

# Carolina Panthers Media Conference

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Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

## Coach Dave Canales

### Weekday Press Conference



DAVE CANALES: First just want to start off, talking about the Joy to the Carolinas event last night. We had over 60 players. Really proud. Really proud to say that. Our guys showed up with great energy and were just loving on a bunch of people that showed up.

There was almost 1000 kids there, staff included, family members. Just to have all hands on deck, the Teppers so an amazing job, particularly Nicole, organizing this event. Just an amazing way to connect expect it and show the guys just the bigger picture of what's happening.

Yes, we're playing football and we are blessed to be able to do this job, but any chance we have to extend who the Panthers are, to just spread some love during the holiday season, is an amazing opportunity. Just wanted to start off by saying that.

You know, the players, again, you show up to these events and you don't know what to expect from the players, but were they were so into it. They were all just smiles, whether it was passing out food or toys, shoes, different things like that. It was a really blessing to be a part of that.

**Q. I don't know if we talked to you since it happened, but Austin Corbett was named Walter Payton Man of the Year. Why was he your guys' choice for that award?**

DAVE CANALES: Well, just his involvement in the community and the commitment. The cool part was, I don't know if ya'll saw the video, but was Metallica was able to present the award to him. It was a big deal for us to show that in the team room.

Just a leader, a guy to point to to show some of the younger players the type of impact you can have playing this role; understanding you have a job to do, but knowing that you have a bigger platform to be able to affect people.

**Q. With Cade being back, is he the right guard?**

DAVE CANALES: Yes. So we'll go in there, Cade will play center and Austin will play guard, which he basically spent about six or seven years of his career playing, and so feel really confident about those guys.

**Q. Claude and Jaycee still in the protocol?**

DAVE CANALES: Yes, they're doing great. Making strides. They're clearing all the things we need them to. So we have one more day to get out there now in pads to be able to do some more movement, and making sure we do the right thing for them, getting the information we can from them in their movement.

But they were able to participate in a limited fashion today and we will ramp it up a little bit more to see if we can get them out there.

**Q. I wanted to ask you, when Bryce is going good from a passing perspective, is there something you're seeing mechanically that maybe he's not doing as consistently in some of the games we've seen him struggle?**

DAVE CANALES: Really it's been a group thing. It starts up front. When the protection is right and the guys are where they're supposed to be when they're supposed there and he's on time, the thing works.

I've seen that chemistry continue to grow throughout this season. And we haven't had the consistency I would like to see from the entire group and certainly Bryce is a part of that. That's the challenge we have in front of us and that's what we been attacking for weeks now, to find that.

We had some really critical downs last against the Rams and we were able to come through because they were all on the same page. That's what I see for this group, and I hope we take another step this week.

**Q. Related to that, you were talking on Monday about finding your identity and trying to be balanced offensively. Are there ever benchmarks yards-wise you're trying to hit or is it just about the game flow?**

DAVE CANALES: Absolutely. It's the game flow. It's the defense they're playing. It's what they're giving us and how they're trying to attack us, starting up front with the structures facing the run game.

Whatever their plan might be that day, it's for the coaches, our job to figure that part out and find the run game that fits what they're doing. We have an idea for what they should be. For the most part defenses stay within their identity.

We've worked so hard in the different schemes that we have, but they may pick one over the other. That's where we have to make those adjustments.

And then of course early in the pass game, where are the matchups and the voids. That's all communication that happens live and then we try to make those adjustments. But for me, it's a win is a win, yards are yards, and that's what we want to come away with.

But I do know I want to be able to run the ball in some way, shape, or form. I understand who we are as a team. Panthers football should look a certain way. I want to make sure we come out playing the run well on the defense, and then on offense making sure that we have Rico and Chuba have an opportunity to affect the game.

**Q. With the bye as late as it was, was there any sort of load management conversations getting to the bye week in terms of practice or things like that? With a lot of folks healthy now and the bye week, are you able to do anything differently?**

DAVE CANALES: Absolutely. This is where I can give Josh Hingst and Denny Kellington a lot of credit for the conversations we've had coming into the season knowing when the bye week was going to be. We didn't have any Thursday games where you kind of get a pseudo-bye after some of those and you have to take care the guys going into the game.

But we had to be smart about that. We had to see what team we were working with. We've had bumps and bruises along the way, some longer term injuries that affect that part of it.

But we had to modify. We had to make adjustments. Every day going into practice, what's the group that we have available? If we scale that back, who can we get out there to get those reps? He may not be able to hand two full periods of full speed reps, but if we bring it down on this period can we get him out there for reps and things like that.

We just had to make sure we were connected with the

guys, and that's what Josh and Denny allowed us to do. Making sure we had enough in the tank to finish it the way we finished. I've been really pleased how we've played at the end of games in fourth quarters consistently for the season, and that was because of the hard work of doing all the re-gen that we do going into practice, doing all the recovery that we do, and then making sure we dose the guys the right way so they're still ready to play an game day but they're also fresh.

**Q. Last night Brady Christensen, Pat Jones, Jonathan Brooks, David Moore were all involved in kind of the celebration. They're also readily available in the locker room. They're around. Rob Hunt is around.**

DAVE CANALES: Yeah.

**Q. Why is it so important to keep those guys focused on what the team is doing even when they're injured or sidelined or even done for the season?**

DAVE CANALES: Yeah, the team evolves and we become something. We start to see different concepts in all our phases, offense, defense, and special teams. We start to become an identity of something. It's so important for those guys to be around that as we continue to grow and build our team and find an identity.

So I've seen it happen both ways. I've seen where guys have chosen in IR situations where they're not in the building as much and really focused on the rehab. I understand and respect that, but I really respect the guys that have been here doing the rehab in-house. We have a great staff. They trust the staff. That's first and foremost.

If you have great care, there is really no better place to be than here so you can be a part of those meetings, be a part of those conversations, and continue to grow with us so that if we get these guys back they're hitting the ground running from a mental standpoint.

**Q. Coached receivers for a long time.**

DAVE CANALES: Yeah.

**Q. Going interest a season with a young group across the board how, do you manage the ebbs and glows of those guys over 17, 18 weeks?**

DAVE CANALES: Yeah, there is a toll on rookies from a physical standpoint certainly with the longer season, the speed of the game, the amount of effort that is required of them.

And then of course there is a mental and emotional strain



of the game plans that go into it, the nuances of what you're seeing. From a receiver standpoint at least the disguises, they take a step up when you get to the NFL.

Obviously the size and speed of the players that they're playing against, it requires you to continue to evolve your game from a technical standpoint.

There is a lot of patience that's involved with that. I think it's really important also to celebrate the successes and to make sure even when the ball may not go your way and you end up with two targets, let's look at what you looked like away from the ball here, though, right?

That was always our mantra in Seattle when I was coaching receivers. Bottom line, guys, put wins on film. The more you do that, the more the quarterback sees what you're doing and trusts that, the more your teammates respect the work you're putting out there.

And then the wins will come and the ball will come. So there is a big patience game involved in that. There is also urgency, right? So it's like, can you have great urgency? We need you to be great right now, and also have that patience to know it's going to come, keep at it. Hard work works. Just kind of reinforcing some of those principles.

**Q. Saints, I mean, they've only won three games and two big games within the division. Chalk that up to how hard it is to win in the division? What do you make of their season?**

DAVE CANALES: Absolutely. If you look at the totality of their body of work, this is a defense that's been playing really good football for a long time. They've found an identity offensively.

You look back to our game, they had some big wins in some third down situations. But if you look at their run game to finish the game they had variety, they sustained long drives, and they really found way to play really good football.

So I respect that and I understand that. And when you look at some of the margins of some of their losses there was a couple big ones, but more the most part they're battling and a team will make a play our two.

I think about us. We have three walk-off field goals and how close the NFL is in general and how hard it is to win.

So I know what we're facing on Sunday. I know what we're going up against. I respect this team and I know our players, they understand as well the challenge we have in front of us in the division with an opponent who knows us

and is playing really tough football right now.

**Q. Dave, following up on the Saints question and the way they played you guys here, big on learning.**

DAVE CANALES: Yep.

**Q. Tell the truth Monday. What are the lessons learned from that first meeting to apply to this one?**

DAVE CANALES: Yeah, first and foremost start off with our run game. It was about blocking to the second level. Demario Davis, Pete Warner, these are guys that I really respect. Making sure we get a hat on their best tacklers in the different phases. I didn't think we did a great job of that.

And from a physical standpoint, we couldn't run the ball on them they ran the ball on us eventually. They beat us at our own game. We want to play a physical style of football and they did a great job. That's the challenge in front of us.

**Q. With so much riding on the next four weeks, do you approach these games as kind of like an early playoff?**

DAVE CANALES: All of them. Every single one from the beginning of the season. I understand how important every single game is as you get to that point in the season, and so you really can't look past any game. Every game is a championship opportunity, just like the one we have in front of us.

We have to maintain that heightened focus and awareness of how important they are. There is nothing worse than over the years you get through a season and you look back, maybe you squeak in a wildcard berth or win the division, but you didn't get the seeding you could have because of a game that got away from you earlier in the season.

It's why it's easy for me to sell that to the group to say, hey, every game is a championship opportunity and we have one right in front of us on the road against a familiar opponent.

**Q. ... for a team one score game; you're 10-4 in those. That's almost half of your coaching tenure. Why do you think you've been so successful during the crunch time and kind of converting those into wins?**

DAVE CANALES: Commitment to fundamentals. Finish. We talk about finish. We look for opportunities to preach finish. In different ways, as we look at our season, you try to break the season up into quarters as well so that we have something to kind of sink our teeth into and wrap our



mind around as much as we have.

This is a one-game approach right here. We look for finish opportunities. Every Friday, Focus Friday is a finish opportunity to wrap up the game plan. Then we have the walk-through on Saturday. So I just keep trying to look for a finish line to have a habit of bursting through the finish, doing whatever it takes for as long as it takes.

I believe that that's what shows up for us late in games, is our guys are used to having finish opportunities where you have to refocus at the right time.

Then we also talk about do right longer. You don't have to do anything special, anything different, and if you want to be a great team it's fundamental execution all the way through the game regardless if it's the first play of the game or the last play of the game on a fourth down. We just are asking for that focus and basic execution.

**Q. Wanted to ask what's unique about the way Joe Gilbert has kept this line together through all the injuries and everything?**

DAVE CANALES: Yeah, it's really -- the tag team is really Joe and Goody. To have two experienced coaches like these guys who have a ton of experience with the different sets of lines, different types of run games, different types and styles of quarterbacks to connect with and communicate, but I think at the center is a great process.

I have said this a bunch of times; I'll say it again: They're always working. Whenever you come out to practice, whatever period it is during the practice, whether it's kickoff return, you're going to see the offensive line working on stunts, pressures. You'll see Chuba and Rico down there talking with the group.

Could be another special teams period; they're working on stunts and different front variations for the run game.

If you're looking in the building, they're taking care of all these little windows by having the group talk together, wrapping the day up at the end. So it's this constant communication and work ethic that they bring where they want to be covered and go through all the "what ifs" and make sure our guys feel really prepared so they can play fast. And just from a fundamental standpoint, it's the drill work and all the details that go into it.

I'm really blessed to have those guys having my back on this staff.

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