

New Orleans Saints Media Conference

Monday, January 8, 2024

New Orleans, Louisiana, USA

Coach Dennis Allen

Press Conference



DENNIS ALLEN: Yeah, look, I'll just start off by really basically what I said to the team, which was I was proud of the way that our guys continued to fight. I was proud of the way that we finished the season. But I'm pissed that we put ourselves in that position.

When you look at where we've been the last three years, at 9-8, 7-10, 9-8, it's not good enough.

I think we all have to look at -- and everyone in the building is part of the culpability of that, all of us, coaches, players, everybody. So we have to look at what do we need to change, and I'm not going to go into any of those details in terms of what changes will occur, but there's things that have to be different.

I think that's part of what we have to do this off-season as an organization, players, coaches, front office, everybody. I think we've just got to look at what are we going to do differently because we're all part of the problem, and now how are we going to figure out how we can all be part of the solution.

That's really what this off-season is going to be about.

Q. Nobody gets judged by numbers more than the head coach. What does that say about you and your performance?

DENNIS ALLEN: Well, it hasn't been good enough. I mean, obviously as the head coach the last two years at 7-10 and 9-8, it's not what we aspire to be here. I have to do a better job.

I accept that responsibility.

Q. You went 4-1 over the last five weeks; did you do your best coaching job? Was there something that you figured out that worked for this team?

DENNIS ALLEN: Well, look, you can only judge things based on the product that's out there on the field, right, and

so yeah, I think you would have to say that our team was -- in four of the five games to finish out the season, I think our team was ready to play, and I think our team performed well in those games.

Q. Have you and Mickey sat down yet to talk about the future --

DENNIS ALLEN: No, no. There will be a lot of discussion that will go on throughout the week.

Q. How hard are those discussions knowing you've seen glimpses of what you feel like you can be --

DENNIS ALLEN: Look, I think anytime you get through the season, a long 18-week season, going all the way back into training camp, there's a lot to digest. And so I think those are conversations that are always hard conversations because you've really got to look at everything.

All these things we're dealing with, whether it's players, coaches, whatever the case may be, you're dealing with human beings, and certainly there's some things that Mickey is going to have for me that he thinks that I can do better at.

But I think that's part of the growth process. It's part of the growth process for me as a coach. It's part of the growth process for us as an organization and for us as a team.

Q. Is your expectation as you sit here that you are back next season?

DENNIS ALLEN: That is my expectation, yes.

Q. What about the last five games or the stretch of success at the end of the season, are you using that for momentum going into 2024?

DENNIS ALLEN: Well, it was obviously encouraging to see. I think in particular, this last game from an offensive perspective and the way that our offense played in this last game was encouraging to see, and what was encouraging to see is some of the young players that we have step up



in prominent roles and make plays. Guys that are going to need to be, call it core pieces of what we're trying to build here.

To see guys like -- the touchdown, the one touchdown on the fade route to AT Perry, I look out there and it's AT Perry, it's Rashid Shaheed, it's Chris Olave and Kendre Miller, core skill players that are on the field at that particular time. Having those young guys being able to step up I think gives you confidence as you move forward.

Q. The numbers say that your strength of wins compared to the rest of the league was not very good. That's what the numbers say. Does that affect how you look at things in the off-season?

DENNIS ALLEN: I guess the short answer to that is no, I'm not really looking at a statistical analysis of what the strength of win is or strength of schedule or any of that type of stuff. I'm basing it off of the eyeball test and where we performed well and where we didn't perform well.

I would say that overall there was encouraging signs. There were good signs. But overall it wasn't good enough.

Q. You mentioned that you (indiscernible)?

DENNIS ALLEN: I haven't had a lot of time to really self-reflect on that, so it would be hard for me to come up with -- look, there's certainly things where I know I can improve and I can be better. I think that's just part of what this process is about. As I'm going through the season, I'm not doing a lot of reflection on the totality of the job I'm doing. I kind of evaluate that as the season is over and where could I have been better, and that'll be part of my process as we go forward.

Q. You've had some young players who were encouraging in the way they played. Does this roster still need to get younger?

DENNIS ALLEN: Well, look, I think we certainly need to still add some young pieces to our roster. I think there's a good veteran presence here. I think there's some veteran players that can still perform at a high level.

But I think we also need to incorporate some more youth and talent on our team, as you do every year.

So we'll look at ways in which we can do that.

Q. I know kind of like in sports in general there's a player empowerment era to say we overrode the coach. Do you think that shows a fracture between the players and the staff in some capacity?

DENNIS ALLEN: Well, I think I've addressed that situation plenty. What I will say is this: I'll say that those players went out and played their tail off in the last five games of the season. I've been on teams where that doesn't happen.

No, I don't believe there's any fracture.

Q. Do you think culturally, though, you all need to make some adjustments or changes? How important is that --

DENNIS ALLEN: Yeah, I do. I do think there's some things that we need -- our mindset needs to be different.

You know, look, I've been here for a lot of it, and we've had a lot of success around here. I think sometimes you can kind of get a little comfortable with that.

I just think we need to re-evaluate what we need to do to win games at the level that we need to win games at. I think that'll be a big part of what we do this off-season.

Q. Would you consider changes to the offensive staff?

DENNIS ALLEN: Yeah, we're going to look at everything, so I'm not going to get into staff changes or player changes or any of that stuff. I don't think that's what today is about.

But yeah, we're going to look at everything in our organization and where do we need to improve. So that'll all be part of the process.

Q. You're not announcing any decisions on the offensive staff yet, how do you wrestle three years of the offense has battled inconsistency with five weeks of they found themselves? Do you find of overreact to what you saw --

DENNIS ALLEN: Well, I think that's why you don't jump to any judgments on anything 24 hours after the last game. I think you've got to sit back. I think you've got to look at the whole season in its entirety, the last few years in its entirety, think about the direction that we want to go, think about where we need to -- where are the areas that we need to improve.

Then make whatever decisions that we need to make to give ourselves and give this organization the best chance to have success.

Q. What areas do you think the team improved in in your second year as a head coach?

DENNIS ALLEN: Well, improved in the won-loss record. That was one area.

We took the ball away much better this season. I feel like we were more competitive in a lot of games this year.

I thought we threw the ball better this year. I think we were better in the passing game this year. I don't think we ran the ball as effectively as we needed to.

I think this was a more competitive team than the one we were last year. I thought our guys worked hard last year, but I think we were much improved in terms of our competitiveness this season.

Q. With what you were talking about with how things (indiscernible) and the mindset needs to be different, I don't know if you want to call it complacency, but you kind of realized the mindset needed to be different as the season went on?

DENNIS ALLEN: Look, I think there's different -- I think your team reacts in different ways throughout the course of a season. So I think, yeah, there were some times where I felt like, man, we've got to -- we needed to commit a little bit more to doing the things we're doing to be able to win and be able to win the way that we think we should or think we can.

Yeah, I mean, obviously when you get through the season and the expectations that not only did the people outside of our building have for this team, but the people inside the building had for the team, and I don't think we met those expectations.

So anytime you don't do that, then yeah, I think there's a lot of things you've got to look at as to what are those reasons why, and how do we change those.

Q. Andras Peat was put at left tackle yesterday and represented himself pretty well for the most part. Moving forward, do you feel good where he is? Do you feel like that's a spot he could be next year?

DENNIS ALLEN: Yeah, again, I'm not going to get into where guys are going to be at next year, and yet I think Andras came in and did perform well at the left tackle position.

I thought that was good to see, and it was needed in our situation, where we were at this season.

But yeah, we'll make those decisions as we move forward.

Q. Did the Green Bay game change your season

dramatically do you think?

DENNIS ALLEN: Well, yeah, I think there was a stretch of games, six or eight games there, that after that Green Bay game that I don't think we played our best football. I thought our team started fast this year. I thought we finished strong this year.

I think there was a big chunk of meat in the middle that we didn't handle that as well as we needed to.

Certainly at the time I thought this is one that's going to come back and bite us, and certainly it did.

Q. Beyond getting a little bit healthier toward the end of the season, why do you think Derek started playing as well as he did?

DENNIS ALLEN: Look, I think there was a number of factors. I think A was health. I think B, protection. I think C, guys around him played better. So I think that -- it's obviously the ultimate team game and it's never one person or one thing, but I thought those were the factors that led to him playing certainly his best football for us over the last five or six weeks.

But I think some of the better football that he's played.

Q. What did you guys figure out on the offensive line later in the season where they were just playing a little bit more consistently in protection?

DENNIS ALLEN: Yeah, I think, A, I think a lot of those guys ended up getting settled into positions, and there was less moving around, although we had a few injuries where guys have had to step in and perform. I think that was part of it.

I think we incorporated a little bit more play action protection, which solidified things up a little bit more for Derek and gave him a little bit cleaner pocket to throw into, so I think there were some schematic things that we did, and I think there were some execution things that we did.

Q. Does a finish like this keep you guys' optimism going into the off-season?

DENNIS ALLEN: Yeah, look, I mean, again, like I said, I thought in particular this last game, I thought it was the best that our offense looked all season long. I thought we ran the ball effectively in this pass game. We were efficient in the passing game. We made contested plays when we needed to make contested plays. We scored points in the red area like we needed to do.

Yeah, it gives you confidence moving forward. I think that's the type of performance that I expect from our offense.

Q. I know following up on this culture question, when you got here, it was a total rebuild, new players, a whole new staff, but taking over this time, there was more of a shift, so to say. Do you feel like the true believers were you and Derek and giving them some nostalgia and give them what they remembered from previous regimes would you say?

DENNIS ALLEN: You've got to repeat that question. (Laughter.)

Q. (Indiscernible) hanging on to what they remember it used to be than what you are now?

DENNIS ALLEN: Yeah, yeah. Look, I don't know that. I mean, certainly what we've done over the past three years, again, I'll say it again, it hasn't been good enough, so we've really got to look at how are we going to improve. I think there's a level of commitment with everybody that we can't fall back on what we did in '17, '18, '19, '20, and if you really go back, there was a lot that went into that. There was a lot of hard work that went into that.

We've got to get back to the grind a little bit. That's what happened here in '06, and I think that's what happened here in '17, '18 and '19, and I think we've got to get back to that.

We've had some of these success, a little bit of struggle, and then get back to the success that we've become accustomed to here.

Q. Considering that the cap situation you guys are in, how much input do you have on the roster decisions?

DENNIS ALLEN: Well, look, I mean, I think I have a lot of input into what we do with the roster. And yet there's a financial aspect that goes along with that that there's other people that are more qualified to handle the finances than me.

But in terms of the makeup of the roster, yeah, I'm heavily involved in that.

Q. Maybe these are two separate questions, but obviously Marshon Lattimore was on the sideline yesterday and Mike Thomas, they didn't come back and play in the last six, seven weeks. What's your viewpoint on that? Is that totally health related? Is that part of this conversation?

DENNIS ALLEN: Look, as to them coming back and not

being able to play, it's totally a health-related question. Those guys, I do think that based on their injury report this morning that if we were playing this week, there would be a chance that Lattimore could be available.

I think that's good news.

Look, I think both those guys are trying to get themselves back.

But yeah, it was all totally health-related.

Q. Was there any point in the season where you were worried about your job?

DENNIS ALLEN: No, no. I think anytime you're in the season, we've got enough to worry about with just getting ready for the next opponent and how we're going to get our team ready to play. Anything else that you're worried about or you're paying attention to is just a distraction that keeps you from being able to do the best job that you can do.

Much like I talked about last week with control the things you can control, so I control how I come to work every day, the mindset that I bring to work every day, the amount of effort and intensity I put into it. I control how the message is to the team and what we're doing from a schematic standpoint.

Any decisions that are made out side of that are out of my control, so I don't spend a lot of time worrying about those things.

I understand that this is a product-based business. I've been in this business for a long time. And so to say I worried about it, no, but I do understand it's a production-based business.

Q. Speaking of production, point differential I know can be a somewhat misleading stat, but yours is pretty high, actually. What is the most instructive or practical way to look at what that means?

DENNIS ALLEN: Well, I would say that that tells me that we weren't consistent enough. That would tell me that we had some close games that we didn't make enough plays, didn't coach them well enough in some of these close games to give ourselves a chance to win these things. So that would tell me that there's ability there, but it would say that it wasn't as consistent as it needed to be.

Q. Did you find something in the consistency that will help next year late in the season, that kind of got solved? Is that something you figured out that you



can carry into next year?

DENNIS ALLEN: Yeah, look, I do think that we played more consistent in the last stretch of the season, and I think our record indicated that.

Yeah, I'm not going to get into the specifics of what those things are that we figured out, but I do think there were some things that we figured out and did much better over the last month, month and a half.

Q. Is Michael Thomas' knee injury a little more serious as the rehab went on? You mentioned having Marshon Lattimore as his -- how is Mike Thomas doing?

DENNIS ALLEN: Well, he's progressing. He's not where we would have originally had hoped, but he's getting better.

Q. When you talk about culture and commitment, how much of what you treated at during the game was a factor and letting you know that the culture needed to be different?

DENNIS ALLEN: Yeah, I don't think there was any different.

Q. When it came down to Trevor, obviously a first-round pick, came down the field in year two. How much urgency is there in regards to that?

DENNIS ALLEN: I think there's a big urgency in terms of us and in terms of him of needing to develop that player. I think we need to develop that player. We drafted him for a reason. I think he has talent. That's a guy that we need to get the best we can out of him.

Q. Is he somebody who could potentially switch positions?

DENNIS ALLEN: Yeah, I mean, we'll see. But I do think that's a player that we need to develop.

Q. What's your philosophy on developing a player that if you don't trust him in situations like last night when the team was up a lot and kind of switching personnel?

DENNIS ALLEN: Yeah, that's a good question. And yet my focus at that point in time is not how am I developing for the future. My focus on that is I want to win this game.

It kind of got a little late before the game really got out of hand. Obviously they drove the ball down there. I think it was a two-score game, may have been a three-score

game at that time when they got the ball down there on the 2 and we ended up with the 4th down stop, but it wasn't probably until after that drive that the game kind of got out of hand.

But yeah, I mean, for a guy to develop, I think playing is an important part of it.

Q. Talking about the flipside, you guys kind of stuck with Blake Grupe. Are you happy with the end results of that?

DENNIS ALLEN: Yeah, look, I saw improvement. Really both the kicker and the punter I thought improved as the season went on. So yeah, I think that was the right thing to do, and I've seen it so many times with young kickers that struggle and then go on and have really, really productive careers, and so yeah, I was pleased that we stuck with him.

Q. We didn't see (indiscernible) in the locker room, but he seemed like he might be shutting down.

DENNIS ALLEN: We haven't discussed that, no. I'm not on Twitter, either.

Q. I wanted to ask you about offensive kind of system, if you will. Do you have any strong thoughts about not the staff but just the way you all conduct offense, and would you consider maybe some new ideas there?

DENNIS ALLEN: Yeah, I think we're all considering new ideas. And I would say from a system standpoint and schematically in some of the things that we did, there's a lot of it that works.

Certainly I think there's some things that we can do better. But I still believe there's a lot of those things that work in our league, and I think a lot of the stuff that we did on offense this year, it proves that it can be successful.

Yet I do think there's some things that we need to improve on.

Q. Is it a fine line there between keep doing what you're doing because it's working but also maybe bringing in some fresh ideas to maybe balance that out?

DENNIS ALLEN: Yeah, look, I think those are all good questions. I think those are all things that we're going to talk about over the next few days to really iron out the direction that we want to go and how we want to continue to move forward.

But I do think there's some things that have proven to work in our league that we do offensively, and I think we want to be able to keep some of those things.

Then I think we've got to look at how we can maybe do some things differently.

Q. When you talked about what you told the team, we don't get to speak to you again for a few months with the off-season, so do you have a message for the fans who are frustrated with the team so much?

DENNIS ALLEN: Man, that's a great question. Yeah, I think, A, my message would be that I appreciate the fans that we have because I do think we have some of the best fans in all of pro sports, and I do think there's a connection between our fans and this city.

I would say much like the New Orleans Saints have done over the past call it 20 years, 15 years, we've battled through some hard times, and we've come out on the other side of the storm. I fully expect us to come out on the other side of the storm again.

Q. With the success in the sort of latter part of the season with Zack Baun, sort of as this smaller, speedier edge rusher, does that impact the typical prototype that y'all look at?

DENNIS ALLEN: I don't know that that necessarily impacts the prototype that we're looking for. I do think that there's something to a little bit of a change-up and a little bit of a fast ball. I do think that he added some of that to our pass rush this year.

But I don't think that that changes -- these prototypes that we have have led to a lot of success around here for a long time, and so it's been successful. So I don't see us moving too far away from that.

Q. What is your perception about how close or how far you are away? Or do you have one?

DENNIS ALLEN: Look, I think we're closer than -- I think we're close. That's what I'll say. I think we're close now.

As my dad used to tell me, close only counts in horse shoes and hand grenades. We need to do it.

But look, I think there was improvement from last season to this season. You don't get to just pick up where you left off. You start everything anew.

But I do think that we're progressing in the right way.

Q. Do you feel that way about your defense? Do you feel like the defense took a little step back?

DENNIS ALLEN: Yeah, I would say we weren't as dominant this year as some previous years. I would still say ultimately this game is about points allowed, and I would say we were still one of the better defenses in our league in terms of allowing offensive points.

I don't think we stopped the run as well as we needed to this year, and I think we gave up way too many explosive plays, and I think those are two areas that we have to improve on.

Q. The faces of the team are always going to get a lot of criticism. Do you think the amount of criticism that you got or Derek got was fair in relation to how the team performed this year?

DENNIS ALLEN: Well, I'm going to speak on -- like no, I don't think it was fair the amount of criticism that Derek Carr got. He's one element of 11 guys that are out there on the field. I don't think anybody ever really fully understands what goes on inside an NFL building and what needs to happen to have success.

I thought Derek Carr played well this year. I thought in particular over the stretch run when we had to have it to give ourselves a chance, I thought he played some of his best football.

I'm excited about Derek being our quarterback moving forward for sure.

Q. Do you feel the same way about --

DENNIS ALLEN: I don't even pay attention to that.

Q. With Sean Payton, I remember a couple years ago after the season ended, we asked him how he decompressed or got away, and he said he watches Netflix and eats ice cream and stuff like that. What do you do to get away? Do you take a week off, go spend time with family? How do you unplug after --

DENNIS ALLEN: Well, there won't be a lot of unplugging right now. I think the season is over, and now we've got to get ready for next year.

But yeah, like how do I unplug? I go home and spend a lot of time with my family. That's what I do in the off-season.

Q. With regard to the cultural shift you mentioned earlier, Derek was speaking of positivity throughout this season any time that he was speaking with us.

Max Garcia, Cameron Erving, they all had this very positive piece to them that's very much in the forefront. Is that a big piece of what you're looking for in terms of that cultural shift?

DENNIS ALLEN: Well, look. I mean, the easy part is to always point out the negatives and the flaws. I think that's kind of what we do as a society. I think everybody is really focused way too much on the negative.

Yet positivity only goes so far. There has to be action that goes along with that positivity that creates the results that you're looking for.

I think that's what I meant when I said -- like the reason why we've had the record that we've had over the last three years, like all of us are involved in that. All of us are part of that problem.

Now, the positivity is how do we find the solutions. So I think that's where we're at now.

Q. Is that a tough thing for you to balance, wanting to point out what's negative because you want to improve it? Is that a challenge and are you sort of balancing that?

DENNIS ALLEN: Yeah. Look, I mean, there's always that balance between the positive and the negative. Certainly the negatives are the things that keep you from being able to have the success that you want to have, and yet if you just dwell on that, then you're going to continue to get the negative.

It's really about how do we -- the positive is how do we go about fixing it, and here's the encouraging thing is when you look at these things and if we continue to do this, we have a chance to be successful, so that's where the positivity comes in.

Q. At times you were extremely aggressive this year. How much looking back on --

DENNIS ALLEN: In what way?

Q. Like on a couple calls in games. How will you revisit that, or do you think that needs to be revisited at all?

DENNIS ALLEN: In terms of the aggression of going for it or whatever those -- those types of decisions? Yeah, I think that's something that we'll continue to evaluate. There were some games where we were much more aggressive, some games we were a little more conservative. Look, you guys talked about the Green Bay

game. I go back to the Green Bay game, and if I could do it all over again, I'd have Grupe kick that, whatever it was, 56-yard field goal. In a 17-0 game, chose to punt it, tried to pin them back there. They hadn't been able to move the ball extremely effectively throughout the game at that point in time.

Yeah, that's a lesson I learned. Like let's go play to freaking win it, and I think we could have done it in that situation.

So yes, there's things that we and I evaluate on where I can be better. Well, yeah, I got more aggressive in certain situations.

Q. Cam Jordan you've coached a long time. What's the fairest way of putting his season in perspective?

DENNIS ALLEN: Well, I think it's a hard thing to evaluate because when you really look at since the first Atlanta game, he really wasn't himself probably until this last Atlanta game. I think Cam is at a point right now where he's still a very, very good run player. I think we've got to look at how do we increase his productivity from a pass rush standpoint.

So I think that'll be how do we get more production out of him as a rusher, the finish on the quarterback, those types of things. I think that's what we'll look at how can we help him improve in that area as we go forward.

Q. You talked about finding solutions. Given the fact you won two more games this year, presumably you found some solutions from the end of last season. Can you cite some examples where you identified shortcomings and improved on them?

DENNIS ALLEN: Yeah, look, it would be hard for me to say specific examples of where that's occurred. Yeah, it's a good question. I don't know that I have exactly what that answer is. I thought we executed better at times this year, and so I think that leads to performing better.

I thought I was better in certain areas and still think I could have improved in certain areas. I think I've got to do a better job of getting the defense ready to go from the beginning of the game. I think that's an area that we've got to look to continue to improve.

I think we've got to look to how can we finish better, really on both sides of the ball. Those are areas that we'll look to improve.

There was times that we did that and times that we didn't.

Q. Did the quarterback fit into that two-minute drill at all -- (indiscernible) did that improve the two-minute?

DENNIS ALLEN: Yeah, I think that was part of it. I think certainly -- look, we went out and got Derek Carr because we felt like he was a good fit for our organization, for our team. And I believe that he was. And I believe that he is.

I believe that the more that he gets an opportunity to work with a lot of these young skill players, the more that we're going to improve from an offensive standpoint. So yeah, I do think he was a big factor.

Q. Going back around to Zack, the last two years between him and Caden it seemed like out of necessity you kind of ended up with a situational pass rusher who now has to play Sam linebacker, also contributing on special teams. Obviously the prototype for a defensive end hasn't changed, but has the role kind of become a consistent thing considering how it's worked?

DENNIS ALLEN: Yeah, look, I mean, it's interesting because that position of Sam linebacker has kind of taken on a lot of different -- it's changed over the course of the years. In some years it's guys got more pass rush ability. In some years it's just more on the line, set an edge. Some years it's a place holder. Like that position has changed. Some years it's been Von Miller and Khalil Mack.

I think there's a lot of guys that you can fill that role with in a lot of different areas, and I think in a perfect world scenario, you could like for your Sam linebacker to bring value in other areas other than just being an into the line of scrimmage linebacker, whether that guy has got the ability to stack back off the ball like we had when we had Scott Fujita, whether that guy has got the ability to rush the passer. We've had a little bit of that with Caden and Zack and certainly some of the guys I've had in the past.

Q. Any reaction to Arthur Smith's being fired?

DENNIS ALLEN: No. Look, I think this is always a tough day in this profession. I think the reaction is that I know that when guys get let go, they have families. They've got kids.

You never want to see anybody lose their job.

Q. How would you evaluate Kamara's season?

DENNIS ALLEN: Well, I would say, and this isn't just Alvin. I would say that I don't think we've ran the ball as effectively as we need to be able to run the ball to be the type of offense that we need to be.

I would say -- now, I would say this. I would say that Alvin I thought ran the ball physically this year. Like I thought he ran the ball tough.

You know, we didn't have quite the explosive plays that we're used to seeing from him in terms of the run game, but I thought he was highly effective as a pass receiver.

I thought he had a productive season, and I still think there's more to be had.

Q. How do you look at that in judging whether maybe he I don't want to say lost a step but wasn't where he needed to be versus the offensive line could be better and he'll get back to that explosiveness next season?

DENNIS ALLEN: Yeah, I think you saw when there was space that he had some -- he still has some of that same explosiveness. I think all of us, you said lose a step. I don't know what that term is, but you guys get out of bed in the morning. You don't move quite as well as you did 15 years ago.

I think as you get older -- look, in particular at that position. Running back position is a tough position.

But I think he's still got plenty of ability to help us win.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports