

# Carolina Panthers Media Conference

Tuesday, December 24, 2024

Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

## Dave Canales

Weekday Press Conference



DAVE CANALES: First of all, Merry Christmas. I wanted to first just congratulate Chuba Hubbard, NFC Offensive Player of the Week. What an incredible accomplishment and a great season he's having and just the example of consistency, of hard work, Panthers football, our style, all that stuff personified. So I'm just really proud to be a part of that.

If Chuba was up here, he'd be giving all the love to the big guys up front, the tight ends, the receivers in their blocking. All the guys finishing with hands on. Just wanted to start off with that.

**Q. In the spirit of Christmas, are you a Home Alone 1 or a Home Alone 2 guy?**

DAVE CANALES: All of them. All the Home Alones. We ran through them. We're a big elf family as well. Will Ferrell is a hit in our house, soundtrack-wise. The Star is another really good one. Let's see, Road to Bethlehem. That one came out a couple years ago.

Then the latest one was The Greatest Christmas Pageant. That's a new one. It's pretty touching, pretty cool movie. We're running through those like crazy, especially Lizzie with the kids out of school. They're going through all the Christmas movies.

**Q. Did you watch Home Alone 3? ?**

DAVE CANALES: We didn't watch the third one. I've got to say, 1 and 2.

**Q. You saw Legette out there practicing. How's the hip doing? What's the latest with him?**

DAVE CANALES: Today was a half speed day with the walk-throughs and stuff. We'll have to get him out there. We will not practice tomorrow, but when we come back Thursday, we'll be able to crank the speed up and take a look at him there, so we'll go day-to-day with him. He looked fine moving around today.

**Q. Is it a possibility he'll play?**

DAVE CANALES: Yes, absolutely.

**Q. We also saw Miles out there. I don't know how much he's been out there since the injury, but is this just part of the onboarding process?**

DAVE CANALES: Yes, just every day he's got to go out there and continue to clear the protocols and really just take it day by day.

**Q. Your wide receiver room, they're playing through a lot of injuries. David's kind of beaten up, so is Jalen. How is Dan Chisena -- hopefully I'm pronouncing that correctly. How has he played and stepped up the last few weeks?**

DAVE CANALES: It's Chisena. He's done great. He's done a fantastic job just being ready to go. A guy that gives us some speed. He can stretch the field. He's had a couple of targets and made the most of them. A big third down catch in the game.

He plays special teams. He can cover kicks as a gunner. He can play in the vise, a lot of things. He's making the most of this opportunity and showing us what he can do.

**Q. Tight ends have just kind of progressed. Tommy had a couple of big touches last week against Arizona. Is that position with JT kind of coming back and working his way back from injury, are you seeing a little more perhaps volume from those guys the past few weeks?**

DAVE CANALES: Yes, they've been a big part of what we're doing in the run game and the pass game. Tommy's had some really great plays over the past couple of weeks, coming up with some opportunities, breaking tackles, and stretching the field for us. He's done a great job.

We expect JT to get rolling when he gets his ops as well.

**Q. Are you allowing guys to leave town the next 24 hours just as long as they're back by whenever?**



DAVE CANALES: Hopefully guys are just laying low. We've got to make sure our bodies are right for this weekend, especially going down to Tampa where it's going to be a little warmer down there. Hoping guys just take advantage of the rest, the day off to spend time with family, that sort of thing.

**Q. You already played Tampa, saw the familiar faces, and now you're going back. What is it from a personal standpoint of going back there? We know the business side of it, what you're planning for in terms of the game.**

DAVE CANALES: It was a great year for the Canales family in Tampa, made a lot of friends. I certainly was a part of a great organization, a lot of support. Todd Bowles giving me a great opportunity and a bunch of guys I really enjoyed going to work with every day.

That part was special, but I've got to approach every day like this is another game. This is another championship opportunity for us to work on our football, to go on the road and play a really good opponent. So the focus is there. I couldn't probably tell you exactly how I'll feel going back into the stadium.

I'm looking forward to the challenge of it. I'm looking forward to calling on our best football, and that's first and foremost. We certainly did make a lot of cool relationships down there.

**Q. You know where you're going. You know you're going to see people that work there, the attendance, that sort of thing, that I'm sure you have relationships with. Is it hard to turn that off, or do you allow yourself the pre-kickoff, hey, what's going on, and catching up, and turn on the switch?**

DAVE CANALES: Certainly. Within the windows I have pregame, even when they came here and played in Bank of America Stadium, it was connecting with the people that I did a lot of hard work with, lived a life with in a short amount of time, but I'm sure it will be the same that way, you know.

For me, I always use gratitude as a grounding force for me, whether it's here, whether it's on the road. This is just another opportunity to be grateful for opportunities, to be grateful for a lot of people that -- these seasons are long. You go through a lot. For me, I'm sure the overwhelming feeling will just be thankfulness, gratitude, which will just pull me right back to our team and what we're working on and focusing on finishing strong.

**Q. Were you contemplating this time last year that you could become a head coach after one year as a coordinator?**

DAVE CANALES: Honestly, I was focused on trying to make the playoffs and win the division. All the rest of the stuff takes care of itself. We were finding a way to play really good football in Tampa last year around this time and had a string of wins. We lost one at home against the Saints late, and so we had to come here to Bank of America to win the division.

That was really my focus. My focus was on the players, trying to make sure we're putting them in the best position to be successful. I knew the rest of the stuff would take care of itself.

**Q. That was pretty fast track to go from one year as a coordinator to here. What made you feel that you could -- that season and what you did could propel you to this?**

DAVE CANALES: Honestly, it was just opportunity and just looking for doors opened. I felt that was I ready for this job? I didn't know, but I was ready to take on the challenge for this and to learn the things I needed to learn.

You don't know what you don't know, so you've got to just go for it. That's kind of been a recurring theme of my career. When there's an opportunity, I'll volunteer myself for these opportunities knowing there's some things that I'll have to learn, but also knowing there's a bunch of great people around me that can help me make decisions. I've got to talk about Coach Caldwell, I've got to talk about Dom Capers and the influence they've had on me this year. Of course Pete Carroll in my back pocket at any time, really available at any time to take a phone call or a text.

So a bunch of people I'm grateful for, and for sure this staff. Guys that I got to know, the defensive staff that was here, and then the offensive staff and people I worked with before who knew the culture I was going to try to put into place. So I had a lot of great help coming into this.

**Q. You mentioned a lot of great coaches. Ron Rivera was in Sunday calling the game. Did you get to a chance to see him before or after?**

DAVE CANALES: I did not. I did not get to see him in person, but Coach Rivera has been so supportive this whole time, encouraging, chiming in on watching our games and saying, hey, I see the progress here. I see where you guys are challenged in this area. Keep up the good work. Stay consistent with your messaging. Keep a consistent focus that way so guys have something to lean

on. He's been really encouraging this whole season.

**Q. Did you see anything from the Bucs a couple weeks ago, as opposed when you were there last year, that was maybe different from an offensive side?**

DAVE CANALES: Absolutely. I think Liam Coen has done a great job. We tried to lay a foundation, kind of learning year one from a system, and Liam has experience with the same system when he was in L.A., and then he ran a bunch of different things, including parts of the system when he was at Kentucky and added to it, added flavor. I watch him on film, and I kind of covet some of the cool things he's been able to incorporate with this group.

He's done a great job with just the changing dynamic of their receiver room, getting the ball to different players different ways and using Rachaad White and Bucky Irving. He's done a great job with that.

It is kind of strange to see the familiarity of some of the guys. I've seen Baker take strides continually improving his game, and that offensive line just really solidifying themselves, a few people and the growth across the board. It's going to be a great challenge for us knowing that this offense does have some fire power in the run game and the pass game.

**Q. You brought up gratitude for assistant coaches too. Your name is obviously attached to Bryce, but what has Will Harriger brought to that room and to Bryce and to Andy and really the offense?**

DAVE CANALES: Will has done a fantastic job. He has taken all of the basic fundamentals of our QB school, the things we take our guys through, the footwork drills. He calls it CNS drills, central nervous system. You're training the reactions, getting off platform, all those things.

All those things I believe in training your quarterbacks that have to deal with pocket that's can shift on you, pressure looks, different things like that. I enjoy just being in that QB room. The cut-ups, the hours that he spends building these cut-ups to bring the plays to life to show different looks. It could be from two seasons ago on a different team, but the same type of defensive structure trying to attack these voids and just the way he tries to bring it to life.

He's really entertaining too. He's got all these crazy sayings. He's from Lubbock Texas, he calls it the cradle of toughness. The Texas pride that we have to fend off between him and Andy and Bryce, I have to remind him there's been a lot of great quarterback that's come out of California. So there's a good battle in there. Mike

Bercovici is in there as well, another guy that spent time in California.

He keeps it lively. He does a great job. I've got to say, as far as the growth of our quarterback room, the production and all that, there's nobody more important in that room than Will Harriger and the work he's been doing with those guys.

**Q. When Joe was asked about Ron, he gave you a lot of credit when I was talking to him the other day, for the development of Bryce and the way you brought him along. I asked you about the play calling. He feels like you have changed the way you call a game with Bryce. What do you say to all that? I'm just curious, how much of that is just him seeing that, or is that actually something you consciously do?**

DAVE CANALES: First of all, I appreciate Coach Rivera's encouragement on that. I think it's just at the heart of the guys that I admire around the league, the play callers and the people who develop quarterbacks and offensive systems, they try to find what's best for their group, and they're so committed to that, that you can see things added, you can see things leave from concepts that I know they love, concepts that I know are a part of their system.

We have to become what our players are. We have to become what Bryce does well. We have to become what our receivers can run with speed and confidence. That's my commitment to it. Hopefully it should look different between Andy, Bryce, Baker last year, Geno the year before, Russell. I can see the evolution of these offenses because of what these guys do so well and try to put them in their best position to be successful.

**Q. Do you feel like you did that enough? You had an 0-2 start? Or did you have to find something different to get him to where he is now?**

DAVE CANALES: It's a part of the learning process. That stuff takes time. It does. Regardless of who it is, last year it was Baker, and it took weeks to find that sweet spot, and then we grew and grew and it got tighter and tighter. Then you just start reformationing the same type of concepts, the things he does well. It's about becoming something. It's part of the process.

**Q. Speaking of your development of quarterbacks, given your work with Geno, Baker, and now Bryce, you've been given the moniker of quarterback resurrector. How do you feel about that? Is that something that you embrace?**

DAVE CANALES: Not really. Honestly, like to me the

credit goes to these men. It goes to guys who are committed to excellence. It's all about these quarterbacks. It's all about Bryce. The courage to just continue to improve his game, to stay with it, to grow, to take in the concepts, to own it, to make really great decisions, to verbalize the things he likes and he doesn't like as we go through the week.

It's a willingness for these guys to be vulnerable. It's a willingness for these guys to work at it and to believe that they have greatness, to believe that they can have success and they can do these things.

So I've just got to pay attention, pay attention to the things they're telling me verbally and non-verbally and try to make sure we incorporate that part into what we're doing.

**Q. The wide receiver room is filled with undrafted guys. What do you need to continue to see from them, the unsung guys, and do you see an increased role for Thompkins going forward?**

DAVE CANALES: Just week-to-week improvement. That's the focus for our guys. We're playing the Bucs, so we're looking at coverages. We're looking at matchups. We're looking at how they play press man and all the different shells and looking at our concepts and trying to be tight on the details. That's the focus for the guys, so just looking for them to take another step.

**Q. Is that what Legette and Coker are working on in the corner, press coverage?**

DAVE CANALES: Yeah, they're just working different leverage, different setups at the top of routes and stuff like that. I love to see those guys together working on their game, working on the team. That's the motto, that's the message for the guys. That's our approach every day.

**Q. Obviously you saw a lot from Demani in training camp to want him to stick around. What have you seen from him as he gotten more and more adapted from this defense? Did you expect to get this much out of him this first year?**

DAVE CANALES: My expectations are always wide open for whatever players want to make it and whatever they want to become. When they take advantage of opportunities, it's my job to see that.

To see Demani continue to work on his game and ask the right questions and continue the coaching, and he's made plays. He's come up and made open field tackles. He's come up with interceptions and those things like that.

He's got so much he needs to work on. He's got so many things that can be cleaner from a communication standpoint, accountability, playing as leverage. Doing all the things exactly right. It is not just about making plays. It's about doing things right longer than the opponent.

That's the goal for Demani. That's the challenge for him. He's got to realize the weight of this opportunity to continue to press in and to make it so that his teammates can count on him at all times. So that's what I hope for him is he continues to press in and strive to be somebody that your teammates can count on and respect.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports