



Los Angeles Rams Transcripts - Head Coach Sean McVay, Linebacker Bobby Wagner, Quarterback Baker Mayfield - Wednesday, January 4, 2023

Head Coach Sean McVay

(Opening remarks)

"I want to start off, thoughts and prayers are with (Bills S) Damar Hamlin and his family. When you're watching that the other night and the emotions that you feel, sometimes you get so caught up in the competition in this game and you don't realize the sacrifice and the things that these players do to put themselves out there for a job, but also for the entertainment. It's gut wrenching, it's chilling, it's emotions that you can't even begin to describe. You just pray for a full recovery. In the midst of some of these things, you do see some good things in terms of the response, the empathy, the ability for people to come together for something that's way bigger than the game of football. You just pray for a full recovery for him. It's one of those deals that you can't even describe it and you've never seen anything like it, I know I haven't. You're not going to pretend to know how to navigate situations that you've never been through. And this is where you listen, you try to learn, you try to be empathetic to the player's perspective. Some of our guys obviously know Damar, and it's a close-knit community in this NFL. I thought (Bills Head) Coach (Sean) McDermott and (Bengals Head) Coach (Zac) Taylor handled things the right way, but there's never a right way to take away the pain that I'm sure so many people are

feeling. You just keep him in our thoughts and prayers, and I know that's heavy on you guys and all of us, and it sure keeps things in perspective for you.”

(On how he addressed what transpired with Damar Hamlin with the team)

“I think it's really similar to kind of what I had just said. You acknowledge the situation, you want to make sure that you're understanding of how they feel because it's one thing for me as a coach, but I'm sitting on the sideline. They're the ones that are out there. I'm sure there's an incredible amount of emotions that these guys are feeling, and then not to mention the emotions that their loved ones feel as they go out there and they see somebody else. Like I had said, it's more about listening, learning. You talk about an impressive guy that has such a great perspective and a wisdom that is wise beyond his years in (LB) Bobby Wagner, but we've got so many special guys in that locker room. I think the most important thing is understanding this is bigger than football. How do they feel? How can we equip them with the necessary resources and support to work through these types of things? You don't ever want to become numb to these types of things, but you want to make sure that you're understanding and you're there for these guys and you're setting them up whether it's just being a listening ear from my vantage point, whether it's their teammates or counselors or team pastors that we have. We have a lot of really good resources that can try to help create an understanding and help these guys work through this while not ever minimizing what a serious thing this is. Damar and his family are at the forefront of our minds.”

(On if he was watching the Bengals-Bills game on Monday night)

“I was. I was actually on the phone with somebody and I had it on a little bit of a delay and I could hear the person I was talking to their wife in the background, you could hear the reaction was just pure shock. Then I ended up catching up, and just the pit in your stomach and the uncertainty. You couldn't exactly see, like I'm sure you guys, what had gone on, but it was really strange. (A) routine

play, pops up, goes down, but then the reactions from the guys you knew this is different than anything you've seen.”

(On his reaction as a coach to the reaction to the players on the field)

“It's hard for me to even say, I don't know. I just know that you're just feeling this pit in your gut and you're just immediately praying that he's going to be okay. It's one of those deals and then what was nine minutes probably seemed like an hour's worth of time. I thought with the appropriate understanding that this is something you've never gone through, I thought (Monday Night Football broadcasters) Troy (Aikman) and Joe (Buck) and Lisa Salters did an incredible job of acknowledging what was going on while also making it very apparent what everybody felt that this is way bigger than the game of football. It's one of those deals that I think probably all of us are still... you don't know exactly how to describe it, but you know it's a terrible thing, and you just hope that what seems to be an incredibly special young man makes a full recovery. It's hard to fathom.”

(On if it is tough to get ready to play this week will all the emotion)

“I think it is. I think you don't minimize what a big deal that is and how important it is. I think with the appropriate emotion and empathy, you don't ever say that you're going to just be normal as is. I think you acknowledge it, but you do have to be able to move forward in the right way while also being understanding of the amazing range of emotions that I'm sure so many different people are feeling. That's the best way that I know how to go about it is asking the right questions, but also then making sure you have the appropriate understanding and then how do we best heal and move forward the right way while not ever minimizing what a serious thing this is.”

(On if he has had any conversations with players who have expressed that they are not ready to play this week against Seattle)

"I'd rather keep those things. If guys want to be able to share that with you guys... I think the most important thing is getting an understanding for guys, and they know from my vantage point that whatever they're feeling, I support them unconditionally and 100%. But if any of those guys do feel that way and they want to be able to share that, I would prefer to let them kind of share that with you guys."

(On if he has spoken to Zac Taylor)

"No, I have not."

(On how he expects Bobby Wagner to play and react in his return to Seattle)

"I expect him to play like he's consistently played. He's a great competitor, he's a great leader, he elevates people around him. Kind of like what I've said before, the thing that's special about Bobby is how steady and how consistent he is. He played great against these guys the last time, but he's played great in a lot of games this year and I expect him to be able to do the same and bring people with him. It would be great if we could play the way that we're capable of and end what's been a really challenging year on a bright note and a bright spot because I think one of the things that is a hallmark of this team that I'll forever be grateful for and always remember is the resilience of this group. We've talked a lot about overcoming adversity or setbacks or things going anything but what we had anticipated for a variety of reasons, but these guys and their ability to be able to continue to come to work, do everything that we ask, and compete at their highest level has been something that I've learned a lot from these guys. I want to be able to cap this season off on the right note with that same sort of character, courage, and ability to go compete at the level that we're capable of."

(On if there would be anyone listed as a non-participant on the injury

report because they need a day to process)

“There wouldn’t be anyone in that situation today.”

(On if this season has changed him)

“I don't know about change, but you've learned a lot. I'd like to think that you use it as a growth experience. To say that I have learned a lot of things about myself, both good and bad, I think that would be fair to say. However you want to look at it, you realize how fortunate and blessed I've been to be in a situation where you're surrounded by so many good people, and we've been able to stay relatively healthy and that's led to us having fairly consistent results. This year has been, in my opinion from just what I can control, professional failure. That's been humbling, it's been challenging. I think it's revealed some things that maybe I wouldn't have known about myself that you have to be able to deal with and acknowledge accordingly, but if you do it the right way, I do believe you can be stronger. It has been something that I think every experience you always are able to learn from. Some might be good, some might be bad, but I do believe that this will be a year you'll look back on and you'll take a lot of things that you can't really learn unless you do go through those hard things. Because if you had asked me if we had gone through this, how would you handle it? I probably would've answered you differently last year thinking that maybe you're a little bit more equipped to handle it in a way that's better in terms of internally. Because it's one thing to be able to handle things externally, it's another thing to know exactly how much it bothers you and eats at you. Those are things that you want to continue to grow and be equipped with the appropriate amount of resilience and the stillness and the steadiness internally to be the leader and the coach that these players and these coaches deserve from the role that I'm charged with. That has been something that no doubt about it... I don't know if changed as much as growing, challenging, revealing some things that I am grateful for even though you don't want to have to go through it again. There's no doubt about it that these will be lessons that I am

confident will make me better and a more whole person and man and leader moving forward.”

(On why he admired how Zac Taylor and Sean McDermott handled the situation with Damar Hamlin)

“There's not a manual on how you handle anything like that other than trusting your gut, being considerate to the human being way before anything about football. I did see a couple of the things that Zac had mentioned from earlier today where he talked about Sean immediately saying, ‘Hey, I can't even begin to think about coaching a game right now. I need to be with Damar.’ There wasn't a doubt in my mind, I don't know what was being said, but you could see that game wasn't going to be played. I could feel from my sense, and I could be totally wrong, but the sense that I got from both Sean and Zac is they knew this was way bigger than football. This is about the human being. This is about understanding how we handle stuff like this and this isn't the time to play a game, this is a time to be as supportive and understanding to a uniquely challenging situation for Damar Hamlin and his family. That was what I thought was reflected and that's where I think you have respect for the way that they did handle that.”

Linebacker Bobby Wagner

(On the discussion they had as a team about what happened on Monday night to Buffalo Bills S Damar Hamlin)

“The discussions that we had were kind of like, ‘What are the protocols for something like this? If something like this was to happen to one of us, what are the protocols?’ Obviously, you saw everybody on the Bills do a good job of handling the situation and getting them to where he needed to be as safe as possible. And so a lot of it is that, reassuring that they're proper protocols in place for you, and your safety, and things of that nature. Obviously, we're

praying for him and wanting him to be healthy and be safe and be good. So I think like the rest of the world, we're kind of just waiting and seeing all the news that could come out. I was kind of unfortunately part of something like this with (Former Seattle Seahawks WR) Ricardo Lockette. (It) wasn't as extreme. But if the Seahawks didn't do everything that they did, one wrong move, one wrong thing, Ricardo wouldn't even be here today. And so I think you kind of just remind people of that and just try to let people talk about how they're feeling and respect people's feelings, respect people, how they feel, whether they have thoughts about the game or whatever the case may be. I think the biggest thing is just talking about them, expressing them, letting them out and not holding them in and trying to make a decision or think about these things by yourself. And so just kind of just reiterating that you're not by yourself, you're not the only person that saw this, the whole world saw this. And you don't have to be the only person that deals with this or deals with those thoughts or have those thoughts. And so that was kind of the biggest thing to be honest.”

(On if Head Coach Sean McVay has addressed the situation)

“Yeah, he's who started the conversation. He started the conversation, opened up a team meeting about that. And then I think as the conversation went on and moved to player's feelings, how they felt about what they saw, obviously the fears that are real, the emotions that are real, and obviously prayer that is real. And so that was kind of the biggest thing.”

(On how he balances the fear and shock from this situation as a player and playing this next week)

“It's hard for me to answer for everybody, to be honest. I've been in the league for 11 years so I've seen a lot of stuff. I think I was on Twitter or something, it reminded me of a situation in 2012 that was kind of unfortunate where a player shot and killed himself in the parking lot in front of the coaches and things of that nature, to Ricardo, to this moment. So there's been moments throughout

my career that you've had these traumatic experiences and you have to find a way to deal with them. And I think the best way to deal with them is expressing those feelings. I think the thing that we're kind of taught to do in this sport because it's such a quote on quote 'manly sport' is to hide your feelings, hide your emotions, and any expression of these feelings or emotions makes you less of a man or emasculates you. I think that's a myth, like talking about your feelings and talking about things that affects you mentally, physically are more manly than anything because it takes a lot of courage to talk about those things. So you talk about those feelings, you express those feelings, you feel those feelings, and you understand there's a job to do at the end of the day and you find your way to do it. I lost my mom, so I know how to compartmentalize stuff pretty well."

(On his feelings about seeing Damar Hamlin collapse after making a hit that would be a similar hit that he would make during a game)

"Yeah, I've never seen anything like that, you know? Honestly, I wasn't even watching the game. I was on the phone doing something and my friend came into the room and was like, 'Yo, you got to come see this.' And I knew it was something for him to kind of come in and say like, 'You got to see this.' So when I watched it, it was just kind of like everybody else, you're shocked like, 'What just happened?' And then you're just paying attention, you're watching the long breaks, the nine minutes, now you're just trying to get information. And so that whole time you're just trying to get information and wondering if the league's going to do the right thing and just call the game because the game wasn't important at that moment. A person's life was more important than anybody seeing that game and so I think I kind of felt like a lot of people in that situation. But again, like I said, I've been around this game for a long time. I've watched (Former Seattle Seahawks Defensive End) Cliff Avril have a neck injury. I watched (Former Seattle Seahawks S) Kam Chancellor to have a neck injury off of routine plays or things that didn't seem like big deals at the time.

But after practice or after the game and you got the test, you realize that they were one move or one hit away from something serious happening. It's the game that we play and I think it's important that people realize that we have pads, we have helmets, we have all these different things, we work out, we look big, but we are humans at the end of the day and we are real people at the end of the day, and we go through a lot of things that we talk about, and unfortunately, we go through a lot of things that we don't talk about. And so again, like I said my mentality is pretty strong. My mindset is pretty strong.”

(On if there are guys feeling that they should not play this week)

“It's hard for me to speak for them because I'm like everybody else, I watched from a distance. They were right there. They saw stuff that we never saw. We hear reports, we hear what they say a person looked like, what they say this looks like, but they saw stuff that we didn't see. So as far as like them and what they're going to do, I think that is solely up to them and it's solely up to those two teams because those two teams were in a position that no one else was in. They saw it firsthand, they were right there, they were looking, you see the looks on their faces, you see how they reacted to certain things. So that's a different experience than what we (had) as spectators.”

(On his emotions going back to Seattle with a chance to spoil their playoff chances)

“It's a lot of emotions, man, to be honest, but like I said last time I played them, I'm a master of my emotions. But it's going into a stadium I've been thousands of times, played hundreds of times, and to be in a position to spoil their playoff hopes is always a good position, something worth playing for. It will be fun to go back there, be back in front of those fans that I spend so much time (around) and it should be a fun game.”

(On why it's or not important to control their emotions while playing the

game)

“I don't know if it's more so that or more so just in life. I think life has so many different things. You have so many different aspects of life that happen that you have to control your emotions. You don't want to react always out of anger because then when everything settles down or when everything calms down, you realize that maybe that reaction that you had in the moment wasn't the right reaction. And so a lot of it is just trying to have the right reaction for whatever it is in that moment. So when you do kind of process later on or you do kind of process when you weigh and the emotions are down, you feel better about the decisions and you live without regret.”

(On what he'll let himself feel as he walks into Lumen Field)

“The energy, the crowd, the moments that I had there. For me, my last time I played there wasn't a great one so I'm just blessed to be able to have an opportunity to not have that be my last play at that field.”

(On what he appreciates most from his time in Seattle)

“I just think the love, to be honest, because even especially coming from Los Angeles, Ontario area to Utah to Seattle, that really became my second home and it's a place where I grew up. I grew up in California, but really, 21, I was on my own, making my own decisions, doing my own thing. I didn't have the parents controlling everything, that's really where I grew up and they accepted me. They showed a lot of love and so I'm forever grateful.”

(On if he thinks the league has adequately communicated mental health services for players)

“I think so. I think there's obviously a lot more conversation going around than it once was when I first got into the league. I think it wasn't really even a thing when I first got into the league it was just be tough and tough it through. So they're definitely moving in the right direction, and I think our world in general, I

think we're more open to therapy, we're more open to concepts that we were kind of closed off too because again, doing something like that emasculated you so I think that is a little bit more open now than it was when I first got into league.”

(On if he will be as animated on Sunday as he was the during the first game against Seattle)

“Again, I think there was a reason for that and I think it's different. I'm pretty sure you played your family before in basketball, golf or whatever. When you play your friend or like that person you met over there, y'all playing, y'all might talk a little trash, it is what it is, but when you're playing your family member that knows your deepest, darkest secrets and knows exactly what to say to you to make you feel a certain type of way and also you're playing the organization that you feel gave up on you, so it was warranted to be honest. And then again, I'm playing against people I know how to push their buttons too, so I know exactly what to say to them to make them mad and I did that.”

Quarterback Baker Mayfield

(On his thoughts about the incident with Bills S Damar Hamlin)

“I can't recall anything ever being like that. Yeah, it was an awful, awful thing. The one thing I can say right now is that I think it brought a lot of people together in prayer and in good spirits. Obviously, I can say that now on Wednesday that they've been saying that there's improvement, so thank God, but in the moment, it's scary. We talked about it this morning. It looked like an ordinary play and that's the scary part so not much that you really look at it and say, ‘Oh, if somebody did this differently...’ It really did look like an ordinary play so it's tough to watch and to see somebody collapse like that and obviously, they didn't show replays like that, but you could tell on the player's reactions, the teammates and all that. So it's tough. This is a violent sport, but

that's about broken bones and different injuries like that, not life and death, so this is something I think we're all going through for the first time.”

(On if he also thinks about how Bengals WR Tee Higgin in the situation)

“Yeah, I did see the...I didn't read the details on it, but I saw what his uncle said, ‘The criticism of Tee Higgins needs to stop,’ which I think that's very fair to say. So, like I said, it looked like an ordinary play. I don't think we'll know the details for a while about what exactly went wrong and that's right, because that's for Damar's privacy and his family's privacy and I wish everybody would respect that and I hope so. So, like I said, we're just hoping and praying that he's going to be alright and make a full recovery. Football's a secondary thought when it comes to a situation like this. And Tee Higgins I'm sure is going through it as well, being personally involved in it, but that's not on him. I think it was a freak accident and we'll see how it happened.”

(On how he's processing such an unprecedented injury)

“It's tough to process. I think it takes time, especially when you think about him as a human being instead of just a football player. It's tough to process. I don't think there's a right way to do it. I think it just takes time. We talked about it as a team this morning, I think it takes actually speaking your feelings and emotions on it and it comes (down) to player safety and all that stuff. You just have to evaluate and everybody's different in how they process it and that's the thing about it. Every human's different, so how they're going to process this is going to be different as well.”

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