

# Carolina Panthers Media Conference

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## Dan Morgan

### Press Conference



DAN MORGAN: All right. I'll start off just 53 men. Obviously that's the hardest time of the year. You develop the relationships with the guys, the bonds, relationships, just with them every single day. Then you got to bring 'em in your office, talk to them and tell them they're not going to be one of the 53. So that's always a tough time. It's probably my least favorite part of my job. But yeah, we definitely don't take it lightly.

We're excited for the guys that made it. The guys that didn't make it, that we didn't bring back to the practice squad, I know that they're going to have success in other places, so...

We're excited about the roster that we put together, our 53 guys and our 17 practice squad guys. We're excited about that.

I think we have a really good, young core, mixed with some veteran guys that are really good players, as well.

Yeah, it's an exciting time. The roster, that's still fluid. We're going to be aggressive. We're still going to look at the waiver wire. We'll be involved in everything, whether trades, all avenues to make the roster the best roster in the NFL and the most competitive roster in the NFL. That's the goal.

Big thanks to the coaches. It was a great camp. Just, like, the training staff downstairs, Danny, Josh, guys like that downstairs. They did a tremendous job. Knock on wood, the guys were really healthy. I think we're really in shape right now. Guys are looking good and fit. I'm really excited about that.

The scouts, they worked their butts off. They combed through all the pre-season tape. They're all responsible for teams. They really worked their butts off. Big props to engineer Jared Kirksey and Lee McNeill for heading that group up and doing a really good job.

Coach Canales, his leadership out there was really phenomenal out there, the coaching staff, in terms of

developing players out there on the field. It's fun to watch. Really excited about the coaching staff and the season moving forward.

Everybody knows we traded Adam Thielen. Obviously made a huge impact on this building, the people in the building, myself included. Made a huge impact on the wide receiving core, the young guys. I think he set them up for success moving forward.

Adam's just the consummate pro, a guy that prepared the right way, took care of his body, did all the things that you want an NFL player to do. He was a great example for our locker room, especially our young guys, on how to do it. So he'll be missed around here. I wish him and his family the best moving forward.

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

#### **Q. When you look at the roster as it is right now, what allowed you to feel comfortable trading Adam Thielen?**

DAN MORGAN: Anytime you lose a receiver like Adam, it's a big loss. At the same time we're really excited about our young core of receivers. Jalen Coker is going to step into the slot. Utilized a lot of resources with XL, T-Mac. We have guys that we're really excited about. I think that definitely made me feel more comfortable pulling the trigger and trading him.

#### **Q. When you said that you guys have been in constant conversation with Hunter Renfrow, what have those conversations been like?**

DAN MORGAN: Yeah, I was even texting with him last night. I told him I want him back here. I talked to his agent, talked to him. We're in constant communication.

Nothing is imminent, but we're going to stay in contact with him and try to figure something out to bring him back here.

#### **Q. A role on the practice squad or 53?**

DAN MORGAN: I think we're still trying to decide that. Hunter I think is thinking through things, looking at different



options. I think right now it's really up to him with what he wants to do. But we would definitely like to have him back here at some point.

**Q. Obviously with your linebacker background, people are going to highlight that position. Where are you at with those four guys? Why do you think you didn't make a move maybe on the waiver wire?**

DAN MORGAN: Yeah, I think on the waiver wire, I really don't want to make a move just to make a move. I like our linebacker core. Trevin Wallace, the way he's developing, looking out there. Rozeboom out there, he's everything we thought he'd be. The smart veteran guys, got great instincts. We feel really good about our two starters.

Claudin Cherelus, we've been developing him for a couple years. He's making strides out there, too.

Obviously we kept the young undrafted rookie out of South Carolina, Bam Martin-Scott. Talented kid that will help us on special teams. He still has to develop from a defensive standpoint. We're really excited about him and his future.

Then on the practice squad, we had Kryz Barnes, another veteran guy, another veteran option that kind of gives us a little bit of security on the practice squad. If we need to elevate him at some point, we can elevate him.

We feel good about our core. That's not to say that we wouldn't explore something outside the building. We're always going to be looking, not just at the linebacker position, but we're going to be looking at every position and try to improve the roster.

**Q. Back on Adam. Did you feel any pressure from him or his side for you to make that deal 'cause of the homecoming and all that? Did that factor in your decision to ultimately pull the trigger?**

DAN MORGAN: I think, no. I would say Minnesota called me and they asked about Adam. Me as the GM and as a former player, I like to be open and honest and transparent with the players. So I called Adam to my office and I let him know that they called. I asked him if he would have interest in going back there. He said that he would.

Once he told me that, he was very intrigued, very excited at the possibility of going there, basically ending his career where it first started. That's where he lives, too. He has a house. I knew and I could tell that he was really excited about the possibility that that might happen.

I told him I'd do my best to make it happen, but I'm not just going to give you away. We're going to have to get

something, fourth round value, something that we feel for the Carolina Panthers is good, because you're a really good receiver, you're a really good leader. We wanted to make sure that we got the compensation that we feel comfortable with before we did it.

Glad it worked out. It worked out for us. I felt like we got the compensation that we wanted to get. At the same time he can go and continue his career and end his career where it first started. I guess you can say it's a little bit of a win-win for both sides. Everybody's happy.

But again, we will miss him. I know our young guys are ready to step up.

**Q. What did you see out of Bryce and the receivers that are still here to make you confident to make a move like that?**

DAN MORGAN: You all have kind of been out on the practice field every day. When you see the way T-Mac works out there, when you see the way XL works out there, Jalen Coker, David Moore, Jimmy Horn, all these guys out there, we feel like we have a really good, young stable of wideouts that were mentored by a guy like Adam Thielen.

They're more mature than their age. I would say even, like, they're more polished than their age, too. I don't see any reason why they can't go out there and step up and have a great season. I have full confidence in them.

**Q. As a former player, are you more conscientious about sort of doing the right thing - not doing the right thing - but being more aware of how that player may be feeling? Is that a reputation that you do want to cultivate?**

DAN MORGAN: Yeah, I know how they feel down there. I know what it feels like to be in that locker room. I kind of put myself in his shoes a little bit to where if I could play my last year to where it first started, I mean, that would be kind of a cool thing. It's where I'm going to eventually retire and live. There's a little soft spot in my heart.

At the same time it's a unique situation that I think I wouldn't do for just anybody. At the same time I'm also always going to do what's best for the Carolina Panthers, as well. It has to make sense for us. But there's different situations that are unique that sometimes you got to have to step aside and kind of look at it in a different lens.

**Q. It seems like just what you guys get back was what took a little bit of time. Was there ever a thought in the back of your mind, as excited as you are with the younger group, taking a guy like Adam with that**

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experience...

DAN MORGAN: Yeah, there were times during the negotiations with Minnesota I didn't think it was going to happen. There was a lot of back and forth, a lot of posturing, No, I'm not doing that, no, I'm not doing that. It was a week's worth of negotiating, kind of going back and forth, probably hating each other at some points (smiling).

Yeah, there's no doubt we'll miss Adam. I feel like our young guys are well-suited to go out there and play really good football.

**Q. From a general manager perspective, what are you looking to see out of Bryce this year, his progression? What specific things are you looking for?**

DAN MORGAN: I would say just continue ascending as a leader, continue to develop the chemistry with the wideouts. It takes time to develop chemistry with wideouts and understand the way they move, the way they come out of their breaks, where some guys attack the ball better downfield, some guys are better when you put it in different spots. I think the sooner that he figures that out and who's out on the field, like, just gets that feel, the better off he's going to be.

They're already making big strides out on the practice field. Again, I have full confidence that the chemistry will come along pretty quick.

**Q. Adam, we saw time and time again, third downs, fourth downs, he came up with big catches. Seemed like he was the go-to guy when you needed a big play.**

DAN MORGAN: Yeah.

**Q. Any concerns having that taken away?**

DAN MORGAN: No, we have guys that can make plays out there. T-Mac is doing it every day. XL is doing it every day. Coker is doing it every day. We have guys out there that we have full belief in. If I didn't think that, then maybe I wouldn't have traded Adam.

I have full belief in the guys that are here and our receiving core in general.

**Q. About the core, you like the core, how do you feel about the depth?**

DAN MORGAN: I feel like we're still building. We're still building that depth. You know what, we're never going to be content. Even when we do reach a certain height, we're still going to be looking and always trying to evolve and get

better. So yeah, we're never going to be content. We're going to try to add depth everywhere.

I think to go far in this league and to win against really good teams and to win in really tough environments throughout a long season, you do have to have good depth.

I think that we're building towards that.

**Q. Following up on Coker. What makes you so confident he's ready to step up? Will you scale back some of his special teams reps?**

DAN MORGAN: I think what makes me confident is, first of all, the opportunity he got last year, he took full advantage of it. He was out there making plays all over the place. Then you see him on a day-to-day basis out there, he's a baller. He's a really good player, somebody that we're extremely excited about, along with the other guys.

He wants it. He wants it. He wants to be great. The other guys, they want to be great. That's why I have full confidence that they're going to be good.

**Q. (Question regarding T-Mo.)**

DAN MORGAN: We've been working through it for a little while. Even a little bit before he got on the podium.

But T-Mo, he's one of those guys that doesn't get talked about enough. He's consistently on that right side, consistently being great, consistently protecting the quarterback. Nobody pays attention to him because nobody's getting to the quarterback on that side. He's just a great player. Even better person. I know that's kind of cliché, but he truly is a great guy, great player. He's everything we want in a Carolina Panther.

**Q. You have two guys on the left side of the line who are dealing with either injury or coming off an appendectomy. You also kept nine guys, all who were here last year. How do you feel about this offensive line after watching them and potentially dealing with the two guys not being there?**

DAN MORGAN: It's unfortunate. There's the possibility that he does miss the first week. Hey, we're in this business.

Again, going back to David's question, you have to have great depth in this league for situations like that. Sometimes things happen that you can't control. When you have good depth, it can cover that up a little bit.



Feel good about Yosh. Feel good about Brady, two guys that are more than capable of protecting that left side, making Bryce feel comfortable.

Yeah, not too concerned. We just always got to be ready, expect the unexpected.

**Q. At safety, you kept four. What's the plan there outside of Moehrig? How do you feel about the two young guys there?**

DAN MORGAN: Yeah, I think alongside Moehrig we do have three guys that can go out there and we can play winning football with. Really excited about Ransom and what he brings out on the field. When Moehrig and him are out on the field together, you can really feel an intensity and a toughness and a physicality that they bring out there.

So yeah, we're really excited about Ransom.

Demani has made strides. He's got really good ball skills.

Nick Scott has been in this defense forever. He knows exactly where to be. He's a really good communicator, really good leader out there on the field.

We have guys that are more than capable of playing winning football.

**Q. Back to Taylor's deal, looking at the rest of the line, how does Taylor kind of help you guys plan for looking at that position in particular, some other deals you might have to make?**

DAN MORGAN: I think you feel like getting Taylor done, that's another hole that you really don't have to address the following season. Definitely it feels good to get him done and not stress out to try to have to find a starting right tackle next year.

Going back to contracts in general, like, I think when you perform around here, and I want the locker room to know that, when you perform around here and do things the right way, you're going to be rewarded. That's just going to be our philosophy around here.

Now, there's always factors to where maybe you don't have enough money or stuff like that. If at all possible, we're going to pay the guys that do things the right way and play football at a high level.

**Q. What was the reason you chose Fitzgerald over Matthew? It seemed like Matthew had better outings during practices. Is Fitzgerald the starter?**

DAN MORGAN: To answer your first question, Fitzgerald, he's got an extremely strong leg, a guy that I felt was getting better and better every single week with the kickoffs, the placement, inside the 20. So you just kind of saw him starting to get better and better and better every single week. He performed really well in the game. Made one field goal. He made it, made it by a mile.

We just think he's a really good player that we can grow with. Will we take some bumps, will there be some bumps in the road during the season? Potentially. I think a young guy like that with talent, you're willing to grow with. I think that's kind of where we're at right now.

**Q. During the draft, you had a few scouts speak with us about their experiences. You had three undrafted guys make the team. Who was the point person on Bam and Corey?**

DAN MORGAN: Like, I don't want to call out names. I would say our staff is extremely tight-knit, really good communicators. Our scouts do a great job of identifying under-the-radar guys with traits. We're always looking for the trait people.

Bam Martin-Scott goes undrafted, but he's 6'2" and some change, 230 pounds. He's got a 33-and-some-change arm. Same thing with Corey Thornton, super longer, super physical, smart.

Our scouts do a really good job identifying those type of guys because they know that's the type of guy that can play in our defense and potentially keep developing and become a starter at some point.

**Q. Specifically as a head coach, how have you seen Dave progress over this past year?**

DAN MORGAN: I would say Dave's the same guy every day. I don't know that I've seen, like, anything that stood out that he's just gotten better at.

He's trying to get better at everything every single day. Has a smile on his face. The same guy you see when he comes out at the media, big smile on his face, he's like that when he comes in my office every single day.

He's just a great communicator. He's somebody that's contagious to be around every day. His personality. Then the way that he can motivate the players and the way the players respond to him I think speaks volumes of the type of coach he is.

**Q. When you started, I'm sure you had a vision of what you wanted the roster to look like. Heading into year**





**two, how close are you to that vision?**

DAN MORGAN: Like I said before, I think no matter how good the roster ever gets, we're never going to be content. We're always going to be turning over every stone and trying to find guys and exploring just different options to get the roster better.

I don't think we're ever going to feel like we've arrived around here. That's kind of the attitude we need to have to have long-term success.

The more hungry we can be as a scouting staff to go out there and find players and find diamonds in the rough, just find guys that fit us... Really doesn't matter what the other 31 teams like. As long as the guy fits us and he has the DNA that we want, that's really all we care about.

**Q. On Adam and the negotiations specifically. They felt very public. I'm wondering what sort of challenges, if any, that does present to you when it feels like there's stuff coming out?**

DAN MORGAN: Honestly, I was so in the negotiation part of it and, like, talking with Adam and Adam's agent, talking with Kwesi, the GM of the Vikings, I didn't really see anything on the outside. I was just focused on, Okay, this is the goal, then we're going to try to get to the goal.

That's kind of where my mind was.

**Q. Some of the moves here in the last couple days actually, moving on from Adam, keeping 11 rookies, kind of suggests you're looking farther down the road in building this long-term. Is this team also built to win now or are you thinking more competing, contending, maybe in '26?**

DAN MORGAN: We're always going to be competing and contending. This season is no different. I think the possibilities of the season, they're endless. We're going to write our own story here. How we write that depends on what we do out on the practice field every day, what we do off the field.

That's what I said in the beginning: we're going to have to earn everything. We can write our own story, but we're only going to do that by working hard and doing things the right way and being very detailed in everything that we do. That's coach's mindset. That's my mindset. We got to go earn everything. It's only earned by putting the work in.

**Q. What do you see in Hendon Hooker?**

DAN MORGAN: So myself and Coach Canales, we see

still a fairly young guy. I think he's 28 years old, 27 years old. Sometimes it takes a change of scenery to come. Under a new coach, under a new staff, just a breath of fresh air, new air, for him to come in here and learn under Coach Canales. The biggest thing is Coach Canales wants to develop and work with him. I think Dave's bought into that. Hendon has bought into that. We'll kind of see where it goes.

That's why he's on our practice squad right now, because we think he has some really good traits to work with. Coach really wants to work with him.

**Q. You and Dave mentioned your interest in bringing Hunter back. Anything he said that suggested any hesitation? What is his status?**

DAN MORGAN: Again, I've been talking to him. I think he's just trying to figure out what he wants to do. Whatever that means, I don't know.

But he knows that we're interested in bringing him back. Door's open for him if he wants to come back. We'd love to have him back. If not, I'll respect any decision that he makes. That's where it's at right now.

Thank you.

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