

Carolina Panthers Media Conference

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General Manager Dan Morgan

Weekday Press Conference



DAN MORGAN: How is everybody doing? Good? Good.

So first off, obviously not the season that we really wanted in terms of the record. However, I do feel like we're making a lot of progress. Things are trending in a really good direction. I feel like the culture is changing here. Guys are starting to feel what it's like to win.

You know, we only got five wins, but feels like the momentum is building. I think guys are feeling good about the direction the team is going.

You know, want to thank the coaches and the staff for all their hard work and dedication throughout the season. Super long season and these guys, they're here long hours. They work their butts off.

So Coach Canales and his staff have done a great job with their players, developing them and creating the culture we want here.

Like to thank my scouts for doing a great job during the season. Again, a lot of hard work, dedication we all go through. We put in a ton of work and preparation throughout the season on the draft, free agency.

Yeah, we're grinding and trying to make this team the best that we can. We're excited about the future.

With that, I'll open up to any questions.

Q. You said you had no expectations going into the season. What did you fulfill out of your no expectations?

DAN MORGAN: Yeah, I think obviously Coach Canales did a really good job with this team. I think you saw guys get better on the offensive side of the ball. Dave and his staff have done a really good job with Bryce, with young wideouts out there just kind of developing these guys, growing these guys.

Again, I feel like we're headed in a really good direction that we're all really excited about right now. We got some young guys on defense that we're excited about, too.

So guys are going to continue to develop, get better. A lot of the guys gained a lot of experience this year, so I think that will be valuable really going forward. And, you know, kind of going where we want to go and building this thing the way that we want to build it we're going to have to have really good depth.

Those guys got a lot of playing time this year. Kind of went through some growing pains with some of the young guys. Again, in the future I think it's going to allow for us to have some depth and guys with playing experience.

Q. On defense, Canales said you're retaining Evero despite the season. What were your conversations with him heading into today about that and why ya'll came to that decision?

DAN MORGAN: Yeah, you know, I love EJ. I love his defense. He has a really good scheme. Again, like I have to do my part as well, me and my staff, of putting really good players on the field and adding really good pieces to the defense.

You know, again, the young guys are developing on the defensive side of the ball. There are some young guys that we're excited about there. You know, just some cornerstone guys we have on the defense that we're excited to get back with Derrick Brown and Jaycee.

But Evero's scheme's really good. We're excited to have him back. Again, we just got to add pieces and keep developing the players we do have and I think things can turn around. We just have to put the work in; we're going to do that.

Q. One of the words we heard a lot today was "stability." In and out of the locker room, having stability at head coach, at GM, at quarterback. In your offseason outlook, how does that change?

DAN MORGAN: Yeah, I think obviously having an offseason where you're not really doing the interview process or having to interview a head coach, what I had to do last year, I'm able to really dig in on free agency and the draft and the roster part.

You know, I'm excited to go to the east-west game, the Senior Bowl, the combine, and just kind of really dig in and try to make the Carolina Panthers the best team we can make them.

It's going to be really exciting to have a full offseason and a clear mind, just be ready to roll.

Q. Dan, what is your evaluation of this rookie class, your first rookie class? Not just the draft picks, but the featured undrafted guys?

DAN MORGAN: Yeah, I think the guys, some of them went on IR, but I think they were making strides. You know, you go from Xavier in the first round to Trevin to Chau Smith-Wade, Ja'Tavion Sanders. I feel like those guys got better and better. They continue to grow and work throughout the season. You know, I think they had a solid rookie season. I think there is a lot of good things to build on. They're going to put the work in and I know they're excited about that.

I talked to all those guys today. Along with the rest of the roster. So I'm excited about the rookie class. It's young. They're hungry. They're looking to get better and grow and get better.

Q. One of the guys you didn't mention was Brooks in that class.

DAN MORGAN: Right.

Q. What was your reaction and where do things stand with him?

DAN MORGAN: Yeah, you know, obviously we're really excited about Jonathan. You know, it's unfortunate that he reinjured his knee. Feel awful for him. He put a ton of work in to get back to where he was ready to play in games and really contribute and help us moving forward.

But, again, it's football. You know, things are going to happen. Unfortunately he injured his knee. I know he's going to attack the rehab process and be a pro like he is. Yeah, we'll be excited to get him back whenever that is.

Q. Dan, the way the season ended, the way Bryce has been playing, the buzz that's around this team, when you're identifying free agents does it make it easier to

recruit and pitch them when you have a guy like Bryce?

DAN MORGAN: Yeah, yeah, I think it does. Definitely players don't want to come to a team where they first of all don't feel like there is stability, which I feel like there is here now. We have a young head coach that brings a lot of energy. He's fun to play for.

And then obviously Bryce, the way he's developing and growing under Coach Canales and his staff definitely helps in the free agency process. Makes things exciting moving forward.

Q. This is kind of two parts. Firstly, given that you guys set a record for most points allowed and you're a former Pro Bowl linebacker, did you take that personally?

DAN MORGAN: Yeah, you know, obviously makes it tough. Ultimately, it lies on my shoulders to bring players in here to help EJ and his staff out. We're going to continue to add to the defensive side of the ball. We'll be aggressive. We'll be smart, but we'll be aggressive in our process this offseason.

So, yeah, yeah, definitely it's something that I think everybody on the team takes personal. You know, EJ, his staff, myself included, Coach Canales. Like we all want to improve on that side of the ball and continue to grow on the offensive side of the ball.

So we're going to look at every avenue to make this roster better on both sides of the ball, and we're going to be aggressive and we're going to be smart in our approach.

Q. Dave mentioned before kind of famously that you wanted some dogs on this team.

DAN MORGAN: Yeah.

Q. How far away are you? How many more dogs do you...

DAN MORGAN: I'm not going to put a number on how many dogs we need to be where we want to be. Listen, we're going to keep drafting, signing players in free agency that have those qualities, the love to play the game, passionate about football, smart, tough competitive players.

So we're just going to continue with that approach and just bring players in here to help us out.

Q. I know there is a lot you probably have to address

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and free agency and the draft, internally, all three of your specialists are free agents. I know you guys went 5-12 and you do need to add depth. Internally, who are the guys that you really think have stepped up prior to the negotiating situation that you have with the guys on the roster currently?

DAN MORGAN: I think there are some guys that have definitely stepped up. I'm not going to name names right off the bat. We're still kind of sitting with Coach Canales, with Brandt kind of developing a plan for free agency, for our own free agents.

Yeah, we just got to sit and strategize a little more and talk about the roster and digest the season and just see where we are at. So there will be a lot of discussions to make this roster better.

Again, we're going to be aggressive but we're going to be smart in our approach.

Q. Would you say the focal point in the draft is probably going to be on defense?

DAN MORGAN: I think the focal point will be to bring in really good football players. So wherever those players are at, either side of the ball, we're going to look to add to obviously the defense and offensive side.

We just want to create a lot of depth and contribution on this team. That's going to start in free agency and obviously have the draft after that. We just want to continue to add really good football players.

I'm definitely not blind in the sense that we do have to improve the defense. The defense wasn't up to standard. You know, we have to address that and we'll be aggressive in doing so.

Q. Regarding wide receiver.)

DAN MORGAN: Yeah, we need playmakers all over the place. We're going to look to add playmakers wherever it may be. If the best playmaker is in free agency, we're going to consider every option and look for playmakers in the draft, too.

Q. But at that position specifically, in terms of a big time receiver?

DAN MORGAN: Yeah, I mean, again, every option is on the table, whether receiver, whether a corner, offensive lineman, linebacker, D-linemen. We are just going to look to add really good football players. Not specific to any position or need.

Q. Dave was in here talking about his role as a head coach, growing with Bryce Young along the way and learning what he liked and what helped them grow together. What did you observe from your seat watching that growth in the moment?

DAN MORGAN: Yeah, to see Bryce kind of go through the benching and be out on the practice field on the scout team, just he took the same approach every single day. Dave was working with him every single day, even on the scout team, just with little details, just little things he want him to work on.

Hey, Bryce, to his credit, he never batted an eye. He came out every day with the same approach, with the same attitude, and I think that's what -- it says a lot about Bryce and who he is and why he's successful right now.

Q. Dan, you've been in the job for a while. What was your biggest takeaway as a first-year NFL GM?

DAN MORGAN: I would say expect the unexpected. You know, in my seat there is something new that comes across your desk every single day. I think the biggest thing being a GM is problem solving. You've got to be a really good problem solver and communicator with your staff and just always available and always have your door open for anybody to come in. Any problems or issues or suggestions they have, I always have an open-door policy.

Yeah, I would say definitely first-year GM, expect the unexpected. Expect the early texts in the morning, the texts what you weren't really expecting. Or even a late-night text.

Yeah, it's definitely a problem solving position.

Q. Defensive focal pieces, Jaycee is one of those. Where does he stand as far as for you...

DAN MORGAN: Yeah, I think I said that to you guys the last time I talked to you guys. Jaycee is obviously the focal point of the defense, somebody that we're going to want here long-term and we're going to work on getting him the long-term deal.

Q. Dan, both you and Dave came into your first year roles, a lot of instability and a lot of national media regarding David Tepper's involvement. Can you talk about the confidence he's had in the two of you, how he's taken a back seat and let you guys handle the football operations?

DAN MORGAN: Dave has been great to work with. Dave



and Dave. Mr. Tepper and Nicole, their support and their trust in Dave and myself has been great. They support us in everything that we do. They're great leaders in the building. Great to work alongside every single day.

Just can't thank them enough for their trust in us. Yeah, we're looking forward to bringing them a winning team. That's what they hired us for, so we're going to put that work in and try to get there.

Q. What's the most efficient way to make the improvement on defense that you made on offense this year?

DAN MORGAN: I'm not really into quick fixes. I don't think there is such a thing as a quick fix. Obviously want to fix things as soon as possible, but I'm just going to go into this as, hey, listen, we know where we were on the defensive side of the ball. We do have to continue to add playmakers on that side of the ball.

So I just think we have to look at every avenue and explore every avenue to find those playmakers. And, hey, if we find somebody and we like somebody, whether it's a trade, draft, or free agency, we're going to explore every path.

Q. Dan, you've been around Ickey since he got here.

DAN MORGAN: Uh-huh.

Q. How do you feel he performed this year compared to previous two years? Where are you guys at from the standpoint have you spent a lot of money on this offensive line.

DAN MORGAN: Yeah, I think Ickey fits right in there. We think a lot of Ickey. I think he got better every single year. I think he made strides this season. I think Joe Gilbert and his staff have done a really good job with the O-line in general.

So, yeah, I see Ickey as a piece that we want around here for a long time.

Q. Dan, you've been in this building when the culture has been at its best. What did you see this year?

DAN MORGAN: Yeah, I think you can really see the players' attitudes. They're still learning how to win. We have a lot of young guys in the locker room, and it takes time to learn how to win and learn how to finish like Coach Canales says.

So I think from the culture standpoint I think you could tell the guys are starting to really buy into what Coach Canales

is preaching and starting to figure out what it feels like to win.

I think once you get that feeling you really don't want to lose it. I think guys are like, hey, like we may have something here. Let's buy into this, put the work in. I think everybody is in that mindset right now moving forward.

Q. You were part of the team that drafted Bryce Young. What was going through your mind as you watched him in that performance yesterday? Is that what you envisioned all along?

DAN MORGAN: Yeah, I think so. I think we all saw Bryce in college. He won the Heisman Trophy for a reason. You know, he's an electric player. He's somebody that can extend plays. He can hurt with you his legs. He can hurt you with his arm.

That's the same Bryce we saw at Alabama. I'm just so proud of him for putting the work in, taking the coaching, and being the resilient player that he is.

So I think everybody saw on display what Bryce is capable of, and not just yesterday, but in previous games, too. I think he's just scratching the surface, and I know he's going to put the work in to get better and better. I'm just really excited for his future and excited for him.

Q. ...two games. Was there a level of concern? I mean, here he is, your number one and that doesn't happen too often where they get benched. Was there a concern that can he do it? Getting franchise quarterback is not easy.

DAN MORGAN: Yeah, I always had the belief that Bryce was going to reach his potential. How that happened or when that came, I wasn't sure, but I knew it was in there.

I think when he was benched, you know, I thought that was an opportunity for him to kind of sit back and just take a deep breath after a long previous season and first tough couple games. I think was a really good thing for him in the long run.

Hey, to his credit, he's come out and he's really turned the page on that. You know, we all feel really good about him being our quarterback of the future.

Q. Was there a plan to come back to him?

DAN MORGAN: Yeah. Yeah, there was. You know, obviously I think Coach may have talked to you about that before. Yeah, there was definitely a plan. There was no giving up on Bryce.

Q. What was the plan? Because he didn't tell us the plan.

DAN MORGAN: I'll let him tell you if he wants to tell you.

Q. To that point, you're a first-year GM. He's a first-year head coach. There are conversations that led to benching the number one draft pick. I'm not asking you to talk about that decision. What I'm curious about is the level of trust that you have to have in each other to say, let's pull that trigger and take all the backlash?

DAN MORGAN: Right.

Q. Obviously it was a great decision. What did that moment do for your relationship with Dave?

DAN MORGAN: You know, I don't know if it's that moment that's really again set our relationship off in a great direction. Dave and I just have a really good relationship in general. We're always communicating and talking about different scenarios.

I think it was just communication on our part and ultimately Dave's decision on pulling the trigger on that. Hey, worked out really good and I'm glad it did.

Q. Last year when you put this staff together and put this front office together, you guys didn't have a lot of runway to plan. Curious, what has Brandt and analytics and the coaching staff brought to your planning for this offseason that maybe enhanced what you can do this year as opposed to last year when it was kind of makeshift from the jump?

DAN MORGAN: First of all, like having Brandt around a awesome. He's great just to bounce things off every day. He's obviously really good at his job. Really good with the numbers, and, you know, just work things in free agency and negotiating contracts. If there is a better guy out there I don't know who it is, so I'm really lucky to have Brandt, just kind of working side by side with him every day.

And from an analytics standpoint, we brought Eric Eager in and his team, so obviously they bring a lot. It's really like with the analytics it's a checks and balances really is what it is.

So if I really like a player in free agency or the draft, I can always bounce things off them. They give me feedback if it's not matching up with that I'm seeing, the numbers don't match up.

It's just the checks and balances and part of the process of just being thorough on everything he with we do.

Q. From your perspective, how important is Andy Dalton in Bryce Young's ability to come back and really ascend the last couple games?

DAN MORGAN: Yeah, you know, I'm not in the meeting rooms every day so I really can't speak to that. I know Andy is a supportive teammate and I know him and Bryce have a super close relationship. You know, definitely have to say that Andy was there for him and one of his biggest fans.

I'm sure he would tell you he's super proud of him, too.

Q. Considering what you just said, would it be a priority to get him back?

DAN MORGAN: Yeah, something we're going to talk about upstairs, along with the other free agents we have. We just got done with the season the other day. We'll sit down and talk about the free agents, who we're going to sign, resign, who we're not going to resign.

Yeah, there will be a plan in place. If he's part of that equation, we'll resign him.

Q. Last year going into the draft we asked about having a first round pick; this year top 10. What's the process, approach going into this year?

DAN MORGAN: Again, just we have a process. We're going to be really thorough in that process. You know, I think, again, just going back to previous conversations, we just have to draft really good players and playmakers, guys that are difference makers, especially in the top 10.

Whoever that guy is, we're going to feel like he's going to be a difference maker for us. Yeah, we'll be excited about that.

Q. Dave directed us to ask somebody else this question. End of the season surgeries you're aware of?

DAN MORGAN: No. I don't really have anything for you right now. I know we'll be meeting with the medical staff here actually today so we'll be talking about some of the season-enders, guys that maybe had some injuries yesterday, and then guys that are going to have surgeries potentially this offseason.

So I'll have more for you next time I'm up here.

Q. When you hired Dave a year ago, you didn't know what he would be as a head coach. You had your hopes. What have you seen from what you thought you knew back then during the season that made you believe he was the right choice?

DAN MORGAN: You know, I think he's everything I thought he was going to be. You know, young, energetic, players' coach that's really good with quarterbacks.

I think he's really shown that. I think the guys really respond to him and love playing for him. He brings that energy out at practice every day, in the meeting rooms. He's fun to be under, fun to work under.

But, again, just brings that energy every day that as a player, you know, that's what you look for. You don't want to really be playing under somebody boring and monotone. Dave always has a smile on his face and is ready to roll.

I'm excited about his future, and he's going to continue to evolve as a head coach and as a playcaller. I think I'm really excited about it.

Q. (Indiscernible.) Any one moment there that you saw really jumped out to you?

DAN MORGAN: No, not really. I just think it's his positive attitude. He's always optimistic about the day, about the future. That's truly how he feels. He's genuine. He is who he is. That's what I love about him.

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