can play our fastest. That's where we've arrived at this point in the season.

**Q. What's the update on Xavier, if you haven't already addressed it?**

DAVE CANALES: He's progressing really well. We're taking it day to day with him. He was going through a return to play protocol through the weekend to try to -- to make sure we got in on top of his availability for this week, but we like the strides that he's taking.

He's going to have to make pretty significant improvement in the next two days as we continue to evaluate him, but we definitely want to get him back out there.

**Q. You said it would take significant improvement to have him ready for Sunday?**

DAVE CANALES: Yeah, just looking for that like -- he's got these milestones he has to reach daily, and he's hitting them so far. So that gives us hope that we can get him back out there this week.

**Q. This is just kind of a one-play snapshot, but the sack in overtime of Kyler, it was one of those plays where you kind of pick your poison. E.J. brought an extra guy, but what did you see there out of Wonnum. It looked like he had a nice rush. And then Josey comes free late up the middle.**

DAVE CANALES: Just like you said it. D.J. got a good jump on the snap count, had a really nice speed rush up the field right now, beat the tackle, turned the corner and really was in position to try to get Kyler down. Kyler had to step up. So I thought it was just a great effort in a critical situation.

At the end of the game, where the work that you put in throughout the season but also throughout the week to be able to be that fresh and that explosive in that situation and just executing the plan was what I loved about it. It just goes back to talking about the finish, for guys to be able to play and do right rushing your pass lanes and execute all the way to the finish was great.

**Q. The team website showed after the game your kind of celebration in the locker room. You said this is Panthers football. We've probably asked you this a lot about culture and you like staying consistent, but there's a difference between believing and proving. I'm just curious how do you guys handle the successful plays in the building as opposed to maybe games that have a lot of negatives? Is there a way that you kind of differentiate or the way you highlight or the way you maybe have positive or negative reinforcement? How do you guys handle that internally?**

DAVE CANALES: The beautiful part about our game is it's not perfect. It's an imperfect game. With execution you also know there's 11 guys on the other side trying to make sure you don't, and they're striving for the same things, but it all starts with the ball. It all starts with no turnovers. Coming up with two -- I know one of them was an exchange, but it requires effort to beat the guy to the ball.

Jonathan Harris, great effort to get to the ball and secure it for us. The late interception by Demani making the catch, getting his feet inbounds. So those big principles are the things we point to, like this is what it feels like. Finish the game running the ball, where they started to play us tighter in our passes towards the end of the game, but it was the run game that allowed us to move down the field quickly in that situation because of the physicality and the finish mindset.

Like we're going to continue to do this as long as there's time on the clock. But the way that you do it is culture is what you celebrate. We celebrate the successes. We celebrate guys doing right. We celebrate them showing great effort, great enthusiasm, great toughness, smart football plays, and great finishes. We celebrate those things and say, guys, this is what we're looking for out of our team. This is our style of football and trying to show them examples of that.

Then we handle all the things, we handle all the stuff, the issues that come up, the mistakes and all those things, we handle it with accountability from a coaching staff standpoint to the players. We just talk about it, and it just becomes a normal part of what we do. Here it is. Here's our process. We talk about the truth of what happened. We attack it during the week. We're going to emphasize it. We're going to challenge you guys with these different looks on both sides to correct those things.

Then it just becomes a normal part of what we're doing. That's kind of how we go about it.

**Q. On the hit drop tackle in the first half, upon watching it on film, I know you didn't get -- we asked you yesterday you needed to watch it again, you said. What did you see in the film, and was that the correct call?**

DAVE CANALES: What I saw in the film was I saw Coby. He had grabbed James Conner around the waist, and then it was a beautiful wrap tackle. His leg slid down on the ground, and he brought him down. So there wasn't a high grab tackle, unload my weight to the lower extremities of the running back. I thought it was a clean, open field tackle for a one-yard gain. We should have been sitting at second and nine right there in that situation.

**Q. Obviously a couple games left, but when do you kind of peek your head into the bowl games and the scouting and look into the future. Is that something you and Dan have even talked about yet or are we still just focused on the last two?**

DAVE CANALES: Scout's all over it. Dan's all over it with his group. The staff and I, we're all over trying to play the Bucs in Tampa. That's our focus.

We've got enough of our things that we've got to clean up from a film standpoint from the last game, locking back into a really good opponent. So that's where my focus is. My focus is on the guys that are here right now, giving them everything we have to try to help them to be successful on Sunday with these opportunities that different players are getting in this situation.

**Q. I know we talked a lot about -- well, everyone's talked a lot about Bryce Young and how he's kind of evolved throughout the season, but can you talk a little bit about how you have evolved as a play caller as you learn the strengths of the players that you do have with injuries and things like that?**

DAVE CANALES: That's my whole goal. My whole goal is to try to find the run game that works for us, starting with Chuba, starting with the big guys up front, our tight ends, and the receivers involved in that as well. So what do we do best? How can we put our guys in position to be successful in the pass game?

It's the same thing, when does Bryce look confident? When is he putting that plant foot in the ground and letting the ball rip? What are those concepts? Let's build him a few different ways. Then just finding those routes for our guys -- the receivers, the tight ends, the backs on the checkdowns. Different ways that show, hey, when you put him in this split or he has this release and he can run this stem at the top, he looks really good there.

That's the exciting part for Brad and I and for the offensive staff to really come together and say what works for us. Okay, yeah, that's a great concept. Is that us? Are we going to be able to execute that on Sundays? That's really been the joy of working through this and watching Bryce and his group continue to emerge with different concepts we can count on.

**Q. Speaking of play calling, I was wondering if you had a thought on the clip of the Lions' play yesterday where the quarterback and the running back duped falling down, and he ended up throwing a touchdown pass.**

DAVE CANALES: I thought it was incredible. I thought the scheme would have worked without it. I thought the added element of a stumbled handoff just added a little flair to it.

This is a really good offense, the Detroit Lions. I'm sure they don't get bored with the success. They've been doing a fantastic job. But to add little wrinkles like that to challenge the defenders and maybe grab someone's attention a little bit more, I just thought it was a cool play executed by both guys.

**Q. As a play caller, did you learn anything from it? Are you going to take anything from it?**

DAVE CANALES: Always trying to learn. Always taking notes and seeing if there's something we can incorporate.

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