



LOS ANGELES RAMS

Rams Head Coach Sean McVay – Media Availability – January 16, 2019

(On how the organization is leaving no stone unturned in preparation for Sunday's NFC Championship Game and why some people feel there is a rivalry between he and Saints Head Coach Sean Payton)

"Well, the first thing is, you've kind of got to make the decision just based on the circumstances that we have. If it does rain, let's provide the right resources so guys can utilize the walk-thrus, different things like that, in a covered area where we're not getting soaked because, really, there's not a lot of indoors in proximity unless we wanted to travel somewhere else. So, we felt like for us to try to keep a regulated schedule in terms of what our players are comfortable with, with their normal rhythm and routine, we wanted to do that. Then, as far as a rivalry, I think he's been doing it at really high level for a lot longer than I have. I've got a whole lot of respect for (Saints Head) Coach (Sean) Payton. He's an outstanding coach – clearly referenced by the way that his team is playing this year, how they've played over the course of his career when he's been leading the Saints. So, I don't think we're in that category yet. We've got to do things for a lot longer to be able to be mentioned in that same breath."

(On if he's also walking up and down the field on the sideline to see what the defense is doing and if that process is going on as late as he's talking into the headset to QB Jared Goff)

"Not really. You're looking at it so when guys come off you can communicate, but that's not something that we're utilizing during the course of the game or anything like that. Like we've talked about, sometimes you give certain information and you want to utilize that ability to communicate if that's something that (QB) Jared (Goff) feels like is necessary. But in a lot of instances, we're in the huddle, sometimes we're at the line of scrimmage, whether it be two-minute or no huddle where you actually really have to communicate a play, whether that be through visual hand signals or through the verbal headset. Sometimes you're looking at it, but that certainly isn't exclusive to how we operate."

(On if the offense will be limited by the noise in New Orleans)

"That's a huge advantage that a great atmosphere and environment for the home team provides. It definitely forces you to adjust and adapt and it limits your ability to communicate a lot of things that you would be able to do otherwise, if you were at home. So, that's definitely something that we have to be aware of. Fortunately, we've played in this environment earlier in the year, but I would imagine that it's going to be an even better atmosphere just based on the magnitude of the game."

(On if the Saints receivers provide a challenge for the secondary)

"Absolutely. I think they do a great job. (Saints QB) Drew (Brees) does an excellent job spreading it around, not only to the receivers, but the tight ends. They get the running backs involved in the pass game. Then, clearly the production from (Saints WR) Michael Thomas has been outstanding. Big game last week. He's really been extremely productive throughout the course of the year when you look at his numbers. Anytime he's targeted, the catch rate that he has is almost unheard of. He's playing at a really high level. Obviously, the accuracy that Drew delivers the ball with and his ability to read, recognize and move and manipulate coverage makes it really difficult. So, it's definitely going to be a challenge for our defense and our secondary, for sure."

(On if he has talked to CB Marcus Peters regarding his comments towards Coach Payton following their Week 9 matchup and if that is going to be a distraction this week and what makes him think Goff is ready to step into a championship situation)

"The first thing is, I think it was all in good fun. I think there's a competitiveness that exists. There's a lot of dialogue that goes back and forth where when you have relationships or you have a history with people – and I think (CB) Marcus (Peters) was having fun with it. I know that he has a whole lot of respect for Coach Payton and the Saints. But, part of that banter, as long as it doesn't take away from our ability to execute, I think can be fun as long as it doesn't get out of hand. I don't think anybody took it out of context where it was anything more than just, 'Hey, we're fortunate we get a chance to see these guys again,' and that's really what it is. I don't think that will be a distraction at all for Marcus' ability to play. Sometimes that can be fun. I'll talk to guys that you know or have a relationship with as well. Then, as far as for Jared, I don't think any moment is too big for him. I think he's just going to go about his normal weekly rhythm this week. Certainly, we don't shy away from what is at stake in terms of what we can accomplish, but we also know what a great challenge it is. I just think that – like you've heard us say over and over – he really doesn't allow himself to get too high, too low. I don't ever really feel like any moment is too big for him and that's why you feel confident that, you know it's a great challenge, but you do feel confident in his ability to perform and lead our offense at a high level on Sunday."

(On if there is a story that speaks to what CB Aqib Talib brings to this team off the field and in the locker room)

"I think just his experience and then how he's a guy that's had so many great experiences. Then, what I also respect a lot about him is that he's secure enough in himself to be able to use some of those things that you learn from in a positive way to be able to mentor some of his other teammates. But, he's done such a great job. He's such a smart football player. What people don't realize, my first year in coaching was (CB) Aqib's (Talib) rookie year in Tampa, so we were actually together. Just watching his growth and maturation – you always knew he was going to be a great player, but to see the talent matchup with the preparation. The way that he's been able to sustain over such a long period of time playing a cornerback spot, his ability to communicate, the way that he studies, his situational awareness – you could go on and on. But, I also think that he's a charismatic guy. He's fun to be around. You're always laughing with him. If you're in a not great mood and you want to get in a better mood, go hang out with Aqib Talib. He'll get you laughing. He's one of those guys that just has a great presence about himself and you can't help but feel good about yourself anytime you're around him. He's been huge for our football team."

(On how big of an impact Run Game Coordinator Aaron Kromer has on creating the gameplan and taking advantage of opponents' tells and tendencies)

"I think he does a great job. I think our guys probably thought they knew a little bit more than what they did, too. So, I think there's an element of there's some regulated things, but there was a handful of instances where we thought something was going to be one thing and it ended up being another. That is part of the preparation you study. I think in a lot of ways, you try to do a good job – whether it's offense, defense, special teams, from a self-scout standpoint. But then there also is the element of let's line up and play and even if you do know what we're doing, it's about the fundamentals, the technique, the ability to execute. But, (Run Game Coordinator) Coach (Aaron) Kromer has been outstanding. I've learned so much from him. Couldn't be more thankful to work with a guy like that that's been instrumental in our success. I know that I've become a better coach from being around him and the way that he mentors those guys. You just talk to those linemen, ask them what they think about him, and that says as much as you need to know because he's got great techniques that he's teaching them, but then he's also invested in them as people where he cares about them. That's why he's a phenomenal coach."

(On how the receiving corps has evolved since WR Cooper Kupp's season-ending injury, especially with TE Gerald Everett, TE Tyler Higbee and WR Josh Reynolds)

"Yeah, those guys have done a great job. Certainly, we know what a great football player (WR) Cooper (Kupp) is. He's always missed any time he's not out there, but I think it has presented a great opportunity for guys to step up and get some chances and some snaps that they wouldn't have gotten otherwise. Clearly, (WR) Josh (Reynolds) has been the biggest beneficiary of that and I think he's done a great job getting better and better. You look at just some of the opportunities, whether he's carrying the football, whether he's blocking and digging out a safety in run support, whether he's winning on a man-to-man route

on a second-down-and-10. He's doing a lot of really good things right now. (TE) Gerald Everett continues to get better and better and like we've said about (TE) Tyler Higbee, he's playing like a complete tight end where he's demonstrating the ability to play in-line, in space, making plays in the pass game, protecting, doing a great job blocking. Really, those three guys have done a nice job. Certainly, we miss our guy Cooper, but it's been good to see those guys grow and they've gotten a lot better, for sure."

(On his memories working in Washington with now 49ers Head Coach Kyle Shanahan and Packers Head Coach Matt LaFleur and what kind of thoughts he has when thinking back to that time)

"I think, in a lot of ways, you'd like to think that it's a similar environment that we try to create here. I remember it was some younger guys, but then there was also some great veteran coaches where everybody was positively pushing each other to get better, but it was in a fun, competitive way where when you're around people that are better than you, you can't help but get better. I think that type of approach, the level of detail that those guys operate with, you feel like, 'Alright, I better be on this level or you're going to get left behind.' I learned a lot from those guys. I think it started with (49ers Head) Coach (Kyle) Shanahan's leadership and kind of the command that he had with regards to the standards, the way that we operate, the detail that he expects on every little thing that you do and how that translates to consistent performances. Really, so happy for (Packers Head Coach) Matt (LaFleur), like we've talked about. You guys know, Kyle has taught me so much about the game of football. Then, I'd like to think that here where we've got a great mix of some veteran coaches that we can definitely learn from and then some younger guys that have a lot of respect for the game, but also trying to learn and always kind of just figuring out ways to get better. I think that creates a good atmosphere and environment that's conducive for that daily improvement like we talk about."

(On how RB Todd Gurley's knee came out of the game against the Cowboys and if they'll continue to be a little cautious with him in practice this week)

"We would do that regardless. That's just because of the workload that he's had. So, he'll take a similar workload, as what he would whether he had the knee (injury) or not. That's just based on the way that we've kind of dealt with (RB) Todd (Gurley II) even going back to last year. He felt good. He looked pretty explosive on a couple of those runs. It was great to get him out there. Then, I thought because we were able to get so many different carries off, it enabled both those backs to be able to get into a rhythm. Those are positive problems where you're able to do that. Certainly, sometimes the game doesn't dictate or allow you to be able to do that, but I thought as a result of our execution and the way that the backs ran and (Running Backs Coach) Skip (Peete) having those guys ready to go, we were able to get a lot of carries off. That was great for both those guys."

(On if it makes it any easier being the team's third trip to New Orleans this season and the difference that RB C.J. Anderson has brought to the offense)

"Really, the preseason game is a different approach, but I do think there is a comfort level with just having been there, knowing kind of where the locker room is. But, I do think you could look at – there's pluses and minuses to both. If it's the first time you're playing them, there's a familiarity that doesn't exist on both sides. There is in this instance where, really, we played one game against them. In the preseason game, I don't think either team was showing much, but it's going to be an outstanding challenge. I think (Saints Defensive Coordinator) Coach (Dennis) Allen, when you really look at it just from their trajectory of where they've gone since we've played them, their offense is still playing unbelievable football where they can beat you running it, they can beat you throwing it. They do a great job of playing to win games. That's what I've been so impressed with Coach Payton is he understands how to win a football game and set his team up for success, then the players are making plays. Defensively, Coach Allen has done a great job. You really look at the way that they've played over the last half of the season, mixing it up. They're great against the run, they play sound coverage principles and they mix it up and then he picks and chooses his spots to activate some of those pressures which are very challenging. And they've got great players. Then, special teams, they do a lot of things similar to us where they've got the element of some of their players that can do some different things, whether it be the fakes or some of the ways that they can put themselves in those advantageous spots. It's going to be a great challenge for us, but something we're definitely looking forward to."

(On Gurley and Anderson being similar to a two-headed monster)

"I think, really, the last three weeks, I think it's been a credit to our ability to be able to sustain some drives and to be able to stay ahead of the chains so you can get some more runs off. C.J.'s done an outstanding job. Like I've said, I've been so impressed with his ability to come in here immediately, pick it up – pick up the system. But then also, he's a great runner. He's got a great feel for leveling things off. He's got quick feet through the hole and then when he gets to the second and third levels, he seamlessly does work edges on people and he's always falling forward. That's been a really big positive for us. (RB) John Kelly has gotten a chance to grow and do some good things. Then, obviously, getting Todd back with all the different things he can do, does give us a nice two-headed monster. But, we've got to be able to sustain drives and be able to get consecutive runs off to get both those guys going. But, C.J.'s been a big boost to us, for sure."

(On DT Aaron Donald and DT Ndamukong Suh's ability to get through the Saints offensive line and disrupt Saints QB Drew Brees)

"Yeah, they've been great all year. I think they do a great job of mixing it up – they're changing the launch point, they're running it downhill on you, they're running playactions. They're getting into some empty, where they've got guys in nudge positions on the edges, so, it's a great challenge. The mixture of what they do and then the timing and rhythm that (Saints QB) Drew (Brees) plays with, makes it really difficult to be able to hit home on him. But, I thought our guys played really well last week, was really impressed. Obviously, (DT) Aaron (Donald) continues to play at an extremely consistent level. But, I thought (DT) Ndamukong Suh had his best game of the year. You could see, he had a look in his eyes where he was ready to go. It showed up with the way that he played throughout the course of the night. (DL) Michael Brockers made some plays. Certainly, that's going to be needed again this week to be able to come away with a win."

(On being in the final four with head coaches that have won conference championships and what makes him think that this moment isn't too big for him)

"The people around you. I think it goes back to those same things. You've got people that have been through these experiences. You talk to a lot of coaches that have been a part of conference championships – played in and won Super Bowls. So, really, we want to keep a consistent routine. Like we said, we know the magnitude of this game. But, I think as long as we do a great job with our planning, our practice, our preparation, hopefully it'll lead to a good performance from our players and hopefully it'll lead to good decision making by us, as coaches."

(On how CB Aqib Talib's presence will change what he can do on defense compared to last time they played the Saints without Talib)

"Yeah, it gives you some flexibility. I just think his command and his ability to communicate on the back end – formation, concept recognition, helping guys get aligned because they do such a great job with the variety of personnel groupings that they present. So, sometimes we're matching or changing in and out and that late communication is something that's really important to be able to get aligned and then be able to react accordingly. So, his presence just based on what a productive player he is but also his ability to communicate, will hopefully be a big boost for us."

(On how concerned he is with the Saints being five-for-five in the red zone and seven-of-12 on third down last time the Rams faced them in Week 9 and how concerned he is about those situations and how important it will be in determining the winner of this week)

"It'll be huge. I think, when you really look at it, to be able to finish drives with touchdowns, from an offensive perspective, ends up being a lot of times the difference in winning and losing the game and then being able to sustain drives on the third downs. So, the situations are always a key and crucial point in addition to those turnovers. They did a great job being able to execute and then when you flip it over offensively, we didn't punch it in on a couple. We ended up getting stopped on the fake field goal. So, those are the types of plays that, if we expect to win this game against the caliber of opponent we're going against, we've got to do a better job on both sides of the ball situationally. That's something that's a big point of emphasis, without a doubt."