

Carolina Panthers Media Conference

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Coach Dave Canales

Weekday Press Conference



DAVE CANALES: All right, what an exciting day, exciting week for us, right in front of us, a championship moment to be able to attack this. The guys are excited about it. Had a great day of work. Going back into our film session right now and make sure we're just crossing the Ts, dotting the Is, and getting ready for this weekend.

Q. Have you guys looked at any of those playoff scenarios, who has to win, who can clinch?

DAVE CANALES: Yep. We're aware of all those scenarios, and it's a pretty simple path. We got to handle business and win the game, and that's got to be our focus first and foremost. A team that I really respect and that we just played a couple week ago, so we have to approach this thing like we didn't just play them. Don't take anything for granted and make sure we're on the details.

And all the other scenarios will play out how they will. I was watching the game last night. I watch every game on Monday night, and this one right here, it's got implications. At the same time, the focus has to be there for us to be able to handle business and play our best ball.

Q. Rico (indiscernible). Can you give us insight?

DAVE CANALES: Yeah, sore toe. Came out of the game. A little bit more sore than normal and so we just decided to give him a rest day. I'm pretty confident that he'll be able to go. We got to take it day by day and see what he can do tomorrow.

Q. Claudin?

DAVE CANALES: Same thing, day-to-day. We got to evaluate all these guys coming out of the game, you know, with a little bit of a re-aggravation of his ankle.

So just got to see if we can get him out there and get him working.

Q. How difficult is it to beat a team twice in this short

of a span? What are the positives and negatives of facing them again that quickly?

DAVE CANALES: The challenges are you prep for the first time you're playing a team and you try to throw your best plays at them. Some things with the degree of success; some things they play well really in all phases.

So as you circle back around you look at some of those plays and say, okay, how can we doctor this one up a little bit and try to present it differently to hit the same type of voids or get the same type of matchups?

So on the flipside of it, for both teams really collecting information, looking at there is one game in between, was there any shift, any change? What happened last year when we played them the second time? Was there a difference in style? We have to take all those things in consideration.

Q. In 2010 when you first got to Seattle you had a season like this where it came down to the wire. You guys ultimately won; led to the Beast Quake game and you guys were able to make some noise in the playoffs. What did you learn from that experience about getting that home game to start? You guys break through, how important that first home game is in the postseason?

DAVE CANALES: It really is a gift when you win the division to be able to host that first one. We hosted the defending Super Bowl champs, the New Orleans Saints that had to go all the way across the country to come play us at 7-9.

But what I learned about that group is you just keep playing football and there is way to win every game. You don't make a judgment about the game when things happen in a series. You don't make a judgment about the season based on what happens in the early or middle part of it.

You just got to keep playing ball because scenarios play out, and all of a sudden you're there. There is a hopefulness that you have to keep to keep trying to find your best football.



That's what I learned from Coach Carroll, was to be optimistic about what could happen, dream a little bit here, regardless what's happening in the different parts the season. Can we just keep getting our football better?

That's the biggest approach that I try to apply to our group here, too.

Q. You mentioned a few week ago when you beat the Bucs about the belief. That's what that game kind of gave you. How big is that this time of the year, to have that hope going into the last game for keeping I guess people's thoughts and everything else positive?

DAVE CANALES: It really does help, and playing meaningful games all the way through the stretch. Last year I think it was five games -- did we have five games where we were out of playoff contention last year? Even in those moments it's a different approach at that point. You know you're not playing for playoffs, but the bottom line is you're playing for pride.

We work so hard all year, really all offseason, during the summer. The guys are training for a full football season. All of us understand that, as we are in that mode continuing to build our team. Finding really good football that we can count on every single game matters. Every single series matters for our team as we become us and find our identity.

This year with all these games really just for over a month now, just it's been such a rich environment in the building to know that we're playing for this division. Win the first championship first. That has to be the focus and we have that opportunity in front of us.

Q. How do you weigh the Rob Hunt decision? Is it this week? Is it next week? Are there concerns about him not being ready at all?

DAVE CANALES: He had another great day. We were ready to give him more. We got to push him a little bit more tomorrow as well. It's a collective part. First and foremost, making sure that the injury, that the strength and support is around his full upper body to be able to handle what's a violent game.

So we're trying to simulate some of those things for him so that he has confidence to be able to do that. We'll have a couple more days to look at that to make a decision for this week and then we got to see what happens.

So I wouldn't say today, like, yes, Rob is going, but I think today was a promising step in the right direction.

Q. Dave when Bryce is asked about patterns or anything else he'll always say, I never look back. Is his ability to compartmentalize unique?

DAVE CANALES: I think it's something that gives Bryce the ability in the flow of a game. What I've noticed about Bryce is he doesn't get hung up on things that happen. He moves on. That's a really special trait to have.

It's really important for the big picture, especially when you're standing in front of the group, that this drive is going to be a touchdown drive. This next play is going to be a big one.

To have that kind of salesmanship, it's really important for the quarterback to have that. I see Bryce step into the huddle with every single play as if this is the best play that Coach has ever called. It's great to have that support, but it does give the guys a lot of confidence going into it.

Q. As a playcaller, given the implications of this game, do you go a little deeper into your bag when you're game planning this week?

DAVE CANALES: A little bit. At the same time, I have to be aware of what our guys can handle. And that's really my biggest responsibility, Brad and I, is identifying the scope of what we can handle from a football standpoint with this group. How much run game can we handle? How much pass game? How many wrinkles and nuances? All those things.

Even when you're running plays that have several different motions and you're trying to get a defense in a specific look, those take a lot of timing, a lot of detail, and they're different. They're different than the normal calls that you would make. So they require as much, if not a little bit more, attention.

So you got to be careful about how much you try to do extra. The goal is to play fast, and I know that the best way to play fast is to have concepts that we're very confident with, very comfortable with, and that gives us the best chance to have success.

Q. On that note, I don't think we got to ask you about this Sunday, you used Mitchell Evans on a quarterback sneak. What does that add to your offense?

DAVE CANALES: It's just really good to have a sneak play. Up to this point we've really leaned on Chuba and Rico with our dive plays, our belly plays, some actions off those things, toss cracks, boot legs, play-action passes. Sometimes we will spread it out and go 11 personnel.

So just trying to have variety. When it's less than a yard, it's half a yard, it's six inches, it's good to have a sneak play. We been working on it for a while now. You know, Mitch was just getting a comfort level of it. I think we talked about this before, but there is a lot that goes into the sneak play.

The timing of the snap, the guys flying off the ball the right way, and then the quarterback being able to brace himself so he doesn't take that initial impact. Because if it you go too quickly you can get knocked back with an initial charge from the defense, but if you give yourself an element of space and time, then your momentum adds to the center's momentum and the guard's, so the whole thing kind of times up the right way. That takes practice.

The guys, the quarterbacks around the league and the tight ends more and more now are getting really good at that part of it. I felt confident enough to give us a chance to do that one. I was glad it worked out for us.

Q. Can the way you use McMillan, X, he's probably going to be one of your more fluid wide receiver positions. We've seen the last couple weeks Jimmy get a little bit more run than he typically had and X get a little bit less. How much is that setting up other plays and maybe other looks that you haven't shown on film prior? How much is that trying to evolve the pass game as you head into the postseason?

DAVE CANALES: It's really just all about creating things that start the same but end up different. Trying to give a little bit, just a moment of hesitation for the defense to have to deal with something.

Jimmy is so fast and you can do a lot of things with him on the perimeter. That's where he makes a lot of his yards and a lot of his plays, and so teams have to respect that. It's really good because you make the defense cover the whole width of the field. We're in condensed splits some, we have some wide splits. When you get Jimmy going that way it does kind of spread it out a little bit for the run game and the pass game.

Xavier, just putting him in spots, trying to play to the strength of different guys and making sure we're utilizing all the talent that we have.

Q. Would you consider Isaiah Simmons at inside linebacker?

DAVE CANALES: He's been training at safety, so he does have a little bit of a dime linebacker role he's been preparing for. You only get so many guys on game day, so

they all have to be able to contribute if something happens. He's been really dial in with Renaldo Hill, our safeties coach. He's been studying that stuff to be able to help us out if we need him to.

Q. Dave, you talk about the developmental a lot in terms of whether it's rookies, backups, coaches, too. When did it become such a point of emphasis for you? How do you learn that and how do you implement that?

DAVE CANALES: Yeah, that was straight from Coach Carroll. What I learned early on is the best way to elevate everyone is to have a developmentally minded group, organization in general.

And certainly with the players and making sure that we see guys, we're exposing them to different things, and help them take the next step for their career.

When you talk about the coaches, especially for some of the assistants, giving the assistants opportunities to present. We've done that. Throughout our Wednesdays, you know, we have fundamental presentations on Wednesdays and we've had a rotating group of coaches from our quality control coaches and to position coaches and coordinators to get up in front of the whole team, in front of the room, and teach a basic fundamental part of football.

It can be mindset, it can be footwork, hand placement, different things, tackling. We've had some great presentations this year. It's a great opportunity for those guys to stand up there and have confidence and to work on their craft, because they will be called someday to stand up in front of a room, be confident, and be able to deliver a message.

On top of that, it's also important to make sure that the staff has roles in the game plan. You know, becoming an expert. That's kind of how I started. I started off with having four-minute offense, backed-up offense, and empty. That was my specialty. So I just threw myself at it in between all the other tasks that I had to do.

When you do well then the coach goes, okay, why don't you take third and short also. Great. And you just start adding responsibilities, try to do a great job, have ideas. That's what we try to give our guys here, skin in the game. And then happens is we just have a really well-rounded staff and it eliminates group think. Then you get fresh ideas. Oh, shoot I didn't think about that play in this area. We love doing that and our guys have done a great job.

Q. Do you remember the first one of those you did?



DAVE CANALES: I remember a couple of four-minute passes. Might not be the most exciting plays, but spider two wide banana. We didn't call it that, but basically those were the types of plays I was coming up with. We used a fullback a lot in Seattle, so I would try to find a way to get the fullback free in the flat. Do we rub the inside linebacker? Can we send two guys up, different looks and try to find the best access?

It starts off pretty simple, but first time one of those hits in a game you get a first down get-down in a four-minute scenario it's a special moment.

I remember Derrick Coleman, we had built kind of a designer run. Derrick Coleman caught a flat for three yards, slid down, we were taking knees. I couldn't be more proud to be able to have an impact on the game even in a small way that way.

Q. Chuba Hubbard hasn't had the production anyone anticipated this year; fumble on Sunday. Can you speak to his continued leadership in the locker room and how he's handled the season?

DAVE CANALES: He's an absolute stud. He is one of the leaders on our group. I lean on him for mentality to make sure we're in the right place, we're focused. He certainly just challenges its whole group by how he works and how he prays. I love Chuba. Going to give him the ball some more and find ways for him to impact the game. He's just a guy that I really trust.

That whole room really. Bernie has done a great job. They're a bunch of tough guys. They do the dirty work when we ask them to. They're available for us all along the season, especially the way we want to run the ball, so...

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