

Carolina Panthers Media Conference

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Coach Dave Canales

Weekday Press Conference



DAVE CANALES: Great day. Great opportunity to get back on the grass. Guys are excited about the opportunity to go on the road together, play a good four quarters of football, put that together.

That's a piece of what we're trying to build here. We have to be able to go on the road and function the way we have been at home playing together, playing clean football, and finding a way to finish.

So great opportunity for us this week.

Q. What's the biggest difference for you as the head coach when you are on the road?

DAVE CANALES: You sleep in a hotel. We try to keep all our rhythms and timing of things, what it feels like on a Saturday; obviously we're getting on a plane, but our meetings we approach the same way. We get the guys physically and mentally ready to wake up on Sunday and we get to go, here we go. It's 1:00. We're at the stadium with plenty of time getting prepped.

For me, I always look at the road games as an opportunity for us to grow together. We spend a lot more time together, whether it's on the plane going to, coming from, just hanging out at the hotel and talking to each other. There are a lot of great conversations there. It's a great opportunity to build that chemistry.

So again, you have to be able to win on the road. You have to be able to do that at a high level and to block out the external factors to understand the energy, the excitement comes from us. It always has to start with us, with the coaching staff and the players. We have to work together.

Q. ... was limited, but how did he look out there for the first time I guess in a couple weeks?

DAVE CANALES: He looked great. He looked great. Last week he started to ramp up; today he looked awesome out there running around. Got a real focused look in his eyes

and hungry and can't wait to get back out there.

Q. I don't know if you got to watch much of him, obviously these three weeks, how did he look (indiscernible.)

DAVE CANALES: He looked really good. He's working in hard in RTP, return to play, with the trainers. He did a great job of getting his strength and mobility back and ran him around last week.

This was our chance to get him on the field. He looked awesome. We'll take that day-to-day and see what it looks like going into the weekend.

Q. Do you agree with kind of the outside perception or consensus that each of those running backs are guys that gets better as they get more carries? And if you do agree with that, what kind of challenge does that present?

DAVE CANALES: I think it's a fair statement for all running backs. They like to get a lather. They like to have rhythm, set runs up on the front side, see what they're doing. You get to the sideline in between series you get to look at the pictures and see where the voids are at. Are they overplaying it the front side? Are they hanging back too much? There is this cat and mouse game that happens with backs.

That being said, every single carry like it's your last. Every single one with the intensity, the violence that we're looking for. It affects the whole group. So regardless of when those guys go in there we expect Chuba and Rico and Trevor when he gets his chances to go out there and empty the on every single run.

Q. Dave, Sauce Gardner has worked some of the tightest windows in the NFL. What's the best way to combat that?

DAVE CANALES: Yeah, you got to be able to catch contested passes. He's going be there. He's sticky in man coverage. When he's in zone, he's playing off the quarterback's drop. He's a fantastic player.

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You have to come off the rock with speed. You got to be able to use your hands. He's not afraid of a penalty here and there. He's a really confident guy, and that's exactly the type of opportunity and challenge that brings out the best in our guys.

So we got to meet the challenge. You're going to have to catch the ball when he's near you.

Q. Dave, generally speaking, when you have an injured starter who has been part of your program for a while and you have somebody replace him and he does well, how much management of the person do you have to do? I know you have to worry about what's best for the team. What is that like behind the scenes with a player who's injured and seeing somebody perform in his place?

DAVE CANALES: I believe in full transparency. I believe in having these conversations early on to talk about what it may look like, give the guys the benefit of the doubt to say, okay, let's look at the situation that we are currently at. Let's deal with the facts. Let's move forward from there.

Again, my job is to make the best decision for the Panthers. I don't like to paint myself in a box and say a guy can't lose his job to injury. I think that's a dangerous spot to put yourself in when a person shows what they can do. But sometimes that's the case; sometimes it's not.

I think you just have to take each case independently and do the best thing for the team.

Q. With that being said, with Corbett now returning to practice, have you made any decisions about what may happen at that center role?

DAVE CANALES: We are. We're talking through all that stuff right now. I don't really want to share what our approach is going into Sunday. Yeah, those are discussions, hard discussions that we have to have.

You know, really great opportunities for us to look at, because when you have great options on both sides, whether you're talking about the center position, running back position, you look at it and it's like we are blessed to have these opportunities. Now let's go and see how we can put our best foot forward and take advantage of players across the board.

Q. Follow up on that. Could you say the same thing at the right guard position?

DAVE CANALES: You could. You could. Brady has been

playing really at a high level. It's the reason why we had to have him back here, is his versatility. But look at him just as a pure guard, he's doing an excellent job.

Q. You expect and is the plan for Coker to play this week? Do you have to monitor his reps?

DAVE CANALES: That's the plan. I never want to put a player out there -- we only get 48 helmets on game day. They got to be able to play football. There are different ways, different modes that you have to play in, and whether you're playing with a lead or from behind, sometimes you got to throw the ball and the guy has to be out there. You have to be able to count on the guy physically to be able to do that.

Coker looked great today. Had a fantastic practice. We're going to just look at him again tomorrow. It will be a little bit more high speed mileage tomorrow. It's our big third down day, so that will be the real test to see what we are looking at going into the weekend.

Q. (Regarding Pat Sunday.)

DAVE CANALES: Pat finished the game and you know, he was -- he had a little bit of tightness but it really was something that we had to reevaluate on Monday. The whole staff got all hands on deck and got some imaging. Pat is going to need surgery and he's going to be out for the season.

It's a big one for us. I know it may come as a shock because he was playing such awesome football throughout that game, was able to get through it, but was something that as we continue to evaluate it and go through our process, popped up on us. We thought the best thing for him at this time was to make sure that we address that.

Q. What's the potential injury?

DAVE CANALES: It's a low back.

Q. Okay. Like a strain?

DAVE CANALES: I don't want to get into that.

Q. You said it popped up after the game?

DAVE CANALES: It was something he woke up with Monday and he was in a really bad spot, so we just did the full evaluation and the imaging and all the things that go into that. You know, he was really upset clearly because of just like when he's in there he's such an impactful player for us.



You know, I wanted to make sure that we did the right thing for Pat and of course everyone in his camp, his family, and his agent, people involved there making the right decision for Pat.

Q. You said lower back?

DAVE CANALES: Yes.

Q. Speaking to that group specifically, what does this mean for Nic Scourton, Princely Umanmielen, and what does it mean for those guys?

DAVE CANALES: Yeah, great opportunity for all those guys to step in, and guys we been counting on who have been growing in their roles, first, second down, rush packages, all these things.

So fortunate to be able to have those guys have to play early, you know. DJ missed a couple games so they stepped in and had their roles. Each week they keep improving. Every practice is a milestone. You can only imagine at this point in their careers adjusting to a system, to the NFL. Each practice is a milestone.

Every individual period is important and every game certainly is, so great opportunity for those guys to come out and help the team.

Q. Is there anyone else, Dave, that you might consider, I don't know, shifting to that outside spot, getting a longer look at somebody that you haven't really gotten a lot of reps at this point?

DAVE CANALES: Not right now. It's basically the group that's been working in there and in different levels with substitution, and of course the guys that are out there playing get the lion's share of the reps. A lot of guys have been working, so this is an opportunity also for Boogie Basham who, has been on our team and has been up for one game.

It's a great opportunity for him to show us what he can do this week as well.

Q. I don't know if you want to say this or not, but is the plan for Rico to start? I guess you go a guy who is (indiscernible) the way he has would make sense?

DAVE CANALES: We'll see on Sunday.

Q. Would be hard to sit him down?

DAVE CANALES: Who is that?

Q. Rico, given what he's done.

DAVE CANALES: I think he's earned everything that he's done in the last two weeks. He's earned the right to help this team and he will, and we'll find a way to do that. How we do that specifically, I don't want to really share those details.

But, I mean, certainly the world knows the recognition he's getting and just for all of us who have been here, you know, right at the forefront to watch the violence and the attitude that he's brought to the offense.

Again, great opportunity for us to look at both guys and find a way for them to help the team.

Q. Not taking away anything from that performance, but the offensive line has blocked really well. How much does that have to go into your evaluation of who gets -- how the rotation works?

DAVE CANALES: Absolutely. Let's give credit where credit is due. It starts right up front with that group communicating together, staying connected on blocks. I can't say enough about the tight end group and the way they've been blocking physically.

The growth of Mitchell Evans, being a reliable catcher but also the physicality he's bringing.

Tommy has been unbelievable.

James stepped in in JT's absence; hopefully get JT back as soon as possible. We're looking at that again right now this week.

But give a shoutout to Pat McPherson and having his guys ready to play violently. I see the wide receivers taking strides and steps on finishing plays with their hands on guys.

When you watch the highlights it's not without seeing T-Mack or Xavier down the field getting their hands on DBs when Rico has been at the second level.

It takes a full group. It takes Bryce getting us to the right plays against the right fronts depending on what the defense is doing and finishing his fakes on those to be able to hold the backside and to complement the whole thing, you know.

So it's a group effort. Rico did it at the time and I would've loved to see Chuba playing behind the production that this line has been doing as well.

Yeah, I love just the fact that it's a group effort and it's a collective thing with the staff putting great run plans together and the players going out there and executing it.

Q. ... perform run and pass. Really the next group of people, a different group almost every week. How are you guys able to sustain that level with so many different people?

DAVE CANALES: It's the work. It's that group that's committed to each other. I'm talking about the offensive line group. These guys spend a lot of the time together. They have a lot of the camaraderie. They're always working. It starts off with Goody and Joe. They're always working on stunts. They're always working on different front looks, possibilities that may come up on the side when their special teams period or when the defense is out there in the scout team periods.

They're just constantly working, constantly talking, and just committed to that process of work. That's what it takes because you never know what your number is going to get called. When it does you don't want to miss that shot. I just love what Brady has been able to do. I love Yosh coming in and playing what I believe is his best game as a Panther, really balancing it out from a run game and a pass protection standpoint.

So we're really fortunate to have those guys. It's one thing to have the talent in the room. It's another thing for those guys to work together for the whole room to grow, the whole room to continue to develop.

Q. Luke Kuechly praised your playcalling this week. He said he didn't even know what was coming and that seems to be high praise coming from him. Similar to a running back or quarterback getting in a groove, do you get in a groove as a playcaller and feel when things are clicking?

DAVE CANALES: Absolutely. And it's about efficiency and that's what this group has been. We've been an efficient team. We've been efficient in the run game. We've been efficient when we are throwing the ball. When we're getting first downs and getting explosive, it opens up the whole call sheet and just allows just the more chances we get the more we can protect our core.

You can protect the core of your run game with the play passes and the boots. You can protect your pass game. So you have your core concepts and then you have adjustments to routes based on those things. The more plays we're able to have the more times we're converting those first downs, then it just grows and the attack becomes really balanced.

For me it gets a lot easier, but really starts with our players. It starts with those guys being efficient, blocking the run the way it's supposed to be blocked. It starts with Bryce in the pass game. The ball has to come out at a certain time and make sure that guys are catching it, coming up with those catches, a group that's really come together to make some plays.

We missed some ops early on in the season. That shortens the call sheet and the number of plays. So the way the guys are playing and executing, it really allows me and Brad, because Brad is in my ear the whole time about setting things up. I can't see the whole call sheet so I'm calling for Brad. I'm calling for Goody.

Okay, we've run this one already. What's the backside looking like? Somebody look at this one. It's a full group effort, trusting the guys, the eye in the sky. Mike Bercovici is up there calling out the coverages and making sure we're balanced with runs and passes.

It's a full group effort, and it just gets a lot more fun for me the more opportunities we have out there.

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