

Carolina Panthers Media Conference

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Coach Dave Canales

Weekday Press Conference



DAVE CANALES: Happy New Year. Great day, beautiful day to be out there on the grass with the guys. Really cherish these times, moments like this, especially late in the season. You got to fight for every game after this, so the guys, just asking the guys to take a little gratitude, take the moments, take it all in. We have this great opportunity in front of us, so really excited about it.

Q. With inside linebacker having those injuries, what is the plan next to Rozeboom?

DAVE CANALES: Yeah, so Claude will be out so Krys Barnes, we been working him back in. Looked better and better each day, so hopefully we'll get him out there. Krys played some good snaps for us.

We got a couple other guys. Bam has played some for us, too, you know, look for an opportunity. If we need another person Jacoby Windmon has been in the building, so rely on him it help us out in some ways, too.

Q. With Krys, he was obviously on the injury report to start of the week.

DAVE CANALES: Yeah.

Q. Was that the reason why you guys went with Bam first to replace Claude?

DAVE CANALES: Yes. Yeah, so he was kind of dealing with it throughout, and he was able to kind of bounce back a little bit stronger each day, which was fantastic for us just as we were thinking about who we were going to put out there.

Q. When you look at Krys' career, as a rookie he played in an NFC Conference Championship game with the Packers, and he's been a journeyman since. Now he found a spot in this roster. How valuable is all of that experience leading up to a really important week 18 game?

DAVE CANALES: Extremely valuable just with the week of preparation and what do you do, you don't do anything different. You go about it the same way and you attack the work, and Krys has been a stud for us when we've asked him to play special teams roles, pop in there and play linebacker for us. He's a guy that can handle a lot and has really good experience within our scheme.

So really fortunate that he's here.

Q. Dave, where are you with the two IR guys, Rob and David?

DAVE CANALES: Yeah, David had a fantastic week. At this point it's just about figuring out roster-wise when that makes sense for us.

With Rob, Rob was able to do a little bit more. We got to see how his body responds tomorrow. That's why it's questionable right now for Rob, is we were able to kind of ramp up his work, but it's like the recovery of what does this thing feel like the next day, where are we at in terms of full football readiness.

Q. Sounds like you're more bullish on David's chances.

DAVE CANALES: Yeah, uh-huh.

Q. A lot has been made of the division and how it could be a 9-8 winner, could be an 8-9 winner, what have you. We talked the other day about 2010 and the chance of getting in. How do you look at the division as a whole given you've been in it for two years? It's kind of been owned by the Buccaneers for the last four. What's your overall outlook on the way the division shapes out?

DAVE CANALES: I just see really good football being played across the board, you know. And certainly those matchups that we've had with our different opponents, it's prepared us really well as we play teams from other divisions and outside of conference.

But it's the style of playing that's really starting to emerge



out of this division, a style of toughness and physicality on the defensive side and getting the run game going. You know, it seems like the more that we find our identities, you know, separately on the different teams, there is this like -- I don't know, there is just a style of play that I'm noticing.

It leads up to some amazing matchups for sure with us and the Bucs, and then of course with the Falcons and Saints who are playing really good football right now.

So I'm proud to be a part of this division. I'm proud to be a part of where we are headed collectively. I know that for us, our focus obviously has to be on playing our best football to find that opportunity.

But it is shaping out to be a really interesting just kind of a bloodbath of a division, so...

Q. We don't ask you about punters a lot; it happens. Sam had a really strong year, and doesn't feel like that's been a focus obviously because when you're winning you're punting less probably.

DAVE CANALES: Right.

Q. In your estimation, what has he brought to the table this year overall?

DAVE CANALES: Just a confidence. He has a lot of swagger that he plays with, and love his celebrations. He knows when he hit a good one and the group does, too. Tracy has done a great job pointing those things out, looking for guys who are celebrating because you guys realize how good of a kick that was. They're running down covering like crazy and doing their part.

But it's been really cool to see that whole group appreciate what good special teams play looks like, and I can't talk about that without talking about JJ and what he's meant from a leadership standpoint and his experiences and the breadth of knowledge he has just about the game in general, not just special teams.

It enriches the whole group.

Q. Seemed like the locker room was really calm and almost confident yesterday. How inspiring is that for you going into this game?

DAVE CANALES: It's really important that we feel confident about our football right now. We've played a lot of ball and we have become a version of Panthers football I'm really proud of. The goal is for all phases to play on all cylinders. That's what we're out for. We're out for that complete game.

Does mean it's going to be perfect? No. But you can tell when each group is really just playing fast, playing with confidence, and that's the goal. That's the goal as we get this opportunity to do that right now.

My general feel for the group is there is a real focus; there is an excitement for where we are; there is an excitement for this opportunity.

And then there is also this focus for what's in front of us in this moment. The greatest thing we can do is treat it like every other game. It's a championship opportunity. Let's go right back to that approach.

Don't needed to anything special. Just make our plays when they come to us.

Q. What aspect of that first meeting do you think is most crucial for you to carry over to Saturday?

DAVE CANALES: Just the -- being opportunistic when we have our shots down the field on offense, and then defensively speaking understanding the skill group that they have. They got a lot of talent out there.

And just making sure that we keep building on where people are at in formation, what they like to do in different situations, because we will of some wrinkles, they will have some wrinkles.

Generally you're going to put your best foot forward and run things that you count on, things that you can execute. So we got to make sure we take care of those first and be ready for anything else that comes.

Q. Dave, I know you guys probably been told a lot how long it's been since this team has had a playoff push to cheer for. The crowd in Bank of America the last couple weeks have been getting louder and more excited. Do you get a sense that the players are feeding off that energy and they understand how excited the fan base is for this moment?

DAVE CANALES: Absolutely. I didn't get to talk about it enough after last week's game, after the Hawks game. Just the environment and the experience was amazing. They showed up for us and it meant a lot. Meant a lot to the group. The players feed off that.

I always try to tell the team, it comes from us first. That momentum, that energy comes from us making our plays, and then we can feed off the rest of the energy that comes with it.

You know, I expect there will be some Panthers fans in Tampa this weekend, too, so we're excited about that.

Q. Turk's indicated that he thought he was ready to play. Do you share that optimism or is there some -- obviously there is some question, but where is he?

DAVE CANALES: Yeah, we still got to evaluate him tomorrow even and just make sure that he's fully ready to do his job. He was able to make strides each day and he was able to do things. We just want to make sure that Turk is in the right spot so he can play his best football, doesn't have to think about anything.

That's the decision that we're going to have to make.

Q. Circling back to Rob, is the fact that you guys aren't in pads right now complicating measuring where he is in this process?

DAVE CANALES: We were able to simulate some things from a physical standpoint. Not being in pads certainly does present its challenges. If we were just practicing in the normal scheme of the season and being able to hit each other and all that, you can gather a little bit more information practice.

But the nature of the injury, he just needs that physical change of direction and getting his hands fit the right way. They were able to evaluate some of that.

Q. Baker Mayfield showed up on the injury report. Was a full participant yesterday with right shoulder soreness. How does that change the game plan? Does it change the game plan at all?

DAVE CANALES: It does not. My short time with Baker, this is a tough guy. This is a competitor. He's a great teammate. He's going to be out there with his team and he's going to give everything he has. We got to expect that. We got to be ready for that version of Baker.

So I respect him for it. I've seen him battle through things and find his way it game day and give everything he has. So I'm expecting nothing less than his best.

Q. Have you let yourself stop and think yet about just like where this team has come in two years, or can you not go there yet?

DAVE CANALES: I appreciate it. No, I go there every day. That's something that I'm really proud of with Dan and I and Brandt, Mr. Tepper. You know, the conversations that we've had over the last two years of where we are and where we're headed, what's the next

step. Having at that everyday focus, attacking every day. What does a win look like today.

It's been two years of just trying to find wins by either improving things, by adjusting things, evaluating our processes, and all those things.

I think about it every day and I have so much gratitude for the hard work of this whole group and the organization and what we're doing to put ourself in this position now. I can't name everybody, but I have such an appreciation for everyone who's contributed to this.

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