



POSTGAME NOTES AND QUOTES

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CAROLINA PANTHERS VS. NEW ORLEANS SAINTS SUNDAY, JANUARY 2, 2022 • CAESARS SUPERDOME POSTGAME NOTES

- The Saints' 18-10 win Sunday over the Carolina Panthers improves New Orleans' record to 8-8, giving them sole possession of second place in the NFC South, and keeping their playoff chances alive heading to a Week 18 matchup at Atlanta.
- The Saints win improves their all-time record against the Panthers (regular season/postseason combined) to 29-26. The win gives them a 14-12 mark in contests in the Saints-Panthers series played at the Superdome. The win improves their division record to 3-2, guaranteeing them at least a .500 record in the division for the fifth consecutive season. It also helps them avoid being swept by the Panthers for the first time since 2015 and avoids getting swept by a division opponent for the first time since Atlanta in 2016. The win also improves Head Coach **Sean Payton's** record (regular season/postseason combined) against the Panthers to 17-13.
- The Saints extend their streak to 320 regular season games without having been shut out, dating back to a 26-20 win at the Tampa Bay Buccaneers on September 6, 2002 at Raymond James Stadium, the longest running streak in the NFL.
- The victory over the Panthers gives Payton a 3-1 record against Carolina Coach Matt Rhule, giving him a winning record against 63 of the 88 head coaches he's faced.
- Payton's 160 combined regular season/postseason victories move him into a tie for 21st all-time with Pittsburgh Steelers Head Coach Mike Tomlin, whose Steelers host the Cleveland Browns on Monday Night Football.
- Defensively, New Orleans surrendered a season-low 178 total net yards and managed a season-high seven sacks.
- DB **C.J. Gardner-Johnson** recorded his third interception of the season to seal the win Sunday, tying him for the team lead in picks with Marshon Lattimore and P.J. Williams.
- LB **Demario Davis** became the first Saint to reach 100 total tackles in four consecutive seasons since S Roman Harper (2008-12). Davis recorded 5 tackles Sunday.
- DB **J.T. Gray** now has a career-high and league-best 18 special teams tackles on the season after recording one special teams takedown Sunday.
- QB **Taysom Hill** notched 45 rushing yards Sunday bringing his season total to 356, surpassing Saints legend Archie Manning's 351 yards in 1972 for third place in franchise record books. Hill completed 17-of-28 passes for 222 yards and one score.
- S **Malcolm Jenkins** played in his 102nd career game as a Saint, becoming the 53rd player to do so, moving into a tie with RB Wayne Wilson, WR Joe Horn, DL Bruce Clark and LS Justin Drescher for 53rd on the club's all-time games played list. Jenkins posted six stops (three solo).
- DE **Cameron Jordan** recorded a team-high tying eight tackles (six solo), 3.5 sacks Sunday, moving his career sack total to 106.0, three stops for loss and three quarterback hits. The 3.5 sacks are the second-highest total in his career behind four takedowns at Atlanta on Thanksgiving night in 2019.. This is Jordan's 5th career game with at least three sacks. Jordan moves into a tie for 29th in league record books with Kevin Carter and Neil Smith. Sunday was also his 25th career game with multiple takedowns, putting him two behind franchise leader and Pro Football Hall of Famer Rickey Jackson (27). Sunday's sack total marks only the second time in Jordan's career that he has had three straight multi-sack games, joining a three-game stretch from November 22-December 9, 2008. Notching his 10th career sack Sunday against Carolina, Jordan has double-digit sack totals against all three NFC South division teams in his career. Panthers signal-caller **Sam Darnold** became the 41st player for Jordan to

have a quarterback takedown against. With 11.5 sacks on the season in 15 games with one contest remaining, Jordan joins Jackson as only the second Saint with six double-digit takedown campaigns.

- DE **Marcus Davenport** recorded his first career fumble recovery on a **P.J. Williams** strip sack deep in Carolina territory midway through the second quarter. The fumble recovery led to a 27-yard field goal converted by **K Brett Maher**.
- Maher made four field goals on the afternoon, matching his career-high for field goals made in one game (9/30/18 vs Detroit and 10/14/18 vs. Jacksonville) as a member of the Dallas Cowboys. Maher's 12 consecutive field goals made is the second longest streak of his career, behind 16 straight field goals made from September 16, 2018 through October 21, 2018 as a member of the Dallas Cowboys.
- RB **Alvin Kamara** totaled 100 yards from scrimmage in the game, 32 rushing yards on 13 carries, and 68 receiving yards on five catches. Kamara scored on a 12-yard reception from Hill with 7:55 remaining in the contest.
- WR **Marquez Callaway** recorded six catches for 97 yards with a long of 30 yards.
- T **Jordan Mills** played in his 100th career game (combined regular season and postseason) on Sunday.
- LB **Kwon Alexander** tied for the team lead with Jordan with eight tackles (six solo) and also split as sack with Jordan and had two quarterbacks hits.



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CAROLINA PANTHERS VS. NEW ORLEANS SAINTS SUNDAY, JANUARY 2, 2022 • CAESARS SUPERDOME SAINTS HEAD COACH SEAN PAYTON

On the importance of the win: “Look, it was our last opportunity to play at home. We always kind of talk about, when we hear people say, ‘must win games’, today was a must win game. Other than that, any game prior is not, that just means you have to win that game. Our guys understood that, and this was a good win to get.”

On Cameron Jordan’s performance the last couple of weeks: “Listen, he has played well for a long time here. It’d be hard to give it one of those “best ever’s”, but he’s certainly playing awfully well. It has been important to how we play defensively and important to how we have played as a team. It is impressive.”

On Taysom Hill’s performance today: “Yeah, it was kind of up and down at times, but he led us on key drives. He missed a throw or two. I’m sure he’ll want some of those back, but it’s another win under his belt. We will have a chance to look at the tape and really look through the sequencing of the plays to give him a grade. I was happy with the win, and you know, ball security was important. He did a good job with that.”

On the importance of C.J. Gardner-Johnson’s energy for the defense: “I think it’s hard to imagine a good defense without energy. I can’t think of one historically. He’s part of that and you know, I think you have to be a good player to play with the confidence that he does, and he is. That emotion and energy, but also the effort you see from him (is outstanding).”

On the importance of sticking with the running game today despite the early success: “It’s a good question. I was frustrated at halftime. We had some ME’s, we didn’t do much of anything well in the running game, obviously. We made some hay in the second half. We’ll look at the tape. I’m sure there’s going to be a lot of tape that we have to clean up and there’s some guys in there playing right now that are getting more playing time than they’re used to. But I still think the ability to be two-dimensional rather than one-dimensional is important, especially when you’re paying attention to a game like we just played.”

On the value of the defense playing so well when the offense has been struggling: “Yeah, look, you go back two weeks ago to the win at Tampa Bay. We felt the matchups were going to be good and I was really pleased with how we played. I thought we controlled the field position for the most part. It felt like there was a half where we were on one position of the field. That’s a big reason right now why we’re at 8 wins, because of our defense. I think it was outstanding we played the way we did with the turnovers and takeaways. It’s not an ever statement, that’s just the way we unfolded.”

On the reasons behind the decisions to hold Marcus Williams and Erik McCoy out: “Well, it’s actually pretty simple. In the event they tested out (of the COVID-19 protocols), you surely don’t want them on the COVID list. We didn’t think they would (test out), but in the event they did, we would’ve lost two (practice squad) callup spots, so in the event they were able to test and get back, we had them off the COVID-19 list. Obviously, they’ll be back next week. It just made common sense (to hold them out). In the event they had a couple of negative tests, they would have been able to play.”

On the importance of the drive before halftime to cut the lead to one point: “The third down-play where we threw a go-route to Marquez (Callaway), it was well-placed. We kind of threw an underthrown, back-shoulder throw that got us out of that tight, redzone area. You go from almost having to punt in your own end zone, to having the ball at midfield, and then kick a field goal. That is significant. You start doing the math on how that half could have ended, I do think it was important.”

On the feeling of having a consistent kicking game: “I think it’s been important. We’ve had to kick a few more than I would like, but (Brett Maher) has been kicking it well. I thought the timing and the operation has been good and just as important as protection.”

On the performance of Marquez Callaway in the second half of the season: “Look, we’ve seen those improvements since last year. Sometimes it’s coverage-based with where he plays. I love the way he plays the ball in traffic. I think that’s one of his strong suits. We gave him a lot of opportunities today and those were important plays.”

On the message to his team after the game about having an opportunity to earn a playoff spot:

“It was the message to the team going into the game, actually. This was a must-win game. We have to find a way to get to 9-8 and go from there. You guys know how this works, week 16 there’s usually a picture, week 17 it gets a little clearer, and now in week 18, by tonight, I think we’ll pretty much know what has to happen. I think there’s a pretty good chance our game could get flexed next weekend to a different time slot on Sunday. We have to wait for that, but ultimately we have to play well against Atlanta and get a win.”



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CAROLINA PANTHERS VS. NEW ORLEANS SAINTS SUNDAY, JANUARY 2, 2022 • CAESARS SUPERDOME CAROLINA PANTHERS HEAD COACH MATT RHULE

Opening comments: “I am obviously disappointed with the result. After a tough week of COVID, guys in and guys out, adjusted practice schedules, lots of distractions, I could not be more pleased with the effort but certainly not the result. I thought we had our opportunities to win the football game in the end. Our inability to protect the quarterback will certainly show up as one of the main stats. We had a chance to take the lead there in the fourth quarter. Unfortunately, we missed a field goal. They answered it. It didn’t go our way.”

On Sam Darnold’s yards per attempt: “I think we struggled in protection. Coming in knowing these guys are as good of a rush team as you saw them against (Tom) Brady a couple of weeks ago. Obviously, some guys were out from last week. Our whole game plan was to run the football, try to control it, move the ball down the field, keep the game close, win the game in the 4th quarter. At the end of the day, obviously there were a lot of throws in the end that were incomplete because of the situation that we were in. We weren’t able to protect [Sam Darnold]. Even that last possession, we called a hook and lateral just trying to get back and have a chance. They’re a really good defense. We knew that coming in. I thought Sam made some aggressive plays at times, but that was kind of us knowing who they are and how good they are on defense.”

On takeaways from the game with how Darnold played: “I will have to watch the tape to see. I thought we did a good job on some third down conversions. We were 6-of-14 at one point. We limited our penalties coming here. According to this, we only had one penalty. Sam was 17-of-26. Again, for us to truly see whether it’s Sam or Cam (Newton) or anybody else, really see what somebody can do, we have to just have a little more consistency up front. There are too many sacks we took. As a result, the sack fumble that led to points kind of changed the way you want to call the game. You’re having to be very, very careful on third down. I think our defense was playing really good defense. At the end of the day, they didn’t score a touchdown until the last drive. We held them to field goals, there were a ton of short fields. At least from where I stood, I was really proud of our defensive effort today. More importantly, I was proud of our special teams effort from the guys that were covering and getting doubled out there. (Deonte) Harris is as good of a returner as there is. I thought those guys did a good job. We played too much on our side of the field, especially in the 3rd quarter.”

On the protection and turning guys loose on a couple of plays: “One was a match protection, so Ian (Thomas) has the first one, Ameer (Abdullah) has the second one. Ian took one, Ameer took the second one. Who’s right? Who’s wrong? I can’t say, but we had one just right past that blitz. I think they blitzed and crossed. We just didn’t execute it, didn’t pick it up. The last one, we were just hot, and the ball has to get out of the quarterback’s hand. He’s working the boundaries. It’s two-minute. They brought a lot of pressure today. That is really what people are doing, bringing a lot of pressure. I thought the third down call that led to the field goal, we knew we had to be inside of the 32 to kick a field goal. They brought two guys off of the edge. Sam did a great job of sight adjusting. He got it out to Robby (Anderson). Robby was half a block away from maybe scoring. Unfortunately, we missed a field goal. That was those two plays from the field level. I haven’t obviously seen the tape.”

On players who were unavailable and how that inhibited the defense: “This week having some guys go down with covid and come back. Some guys like JB (Juston Burris) who’s had a bad groin, he was available, but we played the other guys and had him up as an emergency. CJ (Henderson) went out before the game. He warmed up. He ran around. His knee is still bothering him, but he was available as an emergency guy. We had those guys in case we needed them. I thought it looked like Rashaan Melvin showed up a couple of times really nicely in the run game. Unfortunately, we gave up the one big pass down the sideline from our own 3-yardline from 3rd-and-13 before the half that led to points from them. There were some good things in the back end, but probably gave up too many yards passing at times. That’s why those guys were out. They’re not 100 percent healthy, but we just don’t have the numbers right now to not have them up as emergency guys.”

On the offensive struggles: “Just not really winning up front in the run game and having to go to the protection game and not really being able to protect, to be quite honest. We knew coming in the defense that they have, the front they have. Early on, we were able to mix it up, keep them off-balance a little bit, but in the end, their front won the game for them with us with the chance to go up and win it. We weren’t able to get them. Kind of the same sort of story we’ve had at times when we haven’t played well offensively, it’s kind of just that up front, not being able to win in the run game, in the pass game at the level you need to win a game like this.”

On the added pressure to the Carolina defense: “That’s kind of what the defense wants though. The defensive coaches and players are saying, ‘Run the ball. Run the clock. Hunt the ball down. Let’s not turn the ball over.’ It is what it is. We wish we could score 40 points against these guys, but not many people do. The defense was great today. Our guys kept saying we were going to have to get a turnover. We were going to have to take the ball away. We came into the game knowing to beat these guys we were going to have to take the ball away. It’s just trying to play complementary football. Obviously, playing defense when you have a big day offensively, you can really let it rip. We did a great job for a defense that struggled in the red zone earlier this year. We held them to field goals until that very last one. I thought today was a big step defensively for us. It makes it hard at the same time if you’re in that situation to try to play to the defense and just not do something that gives them a short field like we did on the 1.”

On the offensive line struggles: “I think when you have 11 different offensive line combinations, when you have guys being elevated from the practice squad, when you have guys changing positions, all of those things, you’re not going to have the unity you want. You’re not going to have the cohesiveness you want. We talked about it. You guys have asked about it since the very beginning. We’ve had runs where we have been able to protect the quarterback and be consistent, but I do not care who you are playing (at) quarterback, if you do not have a run game or a pretty nice protection game, it is going to be difficult. I thought when Sam (Darnold) had protection, he was able to complete balls and made some nice throws. Again, this is a really good defense we faced. We knew they were going to put us under duress.”

On what changed in the game plan after Sam Darnold started 9-for-9: “We had some runs early. It says here we finished with 28 yards rushing. In the first half, I don’t know how many yards we had. We were able to keep them off-balance. We converted some third downs on a bubble, on a slant. As the run game started to bog down a little bit, as they started to take away the run game, it forces you into more of a drop back mode. We try hard not to do that. We had the one fumble. We tried to protect the defense. Unfortunately, we had a chance to kick a field goal and take the lead, missed it, and they were able to go down and score and change the game. It’s all complimentary. It’s the running game, keeping them off-balance. When you’re struggling with running it, they can really wind up and come after you.”



CAROLINA PANTHERS AT NEW ORLEANS SAINTS
Sunday, January 2, 2022, • CAESARS STADIUM
SAINTS PLAYER QUOTES

QB Taysom Hill

What kind of chemistry has he and Marquez Calloway formed over time? “This goes back to training camp. We have had so many conversations about Quez since July, so this doesn’t feel unfamiliar to me. Quez is a guy that I trust, and you just have to give him opportunities. I will continue to do that, and he will continue to make plays.”

How much is the defense playing great football an asset to you playing quarterback?

“This is not new; our defense has been outstanding all season long. As an offense, you know you have a great defense that is playing very well. It’s part of a team game of football and it’s what we do. But I am not surprised. My hat goes off to them for a great effort from start to finish. As you said, it is such a great asset as a quarterback to feel like you don’t need to press or that you don’t need to push knowing those guys are going to prevent a lot of points from being scored.”

On the intentional grounding call explanation: “No, I did not get an explanation there. I figured it was intentional grounding as I was trying to throw it away to Marquez on the backside and I thought we had a receiver in the area, but obviously didn’t.”

How big was the drive before halftime? “Yeah, that was a huge drive for us. We knew that we got the ball at half and starting at your 1- or 2-yard line you don’t want to do anything stupid with the ball. So, when you can score before half and get the ball back, that’s stealing points and possessions. I think that was big for us as an offense in terms of momentum as well.”

How good does it feel to play a meaningful game next week with potential playoff hopes for your team? “Look, coach challenged us from day 1 this week. We came in and started Thursday this week. He challenged us and told us it was a playoff week and that we have to win. Everyone was locked in and had the right mindset.”

How much does that trust come out in those two-minute situations such as the drive at the end of half with the focus on Marquez? “I thought it was just man press on the outside and I knew I had a one on one matchup with Quez. My mindset being backed up, I didn’t want to hold the ball, so I gave him a ball he could go and highpoint the ball. You look at Quez and see what he has been doing, he makes those plays when you give him an opportunity.”

DB C.J. Gardner-Johnson

How big was Cameron Jordan for you guys today? “He sets the tone for this defense. When Cam brings himself to work, Cam’s Cam. There isn’t a day he doesn’t show up to work. To have a presence like that on the edge and to have a dominant presence up front is something we can feed off of. Can’t do anything but keep giving Cam all-time praise and keep stacking those sacks. Congratulations to him because it’s just going to keep going, he deserves it.”

How has PJ Williams been beneficial to you guys this year as a team? “That’s the vet. The guy taught me everything I know since I got here, and that is why I play nickel. It is just an honor to be playing with a guy like that. He’s been with this team through ups and downs. So just to see a guy be able to go out there to grind, fight, and just be him.

Unfortunate circumstances today and we held him down as a team today. I think we made him proud today and I'm sure he is happy himself. I just love being teammates with PJ and learning from him."

What was the message and reaction after you guys let up some big plays early in the game? "Tackle better. Tackle better and run through the ball. Play with passion. Sometimes it's about X's and O's, then sometimes it's about passion. You see when I bring the passion, my teammates bring the passion, we understand you have to be locked into the assignment and be more physical than the other team. That first touchdown pissed us off."

How satisfying is it to see the defensive lineman getting the production they are after getting criticized earlier in the season? "You can't talk about last week; they were shorthanded. You can't do anything when you only have about 4 or 5 defensive linemen. But you can see when we have a healthy D line, no one can stop that front. They dominated 3-4 weeks ago and dominating now. If it wasn't for them, I don't think we would be playing as high. No one would be able to do what they do without that front. I give a lot of credit to them."



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LINEBACKER DEMARIO DAVIS

On if they are at their best when Cam Jordan is playing at a high level: “Most certainly. He has proven that he is one of the most effective defensive ends in the game. Just the ability to wreak havoc on offense and so certainly he's playing the way he's been playing. It affects the offense tremendously just because of the run game they can't get on track because of them having to account an extra guy in the pass game. It was just a tremendous performance by him a tremendous performance by the guys in the back there and we certainly have to have that type of play coming down the stretch.

On how C.J. Gardener Johnson was key today: “My coach says that every week. He played big today and had a phenomenal effort. Again, he's another player that is effective in the run game and the pass game. When they run his way, he is able to make plays in the backfield. He can take the ball away in the pass game. It was a phenomenal effort by him and the rest of the guys on the back end holding what can be an explosive offense to limited plays.”

On the mindset going into this week: “These last few weeks it's been playoffs for us. It's must win. It's win or go home and we are in that type of situation. I understand the challenge of it being a must win game. It is something that we embrace and don't run away from. To come in against a good opponent and find a way to when we know what's at stake is good. We need to do the same thing next week and from here on out. Our mindset is must win. That can be beneficial to us and where we are trying to go, so we have to make the most of it.”

On having a shot at the playoffs next week: “There are no words to express how proud I am to be a part of a culture like this one with a coaching staff like this and all of my brothers in the locker room. For the journey that we've been through this season that was very unique with a lot of adversity, it could have made a lot of people fold or hang it up. This team has been resilient and has continued to fight the entire time. All you can hope for is going into the last week of the season playing meaningful football. The thing you want in this game is a chance. It's what you do with it. For us to be going into the last week of the season to have a chance to chase the crown is remarkable in regards to all that we have been through. There is no culture or team that I'd rather be a part of than this unit right now going into the last week of the season. I'm certainly excited about the opportunity at hand.”

On how impressive is the coaching staff: “It starts at the top with Sean (Payton) and how he leads and guides us. The injuries that they have had to overcome of the offensive side of the ball and all of the shifting that had to take place. I remember earlier in the season we only had four offensive coaches for one game. It was like that on special teams. We have Pro Bowl players on the special teams unit. On the defensive side, every can see the level that the defense playing. That begins with DA (Dennis Allen) and all the other (defensive) coaches. The things that have taken place this season and the coaches have continued to shift around and to get us to play at a high level no matter who's on the field. To have a shot at the end of the year, you have to give credit where credit's due. I am not taking away from the players on the field, but the coaches have been a big part of that success.”

On the defense carrying an extra load this season to support the team: “I do not know if it is about carrying an extra load. It is just a mindset of the team. Our culture is that you do whatever you have to do to win games. You always play the game that is in front of us. For the greater percentage of the time that I've been here, there was games that the offense was scoring so many points that we had to figure out a way how to get a stop. There has been games where defense has had to get more stops. Our culture for this team is to find a way to win the game. If that means that we have to go out and pitch a shutout, then we embrace that opportunity. Our job is to go out on the field and get stops and get our offense the ball. We just play the game that is in front of us. That is our culture. That is our team. I do not think any unit is looking at that we have to carry the load. I think that is why we have had so much success over the years. It's that team. It's that camaraderie. It's that brotherhood.

I'm going to do my part as best as I can to put my team in the best position to win. We are successful when we find a way to do that.

DE CAMERON JORDAN

On his play the last few weeks: "It's like the stocks. There is self-correction. It's the season. It's a marathon. It's not a short sprint. Early this year I was missing a lot of guys. Once my D-line came back, then we came back strong. You start getting those double and triple teams early in the season. When our D-line came back, then they just can focus on me. That's where you see the change. It's a full blown push from the defensive line. We have always played the run well. That is why I don't look at the sack numbers. Look at my entire game. I play first down. I play second down. I play third down. I play overtime. I play whatever it takes to win. That's with all of the guys. Don't just look at one facet of our game. We are not just edge rushers. We are edge defenders and I think that goes a little bit further than sacks."

On the sacks coming bunches: "I think my D-line coach (Ryan Nielsen) has done a phenomenal job of just cooling me down. There is so much that I want to do in a game. It's just take a breather. Once the D-line is at full speed they can't just focus on one person. I'm going to give it up to the entire D-line and all of the work that we have put in. What we do on the defensive line and the way that we attack practice and push each other to be better, that's where I see real culture. That's why I don't worry about the sack numbers. You guys worry about the sack numbers. We can talk about sacks, accolades and whatever else after the season. What's important to me is pushing my defensive line to be the best that they can be."

On If they are hitting their stride defensively: "What our defensive have done over the last four years in stopping the run is phenomenal. The Defensive backs have stepped up their play the last quarter of the year. We have the ability to fight through and play through. There is no higher praise that I can give to our entire defense. It's that focus and that drive that we take to practice. We are big juice boys and our cup overflows with enthusiasm on the sidelines. It is what it is. We knew going into this year that we want to be a force. We've been saying that for the last three or four years. I think it is showing. You are seeing a combination of the hard work."

On the team winning three of the last four games and looking to end the regular season winning four of five: "You talk about the tenacity of our team. Our coaches have winning mentalities. Every time we win, lose or draw, they are always trying to teach lessons. I think that is a huge thing for us. Our leaders on offense and defense are pushing. We're steady and calm and never being shaken. At this point it is a sprint. We have kept ourselves in the battle and now we have to get to the playoffs and finish that off. Whatever we have done to this point means nothing. Next week is everything for us."



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QB SAM DARNOLD

What did he see as the game went on that prevented the offense from performing as it did with the first two touchdown drives? “I think where we stalled was our second down offense wasn’t great. Whether we ran or threw it, when we were in second and longs, I feel like we could not get into third and manageables. I think that was kind of the biggest thing, we had those three and outs, so that’s what it felt like to me on the field. Obviously, as you guys know, I need to watch what is on the tape. I felt like we just stalled on second and got into too many third and long situations.”

As the Saints defense adjusted, what types of offensive adjustments were made by your team? “They definitely made adjustments. I think we started to get into our, kind of our drop back game a little bit on second down because I felt like we were having good success on those first couple drives with running the football and having some RPOs with that. I felt like we adjusted, and we tried to adjust and get into the drop back game on second downs. Still just couldn’t find completions there but, again, I need to watch the tape to confirm all this.

Was there a particular thing that was working for the offense right before the missed field goal in the fourth quarter? “I think we were moving the ball. We were staying in second and manageables, we were moving the ball on first down, getting into advantageous situations. When you can get into second and medium, and short situations, it takes a lot of what the defense can do and puts more of the pressure on the defense when you start to get into those second and manageable downs. I felt like we were starting to get into those a little bit more, and obviously we converted some third downs on that drive. Again, that’s when we’d love to end the drive with a score there, getting into the endzone.”

Offensive protection was an issue today, did you ever feel comfortable in the pocket and in the position to succeed? “For the most part, in those first couple drives, I was getting the ball out and they couldn’t really get a pass rush going. Again, we were staying in manageable down distances, I think that’s a huge part of it. It’s tough when the defensive line, especially as good as New Orleans is, they can start to run pick games on third and long and start to get after us that way. It definitely makes it tougher when you’re not in those favorable down distances.”

On the last drive, you got to midfield, did you see C.J. Gardner-Johnson or what happened? “It’s something that we kind of talked about. We knew that they had nickel pressure when they’re middle backer was mugged up. That’s something that we had talked about, so I’ve got to see him (CJ Gardner-Johnson) on that one.”

How are you feeling after taking several hits today, especially to your shoulder? “I feel fine.”

How accurate from Coach Rhule that it’s difficult to see what you or Cam Newton can do on the field until there is more consistency up front? “I think the bottom line is that everyone is not playing good enough. We’re just not playing good enough to win games, simple as it is. We just have to continue to make adjustments and get ready to go down to Tampa and go get a win.”

When you’re under duress, how much has that impacted your career? “When you’re under duress as a quarterback, I think the biggest thing that I said early on is staying in those second and medium, and getting into those third and shorts, where you can start to kind of attack the defense. When you start to get into third and longs, like I said, they can pin their ears back. I think it’s about consistently moving the football and taking what they give us, and when you start to get short completions, it starts to open things up down the field. I think that’s something we need to continue to look at.”

Considering you've been under duress most of the game and without some of the weapons on your team, do you think you've had a fair evaluation when they look at you as a starting QB?

"That's not even something that's on my mind right now. At the end of the day, like I said, I'm not playing good enough to win football games. That's just it. I think after the season we can start to look at how I've been playing throughout the season, but that's pretty much all I have to say on that one."

LB SHAQ THOMPSON

Coach Rhule has said that this team has a thin margin for error, how tough is it to walk that line all year? "It's tough because we keep talking about the same thing each and every day, each and every week. Do your job, man. How much more do we have to keep saying that for people to actually click in? It's okay to have a missed assignment once, but not repeatedly. In other words, that's just being a repeat offender. We get paid to do this game, we get paid to go out here and play and give the fans what they want, and we can't keep having these mistakes. Defensive side, that kind of just falls on me as a captain and making sure I hold everybody accountable, even myself."

What do you think needs to happen for the team to get what you're saying? "We just need to grow up and do our jobs. We get paid to come out here and play football, you get paid to do your job. This is a job. Each and every day is an interview. Especially, everybody knows in this business you get fired just like that. This is how we feed our families, so you've got to take this serious. You've got to go out there and do your job. Even if you don't make the play, if someone else makes the play, that's you doing your job. That's one thing we just have to focus on, and we've got one more game. We're gonna go in here and watch this game. I feel the defense, we played great today. We had some mishaps, couple big runs, but I feel like we played great today."

Do you think this change in the team and defense is a product of being disciplined? "I have no idea. It could be a little bit of both, it could be guys just forgetting what you've got to do."

When talking about guys not doing their jobs, is that a specific reference? "I'm just talking about being in your gap. If you have a gap to be in, be in your gap. If you have a somebody to cover, cover your guy. A lot of people do it, even I make mistakes. I'm not the perfect person out there. But the majority of us just need to do our jobs."