



***Cleveland Browns Head Coach Todd Monken
Cleveland Browns vs. Carolina Panthers
Week 3
9-27-26***

Opening statement:

"All right, I said to the team in there, I mean, 'if you want to talk about resiliency, you want to talk about team, you want to talk about guys having each other's back through thick and thin, similar to last week, you know, the ups and downs, the flow of an NFL game, kind of pick yourself up and find a way to go score at the end.' And so what a great win for the Browns. And it's really, like I said, it's credit to our guys collectively. Our defense played their ass off, really did. And, you know, a lot like last week, last week we went for it fourth down at our own end, held them to a field goal. This week, we come out of halftime, we turn it over on the kickoff return, and they hold them to a field goal. Those are momentum swings just because of the score. And then even at the end, we don't get the first down and the defense holds them. I mean, we're going to be a damn good football team once Browns stop hurting Browns, and we're going to fight like hell to fix it. And I'm going to enjoy the win, because we are two and one with a division rival coming to town, and we know we can certainly play a heck of a lot better on offense. The pieces are there; we're just not coaching or playing. And what are we going to do? Fight like hell to fix it. That's all you can do. And I'm very, very proud of our guys, because what I've seen for six months showed up as men, and that's about as proud of a win as I've been a part of. Certain parts of it are disappointing, but really proud of our guys."

Todd, can you talk about the way Deshaun (Watson) fought and scrapped through to the end in a game where you had to tell him just go out there and let it rip, and don't fear anything with coming into this stadium today having to overcome everything?

"Got the greatest fans in the world, man. All Browns fans want is to be part of something special, something to cheer for. Just give them a chance, right? Play tough, play physically, that's what they want. And the better we play, the more we deserve to be cheered. When you don't, you don't. That's what we live by. But I haven't finished on Deshaun yet. How cool, really. We had not coached well enough on offense; we had not played well enough. He probably didn't play as well as he wanted, right? But to get knocked down, then come back in and make a play, and then a two point conversion, this is about him. This is about that. The drive before that too, we stalled, but we're certainly more than capable. But I'm really happy for him. At the end there, it wasn't perfect, and we got to coach better, starts with me and our offensive staff. But man, is that really cool for him, to make that play at the end and the two point conversion."

When did you know, when you started coaching these guys, that Mason Graham could be someone really special?

"Well, let's just say this, we are in the business of wanting success so early from players and teams inside the ball. So, when you have a young player like Mason and he comes in a year ago, we want it now, we want everything now. We want our players to be great from the moment they get here. We want to be great on offense, defense, special teams from the moment you get here. And we're always under construction, and players are going to continue to get better with each year, and you can see it early in their careers, you can see flashes, but as they grow and get older, you see more consistency to their play, not just flashes. And that's what I see. I see with a lot of our players, that they are going to continue to grow. He is one of those. And we're

going to be less flashy and more consistent. And I'm happy for him, I'm happy for all of our players. For today, they put the work in."

Why do you think it finally clicked for Watson in the fourth quarter? The second half started with a two three-and-outs, but things were going well by the end.

"That was awful. That was awful. I mean, we went three-and-out, you know, after the fumble. Well, we went three-and-out and then we got backed up, right, so a little conservative there. But everybody's a part of it, whether it's a missed throw, a poor call, for God's sakes, a penalty. But I think it says a lot about him. Like the last couple of weeks, no matter how it's gone, even the first game, God, I'd like to start a hell of a lot faster than that. So, to say it's a compliment is like, for God's sakes. But it says a lot about him, right? I mean, say it like it is. To come back last week, even the week before, we didn't play very good, but to come back and continue to play well, I think it's a real credit to him."

Todd, what did you see when Deshaun had to leave the game for that play? Did you know right away that he was going to be able to come back? And then what did you see on the scramble touchdown?

"Well, I didn't know. I mean, he popped up and they said he's got to come out. And then as I was calling it, he was jabbing at me like, 'I'm good, I'm good.' I'm like, 'okay, fine, frick, I just called the play. That's fine.' What do you want me to say, I'm excited you're going to go in? I mean, okay, great, you can't go in now. Nothing I can do now about it. It's amazing how many people want to talk to you when plays are going on. It's amazing. It's like, let's let it play out. I'm joking around, I'm trying to make light of that. But it was like he was ready to go back in, and he went back in, and guess what, all the fans wanted to see us score a damn touchdown. Isn't that what they want to see? Isn't that it? And then we're all back, right? Play good football, none of those stupid a**, right? Isn't that right? I mean, shoot, I said I was going to be positive. You got me going, Scott, it's your fault. Okay, so I'm just saying in general, and now it's my fault, way to turn it on me, Scott. I mean, it just is what it is, man. We pour our hearts and soul into it, and man, you know how I feel about playing football. You know. But I'm excited about our guys. Defense played great. Deshaun came back, and we're two and one, and we haven't even touched what we can be. I really believe that."

Todd, you got the running game going. It seemed like maybe not to where you want it to be, but it seemed like especially there in the first half, you were able to just start to see signs of that running game coming along.

"We got a lot of work to do, but really where it started to come a little bit was right there before half, we got a couple runs that got us down there in the red zone. We're just going to keep doing what we do and do it better. And we did do it better, we were more downhill, not perfect. I look at the tablet after every drive too, and there's things we could call better and things we can play better, and the backs can hit it downhill. And the coolest thing about our group is that they all are the same way, just like we are, and that is: we're all in this together, right? We're unbelievably connected. And when it doesn't go right, we've got a lot of guys that own it and fight like hell to fix it. And we're all going to do this together. That's what makes it so cool every day to be with these guys, man. It just is so cool."

You've talked about being aggressive, staying aggressive. On that last sequence there, you had fourth and one. I understand trying to get it, convert, but you could've kicked the field goal and made it a situation where they had to score a touchdown. What was kind of that thinking?

"Well, we screwed it up on second and one, let's be real honest, right? We get nine yards and all we need is a first down, get down, right? So, okay, so we don't do that, right? And then we get to fourth and one, and to me it's fifty-fifty. If you kick it, you do put it where it's a touchdown, or you get the first down and it ends, and they've got to drive it without any timeouts and get the field goal. But what hurt us was we didn't end up getting more time off the clock, because of the way the timeouts worked, and it's never easy. It's just not. And a credit to our defense to go back out there. And so, I got my hat backwards, it's for Rudy (Mike Rutenberg). I don't ever wear my hat backwards, but hats off to the defense. I mean, this is what a great job they did. And it was really, we just, the second half for a while we couldn't get any traction on offense, it felt a little like Jacksonville, man. We're not able to take them off the field. It flipped. We had the possession the first half, we just didn't in the

second half. And what a great job there, what a great job for them, and happy for our players. This is a player's game."

What kind of clicked for Denzel Boston at the end of the game there?

"Well, we threw it to him, I mean that's on me, got to throw it to him, don't you? I mean, there's a guy calling the plays, for God's sakes. He's a good player, and sometimes the game goes that way. What happens is when you don't stack plays and you're choppy, it's hard. Denzel caught a bunch of balls as we got in the flow last week. When you're not, it's like, oh, run, oh, pass, a third down and you punt, you're backed up, a couple runs, a third down and you punt, there is no flow. We didn't get the first first down, and that's the whole key to being really good on offense. You got to get the first down and get it going. And then you get into their subs, right, the guys that sub it out, and we just couldn't get that going. And a lot of it is Browns hurting Browns, coaching and playing. We're all in this together, and I'm going to enjoy it. I won't get to enjoy it long, we got to get on Pittsburgh, but I'm going to say that we're 2-1, and offensively, we're going to get it right."

What about Deshaun, once again, used his legs effectively, converted three first downs and had a scramble throw for a touchdown. How invaluable is it for him to be able to be using his legs like this?

"It is. That's one of his superpowers. As he continues to learn the system and gets his eyes right and gets his drops right, which he's continuing to work on, and we build it better around him, but he's always going to have the ability to make plays, as he did last week, he did this week. Now, where can we be better? Obviously, throwing the football, right? I mean, you're not going to win if you can't throw it. Of course, the last few years you can't win if you can't run it. So, s--- you've got to be good at both. So, I'm just saying in general, we certainly have a lot to improve on. The run game was better, the pass game was not. Got to continue to work on that, and we're going to continue to grow together. And we haven't played our best football yet on offense, so we've got a ways to go, but we're going to continue to fight."

Mekhi Blackmon comes in for Tyson (Campbell), plays in his place. Early on, it looked like they were trying to target him a little bit, but it seemed like as the game went along, he just played more and more comfortable out there.

"I'm happy for him. You're going to have your moments. We do, in coaching and in playing, where if you play enough, man, you're going to get beat, and that's part of it. As a coach, you can't stop calling man because a guy gets beat every now and then. Or you can't call zone, and then you get beat in zone, you'll never call it, you'll never let it rip, you got to call it. And I'm happy for him. Yeah, there's probably things he's going to look at, but to join us a few weeks ago and to go out there and battle, a real credit to him."

Did you see something in the game plan on the tight end when you opened it? Harold (Fannin) had a great game today, was that about Harold, or was that about Deshaun finding Harold?

"I think Deshaun found him. We had a naked or so that kind of caught the ball there. Really, there were more opportunities really to get it to him within our game plan, we just didn't get to all of it. Between the fumble and then just three straight drives to start the second half, we really never got into a rhythm, and something we're just going to have to fix. But Harold is really starting to come along as a player, and the sky's the limit with him, because he worked to be physical, he's a hard matchup guy. And it's another one of those guys that we have on our roster that you want it now. We need it now with a lot of our guys. And we need to be better coaching, and that's what we're going to do. We're going to get back to work tomorrow, like it's a work Wednesday, and get on Pittsburgh, and walk, and then get to Tuesday, Wednesday. Can't wait to get back here Thursday night, because it's going to be rocking. It's going to be rocking."

You ever walked off the field high fiving fans before?

"I did it last week. I'll keep doing it, because that was unbelievable. That was so cool at the end. And there was a lull there, maybe in the third or fourth quarter, where the fans were there, but we didn't do enough to really get them into it in that third and fourth quarter. We just didn't. But there at the end, they made a difference. They make a difference. You don't think that made a difference there at the end? Snap count, they jump offsides, right, that gives us five yards further back. Changes play calls. So, that was awesome at the end. And for Thursday night, Pittsburgh Steelers. What are we now? No matter what...did Pittsburgh win today? Did they?"

So, what are we, all tied at first? We're all in first place? So, right, so we're playing for first place. Holy s---, isn't that cool or what? I mean, so our guys, we're ready to rock and roll. We'll be good to go. But appreciate the fans, you know, and we're not perfect, we're not, coaching or playing, but we're going to fight like hell to get there. I promise you."

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Cleveland Browns QB Deshaun Watson
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Describe your emotions, the whole day in general:

"Yes - the moment I woke up, the anticipation, the anxiousness, everything. To get in front of the fans, just to get here, and get started. I wanted to play perfect so bad, it's the NFL. That's the way the game's going to go. Ups and downs. The energy, the fans, it was amazing. They kept believing in us, they kept the energy up. There was a little lull in the game, but that's going to happen. Overall, we didn't give up and we fed off their energy. The defense made stops, they did a great job at the end. Keeping them to a field goal and giving us a chance. We continued to feed off that energy of the crowd and we wanted to make a special play. I told the guys in the huddle, 'Keep believing in me and I'm going to use my legs. Whenever that play comes up, make that play.' And (TE) Harold (Fannin) did."

How did it feel when you went out for that one play and when you came back in, the fans were chanting for you?

"It was great. It was amazing. I just wanted to finish the job for them. There was one moment where I got a little teary eyed, feeling that energy. I've put in so much work to get here, to be in this moment here and to be able to show I can finish these drives, and finish these games to get W's for this city and organization. This is what all the hard work, belief, prayers, everything that I have put myself through the last 22 months. To be able to stand in front of the crowd on that field and finish the job. I want to keep improving and keep trying to get better each day, each week and we have a big one on Thursday."

Besides the win, what were you most proud of?

"The resiliency throughout the team. The defense - they played a heck of a job. Special teams getting the points when we needed, getting the stops and they gave us a chance. And the offense never gives up. As I mentioned, there's going to be ups and downs through the flow of the game. Carolina has a really good team and plays a really strong defense. They make you earn it and don't give you many big plays. They did a lot of different things, even though they were banged. Switching up the coverages and things. We stayed in it, (Coach) Monken stayed in it and when we needed the big drive, we took advantage of it and capitalized."

What did it feel like - Todd Monken came out earlier in the week and said, 'I want him to let it rip, what is there to fear?' So many of your teammates saying the same thing, that they were totally going to have your back 100%?

"They've been telling me that since the Spring. That is the one big reason I continue to keep pushing strong. Even going into today, knowing that on the sideline 'We keep believing in you, don't worry about it, next drive, next play, it's going to happen. Bad plays are going to happen, but at the same time, we believe in you. Go finish it, go be him, go be that guy we know you are.' That just motivated me to go out on that field and finish that drive. It just means a lot to have that support in the locker room, my coaching staff, the players. You don't get that often in my shoes, so it feels good."

What happened on that last touchdown pass to Harold Fannin?

"It just broke down, I found a lane. During that whole drive, I just told the offensive line that if something happens, give me a lane and I'm going to make something happen with my feet. The guys and receivers, we practice this all the time - the scramble drill. Harold, he found a lane and I just put the ball in the air and gave him a chance. He made a play and he was ready for those moments. We've practiced for those moments since the Spring and that was a special moment because everything we do in practice, that happened in the game."

What happened on the play where he had to leave - was there a penalty? Why did you have to leave?

"I just lost my breath. I guess they thought it was my head. I just lost my breath. I was trying to get up and I asked the guys if there was a flag. I was just trying to catch my breath, honestly."

Did you feel like it should have been a flag? Was it a penalty?

"Oh yeah, I feel like a lot of things should have been a penalty. (laughter) I don't know what was going on. But hey, it happens."

What happened on that play with the facemask? It looked like they got your facemask.

"They definitely got my facemask. It's kind of funny, because I should have just gone down mid-play. I looked at the ref and was like, 'Yo, my facemask' and I turned around and got hit. I talked with him (the referee) and he missed it, we can't review it but we got the W."

This is a long season, but how important is this win?

"It's very important. Games like last week, this game, it just shows that the game is never over. We have to play for 60 minutes. Regardless of what is happening. If it's going good, we're having success, we have to close it out. If we're down and the momentum is shifting, we have to push through. This is what we work for, this is what we practice for right here. This is why (Coach) Monken put us through the test during the week. It just shows that even though we're young, new and a lot of inexperienced guys, we believe. We have that will and we want to feed off that city, that energy and have this whole city feel that same way. If we can do that, we can have something special."

What this in some ways a healing with the fans, with everything that you've been through, to be able to go out there, and there were a few boos, but to turn those into cheers, and to feel that joy in the stadium, did it make up for it?

"I didn't hear any negativity, so for me, I was just hearing the crowd. The yells, the positivity, that was my main focus, so I didn't hear any of that. But at the same time. I was trying to give them something that they could cheer about and we got that W, so that was all that mattered."

What did you see on that first touchdown to (TE) Harold (Fannin Jr.)? And his growth in this offense?

"Harold is a playmaker. Just try to get the ball in his hands. If we can get the ball in his hands, and go at him as much as possible, special things are going to happen. But on that first touchdown, he made a play, and we thought that safety was going to run with him, but they didn't and cut him loose. The O line gave me enough time to be able to see it and I just hit the ball out there and he made the catch. It was great to finish that drive, for sure."

How have you seen guys like him (DT Mason Graham)the interior guys, make the quarterback's life harder?

"Oh, it's a lot. You push the pocket and you make them feel uncomfortable. They do a good job of doing that. Mason has been playing heckuva good football and all those guys, again, the defense played their tail off today to keep us in the game and make sure that we stay right there. (Head) Coach (Todd Monken) gave them a game ball, and I definitely agree with that. I mean, they earned it and we fed off them and managed to capitalize, it was awesome."

Interior pressure probably feels different when it comes, doesn't it?

"Uh, yeah, just push the pocket. You know they are sitting in your lap, so you can't really make the throws. You have to throw it higher, or you have to kind of shift and move off your spot. That is the whole key of it, you have to move out of the spot and throw off the timing of crossing routes. If the inside of that pocket isn't right, it can cause a lot of problems."

You said it a couple of times, that you were telling guys in the huddle that you were going to make some plays with your legs, is that something that you wanted to make a big element of your game this season? And how did you regain the trust coming off those Achilles injuries?

"Yeah, I think the trust just comes from the work I put in. You know, my trainers, and my QB coach, everyone that's a part of this organization that was there helping me. We put the tests in, we tried it, and just over time you mentally outgrow the fear of it, if it's going to go it's going to go. And also having Dr. Anderson tell me that it's strong, just believe it and trust it. But that has always been part of my game, is being able to make plays with my legs, scramble a little bit, and what Coach (Todd) Monken always says, to play quarterback. And you know that can cause a lot of problems for the defense, and that's when we need it at our best, in the two minute drive and that's what happened."

What is it about the fourth quarter and getting to that point that you feel like you've been able to finish all three of those games?

"If you look up the history of my career, from really high school but college. I've always just been really good in the fourth quarter. I don't know if it's just the flow of the game, the reps, being able to see different things, my memory bank. It's just, fourth quarters have always been special, especially when we're in it, if you're down or if

you're up, you gotta close it out. So that's just my mentality, being able to have these opportunities, and that's when the special players make special plays, and I want to be one of those chosen ones. That's just always been in my history man."

Were you able to keep the game ball since it was such an important game for you today?

"I did. I kept the one I kneeled with, and then Monk(HC Todd Monken) gave me one, so that was dope. It was cool to be able to receive both of those."

What do you think, when you look back, will make today so special?

"I think just, like all the adversity that I've dealt with over the years and be able to finish out a game like this, regardless of the energy the outside might feel or see, it just shows the character and the person I am, and how strong mentally I am, and that regardless of what's going on I'm to fight like hell to accomplish what I want to accomplish, and that is to get the W, regardless of what the chaos is outside, good or bad. It was a great win, definitely one of the top ones, super fun, and hell, let's go Cleveland, for sure. It's for the city, most definitely."

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Cleveland Browns Players
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G Austin Barber

Third quarter not good, fourth quarter really good. Did something change from where you saw other than the results?

"We went out there and just played, and I feel like we did things well in the fourth quarter. It's part of football, it's gonna happen. There's gonna be things like that. I'm just really proud of this team, how we competed and how we battled for 60 minutes."

It was an insane last four minutes, what was it like in the huddle?

"Yeah you dream for those moments, especially in the NFL. Just super cool to do it with the guys on the field and even the guys on the sideline that are out there cheering for us. It's awesome."

What did you think of the run game today?

"I think we did some good things. There's some things we have to clean up, that's football. I just feel like you have to get better every single week."

TE Harold Fannin Jr.

What is it about Todd that has you guys responding to him so well?

"Obviously, he is our head coach (Todd Monken). So, he has a lot of faith in us. He breathes life into us. We obviously play for the fans and things like that, but we play for him. He puts so much life into us which gives us the confidence to go out and play."

What about Deshaun and how he played today, as well as the stuff he was able to do on the ground?

"He balled out. I see it every day. He is a consistent guy. He is going to put it all on the line and I love that."

How much fun is it to play with Deshaun Watson?

"On a day like today, it is really fun. I know that going out there, I just have to continue working. He talks to me on the sideline, just trying to grow and build that connection. Today it paid off."

DT Mason Graham

What got into you? It was a dominating performance.

"Nothing really. Just playing my technique. Worked hard in practice. When you work hard in practice it comes to fruition in the game."

What about the ending for you guys - it looked like DB got a hand or an arm on that pass, and Ronnie comes up with the interception.

"Something we preached all week was that we were going to have 60 minutes of hell. That's something that Coach Rudy (Mike Rutenberg) came to us early in the week with that motto. We kind of just played 60 minutes and we needed to play 60 minutes today."

It seemed like you guys were getting too much pressure early that even when he wasn't under pressure, Panthers QB Bryce Young was sailing passes. Did you sense that there was maybe pressure even when there wasn't?

"Yeah, I feel like that was our main thing. Earlier in the past two games, he was sitting in the pocket. No one was really touching him and he was able to tee off on defenses. That was a big emphasis for us to get back there on motion four and just do what we do."

Did it seem like the game was not going to end for the defense? You guys kept having to go out there.

"It is what it is. Like I said, we had to play 60 minutes and that's what we came here to do, and that's what we get paid to do."

How good did it feel to make those two sacks at such crucial points in the game?

"It feels really good. Just seeing the practice habits come to life. It's really what it is. Just also my guys up front. We all work together on those rushes, it wasn't just me. It was fun out there today."

Is there a difference in the way you're playing this year?

"I wouldn't say there's a difference. I think I took a little step. Last year, I was still playing good in my eyes, I just wasn't getting the production off of it. I just feel like it's all coming back to fruition this year."

S Ronnie Hickman

What was going through your mind at the end of the game when you saw that play unfold?

"The ball was in the air for a minute and, you know, when the ball is in the air for that long, things can go wrong. So, I was just making sure I was able to catch it."

Being able to secure the win, what was it like with the defense having those two stands against the two drives?

"It was huge. Anytime it is on us, we want it that way. Being able to come up for our offense and our team and get the win was huge for us."

To go back to the actual pick, what did you see there? Did DB (Derek Barnett) get a hand on that upfront up there?

"Yeah, I don't know if it hit his arm or hit him but it caused the ball to float in the air a little bit. So once I saw it in the air, it was coming right to me. Normally when it is in the air for that long, things can go wrong. So, I was just glad that I was able to come down with it and hold on."

DE Isaiah McGuire

You were right there on (S) Ronnie's (Hickman) interception, you were in (QB) Bryce Young's face. Walk me through that play and what happened there and how you guys were able to close that one out?

"We knew we had to close the pocket altogether. Playing together is what we talk about in our room and Ronnie Hickman just made a heck of a play."

You guys all day were in Bryce Young's face, how were you able to affect him in so many different ways?

"We just all know that we are rushers. From me to (DE Jared) Verse, to (DT) Mike Hall, to the inside to the outside, like (DE) Sam Williams, (DE Derek) Barnett, (DT) Adin (Huntington) all of us. We come with that mentality each and every day."

To get back-to-back wins now, how big is it to get that momentum, to feel it going forward now to a quick, short week Thursday night?

"It feels real good. We know that everyone is not perfect but it's hard to win in this league, so we're gonna appreciate it at the end of the day. Like you said, we got a game Thursday so we have to move on."

How does it feel to play in front of the home crowd?

"It felt fantastic, they are the best fans in the league. We just know through the ups and downs, the fans show up no matter what. That is greatly appreciated from the locker room and within the organization."

DE Jared Verse

Big win. What does it say about this team, backs against the wall and you're able to pull through?

"That's how it's supposed to be. Offense firing off on all cylinders. Defense shutting down everything. 18 points is a little too much. We gotta knock them down a little bit more. We can do better as a defense as a whole."

You guys got a lot of pressure on Bryce [Young]. Even when you weren't getting home you could tell he was feeling it.

"We knew their weaknesses and we focused on them all week. I was like, 'I'm going to stop working on all of these flashy moves and everything like that. I gotta get back to my bread and butter.' And that's just running up in their face."

How do you balance you standing up like a linebacker and rushing from over the top on some of those looks and Mike [Hall Jr.] coming off the edge? It seems like there has been more experimenting, how do you like that?

"It makes their keys a little bit different. It gets them messed up, gets them a little bit flustered. For more I'm just running and causing havoc."

On that Mason Graham sack you pushed Rasheed Walker right into Bryce Young and made him step up and let Mason finish it off from there. What did you see on that play and what was your mindset going into a game clinching play like that?

"I told everybody before the game I'm just gonna run through their face. Not overselling or underselling it or anything like that. I'm just gonna keep walking them back until I make them uncomfortable. It's going to make him have to run around, you guys just clean everything up."

Isaiah [McGuire] had a big game too, can you talk about his performance and what you've seen from his development?

"Zay is one of the people I've attached myself to very well since I've gotten here, especially playing opposite of him. We've been able to focus a lot on how we're going to key up and attack the game, specifically with switching sides. Zay is just a baller. He's a hooper. That's who he is."

LB Quincy Williams

How about (DT) Mason (Graham) today?

"He is balling out two sacks today. We talked about him during the week, going through his preparation throughout the week saying it was sacks. So it was great to actually see the hard work on the field then. He then was like 'I told you sacks!' and I was like 'yeah I like that'."

I think you led the team in tackles today?

"Me? I'm trying to lead this team by example, number one. Just trying to lead by my play and not just being a vocal leader. So me being a vocal leader helps a lot after I make plays and stuff. So I like that, the past couple of weeks I haven't played up to my potential or what they brought me here to do. So today, being at home and then also just making a pact with myself saying 'all right, let's start something different'."

It looked like you guys were doing some different things rush wise, moving (DE) Jared (Verse) around more and it looks like you benefitted from some of that. So what about that kind of led you to get more pressure on (QB) Bryce (Young)?

"Speed and violence, speed and violence, playing fast, not doing a lot of thinking and stuff like that."

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Carolina Panthers Head Coach Dave Canales
Cleveland Browns vs. Carolina Panthers
Week 3
9-27-26

Opening statement:

"[It is a] game of execution. That's what it comes down to. A couple of red zone and fringe opportunities, we came away with field goals, not touchdowns - big difference there. [We] missed a few turnover [opportunities] early on on the defensive side, and gave them an opportunity to continue their drives. Some untimely penalties, some things that really hurt us, and we have to be smarter in some of those areas. We have to contain the rush better. (Browns QB) Deshaun (Watson) was able to get out a couple of times, and we know the challenge of it, but we have to be disciplined with our rush and be able to do that. Those are the margins, and that's what happens. A lot of credit to the Cleveland Browns. The energy that (Browns HC) Todd Monken has these guys playing with, they executed a really good plan. You have to give them a lot of props that way. They stuck with it, they hung tight, and even when we started battling back, they had one more drive left in them, and what could have ended up in an interception, but continued to drive for it after the penalties."

On that penalty, it looked like Deshaun Watson sold it. What was your view?

"I saw him get hit in the head by somebody's hands. I don't know who that was. But we can't do that. We have to go lower on the quarterback when the ball's in the air, you have to make that decision right at the end to either put your hands on the quarterback or not, and we made the wrong decision in that case, and extended the drive. Then he was able to create a little bit of extra time on the scramble play, which is something that he can do well. We can do a better job there as well."

You had a handful of notable injuries - CB Jaycee Horn, CB Mike Jackson, LG Damien Lewis, WR Jalen Coker. What's an update on those four guys?

"Jaycee got a quad on the touchdown play at the end. So we're going to have to evaluate that and see where he's at, but he was not going to be coming back in. Coker, his quad lit up on him a little bit, and so the pain wasn't really going away. We were testing the strength, and we decided we couldn't put him back out there in that condition. D-Lew was able to come back in and finish. Mike Jack got a groin kind of chasing across the field, hit the ground weird. So we're going to have to take a look at that this week as well."

Jaycee's injury looked pretty bad, but he was kind of putting weight on it. Do you know the extent of the injury?

"We won't know the extent of it, but I know that he was nowhere close to getting back out there during this game."

Why do you think the run offense took so much time to get moving throughout this game?

"We didn't handle the movement well up front. We're looking at it schematically, and structurally, the runs looked fine. We missed some blocks up front. We knew the challenge in this group is that they're quick. They moved at the point. They do different things, and we didn't handle that well early. Finally, we were able to kind of settle in towards the end of the game, and really, the feature of that touchdown drive was the run game, the play actions, the offense that we know. The Browns did a great job covering us, making it challenging. Some of the rush patterns, creating a little bit of pressure for (Panthers QB) Bryce (Young), so you had to get the ball out a little bit earlier than he needed to. Some things to work on, some things to look at, but, I have to give a lot of credit to those guys for executing a good plan."

The roughing the passer penalty. What did that do to your momentum when it happened at that point?

"Well, we were playing pretty well. We were covering, we were matching, and the play ended up with an interception. So, it certainly was. They gave us a great chance to try to be able to run the clock down. They had timeouts. You still have to execute, but all of a sudden, the ball will be back in our court to be able to finish the way we want to. So, we extended the drive for them, and if you give a guy like Deshaun Watson a little bit of extra time, and a few more opportunities, he's going to get creative and find something. So that would have been a big one for us, any of them drive."

Panthers QB Bryce Young seemed to be under a lot of pressure. What did you see from the offensive line?

"There wasn't anything too exotic. I think it might have been late one time on a slot pressure. The rest of it, we had guys on guys. They rushed us well. They put pressure on Bryce and Bryce had to operate that way."

Bryce was out there throwing guys like WR Brycen Tremayne and TE Darren Waller and also, what did they do to take WR Tetairoa McMillan away? He was targeted once in the second half.

"That's something as coaches we have to look at and make sure we're putting him in better positions to be able to be effective for us. He certainly wanted to be a big part of what we're doing. They covered us pretty closely. They mixed in man and some zone. They did a good job that way, and ultimately, we had one on one opportunities. We didn't hit a lot of them, really until BT kind of hit that go ball down towards the end. So that's just a little bit of chemistry and the me to you factor, but I'm glad we have guys like (WR) John Metchie (III), like BT, like (WR) David Moore, who was really coming open right at the end on that last drive over the middle. I think they got collisioned in there a little bit, but I'm so glad that we have these guys to be able to step in with the other guys can't go."

We saw Bryce go in the medical tent at one point. Did he look off at different points in the game? What did he have going on?

"He's working through something, but he was able to finish. We'll give you guys more information on that once we kind of do a full evaluation, but he was cleared to go back in, he finished the game."

Is it fair to call it a lower body injury?

"Yeah, that's fair."

Do you think it impacted his mobility or his accuracy in any way?

"Yeah, there were a couple of balls that he would normally hit. So I'm wondering if he was kind of working through something, trying to find his base, to get those balls off. He could make those throws, from different platforms and different things. He'd be the first one to tell you that up here. But, he settled in, he found a way to play ball, and all of a sudden, we're moving the chains again, and really just proud of the way he battled us back, right back into the game, and the defense, and the complimentary football that we were looking for, showed up for us in the second half. We have to do a better job of making sure that that shows up consistently the whole time."

In the first half, what was kind of behind some of the personnel decisions you all made, like a couple of red zone opportunities, where Waller was sitting out of the game, and he's been so effective there.

"Just the mix of the play calls, making sure that we're balancing things and protecting tendencies. It's not horrible to create tendencies, because you can take advantage of those. But we have a good room of guys, and we like to do different things with them in the run game, the play action game, different things like that. Darren has his role in his package as well. That's something we can look at."

It seemed like between the 20s, you guys were really trying to actively get tight ends involved. What did you see from that group throughout this game?

"Just the ruggedness. The guys battled, and really were executing well in our boots, in our play actions, and the run game. I thought they did well on the edges. It's just all of the guys playing together. We have to take that next step up front, to be on the same page, to make sure that a run game is efficient and effective, from the beginning, that's something we have not captured yet this season, and that's something that, as coaches, as players, we have to take a lot of pride in that part of it, because it's central to what we do."

You guys went for it on fourth-and-1, at your own 40. You were aggressive but tell me about the mentality in going for it.

"Those were just right in our wheelhouse in terms of the decisions. [We] felt confident about those situations, and we didn't execute, they did. And one of them, I thought Bryce had the corner route and missed the throw. I can't remember the first one, but the execution of it. We're going to do that. The guys are comfortable in those situations. We'll continue to take the ones that make sense. And our defense was playing well, so we were able to kind of play off of that."

The Browns had been kind of going in circles to that point. They had a drive where they had it for 9 minutes, 5 penalties, punt, and then they got that short field. Did you take that into consideration that you potentially could be giving them a chance to reawaken?

"It was a risk, certainly something you have to think about, but for us, it was an absolute no-brainer to go for it. We can talk about the choices of the plays and all that stuff, which we will tomorrow and what could have been or all those things. We're going to look at those things and try to make sure we have the right selection of things when you know, 'hey, if we get in this fourth down situation, what could we do on 3rd down and mix those things?' But I like the decisions."

Were you surprised they went for it on fourth-and-1?

"I was not. I was not. I thought that was an opportunity for them to try to put it away. The false start there at the end gave us life. We didn't have to burn a time out, so we were able to stop them, and really flip the field and have a chance to go back down and either tie or win it."

You mentioned how Bryce was able to get it going at some point. Did it seem like they had a bit more energy than y'all did to start the game?

"Pregame, they looked happy. Our guys had pretty good energy in the locker room, to be honest. And I love where we're at as a team. I love where we're at in terms of just the connectedness and all that, but we have to get better fundamentally, and we have to make sure we execute and take advantage of opportunities in this game that we know. It's a first down here. It's a turnover here, and you steal a drive. The huge fumble on the kickoff after the rekick was unbelievable. It really gave us a lot of life. But I will say this, Coach Monken had those guys ready to play, building off of that momentum from last week. They looked fired up to be out there. We were able to match the energy. We did not match the execution overall."

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Carolina Panthers QB Bryce Young
Cleveland Browns vs. Carolina Panthers
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You went to the medical tent a couple of times in this game, what were you going through, what were you dealing with, and why'd you feel like you could come back?

"Nothing. Just football. We're all out there dealing with stuff. It doesn't have any bearing on the game. Tough one, just didn't get it done, but none of that stuff had anything to do [with the outcome]."

Why do you think the running game had so many struggles?

"It takes all eleven. I haven't watched the film yet, no one knows. I trust our run game, we all trust it. We're gonna get it going. I haven't watched the film to analyze it yet, but I have all the confidence in the world in those guys up front and the back, coaches, we're going to get it ironed out."

I understand you haven't watched the film yet, but Next Gen Stats had you have a pressure rate at 52%. When you're taking that much pressure, what's your process for settling in the pocket and finding solutions?

"Having to be quick with your eyes. I don't know what Next Gen Stats does, but there's a lot of things that go into that. It's just getting through stuff. It's not just up front. It's making sure I'm not holding on to the ball too long getting through reads. We all play a role in that. There's no finger pointing. Once I watch the film I'll look at all that stuff I'll see what I can do better to help all that stuff out and we'll grow from there."

You went into the second half and you were able to get to your wide receivers a little bit better, Brycen Tremayne stepping up, [John] Metchie, how'd it feel out there in the second half?

"I trust those guys for sure. We have a lot of guys stepping up. A lot of guys are battling through some stuff. It's that next man up. It really speaks to that room. Those guys don't flinch. I trust everyone in there. So whoever is out there for me, I'm proud of those guys stepping up. It's always good to see everyone out there."

You guys were able to sustain things when [Jalen] Coker was having a game the other week, how hard is it when [Tetairoa] McMillan is doing what he's doing today with two catches, and things aren't moving the way you guys are used to?

"Again, I haven't watched the film yet. Have to go back. First off, there's some stuff I can definitely do better. Obviously he's a special player. He's a huge part of this offense. Wasn't able to end the way we wanted to. I haven't watched the film, I'll go and watch it, but for now I'll take accountability for us not getting it done, things not going smoothly and we'll go from there."

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Carolina Panthers Players
Cleveland Browns vs. Carolina Panthers
Week 3
9-27-26

DL Derrick Brown

How hard is it to kind of pull up in those situations where he does draw some of those out-of-the-pocket plays? We saw roughing the passer on both sides of the ball. How difficult is that as a rusher when you have all that momentum?

"I mean, you find him in full speed. Sometimes it happens. It is what it is. I mean, there's no special way to stop it. And I think it's always a 50-50 thing. So I mean, you got to see what's going on with the game and how the flow of the game is going. And the hit, I mean, it is what it is; they called it."

You guys largely held them in check for most of the game. Did you guys feel any lack of energy? Did you feel a momentum swing? What did you feel in that last drive?

"No, we knew we were in a dog fight. We knew we were in a dog fight from the time we stepped out there in the first quarter. So I mean, that was one of those things where you got to come out here and play four quarters of football."

Do you feel like y'all had this one and it kind of got away?

"I'm not going to say it got away. You either win or you lose. So I mean, we lost today. Now we look forward to going and playing Detroit next week."

WR Jalen Coker

Jalen (Coker), you look like you went out there injured for a while. Can you tell us what happened and how you're feeling right now post-game?

"Yeah. I'm just frustrated. That's really all I got. I mean, I'm just kind of frustrated. We're going to get back to it on Monday, and it is what it is."

Are you frustrated about the outcome of the game or how –

"Of course. I'm frustrated about everything. Not being out there, the loss. Yeah, no."

What do you think you guys fell short of offensively? What do you think happened?

"Oh no, I mean I think we were doing a really good job. I think it's just, there's a couple plays here and there that you just want back, but I think we're just going to flush this and get back to it next week."

Jalen (Coker), we know how much work you put into injury prevention. Was that part of the frustration?

"I mean, I just want to be out there. Injury prevention, whatever, being hurt isn't fun, and I want to be out there to help the team win."

Any sense of how serious it is?

"No, I don't have any idea. Not bad, not like anything crazy, but yeah."

G Robert Hunt

I know you do have to look at the film but from your perspective in the first half, getting the running game going, why do you think that has been such a struggle the last few weeks?

"You know, I'm not sure, can't really say, I mean I think we all need to do a better job. I hate to say it but like a one man off kinda thing, every time, that could be from me to everybody else. We just got to be on the same page, I think we got it clickin' later on in the game and it felt good and looked good but we got to start early, we start early it's a different ball game."

Is it an easy fix? Is it chemistry? What do you think?

"Nah, we've been playing for a while now, young guys got some games under their belt now, you know we got to come on with it. It's a long season, but you know, we got to get better."

Rob, I know you weren't on the field for this play, but that roughing the passer penalty on the Browns second-to-last drive. Did you see it in real time, and what was your reaction to it?

"I saw it in real time, I didn't think that but also you know, that's their job to call it and they called it. It didn't work out in our favor, so that kinda sucks."

How difficult are those immediate plays where instances are just flying and you have to show strength as a defender and that's just not their instinct?

"It's hard, I'm assuming, I mean I don't play the position. It's hard when he's running, he's been running all day, kinda like left the pocket, so he's out of the pocket so they just chased him down. If I'm a football player naturally, I think I'm going to try and get him right? So that's kinda what it was. I don't think they killed him, from what I saw I don't think it was excessive. I guess that's how it goes sometimes. We weren't on the good side of that one."

Three roughing the passer penalties total, two for you guys (Carolina) and one for them (Cleveland), it's pretty odd, it's a pretty unusual occurrence right?

"Yeah, but we also knew that they would call it in the game, we kind of have these meetings where we go over it, and it was mentioned early in the week that this crew would call those."

LB Bobby Okereke

Do you think Deshaun (Watson) sold it almost with a flop?

"Can't really say. Obviously, I was focusing on making sure my momentum wasn't carrying through to hit him in the head or neck area, but I just got to be smarter in that situation, not leave it up to the refs."

Did your hands get him up near the helmet or not?

"I got to see the instant replay obviously and watch the film, but just got to go smarter, go lower on them just so I don't give the ref the opportunity to make that call."

You guys really had kept Deshaun (Watson) pretty well in check most of the game. How troubling, not just that one play, but I think he got out for 20 on a third-and-2 on that final drive too.

"Yeah. I mean, we knew that was an X factor for him trying to make plays with his legs. So yeah, we'll go back, check the scheme and how he can do a better job, coordinated rush. But yeah, just a tough ending."

I know you said that you have to see the instant replay, but how difficult is it in that sort of moment and when your instincts are firing and stuff like this, how difficult is it to show restraint on (the roughing the passer call)?

"I mean, it's a bang-bang play. You're moving fast obviously. Quarterback's moving out of the pocket. I just got to be smarter, go lower in that situation and yeah, just not leave it up to the refs."

OLB Jaelan Phillips

What's the most frustrating thing for you right now about this loss?

"Losing, especially given that there's moments we rallied, moments that offense rallied, you know we should've came away with that dub, so yeah it's just frustrating."

Was it execution or was it anything that they did or what do you think? If you could pinpoint one thing right now.

"Yeah, they played a good game, obviously made plays when they needed to."

Jaelan, can you describe the emotions of that play, the shift, obviously you all think you have an interception and can conceal the game there, and then they end up getting in really good field position.

"I mean it's brutal, I'd imagine anybody watching the game feels the same way. It's tough in this game, you can't be making mistakes in critical moments, everybody was just trying to play their best and play hard, just to have awareness."

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