

**New England Patriots Postgame Quotes
January 11, 2026**

NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS HEAD COACH MIKE VRABEL

Q: There's a saying that defense wins championships. Your team had six sacks, pretty much made Herbert's life miserable. How well did you think they played?

MV: I thought they played extremely well. I thought they were committed to stopping the run. The sudden change was critical. It was a very good defense that we were playing. We turned the ball over far too many times. But what our defense was able to do early in that game, in the red zone, inside the five-yard line or inside the nine-yard line, I think really set the tone for them for the rest of the game. Could have been better. A lot of scrambles. We knew that. Again, trying to rush, make sure that those scramble lanes aren't there. Secondary did a fantastic job with the play extensions, making sure that those plays didn't get loose. Just really proud of everybody.

Q: How proud were you to see the effort and the finish towards the end of your defense? Obviously the could smell blood. Milton Williams doing what he does best and speaking of blood, how is your lip?

MV: We talked to them about being willing to spill some blood out there, that the big dogs come out in January. I think Milt took that to heart in the way that he played the game, in the way he finished the game. He came over and got me pretty good. That's what happens.

Q: What did you think of Drake Maye's performance tonight?

MV: Yeah, I mean, again, we've got to take care of the football. Thought he came through when we needed him. The tipped pass is something that was unfortunate. That turned into an interception. But the throw to Hunter [Henry] I thought when we needed him was elite.

Q: Talk about Zak Kuhr. Obviously, defense played unbelievable tonight. He stepped in this season, done a remarkable job.

MV: He really has.

Q: Talk about the game he called tonight on defense.

MV: I would tell you this means a lot to him. These players mean a lot to him. I think that they want to do well for Zak and for the entire staff that put a lot into it. I'm proud of Zak for not only the performance calling the game, but the preparation and what goes into it. He's earned every bit of recognition that he's getting and should get. Again, it takes everybody. There's great communication from upstairs, getting it to the players. They certainly respond. All the credit has to go to them. But Zak was able to change up some calls there at the end. I felt like that mixed the pressure in because that's what we felt like we needed.

Q: On third down you were one of ten, defensively one of three on fourth down. How much momentum did you take from those stops?

MV: A lot. I think they probably got tired of hearing me talk about them being fourth in the league in third down. What they were able to do as an offense, so to be able to do that. But you have to be able to create some longer yardage situations. We were able to do that. That was a real positive. I think being able to get drives stopped, certainly the Chargers want to possess the football, they want to wear you down. I don't think we ever let them do that.

Q: Was there a particular aspect of their defensive performance which you thought was the most significant?

MV: I think the fourth down stop really set the tone. But being able to stop the run. If you look at the runs they handed off to the running back, that's kind of I think where things started. You're going to look at the rushing yards, whatever it was, but those were quarterback scrambles on passes. Our ability to stop the run and force second and third and long situations I think really helped us. Those are only good if you can take advantage of them. We caused some turnovers. We hit the quarterback. One time it bounces into the running back's hands. He's taking off running. Harold [Landry III] runs and makes a great effort play that's going to go for 12 yards. Started as a strip sack. Next time that very easily could be our football. Just the effort. Everybody played. Everybody contributed. Guys went down. Other guys went in there and stepped up. We play a lot of guys on defense. I think they all appreciate that. I think they all have roles. That's fun to see everybody contribute.

Q: I was curious about the run game tonight, what you saw from Rhamondre, TreVeyon and Drake as well?

MV: Yeah, I thought it was good enough. I did. I thought that it was good enough. I thought we were close on a few. Anytime that you can finish the game running the football against the Chargers and a defense like that, I think it's very positive. Certainly we weren't one-dimensional. We were able to run the football. We were able to get some yards on first down. I thought the backs ran hard. I thought they did a great job of taking care of the football. Drake, obviously if he gets the looks that are advantageous, he can take off and run, just like he did last week. He did the same thing this week.

Q: The way the game declared, when did you feel like you got a handle on it?

MV: I think after Drake's pass, after the completion to Hunter, putting us up a couple scores. I thought that was a critical sequence. I thought it was a great drive. We were into drives. We talked all week about fighting to get the first first-down, then we stalled. It was like, Okay, we're getting the first first-down, now we have to fight to finish the drive and do that. That drive we certainly did.

Q: Other than the defense, it certainly feels like your special teams at least keep you in the game for a long period of time. How do you feel about their performance?

MV: I thought it was solid. We didn't have a lot of opportunities. I thought Marcus [Jones] handled the punts extremely well. I thought the decision to let the ball bounce and get a touchback, those are big decisions that we trust Marcus in to come up and catch the punts. The way that we covered kickoffs. I thought it was a very clean game from our special teams perspective. They set the table for everything that we do offensively and defensively. Appreciate you guys.

NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS QUARTERBACK DRAKE MAYE

Q: Drake, take us through this night. Certainly was a battle. What did you learn from it? How proud are you?

DM: Proud of this team. We never doubted it. We never doubted it. Wasn't pretty, that's for sure. But this defense was so fun to watch. Congrats to them. It was so fun to watch. They won the game for us. I didn't throw very well tonight. Need to be better. We did what we had to do. That's what it takes in the Playoffs. Proud of this team. That was fun to get one at home. Looking forward to being back here next week.

Q: You said you didn't throw it very well tonight. Anything that contributed to that?

DM: Just got to be better, whether it's accuracy or ball placement or little things, making decisions faster. Held onto the ball a little bit tonight. Finally got one in the end. I missed Hoop [Austin Hooper] on a touchdown. Feel like I missed Pop [DeMario Douglas] on a third down low. It wasn't my best tonight. But that's why you have teammates, those guys picked me up. Never lost confidence. Was still slinging it around. Kayshon [Boutte] made some big plays. Came after the ball twice on some big plays. That's the thing about us, we spread it around, can do a lot of things.

Q: Is Playoff football different? Did it feel different out there with the stakes, the opponent?

DM: Yeah, I think the biggest thing that Coach [Josh] McDaniels said with the offense, is you come to the stadium with that finality feel. It's win or go home, or win and advance. That's kind of the feeling you get. That's kind of the biggest thing I felt out there. From there, the teams are going to be good. They had a great defense, a great quarterback. We were the better team tonight. We made plays when we needed to.

Q: You talk about nerves set in sometimes at the beginning of the game. Was that going on a little bit in the first half, you had to settle in, make a couple throws, get into who you are?

DM: No, I wouldn't say that. First one to Stef [Diggs], that's right where I wanted to put it. Picked up the first down. Had the one to Hunter [Henry] over the middle that I tried to protect from the safety. Probably need to throw, fire it in there a little more. From there, high-pressure throws. Critical plays, I just have to make them. I like my chances of making 'em. I'm not going to think too much about it, move on to next week.

Q: What did you see in terms of their rush lanes and having some open lanes and some opportunities to put it down and take off?

DM: I think they're powerful. Credit to them. Those guys up front, they play hard, they're relentless. They want to get to the passer. Oftentimes when our guys stay inside-out protection, that leaves some lanes for me to take advantage. Play some man in the back end. Anytime you got that, you have a chance to go and make some plays. From there, it was just trying to get down, just give us a chance to pick up some mobile first downs.

Q: How valuable is it to have someone like Rhamondre [Stevenson], who can pick up a big gain on a short dump-off?

DM: It's huge. They always talk about catching, getting up field. He's really consistent. The one on the sideline he broke a tackle, thought he was going to keep going for a while. He's so good at making the first guy miss. So valuable to have him on third down, be able to pass protect, catch it out of the backfield. I missed him a little wide on one of the third downs. Yeah, that happens. Like I said, 'Mondre is a great player for us. He has been all year. He and TreVeyon are fun to be back there and watch. I have the best view in the house.

Q: Family members here tonight. Who was here to support you?

DM: Yeah, my parents come to every game. They're always here. My three brothers were here, which is pretty cool, all three of 'em being here. It's just special sharing these moments with them. Going home, probably playing ping-pong till 1:30 a.m. or doing something with those guys. Having them in the house is cool. Three of my best friends and obviously, Ann Michael.

Q: During the week, there was a big emphasis on Derwin James, what he can do to an offense, individually. Was there a sense tonight that you went away from him or you made a point of neutralizing him?

DM: Yeah, that was the goal, try not to let him be a factor. They try to put him on the ball, play him at the star, blitz him some. I thought we did a good job handling him. He's going to make plays. That's what great players do. In coverage, he is a good player. He had some man reps tonight. I thought he did a good job. He almost got a hand on the one to Hunter. He's everywhere. With guys like that, you try to neutralize. It's tough when they have guys up front as well that are good players.

Q: Derwin James, on that touchdown pass to Henry, it must have missed Derwin's hands by a couple of inches. How did you process him getting open at the right moment?

DM: Usually got a flat control that kind of holds Derwin. It really didn't. Just trusting Hunt. He just makes big catches over and over. Was a similar throw to the one to Hoop. I missed the one to Hoop. So I was just thinking give him a chance to make the play. Like I said, it's a game of inches. Come up on the right side of it.

Q: You talked about the feeling of win or go home. Can you describe that feeling? Is it an elevated sense of urgency? Excited energy?

DM: Yeah, I think it's just Playoff football. That's what it is. Kind of running out of that tunnel with the crowd, that was a cool moment. I kind of was running off the field like, man, that was pretty sweet, listening to the crowd. I don't know why they put me last. They need to put Stef or somebody that hypes up the crowd. I just kind of run out there. Or Big Willie [Will Campbell]. Big Willie loves doing something funny. It was cool. Proud of the fans for how they showed up every week. Looking forward to getting back here at home. That's it, Playoff football. That's what we said at the beginning of the season, we want to play home Playoff games in the Playoffs. That's what we did. We are 1-0. We got to go to the next one.

Q: Seems like you got almost every receiver or target, a ball tonight. What does it say about that room, the targets you have to throw to, the weapons you have?

DM: Yeah, I think the biggest thing about that room is they care about each other. Coach [Todd] Downing, those guys in that room, they do a great job of blocking the run game, doing little details right. We knew it was going to be a details game with how much zone they played. Those guys are fired up in the locker room to win. Everybody made some big plays. Proud of that group for how they've grown up, allowed me to grow with them. They're great players for us. Nobody complains. They all want the ball. I don't blame them because they are all good with it in their hands.

LOS ANGELES CHARGERS HEAD COACH JIM HARBAUGH

Q: What happened to you guys offensively?

JH: Yeah, we weren't good enough. We didn't get enough points sustaining the drives. Left our defense out on the field too much in terms of time of possession. Yeah, just wasn't our night.

Q: Anything specifically, offensively, you can point to that wasn't good enough?

JH: No, I really don't have the answers. I wish I did. If I did there would've been a different result. But, that I am going to be spending – we'll be spending a lot of hard work and maybe even sleepless nights getting it figured out. The way these players fight, the way they just give it their very best, they give it their all, we'll owe them that and get on. Like I told the team, those that stay will be champions. Not looking at this as an end, but as another beginning.

Q: Jim, what do you think of the way Justin [Herbert] played?

JH: Warrior. Doing anything and everything he could to move our team and get us in the end zone.

Q: You feel like it was up to his usual standard of play?

JH: I do. He just gives it everything he has all the time.

Q: You guys, in your two playoff games, you guys scored a touchdown on offense in the past two seasons. Do you think that Greg [Roman] is the right person to be calling plays as coordinator?

JH: Right now I don't have the answers, as I said. We're going to look at that – at everything. It really falls on me that we weren't at our best tonight. I don't have the answers. I wish I did. But, we'll work hard. It'll be a new beginning.

Q: When you say look at, you mean specifically look at –

JH: Everything on our team.

Q: If Greg is the right person to be calling plays?

JH: I don't have that answer right now. I know you're being very specific. We weren't good enough as a team. And that's what we do. We win as a team and we lose as a team. That's my responsibility to have the team in a better position. And a lot of it is the Patriots, too. Not going to stand here and say – the Patriots played very well. They did a great job and I want to congratulate them. Not be one of those coaches that stands up here and says that they – call it what it is. I mean, they played extremely well.

Q: When it ends abruptly like this – and you said those who stay – what kind of was your message to your team after this?

JH: That. That was the message. We will get it done.

Q: Jim, how much was it a turning point in the first quarter – Daiyan [Henley] had the pick and then you guys come away empty handed. How much of a swinging point was that?

JH: Yeah, just couldn't get into the end zone. That turned out to be, really, our best shot of the night to score that touchdown.

Q: Why did you decide to go for it there, something you hadn't really done before this season?

JH: We've gone for some fourth downs.

Q: One other time. Second time –

JH: No, I mean, looking back on it, you don't get it, that would've been three more points where we got zero. But, had we gotten it, it would've been – we would've just needed one touchdown at the end of the game. Probably would've been kicking myself had I not done it, gone for it and taken that opportunity, taken that chance. Felt like that was the right thing to do. Didn't get it in.

Q: Was there something specific about this game, this opponent that led you to be more aggressive in that situation?

JH: Our analytics were to go for it in that situation. Playing it out, it's not the right decision because you didn't score the touchdown, but yeah, I would – in the same situation – you've got to take your shot.

Q: Over the last few weeks, the Patriots have gotten a little more healthy on defense. Couple of their better guys played. Today it just seemed like they played their best game of the year – their defense. Not a lot of guys seemed open, they got a little pressure, they stopped the run game for the most part. Can you talk about the Patriots' defense, what you saw coming in and what you saw today?

JH: Yeah, they were a big factor. That was a heck of a performance by them. They were able to get the stops, third down, red zone. Played really good situational. Played really good coverage. There were some could have gone either way there and they were able to make the play. But yeah, congratulate them. It was heck of a game.

Q: How do you feel like your defense played overall?

JH: Yeah, I thought our defense played well. It's been a strength for us all year. Opportunistic again, got the turnovers, weren't able to capitalize. But I thought they played well, like they always do. They just fight and play their hearts out like our entire team does, every man on the roster.

Q: You called Justin a warrior. Was the hand an issue today?

JH: Yeah, it's an issue. But yeah, he doesn't flinch, just like a warrior would.

Q: Coach, can you talk about your relationship with Mike Vrabel and what you saw from his game plan?

JH: Yeah, professional relationship, and nothing but respect. And I thought they did a heck of a job.

LOS ANGELES CHARGERS QUARTERBACK JUSTIN HERBERT

Q: Justin, what did you think of the way you played today?

JH: Not good enough. We've got to score points. The defense gave us every shot we needed to, and it wasn't enough.

Q: Realizing that obviously the emotions are still raw, what is your confidence in yourself that you will be able to get over this hump eventually, get a playoff win, make a playoff run?

JH: I don't know. I haven't figured it out yet. Hasn't happened, so we'll have to reevaluate and see what happens.

Q: How frustrating is it to be in this situation again with how well you guys have played at points this year?

JH: It's really tough to lose. We gave everything we had, and it's not good enough. Defense, like I said, gave us every shot that we needed to, and it's not enough.

Q: You guys got the early turnover, obviously went for it on fourth down. Was that a carryover effect at all, not converting points on the two turnovers tonight?

JH: Yeah, we just have to be able to score and we didn't do that today. That's on us as an offense. When we get those opportunities, we have to do everything we can to get ball in the end zone, and we let the defense down today.

Q: Collectively, when your offense struggles like that, were they showing you something different than you expected from your film study?

JH: No. It's just on us to go out there and execute. Like we always say, we have to score points in the red zone, convert on third down, limit turnovers, and we didn't do any of those today.

Q: You haven't made an excuse all year and I'm not asking you to now, but now that the season is over, can you describe the limitations that you had with your hand, especially tonight?

JH: No, it's – the training staff did a great job getting me ready to go. As long as they felt safe and comfortable, and I did as well, there was no issues. I just have to do a better job of holding on to the ball.

Q: The Patriots' defense, over the last couple weeks, have gotten a few of their important guys back. It seemed like for them everything clicked. Seemed like you didn't have a ton of guys open downfield. Can you talk about this Patriots defense? Was it as good as it looked tonight?

JH: Yeah, they played well. We've got nothing but respect for them. As an offense, it wasn't good enough today, I didn't play well enough and didn't make any plays. When it mattered most we didn't score any points.

Q: If you had to break down, what was difficult tonight, especially throwing the ball downfield?

JH: Just didn't execute. It's on us to be able to convert on third down, and when we get our shots in the red zone we have to be able to score points.

Q: How do you feel like you were seeing the field tonight?

JH: Obviously not well enough. That's the tough part. We have to do better than three points. As an offense, it's not good enough. Quarterback play wasn't good enough. We let the defense down today.

Q: Just moving into another offseason here, three trips to the playoffs, you haven't been able to get one yet. Mentally, how are you going to approach that heading into this offseason and how are you going to maintain your mentality heading into next season just knowing another opportunity has passed here?

JH: I don't know. I haven't figured that out yet. That's the tough part about the NFL. There are a lot of good teams, and wasn't good enough today.