



## LOS ANGELES RAMS

### Rams Head Coach Sean McVay – Media Availability – January 24, 2019

**(On having so many people in attendance to celebrate his birthday)**

"I don't think that's why they're here (laughs)."

**(On how he will celebrate him today and how he feels about being the youngest head coach to ever play in a Super Bowl)**

"I've never really been a big birthday guy. I think to be able to be practicing right now is a blessing. To be working with our players, our coaches, it means that we made it to this final step and now we've got to see if we can finish. We've got a great opportunity to have two good weeks of preparation. Really, today started our first day of that prep. Guys were locked in and it certainly is a blessing, but we're just taking it one day at a time. A good birthday present would be let's take care of business over the next couple weeks, put ourselves in a position to compete to the best of our ability."

**(On one thing that he has warned the team about ahead of arriving in Atlanta)**

"Really, just taking care of everything – your family and friends, tickets, all that stuff. We've gotten that all out of the way where players and coaches have handled all that. Understanding that it's a great opportunity. The media coverage that's going to be there – there's a lot of different things that can allow us to be distracted and there's certain obligations that we have to take care of and handle ourselves like professionals. But, then when we are locked in, when we go out to Flowery Branch (Georgia) to practice, we've got to do a great job locking in and continuing to really progressively build until Sunday when we're kicking off."

**(On the challenge of facing a coach like Bill Belichick with his defensive knowledge on a stage like the Super Bowl)**

"It's a great challenge for our football team because these guys are the epitome of, really, the standard, the consistency at which you operate. I think (Patriots Head) Coach (Bill) Belichick, he certainly has had a lot of success on defense, but he's been instrumental on offense, special teams. His success speaks for itself. Like I've said before, I'm a fan of coaching. I have so much respect for the Patriots organization, the way they operate, the way that he consistently leads, puts his players in positions to really have success. Then, that's something – it's an incredible opportunity for us to compete against them. Our players have earned the right to be able to play in this game. Our coaches have done a great job and, really, it's about the Rams versus the Patriots – doing an excellent job with that. But, to get a chance to go against a team and an organization like this is something that we're excited about, but you have a lot of respect for them."

**(On the status of K Greg Zuerlein)**

"Yeah, so (K) Greg (Zuerlein), he really just had a foot strain. It's his plant foot. We're just being extra cautious with regards to kind of having him in a boot, doing treatments, things like that. Don't anticipate or expect it to be anything that prevents him from being able to play in the game. Being extra cautious with it, but he'll be okay."

**(On if the injury occurred during the game or if it's something he has been playing through)**

"During the game. It was something that came up during the game, but didn't seem like it affected him, did it? (laughs)"

**(On what P Johnny Hekker has meant to this team as a punter and a trick-play master)**

"You guys that have been around (P) Johnny (Hekker), too, couldn't be more impressed with just the way that he handles himself. He's got a nice presence about himself. He's a phenomenal athlete, really, where he's one of those guys that can do everything. You look at just the different things that he's attempting to do with the way that he changes up some of his punts, based on where we're at, the types of punts that he has. But, then the athleticism – if you didn't know any better, he looks like a quarterback. He's got a nice, natural stroke. He can make big-time plays. He can do a variety of different things with that athleticism, not exclusive to throwing it, but also being able to run. He's a guy that's been consistently voted – almost unanimously – as a captain by his teammates. So, I think that says as much as anything with the way that he's viewed by his peers. Clearly, that play that he and (CB) Sam (Shields) made the other day was kind of something that sparked a chance to really get us going when we hadn't really gotten any momentum offensively. (Special Teams Coordinator) 'Bones' (John Fassel) did a great job kind of identifying some of those looks. We felt confident and then the players delivered. But, Johnny has been outstanding. You can't say enough good things about him."

**(On if he does anything to add to the team's film study or enhance Super Bowl experience among his players)**

"I think, really, it's about playing in a big-time game. We don't shy away from that, but I've actually heard Coach (Bill) Belichick say – when you talk about just the experience – (Hall of Fame Linebacker) Lawrence Taylor's first Super Bowl, he was pretty impactful as well. So, it's never too soon to be able to make a big impact in a big-time game. We certainly have a respect for that experience that the Patriots specifically have. We've got some guys on our team that do have that experience, but we've also got some really good football players that you feel like no moment is too big for them. We want to be consistent with our approach with regards to preparation. We'll really treat this week very similar to as if we're playing this week and then kind of tighten the screws as we get to Atlanta over the next couple weeks, just to make sure that guys feel confident and understand the magnitude of the game, some of the different distractions. But, if they feel like they have that ownership, then I think they'll be able to go compete with a quieted mind and a confidence that's earned over the next couple weeks. We know that it's a big-time game, but I think our guys – whether they have played in this game before, whether they haven't – we expect them to play good football. When that ball is kicked off, it's just like any other game. Certainly, you don't shy away from the magnitude, but you're still playing football."

**(On what it means to him to be going back to Atlanta and sharing this moment with some people who helped shape him)**

"Yeah, it means I've got a lot more people bothering me about tickets (laughs). No, it – Atlanta, specifically where I went to high school at Marist, that place has been great to me. So many influential coaches that really pour into you. They teach you about how to be a man, how to handle – whether it be success or some adversity – and that's what's real. Some of my closest friends in life are guys that I was able to play high school football with. So, there's a lot of relationships that there's people that will be able to be at that game that are very important to me, but this is about the Rams going and playing in the Super Bowl. It is unique that it's in Atlanta, but we're going there to try to win a football game and then there will be some people that are very special to me and my family that'll get a chance to not have to travel too far to be there as well."

**(On what stood out to him about QB Jared Goff's performance against the Saints and if he has any concerns about Goff's ability to play well from the start on football's biggest stage)**

"I don't so. I think what stood out is the way that he was able to weather the storm. I think, really, that mental toughness that was displayed by our team as a whole, and (QB) Jared (Goff) kind of personified that with the way that he handled the game. I thought just his overall command, making big-time throws when we needed it the most. I thought the throw to (WR) Brandin Cooks was outstanding, the off-schedule third down to (TE) Gerald Everett in a drive that we had to have. Then, when you really look at the two throws he made in the overtime period, those are two of the greatest throws. I thought he made a lot of great throws where he's changing the launch point. He's coming out to his left, he's got a guy right in his face, he ends up delivering a great ball, (TE) Tyler Higbee makes a great catch where he's able to get a positive game. Then, a couple plays later, (Saints DE) Cam Jordan is right in the backfield, as well as (Saints S) Vonn Bell, where

he's basically booting out, he's got his back to the defense, he finds a way to retreat with some depth and get it to Higbee for an unbelievable seven-yard completion that ends up getting us inside of 60 (yards) for the field goal range. Then, Brandin Cooks, to talk about a smart football player having the presence – when I give him a terrible play call on the third down – to drop it knowing that it would have been a negative play where he intentionally drops it. But, I just thought Jared's ability to be at his best when his best was required. The competitive greatness showed up in a big way. That noise, like we said, that was something that I've never been a part of and you've been in a lot of atmospheres that are unbelievably loud. That was something that you have never experienced before. I know Jared and I both felt the same way. He just kind of handled it exactly like a veteran – even-keeled, calm demeanor – kind of like what we talk about all the time. We're very confident in his ability to lead us, knowing that it's a big game like we've said, but I think Jared will be himself, which is exactly what we want him to be."

**(On what Cooks can bring to the room given his experience in the Super Bowl and what he saw in him before the trade that made him think Cooks could fit in the Rams system)**

"I think what you see -- I didn't really know Brandin as a person, which makes you like him even that much more when you really get to know the human being. But, what you see is clear production, going back to his career when him and (QB Sean) Mannion are doing their thing. Then, when you just see, whether it was in New Orleans or the one year that he had in New England, he's got the ability to do a variety of different things. Clearly, what people always recognize is his ability to stretch the top-shelf of the defense, track the deep ball. But, I think he's demonstrated that he's a complete receiver, whether it's taking jet sweeps, winning on quick games, creating after the catch on screens, being able to run the intermediate cuts where you're aggressively having to attack the football. I think it's just that production. Then, when you get around him, the way that he goes about his business, you talk about a guy that's a focused person every single day, focused on getting better. Meticulous with regards to his detail, how he operates. Locked in, in the meetings. You love being around guys like that. I love Brandin Cooks and I think even that much more highly of him after spending time with him. He's one of those guys that can't help but raise the level of performance and expectations for the people around him because of the way that he goes about his business every single day. But certainly, he and both (CB) Aqib (Talib) provide an experience in New England both having played in Super Bowls, Aqib having won one when he was in (Denver). That definitely is something that you draw on to communicate with your players, but these guys are just great football players that have had a chance to play for a great organization and had a lot of success."

**(On he plans to pressure Patriots QB Tom Brady and cover the Patriots wide receivers)**

"Yeah, it's a great challenge. I mean, there's a reason why he's arguably one of the greatest of all time, because he does an excellent job of identifying whatever defensive structure you're in, whether you want to pressure, whether you want to try to put pressure with a four-man rush and play loaded zone or some man principles behind it. He's got such an ownership on being able to get the ball out of his hand in a timely manner and then he's got guys that can separate. So, it's got to be a good mixture. We've got to identify the things that we want to be able to stop. Any time that you can try to move the quarterback off of his spot, whether that's interior or edge pressure, just being able to force them to move where they're not able to just set their feet and work in rhythm – certainly easier said than done, but that's going to be a key to try to get him off of his rhythm, which not many people have success doing."

**(On playing Patriots WR Julian Edelman in college and what he learned from him and if there was any rivalry at the time)**

"Not really, just because we both played offense. But, I remember, Chris Shula, who's our assistant linebackers coach, our defensive guys always had so much respect for him. You could see he was a great quarterback that – he could throw it, but he also had the ability to create with his legs. They used him on some options – some of the zone read – different things like that. Then, you could see when New England drafted him to be able to be a punt returner and a receiver that – he was a guy that was just an elite competitor. But, we didn't really have much interaction back then. But, I remember he was definitely a really productive player then and I'm not surprised how great of a player he's become in the NFL."

**(On what it is about the Rams' defensive front that has sold out against the run and keeping opposing offenses to sub 100-yards rushing in two postseason games)**

"I think, really, it's predicated on what the situation is. But, those guys specifically, I think they've just done a great job of winning one-on-ones, hitting blocks up front. I think they're really playing with violence. (DT Ndamukong) Suh starting inside out, has done a great job. When he's gotten his one-on-one opportunities or even when you talk about just getting guys in combination blocks disconnected and on different levels. I think those three interior players that have really shown up for us with Suh, (DT) Aaron (Donald) and (DL Michael) 'Brock' (Brockers) have played violent at the point of attack. Then, you've got two guys setting the edge with (OLB) Samson (Ebukam) and (OLB) Dante (Fowler Jr.) really coming off. Then, I think you've seen (LB) Mark Barron play really good football the last couple weeks as well. (LB) Cory's (Littleton) continued to be really consistent. Then, if our secondary guys are asked to be part of that run fit as a crack-replace corner or some of our safeties based on, what coverage contour we're playing, I think those guys have come up and we've tackled well – getting 11 hats to the football. I think it starts, really, where it's been the first level to the second and third. But, everybody getting there, getting their cleats in the ground, understanding how to keep it sound, gap integrity and I think (Defensive Coordinator) Wade's (Phillips) done an excellent job, in addition to our defensive coaching staff of putting these guys in the positions to have the success and then they're ultimately delivering in a big way."

**(On 'The Patriot Way' and why he thinks that culture works in the NFL and how he would compare it to the culture that he's brought to the Rams)**

"Well, I can't speak on what goes on in their building, but I know when you just look at it from an outside-in perspective and just from afar, you see extremely detailed players. You see a well-coached team, they're disciplined. You hear this saying that, 'More games are lost than they are won in this league.' They're a team that never beats themselves. They handle situations really well. You can just see, they've got that mental toughness that we would like to hope that our team personifies as well. No matter what circumstance comes up, they just keep competing, they keep battling – they're a resilient group. But, I think it's definitely a credit to the leadership that they have, starting with (Patriots Head) Coach (Bill) Belichick. Their players are bought in and they've consistently delivered and produced at a level that's unmatched. So, I would imagine that's what it is, but I can't speak to what goes on in their building."