

Carolina Panthers Media Conference

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Coach Dave Canales

Weekday Press Conference



DAVE CANALES: We're just really excited and grateful, fortunate to be in this position. Really proud of this group. Really proud of the coaching staff, everybody involved, the players coming together and really finding a style of football that put us in this position.

While we are sitting around waiting for the outcome of the Falcons and Saints game, at the same time was just a lot of hard work put into this season and taking advantage of those championship moments along the way. And here we go, we have another one right in front of us.

Just really excited about being back in Bank of America Stadium one more time. We left this stadium after the Seahawks game not sure if we would get another opportunity, but to have one more chance in front of our fans with the energy that it was like, especially down the stretch this season, it's a really exciting opportunity for us and we're excited for it.

Q. Good afternoon, Coach.

DAVE CANALES: Hey, Jeff.

Q. Hey. Bummer to hear about Coach Carroll, first of all.

DAVE CANALES: Yeah.

Q. My question is the Panthers running backs are coming off their worst rushing performance of the season. Looking at the team's wins and losses this season, there is a stark difference in the average yards rushing. Entering the Rams rematch, how important is it for Dowdle and Hubbard to control the offense the way they did in the week 13 win?

DAVE CANALES: It's a full group effort. It starts with me and the coaching staff making sure that we have the right plan together for our guys. And then it starts up front with the O-line, the blocking, the combos, making sure we're moving guys off the spot to get the play started.

And then once the backs have the ball, just looking for the violent style of play that we saw that we know they can and return to that. Make sure we are getting efficient runs on a consistent base.

Q. How is Dowdle's toe?

DAVE CANALES: He seemed fine to me. We'll do all of medical rechecks and have all that information out later in the week.

Q. Two quick ones. One, kind of a fun one, but you weren't sure yesterday about hats and T-shirts and how they would be passed out. Has that been happening today? If so, how?

DAVE CANALES: Yeah, they're sitting in our locker room. So got in this morning ready to watch film, there it is, a shirt and a hat. That's what we play for. That's what we hope for, is to win the division, win that first championship. That puts us at home for the first round for the wildcard rounds in the playoffs.

Just guys are wearing it around the office and just a great feeling to be able to bring that back here to Carolina, Charlotte and to share that feeling of that first championship first, and now the mentality shifts. It's 1-0 with a chance to win the world championship.

Q. Didn't decide to wear it today to the press conference though, huh?

DAVE CANALES: Correct.

Q. The last one: The Rams, despite you beating them 31-28 earlier this year, are a 10.5 favorite. Do you consider that a sign of disrespect?

DAVE CANALES: Hey, that's what it is. I don't know how they come up with those numbers, but I'm sure they have algorithms for us.

We can't worry about that. We have to worry about playing our best football. That's been the pursuit. We have to get



back to making sure we're efficient on third down, get our run game going offensively speaking, and defensively finding ways to get off the field.

I see a defense in our defense that continues to learn how to play together, trust each other, play with leverage and physicality. We have to continue to build off that.

Q. Hey, Dave, you have 31 players on this team who have never been to the playoffs. How important is it getting exposed to that environment? I know you said you've been playing in the playoffs for the last month. How important is that for the development of your 11 rookies and some of the younger guys who haven't had those type of moments?

DAVE CANALES: It's a fantastic opportunity. Again, as much as I try to preach, we try to preach to our group every game is a championship moment, every game is a championship opportunity, here it is right in front of us now. We're in the playoffs.

To try to make sure that our focus doesn't waver or shift, like you have to do anything that you haven't done before. It's about the basics. Football this time of year is about tackling, it's about blocking, and it's about being really efficient. With each round the pass rushers get better and better.

Here come the Rams with a fantastic front five. The way they get after it, the way they play, these are the types of teams in the playoffs.

And so matching that energy, making sure we're at our best has to be the focus.

Q. And then you've got about a handful of guys who have rings in that locker room. Do you have them -- when you guys are having that Friday meeting or whenever you have it, kind of like the rallying call of the week, do you have those guys step up and talk about how to maintain during the week and all that sort of stuff?

DAVE CANALES: I've thought about that. It's a possibility, you know, night before the game, maybe lean on some of those guys who have that experience, been there to feel what it feels like. So I would expect the message is going to be pretty consistent. Can we find our best football? Can we play with that energy, play together?

The teams that play together, that play the best football, are the ones that have success in the postseason. So hopefully that will be the message from the guys.

Beyond that, I know they'll be having one-on-one conversations with different players all throughout the week.

Q. Hey, Dave.

DAVE CANALES: Hey, Joe.

Q. Good to see you. Wondering about Rob Hunt specifically. You've been trying to get him up to speed. How difficult is that decision just based on, A, his health and wellbeing going forward, but then, B, kind of how it relates to the chemistry the offensive line has built?

DAVE CANALES: Yeah, it's a big week, big week of evaluating Rob and seeing if he's physically ready to take on the game. We wanted to make sure going into last week that he would be able to play an entire game and not something where he's going to pop out there for a couple series and be moving around just for the ebbs and flows of it, just getting your rhythm, hands on people and getting back to football.

So this is a really big week. We have a couple practices to be able to see what that looks like with Rob out there. These are guys that he's been around. He's been here the whole time rehabbing here in house, getting stronger here. He's been in all the meetings. Been in all the conversations.

So nothing has gone by him in terms of how we've evolved together as a group. We'd be leaning on that part, that he's ready mentally to go; physically that's really the question we have to figure out this week.

Q. Quick follow up, different topic. The first Rams game you guys were without Tre'Von, without Rozeboom, and Jaycee. Yet you turnover Stafford three times. I know you preach being all about the ball. What was the key of that game to getting the ball away from Stafford?

DAVE CANALES: Yeah, it really started off on first and second down, getting him to some more pass situations, higher percentage pass situations to try to be able to affect the pocket and force matthew to get the ball out a little bit quicker than he wanted to in some of those.

On top of that, it was about owning leverage, communicating, evaluating the formations, and really anticipating the different concepts that they try to attack within in two by twos, three by ones, different things like that.

Just taking all that information in and making sure they play together. Nick Scott and Mike Jack were right in the middle of all that, a group that really played well that game.

Q. Hey, Coach, wanted to ask, it was mentioned Pete Carroll there at the beginning. What's your reaction to that? Have you guys had a chance to talk?

DAVE CANALES: We have not had a chance to talk. This is pretty fresh. You know, generally speaking, when I've had friends or coaches, colleagues, different people in this situation have been fired, I always felt like it's good to give them some space to connect with family and have those conversations.

Q. Understand. Secondly, you see quarterbacks have success in the playoffs; some just have them in the regular season. How big of a game is it for Bryce in general and for quarterbacks in general to win in the playoffs? How does that separate them from other quarterbacks?

DAVE CANALES: All the preparation, every single game, they're all steps in preparing for these types of moments. It's really important to just be efficient. It's going to be the same message coming from me. I don't need you to be special all game. There will be three to five opportunities in the game where you got to call it all up, use all the tools that you have with your mind and your legs and your arm to make those plays when the time is right.

And that can be early, that can be late in the game, but it's really important to understand that part. You don't have to carry this thing. You just have to do your part and be efficient and make the right decisions so that we can play our best football.

Q. Thank you.

DAVE CANALES: Uh-huh.

Q. Good afternoon, Dave.

DAVE CANALES: Hi, Mike.

Q. As we talked about it in the past, sounds like a rinse and repeat opportunity here, but trying to beat a team twice in the same season. You went through it last week with Tampa. What was learned from last week in trying to beat Tampa twice and how do you apply the lessons to be able to do it this week when everything is on the line?

DAVE CANALES: Had good information. Use the information from the first matchup to see how we were

trying to attack and to react to different scenarios, and make sure that we're on top of that. And obviously expect that there will be some wrinkles. We understand that part of it.

When you play a team the second time there should be a little bit of confidence for things that are similar. You know, things that they may try to recreate in some way, shape, or form.

The fact that we were able to come away with the win should give confidence as well. If we do our job and play right and play well together we can win, but it's going to take all of our focus. We certainly have seen them bounce back and really get back to playing their rhythmic football, Matthew taking care the ball, run game going the way they see it going.

And defensively speaking they been really consistent and so we just have to take all the information in from the past couple weeks and make sure that we revisit some of the things that were successful for us and also just be ready for adjustments.

Q. And back to the question on Rob and maybe even David Moore, how close were they last week? I know we'll get injury information, but was there a lot of decision to go into Saturday in Tampa about those guys?

DAVE CANALES: Yeah, very close physically speaking, really close. But there is a bigger conversation that goes with the roster. Whether or not you bring a player off IR somebody has to go down, and so those are the bigger conversations that we're also just continuing to work through.

Q. Thank you.

DAVE CANALES: Uh-huh.

Q. Hey, Dave, I'm going to ask a similar injury question. How close was Claudin Cherelus to playing on Saturday and how did Krys Barnes do in his stead?

DAVE CANALES: Claude was very close. Krys did an excellent job in the roles that we ask him to. With Claude we took him through the week, and this was something that he was dealing with and we wanted to try to get him out there to get some work done and didn't feel like we can get that done right before the game.

But I have confidence because of all the return-to-play work that he's been doing even through the weekend that we'll be able to get a good evaluation of him going out



there.

Q. Hey, Dave, I was going to ask you about wide receivers. Jaylen played 92 percent of the snaps. Xavier only played 31 I believe. Can you talk about that decision, why you made that decision that Jaylen is seeing a larger role on offense and Xavier less of a role?

DAVE CANALES: Yeah, it's a really big time for Jaylen. He's been stepping up and making plays for us. We looked at last week as an opportunity to get him out there a little bit more in 12 personnel, 13 personnel get him out there, just because of the way he's been producing and give him more opportunities.

Xavier understands that part, too. He made his plays when they came to him in the game, so I was really proud of the way he made an impact as well.

Again, this is a celebration of Jaylen just continuing to step up into a more starter role in 12 personnel and 11 personnel, just trying to find a way to get him more involved.

Q. Real quick follow up. You mentioned the running game earlier. In your mind what has been the falloff? Why are you guys not producing as you were earlier in the season?

DAVE CANALES: Again, it's all of us. It's making sure we're running the right styles of runs for our group. Starts up front. We have to get movement. We cannot let people run through the line of scrimmage. Safeties, linebackers cannot run through the line of scrimmage. Our combos of to be excellent.

We got to make sure it's covered up so that the backs can press the line of scrimmage and make decisions from there, and from there, challenging the backs. Get that ball and run physical downhill. Let's get efficient runs. We can't have zeroes and ones. If there is any daylight at all, let's get behind our pads, let's get two, three, four. We do that twice in a row we're in a manageable third down.

We get into these known pass situations, second and ten, second and nines, then we get a little bit more predictable. We still run the ball in those situations a little bit, but if you want to get into a favorable third down, a lot of times you're going to be throwing some type of passing concept.

We got to get back to having that really efficient run game that we were counting on in the middle of the season.

Q. Good afternoon, Dave. Congratulations by the way.

DAVE CANALES: Thank you.

Q. Quick question. If I'm not mistaken you were part of the 2010 Seattle staff, correct?

DAVE CANALES: Yes, I was.

Q. That's a team obviously in a similar situation; not necessarily a winning record regular season. Do you lean on that at all internally with your staff, with yourself, with your guys to show them, hey, it's a new season, everybody is zero and zero and anything can happen? That Seattle game went a certain way for you guys that day.

DAVE CANALES: I do personally just remembering. We were all the way up until the last game of the season and Charlie Whitehurst played that last game against the Rams. Matthew Hasselbeck, we were in Tampa the week before. He had an injury during the game and so Charlie stepped in.

It was defense, run game, and Charlie being efficient that day that really got it done for us. You know, it's team football and that's your opportunity to win.

But what I remember most is even at 7-9, which we were that year, we won the division and got a home game which gave us the crowd. That's what I'm so excited about, is bringing football back into Bank of America Stadium. Our fans have really had an impact, particularly when our defense has been on the field. They've caused some issues for offenses communicating, false starts, delay of games, defensive things that are a real advantage.

Certainly from a pass rush standpoint when it's loud the offensive line and the defensive line are coming off on the ball at the same time when you're in a silent count. It's a huge advantage for us.

And then just the momentum of the plays being made. I just remember that was New Orleans Saints, the defending Super Bowl champs from the year before, 2009, and of course I can't forget Beast Quake and really the crowd going nuts on that amazing run, breaking nine or ten tackles all the way. I was in the box at the time. We were all yelling so much. The stadium was actually swaying a little bit. The whole building was moving.

I popped up on my feet and was yelling so loud that when I sat back down after the touchdown I almost fainted. It was like all the blood had rushed to my head.

But just an amazing memory, electric moment, and I'm



really excited to create some memories and moments here in Bank of America Stadium wildcard weekend.

Q. Last one. Couple of decades going Dom Capers hosted the first playoff game in franchise history in that very stadium. Does that ring a bell with your staff and you and have you talked to Dom a little bit about how special a moment this might be for him and you to be in this game?

DAVE CANALES: Dom and I have talked and it comes down to the same thing. It's about the basics, being consistent. That's been his biggest impact on me as the head coach, is be consistent with your messaging and be consistent with the thing that are most important to you. You get what you emphasize and you can't emphasize everything.

So you have to be very selective, and that's how you build culture, that's how you build identity, and Coach Dom has been an amazing support for me.

Q. This Monday was obviously a unique kind of situation, whether it was going to be a locker room clean-out day or getting ready for a playoff. You talked about from your perspective, but what did you gauge from the guys as they were getting their hats and T-shirts and just kind of that refocus that you said you're having, and what are you seeing from them as you're getting ready to get going with the week?

DAVE CANALES: Just a lot of excitement for the guys, especially the guys that have been here for a couple years. The excitement of building something together, the opportunity right in front of us. I can feel that about them.

Hopefully by now, you know, being two seasons into it they know what I'm going say. We got to go back to work and we have to trust our process. We got to make sure we take care of each day the same way we have all year in terms of our body care, film preparation, coming in for the game plan, getting ready and being focused in the walk-throughs and making sure we have great energy on the field.

The guys are ready for the work. I'm excited to get back into the building with all of them.

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