

Carolina Panthers Media Conference

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Coach Dave Canales

Weekday Press Conference



DAVE CANALES: ... get out there in the sun. All the guys are excited, fired up; a lot of great energy on the grass today. And then we got just amazing weather, 65 degrees and sunny. You can't beat it.

For this time of year to be able to get outside and work on your craft, it means a lot, you know, to just be connecting together.

We're excited about this week.

Q. Did the week of practice time have anything to do with kind of simulating what time you guys would play this week?

DAVE CANALES: It did not because we had to wait to see the outcome of the Atlanta-New Orleans game. We started our game planning really later that night, and then we needed the full day as a staff to put that together.

So we just kind of needed this morning as well to make sure the cards are right, all the guys all hands on deck to just make sure we're prepped and ready for the practice.

That's why we did it.

Q. Dave, playoff performance can kind of make a guy's career and reputation, especially at the quarterback position. How excited are you to see how Bryce does in this moment?

DAVE CANALES: I'm so fired up for Bryce and the whole crew. But these are the moments, you know, and in my mind when we've put Bryce into these high-stakes situations he's performed well, whether it's going for it on fourth down, end-of-game type stuff. It's an area where he just continues to execute and do the basics and the fundamentals that we ask him to.

These games are like that. When you're playing a great opponent like the Rams, all the little execution and the fundamentals are so important, so I love this challenge for

our group, and especially for Bryce.

Q. So you guys have played so well as an underdog. (Indiscernible.) What's the message to the guys in those situations, and I would imagine going into Saturday when most the people outside the locker room think you may not?

DAVE CANALES: Well, I understand that there is always the favorites and there is always the point spread. We can't really think about that. I know that the guys are aware of it. I'm aware of it. I see it on TV.

It doesn't matter. What matters to us is to play our best football, make sure that we execute. It's going to come back to the fundamentals. Did we block well enough? Did we tackle? Did we take care of the ball? That's always what it's going to be about.

That gives you a chance to win. I fully believe that, the group believes that, and that's what we have to go out there and find.

Q. Dave, on the flipside of the young guys going into the playoffs, are your rookies still rookies at this point? The guys that you kind of leaned on throughout the year, watched them develop, where do you see those guys in terms of their progression as they've gone through a full season?

DAVE CANALES: Yeah, this young group of rookies has been really professional how they've worked and battled through things, battled through bumps and bruises and also just battled through the emotional mental toll than an NFL season can take on you.

They just really stay together and take to the coaching. They've been humble about it and have been great just being coachable on the little things that they need to continue to improve.

And so then, you know, when I look at this group there is guys that have been in really high-stakes games. Latham Ransom was a national champ before he came here; Trevor Etienne has played in big games; Bryce has played

in big games. There is a bunch of guys that have exposure. It's no different. Just in a different level.

But it's really exciting for the whole group to have this experience, and also for me as their head coach to say, guys, I've been to a lot of playoff games and you're going to see, it's going to be a special moment.

Bank of America Stadium will be electric and our fans will be completely into it. It's going to be loud. It's going to be just right. These are the exact moments. I want them to be able to appreciate those things but not let that distract them from just executing and doing their job.

Q. You've been to a lot of playoff games, but your first as a head coach. What's going through your mind? What are your vibes?

DAVE CANALES: I'm just really proud. I'm really proud of the work that it took as an entire organization and this full group of all of us taking one day at a time. Continuing to try to push the envelope. Try to push it a little bit further every day. What is does a win look like today? What are the areas of improvements? Can we get incrementally better over time?

That commitment, that consistency, that type of character for this whole group is what I'm really proud of and excited for.

As far as the playoff experience goes, it's just I've been there. I know what it feels like. It's so important that we don't just block it all out, that we take it in and use it, use that energy, use Bank of America Stadium. Playing at home is why it's so important to win the division. You get that first home game, and we're excited about that.

Q. Dave, you said in training camp that teams were not going to want to play you guys. What did you see early on from this group that, you know, this isn't a surprise for you to be in this position right now?

DAVE CANALES: Right. I think first and foremost just the team that Dan Morgan has assembled. All of us are involved in giving the information, but he's done an amazing job of evaluating what we need. And while you can't fix everything at once, you just add pieces, add high-character football players, Panthers football players.

The guys that we try to identify are the ones who we know we can coach them hard. We know we can push them. We know they're tough because they play through things. And certainly because they're excellent football players. Whether it's in free agency or whether it's through the draft, just continuing to accumulate players that embody what

we're looking for.

And so going into this camp I could see this group and I could see the potential what was we could be. It's taken us a long time to find an identity. We've been up and down at different times. But just the promise of having this group and knowing that it's our job, my job, to bring this whole thing to go. We get one more opportunity to do that.

Q. Robert Hunt and David Moore playing, obviously they've been out for a while. You've gotten to this point with this set group of guys. How much do you have to weigh the fact that there were guys that helped you get here versus guys who maybe make you a little bit more talented on game day?

DAVE CANALES: That's always a really difficult decision for me and for Dan as we think about the guys who have worked so hard to help us get this point and understanding that the plan was always that Rob and D-Mo were going to help us do that.

Now they're ready. We have this window to evaluate the guys, get David back on the team and evaluate if we can have him up this week or not. We have to make those decisions, too. Rob had a couple huge days. He looked great today. Tomorrow is going to be an elevated practice. Going to run a little bit more, push on each other a little bit, and that's going to be a really big test for him.

So just going to have take that one day to day, but I'm optimistic. He's excited about it. He's so proud to be a part of what we've been doing. He's kind of been watching it from the sideline literally.

But to be a part of where we are at should feel really special for Rob.

Q. Dave, that week 13 game, there were a couple moments where (indiscernible) was really aggressive. How much of that was mindset, nothing to lose versus what you saw, and how much can you replicate that this week?

DAVE CANALES: Yeah, just looking for opportunities to be aggressive when it comes up, whether that's going for it on fourth down or taking shots down the field.

But it all hinges upon how well our run game does and puts us in favorable third downs to make an extra set of downs. That's something we struggled with the last two weeks, really not converting a lot on our third downs and just the timing and rhythm of it, making sure the guys understand what the breakdowns are, making sure they understand what type of coverages and things we're getting.

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

That will allow us to just get deeper and deeper into the game plan and into the call sheet. That's what allows you to set things up. We need continuity and we need drives to sustain so we can show them different runs for the play-actions. We can show them this pass that complements this other pass in the screen game.

The more downs you can get, the better off you are and the more dangerous you can be on offense.

Q. Stafford came in on a heater really, hot as any quarterback has ever been probably. You guys were able to turn him over three times. What did you do right in that game and can you replicate that again on Saturday?

DAVE CANALES: We're going to certainly try. I'm not going to sit up here and tell you exactly what we did, but it was really just our defense coming together and doing a pretty good job against the run game to force them into some known pass situations. We affected them with our rush a couple of different ways.

And that's not just with Matthew Stafford. That's with any quarterback. If you can affect the passer early in the game and be around him and make the pocket uncomfortable, they have to throw the ball a little bit quicker and have to make those decisions, and hopefully you can take advantage of it.

Q. ... that you can slow them down again?

DAVE CANALES: It certainly should give our guys confidence that if we do right, all do our jobs, we can play with anybody. That's the message that we have to take from that game, is this is an excellent football team. By no means do I think that -- we're not just automatically going to replicate some game plan that we had. It takes execution down in and down out and guys playing together.

Q. Generally, just talk about (indiscernible) and the illusion of that. Last year, worst in the league; this year middle of the pack, how big that's been in the team getting where it is?

DAVE CANALES: Yeah, first and foremost just talk about Ejiro and the excellent job that he's done. And with the challenges of last year, what I saw from him was consistency, character, looking for solutions and looking for ways to try to just deploy the guys that we have.

We added some great pieces. Again, talking about Dan, just adding guys like Tre Moehrig into the mix and guys like

Turk Wharton, getting Derrick back, Christian Rozeboom, these are guys that we counted on to come through and play together.

He's done a great job of just also within that there is scheme and understanding who your players are, bringing them together so we have the right concepts we can execute. Ejiro and the defensive staff have been tireless bringing these guys together, and then the players have taken a lot of that on their own and do the extra work, have the conversations so that they play connected.

Q. Mike Jack had a big pick six in the first game and remains among the league leaders. Playing in the shadow of Jaycee, is he one of the most overlooked players in the league?

DAVE CANALES: I think so. I think Mike Jack doesn't get enough praise for the job that he's done. He's No. 1 in the NFL in pass break ups. That comes from film study, technique, his individual drill work. He's so focused on it. If you look at his body and his body language and demeanor in a walk-through rep, he's in his stance just like he would be in a game.

He's evaluating the formation with his cleats in the ground so he's ready to play. He's a guy that I've known for a really long time. He's always been a fierce competitor, a consistent guy, a guy that you can count on. He's just also just a high character guy and a great teammate. Doesn't say a lot, but he's so professional about he does and he's accountable to the things he knows he can fix.

I can't say enough about Mike Jack.

Q. Dave, that first matchup with the Rams, four different playmakers were out, among them Jaycee Horn, Tre'Von, Christian Rozeboom. They're all here this week. Have you been able to sense how excited they are? And then generally it's pretty much everyone was at practice today. Is there a playoff vibe, a sense that, hey, if I can go I'm going to go this week?

DAVE CANALES: Absolutely. You know, all the guys that Denny has been working on in the training room, all the guys that are close, they're pushing. They're pushing. They want to be out there with their teammates.

There is. There is a -- as much as I preach every game is a championship opportunity, there is nothing like the playoffs. It just brings an energy. It brings a sense of pride. We know that it's an exclusive group and we had to work really hard to be in this position. The guys are excited about that.

