

# Carolina Panthers Media Conference

Monday, September 1, 2025

Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

## Coach Dave Canales

### Weekday Press Conference



DAVE CANALES: What a beautiful day! Unbelievable. A long weekend. The guys look fresh, they look fast. A lot of excitement out there, and to be able to get back on the grass and continue to build this thing as we head into the first week of the regular season, a lot of excitement.

Good competitive period at the end. Just went ones on ones at the end, best of five right there, so it was a lot of good energy to finish the practice.

Offense won today, so it kind of goes back and forth sometimes like that. It was a really nice pass, Bryce threw about a 40-yard bomb to Xavier early in the competition period to kind of elevate the energy of it.

But it was a really good practice. I was fired up to get back out there.

**Q. Every team wants to start off fast. That's stating the obvious. But after last year's opener, how important is it for the team and for Bryce to set a nice standard?**

DAVE CANALES: It's 2025; we're excited about every week. We treat them all the same, all the way through the preseason, every game is a championship opportunity for us to work on our craft, work on our game, work on our play style, all those things, and that's the way we look at this one.

Excited about the challenge of the Jags, Liam Coen, a guy I really respect and a bunch of talent that they've assembled there. A lot of excitement in both buildings. Just really looking forward to these opportunities to become us and to find the success and to find the challenges and to learn and to grow. Really excited about this week.

**Q. Do you have an update on Ickey's status, and we saw Damien out there --**

DAVE CANALES: Yeah, day-to-day right now. We'll give the official injury report on Wednesday with all the different

levels of what people can expect there. But it's day-to-day right now.

**Q. And then Coker, what happened with that injury and then the re-signing of Renfrow?**

DAVE CANALES: Yeah, it was in our last practice. He got a pretty significant quad strain. Bummed out for Jalen who's had a fantastic camp.

And yes, excited that Hunter, we got that done, and really got to give a lot of credit to Dan and Brent, Hunter and his crew for just working through it. We were going to have this conversation ongoing and couldn't be a better opportunity right now based on the situation we're in. We're so blessed to be able to have Hunter come back to us here and decide to continue with us, with the Panthers. We're stoked about it. He had a great day today.

But I'm really glad that the guys were able to find a common ground and an agreement.

**Q. You had talked to us before about how pleased you were with Coker after you had the talk with him at the start of OTAs. Will you guys have your PT people and your medical people kind of dig into the quad stuff because I think he had a similar thing last year?**

DAVE CANALES: Absolutely. It's all hands on deck. We had a great plan in the off-season which Jalen did a great job of executing as well over the summer, and has really just looked amazing. I had a chance to just connect with him right after the practice. A lot of frustration, and then just kind of seeing him today, and he knows what he has to work on. I was like, shoot, it's all about what are we competing for, and now we're competing to get healthy, we're competing to do this. You know how to do this, and you have the resources here. Everybody is all hands on deck, and we're just -- we're going to exhaust everything possible to be able to get him back into the rhythms of last year where he was able to come back and help us even last season.

Can't wait to get him back out there, and right now it's just going to take some time.



**Q. I think you said a couple weeks ago when you took Tommy off the injury list that you wanted to see how his physicality could handle it. How has he looked so far now that he's in drills?**

DAVE CANALES: He looks great. As good as I remember, maybe better. He looks fast. He looks strong. He's got really two exposures now of limited in that first practice last week. Coming back today was a little bit more. He's handling the load. We'll check in with him again this afternoon and kind of see how he feels. But he's been locked in mentally the whole time, and now it's just a matter of getting his feet underneath him and just finding those rhythms and being able to block different body types and those things.

But I'm excited about Tommy.

**Q. What's the unique challenge of being the first team to see what Jacksonville is going to do with Travis Hunter, and have you been able to deduce anything about what their plan might be in the preseason?**

DAVE CANALES: A special player for sure, but it goes beyond that. I think it's anytime you play a team where you have new coordinators coming into play, familiarity with Liam, with what he did in Tampa, but then this is a totally different group. They're kind of built differently with their skill players on offense and some of their tight ends.

I'm sure they're going to use them in different ways than what we've seen. We might see some similarities.

Same thing goes for the defensive side. You've got a new defensive coordinator. He's been a couple of places. You take the preseason and you've got to think, okay, well, if he's calling plays really for the first time in a while, some of the rhythms of how he's going to call it may show up in the preseason, but we have to assume they're not showing everything, just like we showed most of our stuff, not everything.

So those things present their unique challenges because while it's still going to come down to our execution, you like to have your 60 or 70 percent or better tendencies, whether it's offense or defense, and we really don't know what those things are. We're going to have to be taking a lot of notes early on in the game to kind of see what the game plan is and just make sure that what we're doing attacks that our fits that.

**Q. In identifying those tendencies, are you looking at film from those coordinators in those previous stops?**

DAVE CANALES: Yeah, you just got to collect as much information and use your best assumptions on what you think they're going to hang their hat on from a core standpoint.

**Q. Have you named captains?**

DAVE CANALES: Yes.

**Q. Can you tell us about that process? Was that a vote?**

DAVE CANALES: Yeah, that's the players voting for it. They voted for Derrick and Bryce and JJ Jansen as our special teams representative. We'll kind of have a rotational captain each week that'll go out with those guys. Somebody who is playing the type of play style, showing the type of character we're looking for, and we like to celebrate those guys and call them out front at the end of the week going into the game.

But these are three unbelievable people who represent what Panthers football is about.

**Q. When you picked the roster, you kept the entire draft class from this year plus a couple of undrafted guys. Are there common threads about those guys as a group that you've seen throughout training camp to now?**

DAVE CANALES: I think it's just the evaluation process. Dan does a fantastic job of educating his staff for the types of players that we're looking for, the football character, the personal character, certainly the physical attributes and toughness and all those things, but we have a play style here, those are the things we're looking for and counting on, and those guys showed those things throughout the off-season and camp when we were able to have them, and we'd love to build our team that way with players who we hand pick that fit these profiles, and then we will develop the football part of it as they grow up right in front of our eyes.

Really excited about the last two classes and the guys we have here.

**Q. T-Mac in particular, how have you seen him progress since the day he walks in until now being in the starting lineup?**

DAVE CANALES: First of all, congratulations, T-Mac. University of Arizona football ring of honor, certainly a cool moment for him. Got to see a couple of those pictures. But I've just watched him just attack every day and take the information he's been given and master it. He's done a



great job mentally being focused on where to line up, how to execute the route. Lots of conversations with Bryce, a lot of growth there.

Then from here it's just about stacking days, stacking techniques, seeing different coverages. As we go through a season, he's going to see different types of DBs, different types of techniques than what he's seen in practice. Every week is going to be so valuable for T-Mac to just learn, to grow, and to just continue to grow and adjust his game.

**Q. What was your message to Hunter? Obviously you guys cut him and then stayed in contact, but what was your message to him in bringing him back?**

DAVE CANALES: Yeah, it was just working through it with Dan and Brent. I've honestly just got to credit those guys for continuing to have the open dialogue, what do we want this to look like going forward.

Just really stayed connected throughout the whole thing, and I was able to kind of come in over the weekend and just have a conversation with him and really reiterate the fact that I'm committed to this story. I'm committed to your story here with the Panthers and the excitement that I have for where this could go.

All of a sudden, Jalen gets hurt, and all of a sudden it's like, Hunter, by the way, you're playing on Sunday right now, so let's go. So just a lot of excitement for both of us, and we were able to touch base again today just about that whole thing.

But I think both of us just kind of had a laugh and just thought, you can -- many are the ways of man and the plans that you might have in your mind, but God ultimately has a plan for how things work out, and we kind of just sat there on the field and had a laugh. It was a little different than we both pictured, but here we are, so let's go.

**Q. You didn't think he was ready for the 53-man when you cut him, but now he's going to have to play. How did you explain that to him?**

DAVE CANALES: Honestly, again, it was just going back to let's keep talking this week. That wasn't a definitive declaration or anything that was like set in stone. It's just like, let's continue to have this conversation throughout the week, and it got closer and closer to where both sides felt good about where we were headed, so I'm glad we found the agreement.

**Q. I wanted to go back to the captains thing for a second. That rotational captain, is that something you picked up from Pete, or did you pick it up from**

**somewhere else?**

DAVE CANALES: Yeah, that was from Pete. He kind of looked for a way to celebrate and acknowledge somebody who's just given everything they've got, contributing to the team, a team guy, exhibiting the play style that we're looking for, the toughness, playing smart, and really making a contribution.

On top of that, we also have a scout team player of the week for somebody that just we see continuing to take steps and grow, develop, and really treat every day like a championship moment and like their opportunity to get better, and we recognize that as well at the end of the week. They don't go out for the coin toss, so really it's like a fifth captain that we recognize.

It's no different than the players that we want to pay to be here long-term. We reward the guys that look like Panthers football players and the vision and the dreams that we have, what we imagine our group becoming. We just kind of point to those things like, guys, this is us. This is who we're looking for, this is how we want to play football.

**Q. Last year defensively things didn't go well and you brought a lot of people in. There's a lot of different personnel. Schematically is this defense going to look different than last year? Did you change anything this off-season?**

DAVE CANALES: You will see on Sunday. We definitely have a core of stuff that we love, and of course you get an off-season and camp, and we're working on stuff. We're working on -- I love Ejiro's philosophy, and really having Coach Capers here, it's like, let's get our best 11 players on the field, whatever that looks like, and I believe the same thing about the offensive side.

It's a combination of different guys that we just have to find a way to get guys to put them in the best position to be impactful, and so we'll be able to kind of do that in some different ways.

**Q. You were optimistic going into last year's opener like you are now but things didn't work out the way you would have liked. What did you learn about him and yourself last year?**

DAVE CANALES: Really I'm not looking for last year. I can just tell you where we're at right now. We've got a great leader who's stepping into the huddle, making sure the tempo is right, making sure the attitude is right, the energy is right. You're talking about a guy who's won at the highest level in college football. He knows how to be a



champion. He knows how to win. I just love the way that he's affecting all of us, the way he's affecting his teammates. But it's about his daily approach and the consistency that comes with that, and I'm just really fired up about being able to go out there and battle again on Sunday with him.

**Q. When you said day-to-day earlier, was that Ickey specific, or everybody?**

DAVE CANALES: I mean, Ickey specific and everybody else find out on Wednesday. We'll give the official report.

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