

Carolina Panthers Media Conference

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Coach Dave Canales

Weekday Press Conference



DAVE CANALES: Great day to connect with all the guys. Starts with gratitude and just thankfulness for all the guys that helped this year from our scout team to the guys that played for us on Sunday, to the guys who went to IR at different points in the season.

But was able to connect with all of them and just express my appreciation and just kind of hit some brief points on asking them what's next, you know. Obviously there is a lot of those conversations that involve free agency and different things like that.

It's just important to make sure that it's recognized how hard this job is for these guys to really show up seven days a week. It's six months and to do it all together. It's a gift, you know, but there is challenges that come with it.

It was a great morning of doing that. I remember really appreciate the guys that were here to do it with us.

Q. Dave, what have you learned about yourself as a leader and a teacher throughout this entire process of this first year being a head coach?

DAVE CANALES: Yeah, I mean, just openness to learn from people who have done it before, who have been a head coach. Then also just coordinators and position coaches who have been around football for a long time. To take in all the information possible and then to try to make the best decisions weekly, really daily, that I feel are best for our team from a football standpoint.

And so hopefully just learning that that has helped me, and making sure that I continue to have that openness to collect all the information and make those decisions collectively.

Q. There's a lot of talk in there about stability and continuity. What's the biggest difference that you can have going into next year without having to build and start new?

DAVE CANALES: Yeah, just continued development.

We're a developmentally-minded organization and developmentally-minded coaching staff, so looking at all of our guys we have and trying to find the next step for these players to help them progress and have a starting point in the off-season; a familiarity with terms, different things like that certainly helps.

Two years of building a new playbook, changing logos, and doing all that. Now we have the book and then we became some other things in the process, too, which I'm excited to really look at and take that.

Did that answer good enough for you, Darren?

Q. What were some of the things that you became that you're excited about?

DAVE CANALES: From a football standpoint? Yeah, just having Bryce for an extended time and seeing what that pass game looks like with Bryce and seeing the things he throws well. Watching Xavier, Jalen, Thielen come back to us and be healthy, and Ja'Tavion, Tommy. Just the run styles for Chuba, and here comes Miles for the last game.

Just learning about our guys, learning about the offensive line, what run plays they like called, which direction, how, those things. We just accumulate a lot of information from an offensive standpoint.

Defensively of course, same thing. Coverage-wise, what can we lean on from that standpoint front-wise? What gives us our best opportunity here to play our defense?

So that's what the next couple of days are about. Of course when we come back, it'll be the continued self-scout process to look into those things.

Q. ...the performance of the defense, do you anticipate making any changes at the coordinator position?

DAVE CANALES: Not right now. Ejiro will be back with us as defensive coordinator. We have a lot of things to evaluate over the in next couple days, and then certainly into the off-season to reflect on our schemes, our personnel, to reflect on the guys we have here going



forward.

So there a lot of really important conversations about all those factors that will be great to have.

Q. To clarify, you said not right now, but Ejiro definitely be back?

DAVE CANALES: Ejiro will be our defensive coordinator next year.

Q. You inherited this defensive staff. I think you talked about the benefit of that. Would you consider making changes below Ejiro?

DAVE CANALES: Those are all conversations he and I have to have. Again, day after the game, you know, we just have to process all of it from a schematic standpoint and try to make sure we put the Panthers in the best possible situation.

Q. You mentioned the decisions you made; made some big ones early on in your coaching coming tenure. (Regarding Bryce.) Some outside criticism of positions like that. Reflecting on that and those decisions you made, is it particularly gratifying when you see the growth and development based on some of the decisions?

DAVE CANALES: My focus was to try to help the Panthers that week based on the opponent we were playing and the guys we were playing with. For me, the focus was just to be there in that week.

As I reflect, I think what I'm proud of is just the consistency of decisions, consistency of growth and progress that we saw in a bunch of different areas. I think that's a tribute to the whole staff. I think that's a tribute to the players buying in to a little bit of a different culture, but to really avail themselves to learning, growing.

So I look at that and I'm proud of the progress we made.

Q. Coach, when you talk about this year with Bryce, highs and lows, good and bad, what does it say about him as a young man?

DAVE CANALES: Volumes about his consistency, his character, his maturity. The way that he just looked at it exactly how I would hope all the guys would look at it weekly. How can I get better? How can I grow? How can I take the lesion ones of this week and bring it to the next week?

That's what I saw every week. An area here or there,

applying things, trying things, pushing things, continuing to pursue excellence. That's probably the greatest thing I can say about Bryce, is the consistency of attacking the work, going after it, and as he grew, as his confidence grew, and you can see his personality, you know, the fade-away touchdown throw yesterday, like those things kind of come alive as your command and confidence of what we're doing really starts to settle in, really starts to crystalize for him.

That's what I saw from him.

Q. Dave, as a guy who has worked in pretty much every level of a coaching staff, what is the importance of exit interviews with players as they go off either maybe in free agency or prepare for future years with the team? What do you want to get across?

DAVE CANALES: These aren't very long meetings, so these meetings are first and foremost thank you. You know, it's gratitude. It's another connection, another touch. It's like the players that have come and gone over this past year, trying to make sure that Dan and myself had a personal connection with that player. They may come back at some point.

When they come into our organization we have a conversation, so I think for relationships it's really important to know where somebody is at and to know who you're talking to from a personal standpoint. Some guys have kids; some don't. Who is this person I'm talking to? The off-season will present its own new things that way, too.

So I think it's just having that touch point. Then there are some obvious ones, free agency, guys who are free agents. It's like clearly a, you want to be here, making sure wire on the same page that way to try to get a feel for some of those things as well. You can wonder all you want. Sometimes you just got to ask. Or they'll ask me. Do you want me here, Coach? There is truthful conversation and truthful responses that go into those things.

Q. Bryce's confidence that you mentioned, when he threw the because to Tremble and he turned to (indiscernible) before the ball gets to Tremble, we never could have seen that come out, that personality, that side of him. Did you see that coming and what did you think?

DAVE CANALES: He's got fire and swag. He's got a whole lot of that to his game. I think he's handling it the right way, letting it come to him with humility, with hard work. That's exactly how you would want to do it. What I don't want them to do is play smaller than they are.

I hope we can create a place where can emote, show us their personality. I think that's -- when you look at the great teams in the NBA, in the NFL, guys who are really -- watched the Lions-Vikings game last night. You see the Lion's making the plays and you see the confidence they play with. Jahmyr Gibbs, four touchdowns. You see his personality come alive after runs and in the end zone.

So we want to try to it develop, to create a foundation where our guys feel like they own it so that we can see who they are.

Q. Bryce pointed out to us a minute ago that realizing the impact of his personality and that energy was beneficial to the whole team and the whole locker room. Do you think your positivity and Andy's played a role in him growing in that role, in that way?

DAVE CANALES: I honestly can say that Bryce is his own guy, and that's one of the things that I love about him. He doesn't let external factors really impact him. He just stays consistent on his plan and his growth. I think that's a trait of really good players, is that they're able to continue to have their standard the performance regardless of what the external environment is, whether it's OT to win the game, two-minute drive, whatever it is.

There could be other circumstances going on around you from a player standpoint or coaching standpoint, but to find that consistency, I think he's -- that's from him. That's from his belief in who he is, his belief in the possibilities of where he can go.

You know, we're able to bring our own personalities in there, and hopefully that does affect the room to a certain point, but I think that Bryce has an idea who he is and where he wants to go. That's what's been so great to see at the end of the year come out the way it has.

Q. You might have been asked this yesterday after the game; wasn't there. Has Bryce shown you enough that he is a franchise quarterback here?

DAVE CANALES: Absolutely. Bryce will be our starter going forward. Our conversations are deeper and we had a quick meeting today, but we'll connect again at some point.

He earned that. He won that job and took it and ran with it.

Q. You've said that you like the quarterback room all year. Fair to say you want Andy Dalton back in 2025?

DAVE CANALES: I would love to. There are conversations that need to happen on both sides.

Q. You talked about Bryce's growth. Seems like you guys have grown together as a head coach and quarterback, playcaller and quarterback. Maybe Sunday was like a precursor of things to come. In what ways do you feel like you've grown and your relationship has grown?

DAVE CANALES: I love that story. So I do feel a sense of rookie head coach. I'm not rookie anymore, by the way. I had my last one in the books. I'm a year-two coach.

But I think that the natural progression of myself as the head coach, as a second year playcaller, learning, growing, taking information in, being humble about the stuff, like, ah, I didn't like that call. Being able to take that information and hopefully -- talking about impact -- hopefully that allows Bryce to see, look, we're not looking for perfection here. We're looking for growth, and let's go for it together.

Let's find the solutions together. We want to be a solution-oriented team. I have loved that we have kind of taken those steps together as an offense, as a quarterback, as a playcaller, as a head coach, and all that. For sure some of the other guys on the staff doing things for the first time.

It is a cool story. It is kind of the nature of what we're doing. I'm excited for the progress and for where are headed next.

Q. ... to be a rookie head coach coming in here, knowing just kind of the history and the turnover and everything like that, what was given up for Bryce, what was a really gutsy see move early in the season. Talk us through that decision process.

DAVE CANALES: I don't really want to go back and open that back up. I will say is this, which I said all along. At the time I was making the best decision for the Panthers in my mind. That's what I believe.

I had to take that weekly approach of this is what I think is best for us right now. Of course there was a lot of conversations, a lot of thought that went into that. That's not something that I take lightly.

But that was the approach, and hopefully that will always be the approach for as long as I'm here. Talking about what is the best decision for the Panthers right now, taking in all that information.

Q. There was a lot of external dialog about your relationship with Bryce. Talked about his maturity and

the way he's able to handle things. How much did having a person working with you like that help you to tune out the noise in the process of building that relationship even further after you guys hit a fork in the road?

DAVE CANALES: Yeah, it was great. To understand that first and foremost they hired us to help the Panthers win; let's work on our jobs and do our jobs.

We both had that sense that like show up, work hard, love and treat people well, and that makes sense for us. So having that commonality. I'm going to show up here and be consistent and do my job is really important.

Q. Can you just expand on the decision to bringing Ejiro back?

DAVE CANALES: Yeah, I've played against this defense. I've played against it in Seattle, with the Rams for a bunch of years. Played against it twice last year. I know what this defense will look like. I'm committed to that. Ejiro is committed to that.

So it's about developing the players we brought in. It's about evaluating our schemes. So we have to be able to look at our schemes and be really critical of all these things as well.

It's about seeing who's out there to help us get this defense to the place we know we can. But again, in this part of the season it starts with the work they've done, evaluating that part, go into the scheme, and then go into free agency and the draft and see what we can do.

Q. How much of that confidence is built on the fact you know Derrick Brown is coming back?

DAVE CANALES: I think the question was about Ejiro. For Derrick to be back, awesome. Huge get for us. I think it's more the big picture of thinking about my vision of doing this together with E how I want to do it, how I want to build it.

So we have some good time over the next couple days to look at all that.

Q. ... NFL team together as a head coach?

DAVE CANALES: Finish. Just looking to capture the things that are us, the moments, right? The games where we were able to finish with the ball, running the ball into the end zone in the Cardinals game, running the ball in the end zone this past week. You know, this is what it looks like. No turnovers from an offensive standpoint.

The defense in the games where we took the ball away, to see the impact of Michael Jackson's interception, then score touchdown, and all of a sudden it's like, that could've been the one that decided it.

But like trying to capture those things, and from a stylistic standpoint, the effort, enthusiasm, I thought we grew in celebrating each other. You can see the guys taking more and more group celebrations. You can feel that energy happening further down the season. I saw that grow. The toughness was as you there. This is a group that played so hard all year.

And then we grew in our situational football in different areas as well. The finish is what I was most proud of. While we didn't finish the games to win, we finished the right way, with great effort, doing our jobs, for the most part.

There were plays that got away from us on both sides, but it was the intent that was there and the guys showing up, trusting the process, listening to their coaches, taking good coaching, and then applying it throughout the week.

I really thought we captured some important parts to our culture.

Q. (Regarding off-season surgeries.)

DAVE CANALES: All the medical questions probably have to get from somebody else.

Q. Coach, entering the playoffs as a fan, who's your pick to win the Super Bowl?

DAVE CANALES: No comment. (Smiling.)

Q. How much will you and Brad and maybe even E watch the playoffs and try to add maybe to your playbook for next year, maybe take some concepts or really focus on what really works from a playcalling standpoint?

DAVE CANALES: Yeah, one of the things I have done for ten years, which Will Harriger will be spearheading this project, is collecting all the situational things that come up during playoffs. So we just kind of evaluate from an offensive standpoint.

And defensively, like, first of all, we're all going to watch all those games and take in the information. Those are great things to show, particularly when you're building your systems. Hey, look at this situation here. There is 45 seconds and two timeouts right here. We got plenty of

time, but got to make some yards here. We had that situation come up yesterday. We'll find those things and be able to apply them to that.

And then specifically from a scheme standpoint, there is going to be a lot of good football played over the next couple weeks, so we'll be tuned into it.

Q. As now a second year head coach...

DAVE CANALES: Right? (Smiling.) Undefeated, by the way. Undefeated in 2025.

Q. Was the job everything you thought it would be? Some surprise things that happened. Was it everything you expected as a first-year head coach?

DAVE CANALES: And more, you know. Certainly it called upon myself and our staff to work through the challenges of this season, to bring out the best and the worst in us, to find solutions together. That was a great challenge for us. I think we'll all be better for it.

All of the different -- the injuries and the roster situations and all those things, you know, and every Monday, Tuesday, what are we working with here? Who is up? Who is down? Got to wait and see.

I think just the challenges, I think the best way I put it was talking to Lizzy, I feel so full and so empty at the same time. It's just like I feel full because it's calling on a lot of things I haven't had to use before and having to lean on a lot of people for that information to make good decisions. So full from just like all the connection, being connected to all the different parts of the team, the phases of the offense, defense, special teams, but also the trainers, strength staff. You know, Tracy, just connected to everyone. Travel, all these things.

So it's forced me to operate in ways that I hadn't had to before, so I feel very alive and stimulated in that regard.

On the flipside, I'm completely gassed by Sunday night. I'm kind of punchy after the games. Then here you go, here is a call sheet. Go call about 65 plays again. So it's been all of that and it's a great adventure to be on.

Bunch of guys I really enjoy working with.

Q. This time last year (regarding David Tepper.) Did some research. What have you learned about him since you've been on the inside that you didn't know?

DAVE CANALES: Committed to the process and asks great questions about our processes to decisions and

creates great dialog for Dan, for Brandt, and I to go through things. Been a really gift to just have to go through the mental thought process to come to the decisions that we made from a personnel standpoint, from a coaching standpoint, all these things to facilitate a couple of guys, first-time GM, first-time head coach, and Brandt, who comes into this thing and the three of us working together. But so I think it's just like committed to having great processes in place and that everything is open for evaluation.

You know, that's what I've learned from him to be able to apply to our coaching as well. Okay, guys, this is a great plan. How is this process as compared to last week? How did this process lead to a 14-point game versus 44-point game? How do we come to these decisions?

So that's been great for me just as a leader.

Q. Jaycee said that right after the game he and Bryce were already talking about next year. As a guy trying to build this culture, what does that mean?

DAVE CANALES: It's huge. It's going to come from these players. As coaches, we're going to put the game plans together hopefully of stuff that our players can do well, but that doesn't come alive unless the players are committed to each other, unless the players are committed to the ownership and holding each other accountable out there.

It starts in practice talking to each other and demanding excellence on a daily basis. If you can demand excellence of each other throughout the week and make the week hard, show up on Sunday, it's a celebration. To get to that point where all the guys are doing that. Jaycee and Bryce are two great starting points right there that has a belief that we can play with anybody.

I'm so proud of that part, that we come out of the season with the guys knowing we can play with anyone. We proved that if we do things right and play together, we can play with anybody. I love that those guys are already on that track thinking about 2025.

Q. Dave, four overtime games in your first year as head coach. That's got to be a fairly unique stat. Anything you take from that or coincidence for you?

DAVE CANALES: Great reps. A lot of really hard-fought, battling ourselves back into games, keeping us alive with this play or that. Just the heart and finish of this team. We're comfortable winning the game as long as we got time and downs.

If it takes five quarters, then, okay, great. We'll show up for



that. And in classic fashion, I'm sitting there and I'm like, here we go. Okay, let's do it one more time. But I love seeing that last drive come together the way it did with the balance of the run game and couple passes and punching it in right there.

I couldn't have envisioned it any other way but running the ball to win. I think that's great reps for us, great reps for our team as we build our concepts. Guys, these are the plays we use when we're in a two-minute situation. These are the plays we use when we're ahead. These are the plays we use when we go to overtime.

And that's all going to be beneficial for us in in the future.

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