



LOS ANGELES RAMS

Rams Head Coach Sean McVay – Media Availability – January 8, 2019

(On if he's planning on working RB Todd Gurley II back in a little at a time because he hasn't played in a month)

"Yeah, we're going to see how he feels. Just talking to him now, we were taking place in the first walk-thru and he's feeling good. So, we'll continue to get him more of a workload as this week progresses and a lot of it's going to be predicated on how he feels. But, like we said, (RB) C.J.'s (Anderson) done a nice job. We'll get him in there as well. So, we'll kind of monitor that as the week goes."

(On if the team is anxious to get back into action)

"Oh yeah. I think guys are excited. There's a different buzz. Obviously, there's a lot more people here today. So, it's an exciting week. We're ready to go and we're ready to have a great week of preparation getting ready for the (Dallas) Cowboys."

(On what he's experienced over the last year that makes him feel better prepared going into this playoff game than when he went into his first playoff game with the Rams last season)

"I think it's all about our team. I think we just know our players better, our coaches. We've got better continuity. I think there's a better understanding of how we as a coaching staff can put our players in spots to maximize their abilities. Then, it's just about us doing a great job this week with our practice, with our planning and then hopefully that leads to the good performance. But, like anything else, I think we've done a good job of learning from our experiences, both good and bad. That's what's allowed us to feel like we've improved, but we know it's going to be a great challenge."

(On if Gurley participated in the first walk-thru today)

"He did. Yeah."

(On if Gurley will participate in the second walk-thru)

"Yup."

(On what the plan is for Gurley as far as practice goes)

"Yeah, I mean we're going to get him going and he's going to practice. We're going to see how he feels. I think a lot of it's going to be just him getting out there, trusting, getting some of that movement, some of the – just putting his foot in the ground, doing some of the things that he's been accustomed to doing and seeing how that knee responds. So, this week will serve as a good chance to get a gauge. Like we've always said, Todd does a great job communicating with us how he's feeling. He's making good steps and as this week goes, we'll monitor that."

(On if it's something where Gurley might have to play through a little bit of pain)

"He'd be better served to answer that than I would. I know he's making good progress. He's feeling good right now. But, as far as the specifics of how his body's feeling, I don't want to speak for Todd on that."

(On if Anderson will have a role in the game even if Gurley feels good to go)

"If Todd's able to go, we want to get him going. But, I think we want to get C.J. as well. So, I think you can expect to see a good balance of both. Some different things that maybe gets those guys on the field. But, C.J.'s done a great job the last couple weeks, but getting Todd back is definitely a big boost to us as well."

(On his thoughts from coming out of the bye week and players being able to re-calibrate and them coming out to play at the high level they've been playing at several weeks ago)

"I think it's really just about our ability to stay focused, make sure we're intentional about getting better this week, using the full-speed reps that we do get to physically get better. That's the one thing that's always a great challenge, especially just with the NFL throughout the course of the season, where you want to keep guys as fresh as possible so that they're peaking on Sundays or whenever it is that you're playing. But, you also need to be mindful of, 'How do we get better if the only real opportunity you're doing that is when you play?' So, we've got to pick and choose our spots. I think this team has the right mindset – we know that it's going to be a great team that's coming in here. But, I have full trust and confidence that our guys will be ready to go. It's going to be fun."

(On his thoughts towards former Rams Offensive Coordinator Matt LaFleur being hired by the Green Bay Packers as a head coach)

"Yeah, that's awesome. I talked to (Former Rams Offensive Coordinator) Matt (LaFleur) when he was going in to interview. Matt's obviously – he's one of my closest friends. So, to see that for him, you couldn't be more excited. He's a great football coach. Got a great understanding from offensive football. Really, a very – he's just such a great guy, where he cares about people. He's going to be honest with his communication. Then, he's going to be invested in working really hard and trying to help put guys in good spots. But, when you see those types of things, you can't do anything but just be really happy for a close friend. I love his family. His wife BreAnne. His two boys – Ty and Luke. So, it's an exciting thing for the (Green Bay) Packers and for Matt for sure."

(On what makes him think QB Jared Goff is better equipped to lead the Rams to a playoff victory more than he was last season)

"I think it's the same thing that we were talking about earlier – just the experience. I think he's done an excellent job of learning from that experience. I think he's a better player than he was a year ago. He's gotten better physically. I think he's got a better understanding of what we're trying to get done, what defenses are trying to do from an above the neck standpoint. I just think that he's better equipped to play at a higher level just based on getting better, focusing on the little things and doing it the right way one day at a time."

(On the status of T Andrew Whitworth's knee and if he participated in the walk-thru today)

"He did. Yeah, he was feeling good. It was a really funny collision that he ended up having in the (San Francisco) 49ers game. But, fortunately, it was kind of more of a scare than anything else. So, (T Andrew Whitworth) 'Big Whit' will be ready to go. He's been out there. He was able to take part in some things that we did last week as well. So, he's feeling good. He's feeling fresh. He's looking like a rookie the way he's moving around right now."

(On how much Whitworth's veteran leadership has meant to the entire team over the past two seasons)

"It's been incredible. Really, selfishly for me too as a coach, you get around players that have the type of experience that he has. The way that he leads is something like I really haven't seen before where, he puts his arm around guys kind of individually, interacts with those guys. But, he's got a consistency with the way that he goes about his business. He's one of those guys that he just does right all the time. We say it all the time, 'We see better than we hear.' He doesn't really have to say anything, just the way that he goes about his business, whether it's from a production standpoint or just trying to help guys get better. Being invested and being a great teammate, a great captain like he is, he's kind of demonstrated that every single day. For me, especially being able to lean on our players as much as we do where we kind of have that shared ownership for the way that we want to operate. Always providing a, 'Why' for, 'Why are we doing this?' and that kind of keeps us accountable. He's a great reference to be able to talk through where, he gives you such a good perspective from a player's standpoint that helps, I think, create an atmosphere and an

environment where coaches and players are working together and everybody's pushing in the same direction. You can't say enough good things about what he's meant to this organization."

(On if Goff's struggles over the course of the month and last year's playoff game can help him as a young quarterback going into the playoffs)

"Yeah, I think so. I think he's played pretty good the last couple weeks. I think that there's always going to be sometimes as a quarterback, you're under such a microscope where every little thing is just dissected and looked at. What I think Jared's so good about is, he's really unaffected by the outside noise. He focuses on what he can do to control a better performance or continuing to do a lot of the things he's done at a high level. What I think's really good for our football team is, we were able to cap off the year, show that we could use some of those losses as a chance to harden ourselves – really learn from it, respond the right way like we had anticipated and be able to cap the season off with two tough division wins against two teams that we have a lot of respect for and have some momentum going into the playoffs. So, I think Jared's feeling good. We know that Dallas has a great defense – (Cowboys Defensive Coordinator) Coach (Rod) Marinelli and (Cowboys Passing Game Coordinator/Defensive Backs) Coach (Kris) Richard do an excellent job. We're looking forward to the challenge though.

(On if there is any specific way he has seen Goff take a step forward over these last two weeks)

"Yeah, I just think the command that he's had. He's done a great job getting us in and out of the huddle, getting us in and out of the right plays. I think he's been a great distributor of the ball. He's gotten a variety of guys involved. He throws four touchdowns against San Fran(cisco) where, our defense did a great job getting us some short fields and then we were able to cap it off with some touchdowns. So, I just think just playing the position the right way – good decision making and getting it to his playmakers."

(On the reports of USC Offensive Coordinator Kliff Kingsbury becoming the Arizona Cardinals head coach and what he thinks of Kingsbury as an NFL head coach and how he reacts to reports saying that teams are starting to look to replicate him by hiring a young, offensive-minded coach to lead the team)

"Well, first of all for (USC Offensive Coordinator) Kliff (Kingsbury), I couldn't be happier for him. I know that he'll do a great job. We'll try to get after him twice a year. But other than that, excited for Kliff. He's a great coach, great communicator, great understanding of how to apply pressure to a defense. He's had a lot of success running a variety of different offenses and you've seen him succeed with a lot of different players, whether it be going back to (Texas) A&M, (University of) Houston even when you look at what he's done at Texas Tech when he was the head coach there. So, really excited for him. I think more than anything, it's really the Rams success that we've had. If there's one thing that you do realize over the last couple years is that, this is a product of great people around you. Whether that's (Run Game Coordinator) Aaron Kromer, (Special Teams Coordinator) John Fassel, (Defensive Coordinator) Wade Phillips – we've got (Assistant Head Coach/Linebackers Coach) Joe Barry. I mean we've got so many great coaches. It's awesome to see (Passing Game Coordinator) Shane Waldron and (Quarterbacks Coach) Zac Taylor get an opportunity to compete for jobs. So, this is a reflection, I think more than anything, of the culture that's created by the people that are here and that's coaches, players, our staff. I think that's what's flattering about it. But, I think it would be naive to think that any of this is about one person and that certainly isn't the case at all. I think if the last two years have taught me anything being in this role, it's about, you better surround yourself with a lot of people that are better than you, so that you can learn every day and not feel like you have to have the answers to things that you don't, just based on your experiences. I love the group that we're working with. It's flattering, though, for our organization."

(On LaFleur coming from his coaching tree)

"I'm too young to have a coaching tree (laughs)."

(On teams following the model of trying to find a young, offensive-minded coach like himself)

"It's certainly humbling and flattering. But, I think like anything else, it's a reflection of everybody that's been a part of this. That's what you love so much about football. But, I would say this – I'm put in a better position to succeed because you learn about how to listen, learn and then you lead based on the people that are around you here. That's why you feel good about it."

(On where the Cowboys have progressed the most over the last year)

"That's a good question. There's some different personnel, but when you really look at it, specific to the defensive side of the ball, you bring in Kris Richard when they lose (former Cowboys Linebackers Coach/Passing Game Coordinator) Coach (Matt) Eberflus. He's injected – from a just back end, where you look at some of their coverage principles, where a lot of the success that he had in Seattle, you see a lot of that carry over with some of their core coverage principles that they're running. Coach Marinelli, I've always had some much respect for him. I know him really well just through his relationship with (Assistant Head Coach/Linebackers) Coach (Joe) Barry and what a phenomenal coach he is. You just flip the tape on and you talk about the level of detail, the level of urgency that you see this defense play with on all three levels, it's a credit to these players, but I also think it's a great reflection of what a great coach he is, where you're seeing guys play at their highest level. It's really cool, too, to see a guy like (Cowboys LB) Jaylon Smith, where you look at a guy fighting, persevere back through that injury. He sure looks like the special player he was at Notre Dame the way that he's flying around with an urgency. (Cowboys DE) DeMarcus Lawrence is special. Then, (Cowboys LB Leighton) Vander Esch, you can't help but notice him. He's strong and stout at the point of attack. But, I think you see a really tough, physical defense that plays with elite effort. Then, on the offensive side of the ball, adding (Cowboys WR) Amari Cooper has been a big plus for them. He's made a bunch of plays. He's had over 700 yards receiving in the nine games he's had with them. Then, I think, (Cowboys RB Ezekiel) Elliott and (Cowboys QB) Dak Prescott are two of the best competitors in this league. Obviously, 'Zeke's gotten more involved where he's had 77 catches this year and leading the league in rushing. But then you watch the game, just seeing him play Seattle, one of the things about Dak Prescott is – I hear (Cowboys Head) Coach (Jason) Garrett mention it – the competitive spirit, you see it and it's true. Third-down-and-14, he makes a play on a QB draw. He kind of just wills his way to making plays and that's what – you can't say anything but, 'Man, he's a tough competitor.' They've been really consistent up front. I think (Cowboys C Joe) Looney has done a nice job stepping in for (Cowboys C Travis) Frederick at the center spot. (Cowboys G) Zack Martin is still one of the premier guards in this league, as is (Cowboys T Tyron) Smith at the tackle spot. Then, (Cowboys WR) Tavon Austin is always a threat to make some plays. So, it's a tough team. There's a reason why they're in the Divisional Round, why they won their division. Having had a little bit of history with them being in Washington, you know what a tough matchup it's going to be. Then, when you flip the tape on you see the same thing."

(On what kind of crowd he is expecting to see on Saturday and how it's going to impact the ability to score)

"We're hoping to see a lot of Rams fans come out. We've had great turnouts at home this year. It's been great atmospheres and environments, but Dallas is one of those franchises that travels really well. Obviously, them having (training) camp out in Oxnard (Calif.) I think helps. If they do have a good amount of fans, then we're always ready to adjust and adapt. But, we're hoping that the Rams fans come out and support us and give us that love and that support when we played the (Atlanta) Falcons."

(On the advantage of having the bye week and what message he would give to Rams fans who might want to sell their tickets to Cowboys fans for the game)

"Don't do that (laughs). I think you can go both ways. There's an element of you like to keep your rhythm and keep playing, but then they had a couple unfortunate injuries that occurred where guys might miss or they might be game-time decisions. So, I think the bye will serve us well, but I think you can look at the pros and cons to each. For us, we feel good, we're fresh. We're looking to get some guys back from injury that I think will definitely give our team a boost, but the Cowboys are playing really well right now. They had a great game against the (New York) Giants to finish out the year. They won their division beating the (Tampa Bay) Bucs and then, obviously, a big-time win against Seattle at home, which we know what a great football team they are. So, they've got some good momentum as well. What I would say is, we've been so appreciative of the support that they've (Rams fans) shown us throughout this year and it means a lot. Being able to have that home field advantage is something that we truly cherish. Hopefully, they'll make us feel that way on Saturday night and we'll give them a product they deserve."