



POSTGAME NOTES & QUOTES

NEW ORLEANS SAINTS

NEW ORLEANS SAINTS AT ATLANTA FALCONS SUNDAY, JAN. 4, 2026 • MERCEDEZ-BENZ STADIUM SAINTS POSTGAME NOTES

- QB **Tyler Shough** finished 23-of-35 for 259 yards, a touchdown and an interception. He also rushed three times for 34 yards with a rushing touchdown.
- Shough finished his rookie campaign with three rushing touchdowns, the second-most by a rookie QB behind New York Giants QB Jaxson Dart (nine). In the passing game, he completed 221-of-327 passes (67.6 pct.) for 2,384 yards with ten touchdowns, six interceptions and a 91.3 passer rating.
- RB **Audric Estime** led the New Orleans rushing attack, carrying 21 times for 63 yards. He also contributed in the passing game as well, finishing with a career-high five receptions for 43 yards.
- TE **Juwan Johnson** led all receivers with 61 yards on just three catches. Those three grabs put him at 77 for the season, which makes him as only the second Saints tight end with 75 catches in a season (Jimmy Graham).
- WR **Dante Pettis** tied a career-high with five receptions, tying with Estime for the team high, for 60 yards. Pettis also returned two punts for 17 yards.
- WR **Ronnie Bell** hauled in his first career touchdown as a Saint, finishing with two catches for 23 yards, a one-handed 16-yard grab in the end zone. Bell has four touchdowns on his ten career receptions.
- TE **Taysom Hill** caught three passes for 32 yards as well. He also played in his 118th career game, tying S Brett Maxie and DE Charles Grant for 36th all-time in club record books.
- The New Orleans Saints defense has now gone 23 straight games without surrendering 100 yards receiving to a player (longest current streak in NFL and longest in Saints history). The Black and Gold did not allow a 300-yard passer all season.
- The Saints surrendered only 208 total net yards, allowing only 49 rushing yards on 25 carries (2.0 avg.) and giving up only 159 net passing yards. The Saints allowed the Falcons to convert only four-of-14 (28.6 pct.) third down attempts. The Black and Gold also forced the Falcons to kick field goals on two of three red zone trips.
- Individually, the Saints allowed Falcons RB Bijan Robinson to gain only 33 yards on 15 carries (2.2 avg.) and only allowed QB Kirk Cousins to completed 18-of-32 passes for 180 yards with one touchdown, one interception and a 69.8 passer rating. The Saints sacked Cousins four times for a loss of 21 yards.

- DE **Cameron Jordan** recorded four tackles (three solo), two tackles for loss and a sack. That sack marks 10.5 for the season, which makes this his seventh season with double-digit takedowns and his first since his 12.5 sack season in 2021. It also made him the 22nd player in NFL history with seven seasons of at least ten sacks.
- Jordan is also only the 15th player in NFL history to record double digit sacks at 36 years old. It is only the 11th time it has happened since sacks became an official stat in 1982.
- Jordan led the Saints in sacks for a season for the tenth time, joining Pro Football Hall of Fame DE Bruce Smith as only the second player to lead a player in sacks ten times in his career (13).
- DE **Chase Young** posted six tackles (three solo), two tackles for loss and 1.5 sacks, his tenth of the year in just 12 games and one pass breakup. It is the first time in his career that he has reached double digit sacks, finishing with ten takedowns and he now has a career-high 11 tackles for loss.
- With Jordan and Young both past the double digit mark, it is the first time since 2013 that the Saints have two players with double-digit sack marks.
- DE **Carl Granderson** had a very productive day, recording a team-leading ten tackles (five solo), which tied a career-high, 1.5 sacks, three tackles for loss and one interception/pass breakup, the first of his NFL career. His 1.5 sacks totals six sacks on the season, and it is the second time he has recorded 1.5 sacks in a game this season (Week One vs. Arizona). He also played in his 105th career game, moving into a three-way tie for 51st in team history with RB Reggie Bush and DE Willie Whitehead.
- CB **Kool-Aid McKinstry** recorded three solo tackles and a career-high four pass breakups.
- LB **Demario Davis** posted six tackles (one solo) and played in his 227th career game, tying former Saints LB Rickey Jackson (Pro Football Hall of Fame Class of 2010) for eighth all-time in NFL history among linebackers. He also tied T Willie Roaf for 27th all-time in Saints history by playing in his 131st game as a Saint.
- LS **Zach Wood** played in his 149th career game (consecutive and overall), tying DB Dave Waymer for 15th all-time in club record books for most games played.
- CB **Isaac Yiadom** led the Saints with two special teams tackles.



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NEW ORLEANS SAINTS HEAD COACH KELLEN MOORE

Opening statement:

“Couldn’t quite get it done. We were close. A bunch of guys took advantage of some opportunities out there. So overall, there’s a little bit of reflection in the sense that I’m really proud of this group, the way they’ve stuck together and battled each and every way, all the way down to the very end of this game. So, I’m really proud of this group. Obviously, we want to recognize that first and foremost.”

What did you see on QB Tyler [Shough]’s interception in the fourth quarter?

“I think the DB [CB Dee Alford] – I saw it really live and that was it – did a really good job. He did it inside of the slot receiver and then he kind of bumped out right as the throw was occurring. So, I thought the kid made a phenomenal play.”

What did you learn about him, just like the way he responded on that next shot?

“Yeah, Tyler [Shough]’s response, I thought he did some really big things. He had a couple big plays on there, so he had to scramble that got Dante [Pettis] the ball. He threw Dante another completion. And then I thought Ronnie [Bell] making the one-handed catch in the back corner of the end zone, that was a big-time play. It just gave us a chance to go with the onside.”

Did you like what you saw from the defense there?

“Yeah. Just relentless effort. The run game – 25 carries for 49 yards. I mean really special performance by those guys. Took all 11. Then rushing the passer. Four sacks in there. I thought our guys just played a really physical brand of football, and it was really awesome to see.”

It was also the fewest yards from scrimmage that RB Bijan Robinson got this season in any single game. Just the job you guys did against him, how would you describe it?

“I think it’s just phenomenal performance of taking all 11. I thought the DBs stepped up in the run game, made some tackles. I thought the D-line was stout. The D-ends, the edge rushers set the edge. Backwards were flowing over the top. So, it took all 11 every single play. I think credit goes to our guys in executing the plan.”

Is T Kelvin Banks Jr.’s injury anything that you’re worried about beyond?

“No, not long term. He’s got an ankle that he’ll just have to navigate. But obviously, we’re entering the offseason, so it’ll be fine.”

How much progress have you seen from QB Tyler [Shough] from when he first took over to now at the end of the season? Didn’t have a lot of weapons today. Some guys were missing and things like that. What did you kind of see from him?

"I love what Tyler's done. His development. His growth. His ability to learn from each and every experience. He's put a ton of good football out there. Obviously, we're all going to continue to try and improve and get better, collectively as a football team, and certainly, individually. I'm excited for what he'll have for this offseason. I think always having a full offseason is a huge benefit for guys. Just to kind of step away for a second, look at it. You get to watch a ton of film that you get to evaluate, and then go from there."

You have guys like WR Ronnie Bell and WR Samori Toure, who haven't been with the team for a long time, and they became big pieces of the offensive stage. What did you see from them throughout the week?

"I think it's just credit to those guys for being ready for the opportunity. I thought those guys executed well. Ronnie had the big play late, and I thought each of them contributed and made some snaps. Caught the balls. So, I was really proud of those guys. I was excited to see those guys get out there and have a chance to play. Excited for that."

Talk about the blocked punt, what you saw on that, and how big of a play that was in the game?

"Yeah, huge play in the game, obviously, for them to be able to get that done. I have not seen it, so I don't want to sit up here and judge any component of it. But obviously, they executed well and made a big play in the game."

Would you say that's a phase of the game that you haven't been overly pleased with this season?

"I think we're all just looking to get better. So obviously, we're going to look at all three phases, continue to evaluate that, put ourselves in good positions. I think in the offseason, you have a really good opportunity to kind of evaluate yourself, self-evaluate, find different things that we're going to improve on. So, that'll be one of those facets."

What goes into sort of making a decision about what style of kick to use in an onside kick situation? Does that vary opponent to opponent based upon what you know about the game?

"I think that's just Charlie [Smyth] and Phil [Galiano] just working together on the different tools that you have at your disposal. So yeah, I think a lot of times, it's got to be certainly a comfort level from a kicking perspective of executing the kick. Charlie's had a special one. This one didn't quite go there, but those are really hard kicks to execute. The margins are really small. Charlie's a really good kicker for those situations more than anyone else."

Understanding that it's just the NFL year and you're going to be without guys at various points of the season, is it difficult to craft a game plan when none of the guys that you have at receiver and running back early on, including the start of the season and then some of the late additions, all that stuff?

"I think it's the journey of what an NFL season usually looks like. You're going to have to navigate stuff. You're going to have to navigate roster opportunities. Again, we can all look back at what the initial 53 was and how it's kind of navigated through the season. That's just what you go through. So the most important thing is we keep bringing in the right kind of people. The guys that are really smart, tough, physical football players that we can count on. So certainly, I feel like we're able to do

that throughout the season of onboarding some of these guys in the middle of the season that ended up contributing and playing some snaps late in the season. I have a ton of respect for those guys, as far as their willingness and ability to prepare and get ready to go."

This might be a better question for Wednesday when you've got a little time, but as you sit here now, if you were asked what you think the identity of your team ended up being, how would you maybe define that?

"I think it was just a smart, fast, physical football team. I think we just spent a lot of time talking about the play style, which we wanted to play. The relentless effort, the finish, all those effort plays. I think those added up as you went. And every little detail matters. We've got a lot of stuff we obviously want to clean up, but I just love the way our guys played and competed each and every game in all three phases."

How would you describe what QB Tyler [Shough] was like after the interception? Did you talk to him in that time? How did he process it, handle it, and how much of that are you looking to help him through? How did that process go?

"We were up quick, so obviously it was a quick transition. They had the three plays, and then we were back at it. He responds really well to these things. Obviously, as well as he can on those certain things. Frustrated, absolutely. There's frustration when turnovers occur. I thought credit to him, his ability to respond and put himself in a really good position to be able to get that touchdown. Give us at least an opportunity at the end. I think that's just credit to the way he's wired."



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QUARTERBACK TYLER SHOUGH

What do you feel like you built closing out the season?

"I think it just shows the resiliency of the team more than anything, kind of the ability to bond together where a lot of teams may quit, when the end result isn't exactly what you want. We've just had fun building that stuff together. With new faces, people coming and going, we've kind of really just shared that and it's been a lot of fun. So, tough way to finish with the outcome, but all day, all game, people stepping up and making plays and it came down to the wire."

What was it like knowing that the NFC South was going to be on the line for Carolina and Tampa? Did you hear Tampa in the huddle yesterday yell 'Go Tyler Shough'?

"You want to go win because it's the Falcons. Obviously, it's a unique outcome with the game. Our mindset was to go out there and win, and it's tough at the end of the day. I think there's a lot of stuff that we can look back on and really build off of, which was encouraging."

What was said to you about the performance in the first half, and then the adjustments or whatever it was that you guys made to get things going a little more in the second half?

"It was the penalties. We're going backwards on first and second down, and we can't do that. We had to be more dialed and just be sharper with the communication cadences. It's hard when you're going backwards that way. We were seeing everything fine and operating really well, so we knew it was going to continue to pop. Obviously, we were able to make some progress there. We've got to find that way to put it in the end zone and finish it on that last drive and on that pick."

What happened on the interception in the fourth quarter?

"It was just an unbelievable play by 20, [Dee] Alford knew exactly what he was doing in quarters, ran double slants. We've been running it all game, and he's buzzed out to the flat. He was matching it, and it was just a really great play by him through the quarterback's eyes. Seeing him relate to number two and then fall off to number one late there, so just a great job by him. I've just got to see that. Obviously, I'm throwing it with him matching it, just kind of reset and go back from there. Credit to their defense, credit to him, great play in that crucial moment. Really good things to learn from kind of going forward, and we'll kind of figure out ways to shore it up. But ultimately on me, I've got to pull that back, find a running lane and step up there."

You [QB Tyler Shough] haven't had many of those. Do you feel like you're good at flushing that and moving on?

"100%. It was just a great play. I'm throwing it there 100%. You're already there, the ball's already out, and he [Dee Alford] falls off last second, so analytical-wise, there's nothing more to it than that. It's just football, really, it just sucks. But, great play. For me, it was just operating when we were getting another chance, and just go score and it came down the wire."

What does it say about this team's fight that you come right back, and you score on the next try. By the end of the game, it's down to two starters left, and everybody else is just out there battling. To go through that, maybe you don't get the result you want, but what does the team learn about itself on a day like that?

"It learns a bunch. That was my mindset. Screw it, let's go play, man. This is why you play football. Who cares what the outcome, what the people are saying. We've got stuff to put on tape. Obviously, we want to go freaking win, and that was the most fun I've had throughout this whole week, communicating with guys. Throughout the game, there's just so many limited reps that we have with Samori [Toure] and Ronnie [Bell] and Kevin [Austin Jr.] and DP [Dante Pettis]. Obviously, we have to build up a little bit more repertoire with those guys, but just an unbelievable job by everybody stepping up – Audric [Estime], people coming on the O-Line, banged up. Against that defense here, I think credit to them because they're a really good team, but credit to our guys for showing up and battling."

What was the scenario like this week? You just don't see that happen very often with none of these guys being on the roster to start the year.

"It's kind of the nature of the NFL, and there's no excuse for it. But I was just kind of proud of how they stepped up with minimal reps, learning a lot of new plays throughout the week. Learning the new responses. There's a body language element to it. There's certain things that you can't replicate, obviously, when you build that time with [Chris] Olave. I think Juwan [Johnson] did a really good job showing up as well. That's why you play football. Everybody did a good job. I think it's a lot of stuff to build off this offseason and really kind of have that bad taste in your mouth to build for next year."

You might not have had time to work on the throw to the left hand in the corner of the end zone?

"Right? No, that was not on my bingo card. An unbelievable catch by [Ronnie Bell]. Came up really big there. He's just a dynamic player, and it was a great play to finish that drive."

Would you say that you end this season feeling optimistic, heading into the offseason?

"Yeah. I think the way we kind of grinded and finished, built that closeness together with a lot of guys, veteran guys. There's a lot of changes that's probably going to happen, but I think the core of what we showed is really encouraging. It also kind of leaves that bad taste in our mouth, losing to where we've got a lot of stuff to put in. It's encouraging because I know I'm going to give everything I have this offseason to make sure we're in the playoffs and we're fighting for a Super Bowl next year. I've got to continue to get better and learn and make sure we're doing everything we can."

I'm just curious, when the ball came out of your hand, were you able to tell that WR Ronnie [Bell] got it with one hand, or did you have to see the replay?

"I saw it back in the end zone. I think [No.] 11 [EDGE Jalon Walker] hit me in the face or something, so I didn't really get to see it. Away games are always fun because when it's quiet, you know something good happened. My mindset was we're going to get another opportunity. It was a great play, but it was just kind of let's keep going. Next-play mentality."

On your touchdown run, it's you and EDGE Jalon Walker. When you take off, are you confident you can beat them to the pylon?

"For sure. I feel like in those scenarios, using my legs, I'm always going to be confident. The coaches on the sideline were joking to me afterwards. I think it was like [No.] 98 [Ruke Orhorhoro], one of the bigger guys, and he was like 'You weren't that fast,' but I was like, 'Man, screw you.' I knew it was in. I mean, I trained with him in Dallas, and I remember watching him train for his 40 [meter-dash], and it was pretty scary because he can roll. They've got a great defense. They've got a great front. It was just kind of a great battle, like I said, with the whole offense, the whole O-line, everybody stepping up."

Was that one designed to be a keeper run, or did you have the option?

“No, it was a throw. It was just a boot with the guy making the play at the over. So, I just kind of got washed down, and at that point, I just kept trying to go get it.”

That throw where you went to the left, there’s two defenders coming and you lay the ball over for the first time. Can you even practice something like that, or is that just all instinct?

“I mean, you practice throwing on the move, but in those scenarios, it’s just you’re trying to make a play on fourth down. Just a good catch by Juwan [Johnson]. You’ve just got to do everything you can to go get it.”

Did you see the offensive pass interference call in the end zone? Did you get a read on that at all?

“No, it’s tough. I think we weren’t trying to pick anybody. They just all ran into each other, so it’s just kind of happenstance. Tough call, obviously. Great play by Kevin [Austin Jr.] getting open. Game changer for sure. I haven’t gotten to watch it yet, but I know that’s just kind of football play. Everybody ran into each other. We weren’t trying to grab anybody.”

Did you get hurt on that call? It looked like a collar but they said it wasn’t.

“No. It was kind of an awkward landing, but nothing too crazy, I don’t think. That’s on me. I’ve got to throw the ball away. They’re back. You take a crucial, just negative play and a sack there. I was trying to make a play. Thought I could get off of it. At that point, just throw it away, get even better in third and manageable. So, good to learn from.”



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DEFENSIVE END CARL GRANDERSON

Do you take solace in the way you finished or look back frustrated about how close you were to making the playoffs?

"All of it. For me personally, during the draft process, after Tennessee and the last playoff game, all the way up until now, it was a good journey again. As a team, we didn't get to the main goal. We wanted to get into the playoffs. That's what we [were set on] going into the season. But, we did a good job finishing strong. That's me being a rookie, that's me growing as a leader on this team. These last four games can hopefully give us a jump going into next season."

It seemed like you were interested in the way Brandon Staley was going to play you guys from the very beginning. That obviously played out all year, like you guys all liked being used the way he uses his edges?

"Yeah, Staley's always got a plan. That's why we're one of the top defenses in the league. He's got a plan. We've got three really good edge defenders. We've got a great linebacker as well. So, to put it all together, and not to mention Alontae Taylor at nickel, put it all together, that's a top defense right there. So, Staley is a mastermind on defense, and that's what we did all year."

When was the last time you caught a ball in a game, offense or defense?

"Yeah, I think that was my first interception. But in practice, I just caught an interception in practice as well, so practice makes perfect."

What do you make of the way that this game had a lot of implications on the NFC South, where Tampa was rooting for you guys, the Panthers were rooting for Atlanta?

"All I can say is they got lucky, everybody got lucky. If we would have won an extra game back then, it would have been a different turnout. So, good luck to them guys, but next year, we'll see them again."



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DEFENSIVE END CAMERON JORDAN

With you hitting double digit sacks, I know the outcome wasn't what you wanted today, but to hit double digit sacks again

“You know, this season I've been saying, give me an opportunity, you see what I do with it. It's not the first time I think I've gotten double-digit sacks during an Atlanta game. Some years back it happened again, so it's about on time. Just getting back, the revenge situation. I thought I had two sacks against the Titans. I was going to get one off of 'Kirko' [Kirk Cousins], good old Kirko Chainz anyways. I would have loved to have got the ball out. Of course, when I go grab for it, he ducks under. They come out with a win. I think we had a couple good chances there. Without making it about me, I'm blessed to be in a position to go after him. I thought I was going to get another sack off of him. But it is what it is.”

What did you make of the way the team finished this year?

“I've said it all year. I don't know how many times I've said how resilient our team is, how tenacious our defense is, how we had a good young group that is growing and accelerating towards growth. It just sucks that we're out of opportunities. I wish we'd be fully healthy the entire year. I wish we had started off with the touchdowns that we had, the scoring possibilities that we've had in the second half of the season, in the first half of the season. In terms of defense, I think defense, we started off strong, and we've had to get stronger. We eliminated, for one of maybe three times, that first drive was jitters, let's call it jitters. Three points, seven points, leaky points, and then you finish the game strong. We started off strong. I think we finished strong. We figured without the short possibilities, I think we probably would have had nine points today. If you consider the block punt, whatever that is, find a way to win is the name of the game. I think our defense put us – ourselves in positions to do that more than a few times. It's been good.”

When this team was 1-8, you were still one of the most positive voices in the locker room. Was that something with the new coaching staff that you sort of set your mind to, I'm going to be that guy this year? Was that something you tried to do, or did that just come along?

“I don't think I've ever had to force anything, other than smile, last year a few times. When it comes down to our locker room, I've always said I want so much more success for this locker room, because we're so close, because guys vibe with each other. It's a great locker room. This time, eight months from now, this time next year, hopefully we're in a better position. This time, eight months from now, the locker room will have to start over. You don't know the interchanging pieces. Cameron Jordan, Year 15. Demario Davis, Year 14. You've got guys looking for new contracts. You've got to pay Chris Olave wide-receiver-one money for everything that he does. You've got to figure out a way to make it all shake. I think for whatever reason, the locker room won't be the same. Hopefully the core guys, the guys that want to be here will be here. The guys that want to make a difference will be difference makers for us next year.”



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ATLANTA FALCONS HEAD COACH RAHEEM MORRIS

Opening statement:

"Man, tough-fought game versus a division opponent, the guys we don't like in the Saints, and the guys came out victorious. They found a way to win today, getting down to that onside kick, everybody going out there and executing at a very high level just across the board. Those guys are always going to come out ready to play division games. That's what these things always are and couldn't be more happy for the guys going out there and finishing the season off the right way."

Could you discuss the play of the special teams? You get the blocked punt there to get you started and four field goals from the kicker today?

"Huge job out of those guys. The blocked punt was huge, set us up to score, and then to be able to go out there, nail all those field goals by Zane [Gonzalez], and then obviously Bradley [Pinion], I forget what his exact stats were today, but putting the ball in favorable position for us being able to flip the field when he had to punt it, those guys came out and played a heck of a defense. You've got to win in different phases of the game, and today our special teams came up big for us."

How do you feel? You end the season with four straight wins, obviously, but you don't make the playoffs, but you end on a winning note. Is it mixed emotions? Is it what could we have done, a play here, a play there, a game there, a game here?

"No, one game. One game would be the difference. Everybody is 8-9 in our division, and you had one game out there that we could have won that would have made a difference and maybe everybody a lot happier. Obviously, we want to go to the playoffs. We want to do major things. We want to do really good football things, but the only thing we could do today was win this game, and that's what the guys do. Our business is winning football games, and they did it today."

You got the sack record, how significant, if at all, is that to you – the team sack record?

"Stats are for losers. It's more about us finding a way to get to the quarterback, really setting our mind to it. We've got to give a lot of credit to Terry [Fontenot], obviously, and his staff, being able to find ways to build our D-line, build our people up on defense, to be able to go get after the quarterback. It's been a two-year process of getting those guys, whether it's been Brandon Dorlus, whether it's been Ruke [Orhorhoro], whether this year – whether it's been Jalon Walker and all the different guys that are a part of that, and James Pearce [Jr.], and then obviously building the secondary at the same time, being able to get a guy like [Xavier] Watts, for him to contribute at a high level to make people hold the football, for us to be able to rush it, going out and getting some of the vets like we've been able to get in David Onyemata, being able to get Leonard Floyd, being able to utilize 'AK' [Arnold Ebiketie], people that have been here before and find ways to get after the quarterback with this defensive staff being creative, I think it was a marriage well met."

Have you had any discussions yet with Arthur Blank about next year and your future here?

"No. You can't worry about those things. The boss is sitting right there. All those things – this is a business, what we do. I know it's fun for you guys to talk about it, but those decisions will always be made at a proper time. Those decisions will always be made, utilize whatever is best for the Atlanta Falcons."

Do you expect to be back next year?

"My expectations are always to be back, and I'm going to coach this football team as long as he allows me."

There was an illness going around the team today. Do you feel like it had an impact on this game?

"Not today, it was the week. Obviously, a bunch of guys got sick. A bunch of guys stepped up in different ways. Obviously, I can't give enough credit to A.J. [Terrell Jr.], Kirk Cousins, all of those guys going out there and battling through that stuff, man. Testing positive for flu, doing all the stuff you need to do to get ready to go. Those guys fought. We had one guy that had to miss, Ronnie [Harrison]. He just couldn't go. But other than that, man, the guys went out there and really stepped up in a big way, Ruke [Orhororo]. There were a bunch of guys that got sick throughout the process. No excuses. We didn't talk about it, we just reported it so you guys knew to let you know we weren't making none."

Drake seemed to be very frustrated at various points in the game. Can you address what was going on with that?

"Yeah, Drake is always frustrated. Drake wants to go out there and beat everybody and be dominant and get things done the right way, and he wants to execute at a very high level. He is a high-energy player. He is a pit bull. When you've got to get the pit bull to make sure he's not always off the leash, and sometimes you're going to go that way and go dark. It is what it is. That's why we love him."

Particularly, given the way the team finished, do you feel like it was capable of accomplishing more than it did?

"Yeah, no doubt. We felt that way right from the beginning. There's no secret, we felt like we could be a playoff football team, and we didn't achieve those things. There are a couple games here and there that we'd like to go back and take some of those back, but you can't. This is a big-time season. This is a great league, and you've got to find ways to utilize and take advantage of the opportunity that you have in front of you."

After last season, you named – at the end of last season you named [QB] Michael Penix [Jr.] the starting quarterback for this year. Are you ready to name a starting quarterback now?

"Man, it's a due process to everything. We'll go out and figure it all out. Our young quarterback is dealing with a significant injury right now, and everything about our young quarterback will be about our young quarterback, and we'll be focusing on him, making sure he can get out there and throw, do all the things he needs to be ready to start and we'll find a way to go out there and make sure he's back, and as soon as he's healthy enough, we can make some type of decisions like that."

Has [QB] Kirk Cousins' play and winning four straight games to end the season, has that impacted that decision at all?

"No, man, that's what we felt about Kirk Cousins right from the beginning. That's why we went out and got him. We felt like he had the ability to be able to lead us to the playoff march. It didn't go the right way. At the end of the stretch last year, we had to go to the young quarterback a lot sooner than we had thought. We went to the young quarterback, he went out and got hurt this year, Kirk came in and did exactly what we wanted him to do. It was the reason we were able to keep him and keep him on our staff and keep him a part of our building, despite all the other unpopular belief. That was our belief. Those were the thoughts from our team of people that make decisions and I'm glad we did."

It's so rare for a rookie to reach that double-digit sack total. What does it say about [EDGE] James [Pearce Jr.] and can you kind of speak to his development from day one that he got here?

"We went out and traded back in the first round to get a really talented football player. I thought it was something that was very unique, to be able to have the relationship with your general manager, with your owner, to be able to have those conversations, to be able to put yourself in position to do those things. All decisions you make there are always hard. They're always tough, and they're always going to be heavily criticized. But it sure is nice when a guy comes out and performs like you think he's capable of doing. For James to come out here and get better and better throughout the course of the season, to be able to finish with 10 and a half sacks, arguably the Rookie of the Year, arguably a guy that's just gotten better throughout the process, that's helped us be able to get after the quarterback and be able to become a better defense than we were in the past. I can't say enough about him.

You've always got to put Xavier Watts getting five picks and being able to get a fumble recovery today and just to watch those guys grow and develop this year. We did those things with the thoughts that we had a chance to go do it this year. We fell one game short, according to the math. But we all know that there are a couple other games out there that we had and we had an opportunity to win, that could have us in significant moments of going out there and making significant plays at significant times."

What are the things that you think you guys need to do as a team and as an organization to finally reach the playoffs again and to finally have a winning season?

"You do what we've been doing the last couple of weeks, go out there and win the football games that we're capable of winning, find ways to win like we have the last couple of weeks. These guys, we've got enough people in place right now to be able to do what we need to do, and we knew that, and that's what makes it so frustrating for all of us. If we can go out there and execute and do the things that we need to do every single week, like we've done the last couple of weeks, and make that who we are, and that was a part of why we wanted to do it and show it. It wasn't about me, it wasn't about anybody else, but it was about us going out there, finding ways to do the things that we know we're capable of doing to prove it to ourselves. You've got to practice winning, and that's what those guys did the last couple of weeks."

You know the division really well. How good does it feel to have swept the Saints?

"It's always good to beat the Saints. We don't like those guys. Obviously, not personal. It's obviously our business. It's obviously our business to hate those guys. Obviously, they've got a lot of really good coaches over there, a lot of good people, a lot of good players. 'Cam' [Saints EDGE Cameron

Jordan] just walked me off the field letting me know all about it, not drafting him. Those guys are really good people, but we love beating them. We enjoy beating them and we look forward to beating them again."



POSTGAME NOTES & QUOTES

NEW ORLEANS SAINTS

QUARTERBACK KIRK COUSINS

Opening Statement:

"It's always a positive when you can finish the season on a win. It's always a strange feeling when you're not going into the playoffs. I enjoyed our home crowd today, the energy they brought. Loved the way it was a team win, again, with great special teams contributions, great defensive plays that kind of put us in a position where we were having a tough day going against a really good defense, and felt like our special teams and our defense really helped us when we needed it. Great to finish the season on a four-game win streak, and feel like there were a lot of positives that you take with you now into the offseason.

I can take any questions you have."

Sweeping the Saints, I know the season ends the way it ends, but sweeping the Saints is a pretty good feeling, yes?

"I think so. I think it's a rivalry. I think it matters a lot to our fans, and I think the all-time series was dead even going into this season, so to win two, to go two up is a big deal in this series because it's hard to get that much separation. It was a hard-fought one today and felt like a rivalry game."

Very strange to see a three-way tie at the top, I know this is just right after the game, but are you going to have temptations now to look back and think about one little play, one little game, what could make a difference?

"Well, I think you live it when you show up in April. I've had five of my 14 seasons, I think - I might be wrong, but five of my 14 seasons, I have missed the playoffs on a one-game difference where if we had won one of the games we lost, we would have gone. So, you go in April and you say, one play at any moment could be the difference in winning or losing. Every install, every technique, every fundamental, every ball placement, you kind of live with this constant tension, which I'm sure makes it fun for the fans, but it makes it tense for us as players and coaches because you live with that tension at all times as you prepare, and we're living it right now."

You mentioned a couple of weeks ago you were approaching this like a contract year. Do you think this might have been your last game with the Falcons?

"Hard to know. Hard to know. I'd like to keep playing, but we'll see how things play out in March or even after that."

Do you want to come back here?

"I would love to be back here. We'll see how things play out. At this point, you kind of just see where it goes."

What was happening offensively today? Kind of looked disjointed at times but you were able to get into field goal range a couple of times and put some points up.

"Yeah, I don't have a great answer to summarize it. I do think we had their blitzes for the most part picked up, but they did a good job of making the pockets muddy, felt like their rush was fairly stout. At times we just couldn't string enough plays together, stubbed our toe on a play here or there, had a hard time getting the screen game going. My interception was a screen that they made a nice play

on, but that one was tough because you feel like if you just dirt the ball there you've got at least a field goal. It was a play here or a play there and you felt like you just left points on the board or left some things out there. But, good defense, and they made it hard today."

Drake London's play today - the touchdown and the high-point grab on the sideline...

"Yeah, both were great plays by him. He also did a nice job throttling in the zone on a play action pass later in the game. His high-point catch was awesome. The touchdown, he was open initially in the rhythm of the play, but I had kind of gotten ahead of it and gotten off of him, so I was grateful that he stayed in the move and I was able to find him off schedule because he was actually open early and then he was open late. But, great job by him. Great design by our coaches there, too."

How are you feeling?

"I'm doing pretty good. I'm hanging in there."

Flu?

"I walked in today with my briefcase, my suitcase and a Kleenex box. So, I knew what kind of day it was going to be. But, adrenaline takes over, and you feel pretty good. But yeah, I was a little weaker today going into it than normal."

It wasn't the kringle?

"You know what, who knows. That's why I say you've got to wait to be naughty until after the season because you start eating that stuff too early and your body can quit on you."

I wanted to ask if there's any standout moment this season that you can take with you to the offseason?

"For me, it's always about the people. The offensive line, Ryan Neuzil, Jake Matthews, Chris Lindstrom, Elijah [Wilkinson], [Matthew] Bergeron, [Darnell] Mooney, Drake [London], KP [Kyle Pitts], Charlie [Woerner], Sillsy [David Sills V], Bijan [Robinson], Tyler [Allgeier], the coaches, the conversations I had with DJ Williams day in and day out, week in and week out. It's the people that make the job special. I had said when I had to go in when Mike [Penix] got hurt that you want to use the platform you have to influence people and not use people to help advance your platform, and I feel like that's what I'll remember is these last, whatever it was, seven weeks, just having those relationships and being in the fight together and all trying to help one another. I think there's a good feeling walking away from it after you go 5-2 down the stretch or win four in a row. You feel good about being able to - you feel good about the work you were able to accomplish."



POSTGAME NOTES & QUOTES

NEW ORLEANS SAINTS

WIDE RECEIVER DRAKE LONDON

What's the feeling with this one with ending with a win over your rival and four-straight wins?

"It's good, especially winning four wins in the league is tough. We conquered that, but hopefully next year we're playing for something bigger."

Do you find yourself playing the 'what if' game at all, thinking back on the season?

"In a sense, but you can't dwell over it. It's happening. It's life."

Are you waiting and hoping that there won't be coaching changes?

"That's above my pay grade. I can't make those decisions. I love everybody who's on this team, everybody who makes this team tick. I love everybody."

On your touchdown reception, how did you break open there late? Were you surprised that you were that wide open?

"I think a player fell off on me. I mean, kind of. A little bit. But the ball found me, and I scored a touchdown."

G CHRIS LINDSTROM

You guys didn't give up down the stretch. What is it about Raheem Morris that makes you guys have that attitude?

"Yeah, I think Coach Rah [Raheem Morris] really fosters a connection with one another. I think, really, we have that across the team and across all three phases. When you have that, when things aren't going right, there's still belief in what we want to achieve and belief in one another. I think it's also respect and love for one another, too. So, when it's easy to pull off the gas, you don't, because you care about the guys around you. The fan base deserves it, and we all know that. So, I was really proud of our guys to be able to finish the season that way."

It sounds like you want him to come back.

"Yes, absolutely."

What does it mean to end the season with four straight victories?

"It's good. I think it's a good foundation just to learn how to win, and I think it just showed all three phases really helping and complementing one another and good confidence for guys, knowing what we can look like. Then, I think next season is next season. It's different challenges, different opportunity. I think coming with that intensity in OTAs and then in training camp and everything and starting fresh and learning the lessons that we have this season and then taking that focus and intensity and rolling it at the start of next year."



POSTGAME NOTES & QUOTES

NEW ORLEANS SAINTS

CORNERBACK DEE ALFORD

Walk me through the interception, were you looking at the quarterback eyes and then took off your man, sneaky and grab it?

“I did, I did. I want to say earlier that game, he kind of got me a little bit, faked it and threw it to the inside guy. So, just me just trying to manipulate the coverage and play around with the quarterback. I was able to trick him and he threw it right to me.”

D-line gets the credit for the sacks, but I know it's all three levels helping out to get the job done. What can you say about the defense, the records you guys set today, throughout the year?

“Man, it just shows how great we complement each other. From the front seven, the back end, D-line, everything. It's just a great group of guys and I love coming to work with these guys.”

Personally, what has this season meant to you?

“It means a lot to me. Just being for real, it's a business and I'm on my last year, so I just want to put my best foot forward every time I'm on the field. I'm just thankful to be able to showcase that this year.”

You want to come back to Atlanta?

“Of course, I love Atlanta. It's the home team for me, I'm from Griffin, Georgia, like 40 minutes south of here, so I'd love to be back.”

What does ‘Brich’ [Defensive Coordinator Jeff Ulbrich] mean to you?

“Brich means a lot, man. I talked to him earlier after that play and just told him thank you for just elevating my game. Just lets me be free and just lets me showcase my talent. Overall, just lets me play fast and stuff like that. He's put me in great situations to be able to make plays, so shouts out to Brich.”

‘X’ [Xavier Watts], James [Pearce Jr.], Jalon [Walker], they're not rookies anymore. What can you say about their growth and what they can do?

“It's crazy, that rookie class is crazy, man. Just X coming in, just playing like a veteran, like he's already year four, year five, and James and Jalon on the front line, just treacherous, just playing with speed and can't forget about ‘Bill’ [Billy] Bowman. He was a great rookie too, coming in before he got injured. He was making great plays in the secondary too, so shouts out to Bill. It was a great rookie class.”



POSTGAME NOTES & QUOTES

NEW ORLEANS SAINTS

EDGE JAMES PEARCE JR.

What does it mean to you to set the sack record?

“The D-Line, the defense, we did a great job setting the record. Everybody was getting home by the bill.

Three-three [Billy Bowman Jr.], when he was on the field, Glo [Dee Alford] when he blitzed it. Five-five [Kaden Ellis] and me at home and the front four just getting after it. As the season went on, that was just great for all of us.”

It's hard to fathom that your rookie year is over. Does it seem like it went by in a second or did it seem like a long process?

“It was a journey, for sure. It was a journey. Just when I came to the locker room, it really low-key hit me. It was a journey. It was a good journey.”

Do you take solace in the way you finished or look back frustrated about how close you were to making the playoffs?

“All of it. For me personally, during the draft process, after Tennessee and the last playoff game, all the way up until now, it was a good journey again. As a team, we didn't get to the main goal. We wanted to get into the playoffs. That's what we [were set on] going into the season. But, we did a good job finishing strong. That's me being a rookie, that's me growing as a leader on this team. These last four games can hopefully give us a jump going into next season.”