

Carolina Panthers Media Conference

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Dave Canales

Weekday Press Conference



DAVE CANALES: Wednesday got here quick. We landed pretty early on Tuesday and got right to work. Fired up about the game plan and getting back to work with the guys.

A really focused group, hungry, and ready to go.

Q. Can you give an update on Horn?

DAVE CANALES: I'm going to keep all injuries, but I will say they're in the protocol. They have to make sure they pass all the necessary tests with all that.

Q. Do you think it will be unlikely, given the short week, that they'll be able to clear?

DAVE CANALES: The short week does have a significant factor in it. Again, we have to go through the right protocol and make sure they're clearing each hurdle along the way.

Q. You have three healthy inside linebackers today. How much does that create an issue with special teams and plotting out the week, just as far as depth?

DAVE CANALES: Absolutely. That's a group we really lean on for special teams and their contributions in the coverage units, particularly the interior of the punt team on kickoff, but they're all over. They're all over the core four special teamers that we count on. So that's an area that we have to look at to see who could help us there.

Could come from other positions, but those guys have been very valuable for us this year.

Q. You've seen what Stafford's done with the stats he posts this year, and then you guys come in with a secondary that's a little bit banged up and possibly missing Horn. How do you deal with all this?

DAVE CANALES: Yeah, we've got to press into the game plan, look at what they're doing, how they're finding success. He's distributing the ball well to a bunch of

different wide receivers, and he's playing great football. He's getting the ball out fast, and he's going through his progressions. He has a group that he really trusts.

So we have to lean in on what they've been doing lately and make sure we have solutions for that in our coverages and be aware of how they're trying to attack.

Q. He's been doing this for so long. Can you throw anything at him that surprises him anymore?

DAVE CANALES: You could, you should try to in different ways. First part of it is just formation recognition, looking at the route stems and how they're trying to protect each angle of the cut. They go in, out, and up from a bunch of different spots, and they have good variety and throw it to all the tight ends. They throw it to the receivers, to the backs. So we've got to be aware of all that.

Q. Do you get Trevin back this week?

DAVE CANALES: We should, yes. He was out there today participating.

Q. You're facing two of the more highly known play callers in the league two weeks in a row. What's the difference in those two, and what's the challenge when you're facing them?

DAVE CANALES: Start with the similarities. There's great balance in what they do. They make sure they get the run game going, and they have actions that come off of that, the drop-back schemes. They're different from one team to the next, but it's about execution. It's about finding that first open guy and playing fast in the pocket and guys being where they're supposed to be. So it's timing sensitive, all those things are.

But I think it's also just the variety of the attack and the different ways -- the screen game, the run game, the pass game, all those things are really tied in, and it's a really detailed part of what they do with their formations to make everything look the same. Starts the same, ends up different.

Two guys that I really respect, to be able to look at the crossover tape to watch as I'm studying the defense, but to flip over on the other side and to see how they deploy their offense. These are guys that I really respect and try to emulate.

Q. With a shortened week like this, how does your preparation change? Do you try to cram in everything as possible or do you look to kind of pick and choose spots of more emphasis versus maybe a full week where you'd have more time?

DAVE CANALES: It's really just the Tuesday. Tuesday is the day that really gets crammed a little bit because playing on Monday night, that's typically a prep day -- afternoon, evening, once you've gone through Tell the Truth Monday.

So when we get to Tuesday, we have to kind of condense some of the information to make sure that we can get all those things done, whether it's first, second, and third down. We've just got to be really efficient with our time.

The good part about it is at this point in the season we know what we're doing. We know the concepts. So then it's just a matter of making those decisions quickly to put our guys in the best position.

Q. What do you hope to get out of the two new cornerbacks, Rochell and Long?

DAVE CANALES: Yeah, they've got to come and help us out. They've got to contribute. These are guys that Jonathan Cooley has familiarity with, also Ejiro, guys that they've coached before in the past. Both were past, former Rams too, so they'll have some familiarity with the concepts. That will be a good thing for us.

We're going to ask those guys to help out on special teams as well in different ways.

Q. You've been doing these quarterly reviews. Are you going to do that during the bye week instead now since you didn't really have Monday to kind of do that?

DAVE CANALES: Absolutely. We'll take the bye week the first couple days, dive into those things, dive into all of our processes, offense, defense, and special teams, and look at guys. See who can help us and see who is helping us and then try to keep putting them in those positions to be successful.

Q. Are you at the point where you feel like -- you said you guys know the concepts. You know what's going on. Do you feel like any sort of major change that you would make to either play calling or the depth chart

would be the answer moving forward, or are you at a point where you just think pushing forward is the best thing to do?

DAVE CANALES: Yeah, just execution, and all of us, myself included, making sure the game plan we put together, the vision that we have comes to life, and making sure that our players are continuing to improve fundamentally. And that's the difference at this point in the season. It's the teams that can find a way to improve their technique and fundamentals and continue to make that an emphasis late into the season that have success.

So we've got to get back to that, making sure we're executing on all sides. Then from a coaching staff standpoint, making sure we're connected to the things that have found us success and be committed to those.

Q. With the way the season has gone and the bye week being so late, first, how is the room holding up? Because I know there's injuries this week that have to be contended with. There's been injuries all season long. It's been a long slog to get to this point.

DAVE CANALES: Absolutely, and we have our rhythms, and the guys know what to expect when they show up each day. So we have that process in place. So that part feels good. And they're hungry. They're hungry to get back to work. They're hungry for another opportunity to play against, a formidable opponent, an NFC opponent, and to play our best football in that game.

Q. Is the bye week maybe a talking point to your guys this week saying that's the carrot that's out there to empty the tank this week, or do you even broach that?

DAVE CANALES: No, we have to have the mentality to empty the tank every single week and have that championship mentality so that we don't treat any of these games different. They're all high stakes games, especially now at this point in the season.

Q. The championship mentality, you have a handful of former Rams players and coaches. How important have those guys been in helping you establish the culture here?

DAVE CANALES: It's huge. I love having coaches that come from different places that have had success so that I can bounce off ideas for ways we might structure our meetings, ways we might structure our practices, and just -- and also just from a game plan standpoint, how to attack, how to get different concepts involved because that's where we can pick different pieces from where we've been and try to make those come alive so long as it fits what the

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players do well.

Having a bunch of guys come from the Rams, Goody and Joe were with the Bucs, and they had a lot of success in the last couple years, and really just allows us to have that diversity along the staff and good information.

Q. You talk about execution. I'm just curious, what leads to poor execution? Is it over thinking? Just from a coach's standpoint.

DAVE CANALES: We always try to go back to the fundamentals, the basics of technique, first and foremost, starting the play off in the right formation, making sure we're in a great stance. Then the basic parts of it -- blocking, tackling, exploding off the ball, taking care of the ball -- all those basic things because in any given day, you set scheme aside, it's always going to come back to the most technically sound players that have success, most technically sound play callers.

We have to be committed to those things that fit the areas so the guys can anticipate what's coming. That allows us to play fast. But that's always something tangible that our players can really sink their teeth into, and that's always been a goal of mine is to try to give them something real that they can work on. Each player, each coach looking for ways to improve, looking for ways to find an edge from week in and week out.

Q. It sounds so simple, but is it difficult?

DAVE CANALES: It is, yes.

Q. I mean, it seems like basic stuff.

DAVE CANALES: It's very difficult, and I think it gets overlooked because focus and refocus -- refocus is a real challenge. Can you continue to refocus on a play-to-play basis, drive-to-drive, and then of course week-to-week? Can you refocus and re-engage your mind to find constant improvement? Our goal is to find our best football, that's got to be the pursuit, so we can improve the whole thing. That takes discipline. That takes focus.

Particularly when we get a bye week this late in the season, it really does take that type of mental toughness to show up and go back to work and find an edge.

Q. Generally speaking, I know you don't want to talk about specific injuries, but when you're dealing with a young player who's oft injured and you've seen it multiple times but you also think that player is talented, how do you balance the upside of the talent versus can I depend on this player when I'm trying to

win a ballgame? Like when you're doing the planning process for the week.

DAVE CANALES: Where I go initially is just making sure I'm connecting with the player to keep them motivated to get back to the place where they are physically fit and ready to go. Then there's like an emotional part as well because guys can get discouraged.

When they keep fighting against this or that and things start to show up, particularly when college players come into the pros and the season starts to get really long at this point, emphasizing the importance of body care and all that.

Then also being able to motivate them on the things that they're doing well, how to just continue to build that way so that we can compartmentalize it so they don't start making broad judgments about how this season is going to turn out for them specifically, but where they can actually just focus on what is the next task at hand, whether it's getting back physically or taking the next step mentally, being involved in our game plans.

Q. Kind of following up what was asked earlier, but you obviously you raised expectations here with the wins you've had so far, but with that people become even more specific with things, and he was asking about the play calling. What do you feel you bring to the play calling? How do you evaluate how you've been as a play caller? Do you feel like that's the most important?

DAVE CANALES: It's an important part of everything. I try to be really transparent with the players and to own up to the places and the areas I could do better in this situation. I want them to understand this is all of us. We're accountable to each other. We're all pushing to try to win, to try to improve our football, and I am certainly a part of that as a head coach and then of course as the play caller.

So we all have to be connected on that, and we all have to be real about it and look at the opportunities. While players may get the scrutiny for a missed play here, a missed block there, a dropped pass, an errant throw, a missed tackle, those types of things happen. The coaches are involved as well, and we've all got to be on the same page and be humble about it and be looking forward to improving.

For me as a young -- youngish play caller, but pretty early in my career, every week is a lesson for me. Every week there's something to take, and I have great people around me that we talk to, that we have accountability with, and I lean on those guys because I want to get better as well as

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we continue to do this process.

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