

Carolina Panthers Media Conference

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Dave Canales

Postgame Press Conference



Los Angeles Rams 34, Carolina Panthers 31

DAVE CANALES: I'm really proud of this group. Early adversity, some things that we gave away early on and an interception. We didn't execute on fourth down. We were 0 for three, which is, you know, we have had some success there. Got to give credit to the Rams first and foremost, making the plays when they had to and they got the ball back with time on the clock and the ability to drive the field right there and they got it done and made an amazing play for a touchdown right there at the end.

So my hat's off to Coach McVay and the Rams for battling. And, again, this is -- there's such a mix of emotions in the locker room right now of guys who are proud of what we accomplished and proud of where we've gotten to and sick about the missed opportunity that was right in front of us and that's going to sting. That's going to sting for a good while. But I asked the guys to keep their head up and let this fuel you for what we're going into and to understand how hard it is to work to get into this position where you get this kind of opportunity.

Q. Dave, I know that you have to go and watch film and all those things, but it seems like you guys were getting pressure on Stafford and good things were happening. Why, from your perspective, was soft coverage on an MVP frontrunner with so much on the line, two minutes left in the game?

DAVE CANALES: He made a couple of nice plays when we pressured him throughout it and I thought we did a good job of mixing it. Ejiro had a really good plan for trying to get pressure on him early on and then they picked up the blitzes, and he hurt us a couple of times over the middle on some third downs and so we had to play a little bit more coverage right there.

Q. Dave, for a team that's growing and developing, how important is being able to be in a moment like this in the form that it is?

DAVE CANALES: It's just about belief. That's what this season has been about. Do you believe that you belong in these games? Do you believe that you can beat anybody if we do our job and we play football the right way and make the right calls and all that? It's just it's my job as a head coach to prove to these guys that if we handle business, we take care of the ball and we play great football we can play with anybody, and that belief is here. The guys understand that part of it and that's a big part about why this one stings.

Q. Dave, was Jaycee ruled out at the end?

DAVE CANALES: He was. He was not able to come back in.

Q. How tough was that for that last drive? Do you think that impacted what Ejiro was able to call?

DAVE CANALES: You know, it was untimely. I thought they took a lot of opportunities in the middle of the field with some high/low concepts and made the completions to get those drives going and they didn't really attack us outside where Jaycee wasn't but at the same time, having Jaycee out there is always a great thing.

Q. Dave, what is your assessment of Bryce's performance tonight?

DAVE CANALES: Gritty. Just gritty. Tough. This is a really good pass rushing group and he made plays. He extended the play, found guys down the field consistently, ran a touchdown in from a little bit further out and, of course, he'd be up here and he'll tell you he would love to have that interception back. That's a part of this game that he understands. That's in his control, but at the same time, to give us a chance to take the ball all the way down after the punt, I just can't say enough about the way Bryce stepped up and played in this game.

Q. You were down 14-0 and continuing to fight back to have a chance at the end and also the fans continuing to be in it. What type of advantage did that help give you guys and energy did it help give the sideline?

DAVE CANALES: It was unbelievable. Bank of America Stadium was absolutely electric. It was incredible to feel the pressure that they had to go through of communicating and playing at the line of scrimmage offensively speaking. When we made big plays on the offensive side and the juice and the momentum that was behind it. And our group, we don't pass judgment on the game early on. We just keep playing ball and it really helps when we have our whole fan base behind us and what an amazing, special night in that way.

Q. Do you have an update on Ickey?

DAVE CANALES: Ickey's got a knee injury. We'll give you more of an update. They got to do all the MRIs and all that stuff but I think it's a significant injury and something that we're going to have to go into the offseason with.

Q. Can you talk about what Jalen Coker has done all season and then to cap it with a performance like he did tonight. What does this tell you about his future and what he means to this team?

DAVE CANALES: I'm really excited about his chemistry with Bryce and where they've grown when Jalen came back to us middle of the season and finding ways to get him on routes that he can execute and he just finds a way to win and generally the ball goes his direction, you can count it as a catch. He and Bryce have just worked tirelessly on a daily basis to get that chemistry to the point where this game was a huge one for him.

Q. Has Bryce earned a fifth year?

DAVE CANALES: That's all conversations for after the season.

Q. On the final possession after it's 34-31, what were you trying to do there? You need a field goal and what do you think went wrong?

DAVE CANALES: I think they covered us well and they rushed us well. Bryce had to get off the spot and they did their job.

Q. When you came in here, I could almost feel your emotions. What are you emotions right now?

DAVE CANALES: They are completely mixed, just disappointed, you know? As we all know in this league, there are no moral victories. Today is not about a proud moment of losing this opportunity, but it's about a team that came together to play really good football and to battle and on this stage right here in a prime time opportunity, in the playoffs in the wildcard round, unbelievable for the guys to

step up and make the plays and play with physicality and our style. Our style was on display today and I'm really proud of that.

Q. Dave, what was your thinking after you guys scored to take the lead? Were you starting to think this might be a repeat of six weeks ago? Were you a little concerned about having two and a half minutes left or all of those things?

DAVE CANALES: I have full confidence in our group to get it done and understanding that there's guys that were ready to make plays, ready to rush them and try to force the ball out and Matthew Stafford did a fantastic job of finding open receivers and working the ball down the field. I can't help it whenever situations like this happen and I put myself on the other side, I believe I have a chance to win the game. I know it called for our best. I'm just trying to get ready for a minute if we get a stop, what approach are we going to take at that point? So I had to keep my mind in it and not make a decision of what the game was going to be like until it was over.

Q. As you continue to build the program, can you reflect on Mike Jackson's season and the play he made tonight?

DAVE CANALES: Unbelievable. It's just Mr. Consistency. He just steps up and makes his plays when they're there, knocked the ball down over and over and then coming up with a huge interception for us at the end was amazing after a failed fourth down to give us another chance.

Q. On the fans, you mentioned it, but just the energy in the city this week and the energy in the stadium tonight, maybe it's too soon, but is there any sort of pride that you feel in sort of helping bring that energy back being part of the team that did that?

DAVE CANALES: Absolutely. When we came here as a staff, our whole goal was to create a brand of football that we can be proud of and that's the what we're doing and we're building something from the ground up, from the basics, the fundamentals and the technique and all that and trying to build it the right way. I'm just so proud to bring that to Panthers fans, to bring them a brand of football that they enjoy watching, that they can connect with and it brings the community together and I'm really proud of all those things. I'm sick that we couldn't get it done for our group tonight.

Q. You were successful on fourth down all year. What was the process and the situations you were, especially early in this game because you gave the Rams really good field position there.

DAVE CANALES: Yeah, that's been our MO. We take opportunities and we've cashed in on those. I have confidence in our defendants. Our defense played them well enough, especially after that last fourth down fail. Not the very last one but the one before. We were covering them well. We were rushing them. Mike Jack makes a huge play right there and I just kind of thought about what has gotten us to this point? It's been these opportunities to be aggressive and to put the ball in Bryce's hands and the guys' hands and ask them to execute.

Q. Late in the game, when it comes to time-outs, when they're driving down the field, maybe you need to stop the clock. What was your thought going into not using a time-out on the final drive?

DAVE CANALES: At the end?

Q. Yeah. Or were you just trying to save it for our potential final drive?

DAVE CANALES: Yeah, I thought we were going to have an opportunity, if they did score, we'd have an opportunity to have some time-outs in that pocket to do that. It was going to be us stopping them and getting them into some longer D&Ds right there for me to actually take the time youths in that situation.

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