



Zebra Your Edge Podcast

Hosts:

- Adam Petrus, Business Development and Sales Lead, Sports & Entertainment, Zebra
- Hale Hentges, Former NFL Player and (Current) Vertical Account Manager, Sports & Entertainment, Zebra

Guests:

- RJ Ochoa, Producer/Writer, [Blogging the Boys](#)

Transcript

00:00:00:00 - 00:00:10:24

Adam

All right. Welcome back, everybody, to another episode of Chalk Talk. I'm Adam Petrus.

00:00:10:26 - 00:00:12:19

Hale

And I'm Hale Hentges

00:00:12:21 - 00:00:36:16

Adam

There he is. Hale Hentges is the great Alabama tight end, two time national champ. More than a cup of coffee in the NFL. And today we have an awesome guest, an excellent guest, that's going to give us some insight into the NFL, specifically going to be talking about them Cowboys for a little bit. But really, we're going to talk with RJ Ochoa based out of Texas.

He is the producer of Blogging the Boys, a Dallas Cowboys fan community. And he just got back from the Super Bowl. And certainly RJ and I just missed out on seeing each other, although he was pulling some very early hours there on Radio Row in Las Vegas. But Hale, Super Bowl 58 is in the books.

And tell me, did you have a bet that we were going to see overtime?

00:01:03:15 - 00:01:18:24

Hale

No, no, I don't. I don't think we did. And just, you know, when you look back at Super Bowls, I think the last one was the Patriots and the Falcons with that stunning comeback by Tom Brady. And, you know, you just you never think that's going to be the outcome of the game. But I certainly wasn't upset. Free football.

I mean, that's certainly a great thing. And what a great game it was. I would love to see the back and forth. I mean, great quarterback battles, great defense. I really had everything that you could want as a fan.

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Adam

Absolutely great. And with that, let's bring in RJ Ochoa Straight coming to us from South Texas. RJ, thanks for being on the show today.

00:01:41:00 - 00:01:55:11

RJ

Of course. Adam, Hale, thanks for having me. It's a bummer that football season is over. Pitchers and catchers report and I guess that that's cool. But you know, it's whatever it is, like 190 days until the NFL is back in our lives. So the countdown has officially begun.

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Adam

It has, indeed. And man, that clock just started. But, you know, coming off the heels of Super Bowl 58. RJ, we talked about it and certainly you've got quite the background in covering the Cowboys from video producing and blogging, a writer I believe across SB Nation. Do tell us some of your immediate thoughts about the outcome of Super Bowl 58.

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Adam

What's the storyline coming out of Super Bowl?

00:02:24:09 - 00:02:42:03

RJ

Yeah, I mean, I think I'm past the point as a Cowboys fan, of caring whether or not the 49ers win a sixth title. That used to be, you know, in Super Bowl 47, that was something I felt really passionately about. And I don't know if I've just become numb to it all. But, you know, it is cool to see the Chiefs obviously cement themselves as a dynasty.

And I think we're all just kind of basking in the greatness that they are and the wonderful story that they are. And they have so many fun characters. And obviously the Taylor Swift of it all added to the story this particular season. It was strange in that the game was kind of slow, and I think that allowed for all of us to kind of wait to figure out exactly how we wanted to feel.

And the fourth quarter just felt so stressful. And I feel like the net result or net narrative out of everything is that the Chiefs are the modern day dynasty. They're the first, obviously, you know, dynastic existence. The Patriots were the first team to go back to back since the Patriots and the 49ers are you know really kind of the dynasty that never was right you know. Pick the one you want the '90s Bills, '70s Vikings. If you want to go different sport, I mean they're the '90s Utah Jazz. It is just you know if there were a handful of moments that they could change over the course of the last few years I mean we might be talking about them in the same sort of way. And so that's the perils of sports. That's the magic and the beauty and the heartbreak of it all.

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Hale

Absolutely. No, I love what you said there. And I felt watching it that there was not a moment in the second half where I felt like the Chiefs weren't going to win. No, I mean, it was one of those things where, like, I felt like the 49ers just had to hang on as long as they can. And, you know, right from being around the game, certainly from playing the game, it's it's a moment of, you know, hey, we don't ever want to be in a position where we feel like we're just trying not to lose.

And it seemed like a little bit during the second half, the 49ers went away from that attack, that ground and pound with McCaffery spreading the ball out well to now it's all right. Let's just try and hold on and win this game. And you know, we have someone like Mahomes and Kelce on the other end that, you know, that's not a very good bet.

So that was certainly something I felt like that narrative was starting to catch traction as we got deeper into the third quarter, the fourth quarter, and then it was, you know, Mahomes with two different winning drives, game winning drives. I mean, you know, it's tough to bet against them.

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RJ

Yeah, I think even, you know, there was the weird pitch back to Isiah Pacheco at the start of the second half and you just kind of felt like, man, are they, you know, too tired? And then there was the interception. But to your point, Hale, you know, when he threw that interception, I don't know that anybody was like, this is game over.

Like, it just it felt so inevitable and that they have three world championships and then all of them have come back from ten point deficits. It's just absurd, you know, that anybody could pull that off and make it look as easy as they managed to, even if it did take overtime in this particular instance.

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Adam

I think, you know, you can sum it up to what Patrick Mahomes said on the podium there, that the Kansas City Chiefs are never underdogs. You are never going to rule them out. And you know, what's funny is I will tell you, I wanted to see San Francisco win for a couple of reasons, but irrelevant, except for the fact, though, when I'm watching this football game, I've seen this before and I've been to a handful of Super Bowls.

I've been on the sidelines at the Super Bowl with Zebra supporting the Next Gen Stats program. And so it's neat to see that perspective to be on the sidelines. I was behind Kansas City when they played San Francisco about two Super Bowls back and then three Super Bowls back and then also when behind the bench of the Patriots to see a win.

It is a neat dynamic to see it from that level. But when you see Kyle Shanahan with a lead in the Super Bowl and then you've got Patrick Mahomes, the guy finds a way to win and he did that again here with his arm, with his legs. Being an executive at the helm of quarterback. I'm with you all.

I mean, no matter what happened, Kansas City was going to find a way to win this game and they found it in overtime.

00:06:15:26 - 00:06:38:05

RJ

It was incredible. And I feel for Kyle Shanahan on a human level just because that's such a difficult reality to reckon with that, you know, he's blown three different 10 point leads and circumstances have changed, venues have changed, teams have changed.

His position in those games has changed and that's it. It's such a self-fulfilling prophecy, or at least it feels that way at this point in time.

And, you know, if you're Kyle Shanahan, you have a 10 point lead in a playoff game in the future, How can anyone feel safe? I mean, you know, that sounds silly and it sounds ridiculous, but the wild nature of sports, you know, suggests I mean, it wasn't obviously until the NFC title game that they hadn't come back from a deficit. And it's not until you do those things that that people start to believe. And so you know we like to as Cowboys fans often remind 49 year fans that their Super Bowl drought is longer albeit just barely. And so you know, it's when you're in that place, everything feels dark until there's a glimmer of hope and a glimmer of light. And for now, the 49ers are just kind of entrenched in darkness.

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Hale

It's well said. Yeah. No, I mean, I love what you said there, too. And, you know, let's rewind just a little bit from the journey to the Super Bowl to pivot to the Cowboys, since you mentioned them. Talk a little bit about just what happened with that Green Bay game. You know, talk about what went right, what went wrong, you know, where maybe you would have liked to see some different changes with the offense or the defense.

You just maybe give your perspective on what you shared with your listeners.

00:07:43:19 - 00:08:04:06

RJ

Yeah, I mean, I don't know that much went right to be fair, but it was it was really stunning, to be honest. It was it was almost so overwhelming that you never really processed what I think, as an example, Niners fans are feeling today - and not just because they lost the Super Bowl, but because it's such a death by a thousand paper cuts kind of thing for the Cowboys.

It was just this immediacy. It was just they were immediately down big and it was, you know, down seven and then down 14. After the Alexander interception. And everything that happened was the most sort of course thing. And, you know, I've done a lot of water carrying, I think in my day and tried to, you know, disprove a lot of, you know, silly narratives.

And you all have been very helpful in that capacity by providing some objective data and some objective evidence. But that game just sort of tugged and picked at every wound and scar that had ever healed. About the Cowboys. Dak Prescott can't get it done in the big games. And he has this, you know, MVP sort of caliber season and obviously has a terrible outing.

And Mike McCarthy, you know, can't get his team prepared for a big time moment. He had done all of these things that the Cowboys hadn't done in forever. I mean, I don't know how well aware you all are, but the Cowboys went to the playoffs three straight years in a row. That hadn't happened since the night they won double digit games three years in a row.

That hadn't happened since the mid-nineties. They obviously had all sorts of, you know, pick the record you want. I mean, Darron Bland with the Pick Six record and all these other, you know, the impossible things that they were accomplishing and they pulled off the NFC East, even though Philadelphia had that massive lead right at the beginning of December and they had lost the game at home.

And I know that I'm just going kind of long winded here, but they felt invincible. It felt like, okay, at the very least they're going to break the NFC title game appearance drought and they might lose to San Francisco because that's what everybody except for Kansas City does. But it will feel like progress. And so to just get punched in the mouth and be down 27 to nothing, if you know, people say like, I'd rather my team get blown out than lose a heartbreaker, you would not rather do that.

I mean, because we just had to kind of sit in it and just reckon with that reality for an entire half of football. And, you know, I don't I still don't have a great explanation other than it was just the worst possible day they could have had. And that Green Bay obviously had one of their best days and I think as far as the fundamental football of it all, you know, Dan Quinn has been so great for the Cowboys and I'm anxious to see how he'll fare in Washington.

But I mean, we talk about how nickel is the new base and all sorts of things like that. Dan Quinn hates linebackers. I mean, the Cowboys have had one true classic off ball linebacker on their team, you know, in the last whatever, two years and it's been Leighton Vander Esch isn't necessarily a reliable player from a health standpoint unfortunately and so you know Markquese Bell's a converted safety even to margin over showing who the Cowboys rely high on is a converted safety in terms of his collegiate days.

And they were just too small for what the Packers wanted to do in out of 12 personnel. And they were just getting pushed around and it didn't help that the offense couldn't go shot for shot with them. And I think it was in I'd say in the drought that the Cowboys are in probably the most devastating playoff loss they've had.

It's not worse than the catch or the 94 title game or things like that, but because of the expectation, because it finally felt like they were vanquishing all these demons from their past and skeletons in the closet to just have no chance at any point was really demoralized.

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Adam

Now, that game hurt. That hurt for the Cowboy nation. I think that hurt for anybody who wanted to see a good game in the playoffs. But certainly, you know, you're absolutely right that what the Cowboys achieved this season, let alone going into the playoffs, you expected them to be dominant to put up a serious fight. And to your point, they got punched in the face and they

were never able to get back up.

And so out of all of that and of course, you know, you watch Jerry Jones in the box during the game. You watched what's Mike McCarthy, give us your thoughts. What's in that? What's in the head of Jerry Jones? And then separately, what are the fans think about Jerry Jones these days from the faithful and or the base of the Cowboys?

And then what should we expect out of Mike McCarthy in the next year?

00:11:47:16 - 00:12:05:24

RJ

I think that that Jerry wears on people. If you're a Cowboys fan, I think that a lot of non Cowboys fans view him as this kind of character of the NFL. And I do think he has a place in NFL history. I think he has a rightful place in the Pro Football Hall of Fame. I mean, the NFL has a market in Los Angeles now and Las Vegas.

And I don't know that they've either of those things happen, if not for him. And so he has certainly grown the game as kind of ambassador for the league and what he's done for the Cowboys. I mean, they're the most you know, I would imagine a big reason why I'm here is because people have a level of interest in the Cowboys and I'm connected to them.

They help me put food on my table and support my family. And so I'm certainly gracious, grateful for that. But I think people generally nowadays meet anything he says with rolling of the eyes, at least anybody, maybe south of the age of 45, anybody who who probably hadn't hit puberty, you know, by the time the '90s dynasty was was all said and done. And it's because it just kind of feels like more of the same. I mean, at our current moment in time, just literally Jerry said in the lead up to the Senior Bowl that the Cowboys are going to go all in on the 2024 season and that sounds great and that sounds awesome. And, you know, I'm personally grateful for that, like I said, because, you know, we can have a lot of fun with that.

But, you know, they still haven't hired a defensive coordinator and there's all this mess about whether it's going to be Mike Zimmer or Rex Ryan. And those aren't moves, you know, necessarily that I would endorse personally, not that I know more than they do, but so I think people feel like they're a circus and fans feel like all they care about is money. And they certainly have a lot of it. They have more of it than anybody else. And the McCarthy of it all, you know, I really did defend Mike, and I feel like his greatest crime might be that he lost a really public PR battle to Aaron Rodgers. And that really shaped a lot of people's opinions of him and I think the people, you know, feel like any success you ever had in Green Bay was completely and totally Aaron Rodgers and that he's just this doofus who's responsible for nothing. And I mentioned I mean, as he won the Super Bowl with the Cowboys. No, but he did he did things that nobody has done in the drought and he accomplished all sorts of great things. And I do believe that he instituted a higher level of football culture than had existed and that had been allowed to exist within the corporation.

That is the Dallas Cowboys. A lot of people liken them to the Roy family. I don't know if you all are Succession fans, but it kind of feels like that's who they are sometimes. And so I think that Mike deserved a lot of credit and I always stood up for him. But, you know, people would ask me a year ago leading up to the 2023 season, well, you know, if they don't reach the NFC title game, do you fire him?

And my response was always like, well, well, how do they miss it? Do they miss it off of off of a last second, you know, field goal that hits? Do they miss it because they get waxed in the playoffs? It matters. And I think that what we saw was you know, one of maybe a handful of ways this could have gone to to justify moving on from him, particularly when you consider that they have to make a decision about Dak Prescott if they want to extend him. And so I'm not a fan of going at this with Mike McCarthy in a contract year. I think that that creates this weird sense of awkwardness that it's difficult to overcome.

And if they do extend Dak now you've got your head coaching your quarterback on different timelines, which you know, creates awkwardness for, you know, any sort of potential future head coach. So I, I think you had to make a dramatic decision one way or another. I'm not endorsing extending Mike McCarthy, but I think you either had to do that or move on from him and reset now because you're kind of hokey poking this thing and half in and half out, and that's going to ultimately rear itself over the course of the 2024 season, I'm afraid.

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Hale

I love what you said there. And you know, RJ, I think there is an incredible amount of truth to the couple of different points that you just made there. And I've always been a big proponent, too, of giving coaches and players the time that they need to develop and the time that they need to, you know, prove that they can be really, really good in this league. And, you know, obviously, this is the NFL, right? This isn't high school or peewee football where, you know, it's like, well, they're still growing in the churn and all those things. Right. Obviously, these are grown men who are doing the things that they have to do and they need to produce. Totally get that. But I've always been of the mind of, hey, if someone shows promise like that. Right. MVP caliber season this year. Mike McCarthy, fantastic stuff done this year, right. I've always been a proponent of give these guys the chance, give them one more draft, give me one more free agency, give back a couple more tools. But that's how I see it, Right? As a former player, I've always been a little bit more like, well, you know, a bird in the hands worth two in the bush, if you know what I mean.

So it does get a little bit a little bit tough there. And I see where you're coming from. And I'm sure that was a very polarizing thing for a Cowboys nation, whether or not to keep him what to do, you know, who to go get it. It's never a black and white answer by any means. But I'm happy that he's staying around. And, you know, hopefully that they're going to continue to build andm you know, make it further in the playoffs this season. They just got to get over that hump, though.

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RJ

Yeah. And he's done a great job, I think, of surviving the attention that comes with being the Dallas Cowboys head coach. And I'm certain you both remember the Sean Payton rumors that were just never ending, obviously. And I think we would all anticipate things being similar with Mike Vrabel and Bill Belichick, you know, kind of just waiting in the wing throughout the course of this upcoming season. And so I certainly think he deserves a lot of credit. But and for the first time ever, I have felt in the, you know, brief month long offseason that it's been so far for the Cowboys that they are fighting the history. I mean, this is a obviously a Tiffany brand franchise in the NFL. It's the most valuable sports franchise in the world.

And you know, it is an incredibly heavy shadow that looms over them. It's the only one that that looms over the building because they won't put the curtains up for, you know, for afternoon games. And you get that awful glare that every player hates. But it's so hard. I mean, it's just very difficult. And I think now more than ever, they really kind of feel the weight of fans and their kind of dissatisfaction. I mean, you've got people who, you know, have grown up and lived life and have children and have second mortgages and all sorts of things that you know, have been waiting for this to end. It's you know, we've reached a point of statistical improbability that it would last this long. I mean, I've tried to contextualize it a lot of different ways.

I think my favorite one nowadays is the last time the Cowboys even appeared in an NFC championship game. Marvin Harrison Sr. was in in college. And and so he's you know, obviously done a lot of things and his son will be in the NFL before the Cowboys make it back to the title game at the very least.

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Adam

Well, I got to say I was born and raised in Cleveland, worked for the Cleveland Browns. I feel some pain there as a Browns fan, as a Cleveland Indians fan, as a Cavaliers fan. It's there's a long drought. And certainly, you know what loves what Detroit did this year certainly that game against the Cowboys was was pretty phenomenal. Questionable aspects about some of the the refereeing, the two point conversion and what is a sign... what is it call of designation. But as you know Zebra is the official partner of the NFL for Next Gen Stats for the player and ball tracking. We also do some things for NFL health and player safety. Certainly the evolution of the game, we're only seeing the players get faster, bigger, tougher. But, you know, curious from your standpoint, when you digest all the data that's out there, are you able to take away some notable aspects from what is delivered out of the NFL's next gen stats program?

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RJ

Yeah, absolutely. You know, I I'm kind of a big fraud with that, if I'm being completely and totally honest. You know your newsletter points me in the right direction. I would say more than that kind of holding my hand. Obviously, the first thing I do is kind of scan for for anything Dallas Cowboys related, which is never fun after a loss, you know, particularly after they get blown out when they got beat by the 49eres, as an example, you guys just had all this information about how wonderful George Curry was and all sorts of stuff.

But it's so difficult to process things like that in real time and to appreciate things like that in real time. And we live in an era in a day and age where there's I wouldn't say too much information, but there's too much for a standard human being to comprehend in a moment. And so you do need time, you know, at the very least to absorb this and to contextualize what's happening.

You brought up the Detroit game. Ceedee had I think it was 91 yard touchdown in that game. You all had some really valuable information on that. And in the moment you feel it and you see it and it feels incredible. But then, you know, and then the end of the game happens and it just kind of flies away because there's this controversy and etc.

And it was on a Saturday night. So, you know, particularly everyone's talking about just the controversy on Sunday morning, but then the dust settles and you're able to kind of remember and say, man, he had this massive touchdown, this was a big deal. And that was also the night that city set the Dallas Cowboys franchise record for single season receiving yardage on it was the night Jimmy Johnson went into the Ring of Honor.

So as you can see, there's a lot of things that kind of smush that down as the evening went along. And so I certainly, you know, what you all do is among my most coveted resources and points of information and points of data, because without it, I wouldn't be able to discern everything that's happening. I'm very fortunate that the Cowboys generally play in isolated Windows and Island games to where I'm able to watch a lot of the NFL.

But, you know, there's the occasional week or two throughout the season where they play at noon. And when that happens, you just miss everything. And so I'm always anxious, whether it's with regards to my own personal fantasy team or, you know, whoever the Cowboys are playing the week ahead or the week after, I'm so fascinated to kind of just cross-reference and be pointed in new directions by what you all offer to help me kind of shape the way I think. And so I'm incredibly appreciative of you all. And that's why I was so excited when you all asked me to do this. Because what you do helps me more than almost anything that I have in terms of being able to do what I do.

00:21:38:05 - 00:22:01:06

Adam

That's awesome. That's fantastic. So we appreciate that and look from the operators that are in the venue that collect that data, you know, who show up at 7 a.m. for a 1:00 kick to make sure that we're tracking every player of every single play to include the balls and the officials. They do a tremendous job. And then, of course, how that newsletter is put together and the reviews and the follow ups. We have a great team and but we want to empower guys like you to be able to tell that story and highlight the performers and or and what we've seen in the in the world of player performance and teams taking in the data is that there are there are nuggets that certain teams can pull out and they can build their schema against based off performance data. So it's really neat to have seen how hungry the teams and the clubs and we as fans are for the data itself.

00:22:31:01 - 00:23:00:29

RJ

Yeah, I mean it's almost just wish it would happen in real time for me but it's such great information and such valuable information that I feel like I would get lost in the moment. And so that's why it's so valuable to have afterwards. And because it does allow you to really put in perspective, I think, again, with regards to CTE in this particular game, just how dominant of a performance it was, because, you know, I think the standard football fan looks at it and maybe they do have a piece of the and some sort of, you know, game, whether it's fantasy or whatever the case may be. And they say, he had a million yards and he had all these catches and cool. He said a Cowboys franchise record. Yeah, but, but like how is like how was he faring relative to the field and those, those conversations are really helpful. What I know city didn't win offensive player of the year and I know that Tyreek Hill didn't either.

But there was that debate brewing, you know, at that time in the season whether or not it was was truly kind of entering a space that was, you know, above and beyond even Tyreke. And so that information things like again and you all I would say has such a great feel there's a talent there besides just collecting the data but but feeling out what is valuable and what makes sense. And you also have a great ability and skill to reference it to historical points that are important. And again, that always just kind of serve at least the itch that I'm trying to scratch. So it's helpful to kind of contextualize man his completion percentage over expectation. That is a whole different, you know, level of discussion than how many yards that you have.

I mean, you know, it's a completely different thing to consider on that the pass attack had to him how far Dak had to travel, how quickly he was running, what his miles per hour were. And that allows you to appreciate what seems like a great player, seems like an average play and understand actually this was a tight window throw that, you know, had an incredibly low probability of being completed.

But somehow Dak's on Michael Gallup for the touchdown nonetheless. And so you know the Cowboys might cut Michael Gallup this offseason and Michael Gallup is kind of a pro at pulling off you know receptions like that is one example. And so that helps me understand, okay, if they're moving on from Michael Gallup, they're going to miss somebody who's capable of pulling off these, you know, for lack of a better word, clutch receptions. And so I would not have the ability to think that way if it weren't for you.

00:24:36:20 - 00:24:55:16

Hale

Fantastic. Yeah, we really appreciate that. I love what you said because as a as a former player, there's a lot of goodness behind being able to say, okay, you know, Ceedee Lamb is open, right? Maybe as one starter. But to be able to say, like on average he's getting two yards of separation at that route, I mean, that's for a fan's perspective or for someone like Ceedee Lamb to be able to see that and be like, okay, you know, I'm really in my era here where I'm really playing extremely well. And then, you know, that validates the fact that he's in that Tyreek Hill conversation because Tiger kills getting a lot of separation at the top of the route because of the nature of the routes that he runs. And so that definitely validates that. So we appreciate you saying all those things and it's good to see that being utilized.

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RJ

I would just offer as a rebuttal there or as just a compliment to that. And again, that's why I think you have to have such a great feel is you'll say things like that. And, you know, I think if I told my dad, he might be like, that's cool. Like, doesn't everybody generate the yards of separation? You know, like the context behind how big that is or how wide that is relative to the field or relative to anybody else or relative to however anybody else played that specific week.

That is really helpful because you can you know, the NFL's did such a wonderful job, obviously, and I'm not here to criticize the man or the machine. But, you know, they do things like FedEx Air Player of the Week and FedEx Ground Player of the Week. And sometimes, you know, you it doesn't pass. So you're kind of field test for who played well or who didn't.

00:26:00:21 - 00:26:16:08

RJ

And so this this helps you either justify that or helps you in your argument of, well, you know what, Maybe, maybe this player deserved it a little bit more, whatever the case may be. So so again, I seriously cannot thank you all enough for the hard work, because I know that that is not easy, you know, in any way, shape or form.

00:26:16:08 - 00:26:37:11

Adam

I know there's a lot of data to pull through. And so I got to give a shout out to Don Russo, Tim Klein, who work on that newsletter. They do an awesome job week in and week out. And I'm sure we're going to get an email here later this week with the Super Bowl readout. But RJ, let's move into the lightning round here just on a couple items around football around the Super Bowl. But let's start with your personal greatest of all time Dallas Cowboys football player.

00:26:44:23 - 00:27:09:22

RJ

You know, I mean, if I had to if I was charged with like building a museum, I think I'd say Roger Staubach. I think he kind of exemplifies everything that the Dallas Cowboys represent both on and off the field, obviously. But if I had to go off of just kind of personal, you know, experiences, I'm 34 years old and I'd probably say Tony Romo, just because he you know, he was the quarterback of my favorite team at a lot of formative points in my life. And you remember that. You know, you remember I remember when they lost to the Giants, the divisional round. That was my senior year of high school. Not that that was a good

memory, but, you know, I remember just being so I didn't go to school the next day. I was just I couldn't handle he was and he was the quarterback of my favorite team when I went to college, you know, and and all these kind of, you know, I think as football fans, we measure.

It's certainly true for you all. I would imagine for based on your personal expenses that we measure life achievements or life landmarks through the prism of football. And this happened the year that you know, that, you know, the 22 three come back happened or whatever, things like that. And so having that that bedrock common denominator for a lot of formative years of my life, like I mentioned, makes him just a little bit more special than a lot of players in my own personal experience.

00:27:55:09 - 00:28:11:28

Hale

Absolutely. No, I we really appreciate that comment. And, you know, I think it's a big testament to Tony Romo as a commentator as well, because he's by far my favorite commentator out there. And I'm not just saying that because I live in Texas. I mean, really, truly, I think he opens up the game like few can. And I'm excited to see people like Tom Brady when they get into that sphere as well, continue to add to that former player knowledge pool, because it's just it's so helpful to bridge that gap between player, the commentator, the fan. I mean, I think it increases everyone's knowledge of the game. So great quarterback, maybe even better commentator Yeah.

00:28:32:10 - 00:28:45:03

RJ

He's obviously got a whole new audience in that sense that the kind of forgets that he was the quarterback. Dak Prescott is the longest tenured starting quarterback in the NFL, and it all began when his broadcasting career began.

00:28:45:06 - 00:29:03:07

Adam

I'll tell you what, he didn't do an excellent job together. And my wife tends to say Jim Nantz has a very smooth, glowing voice. And then Romo comes in and but he's that kind of he gives you the straight talk, but he does a really nice job of explaining. And so I agree how I've been right there with you. I think he does a fantastic job. RJ - Can we go back to the Super Bowl. Let's take the halftime show. Give me a rating for Usher, 1 to 10, with 10 being just the best show you've ever seen for a Super Bowl halftime.

00:29:15:00 - 00:29:33:27

RJ

I mentioned my age, so I don't think it's difficult to backtrack and kind of figure out that I was I was in middle school kind of on a lot of these songs were, you know, were heavy. So it was great. It felt like the first halftime show I'd ever experienced that way. That felt like a throwback to my you know, I wouldn't call that my youth, but but some more adolescent days. So in that sense, it was, you know, eight out of 10, I've never been big on the Prince halftime show. I know that's a lot of people's go to. Bruno...I thought he had the best one of all time. He's such a showman. Beyoncé was great. The boss was great. I mean, Prince was great, don't get me wrong, it's is not my personal favorite, but it is so difficult to sing and dance like that. And you inject, you know, roller skates into the equation. So to pull that off in general was a really impressive sort of feat of athleticism. Maybe I feel like you guys should track Usher because that was, you know, there was a lot going on there. I would be curious to kind of see the data.

00:30:04:04 - 00:30:19:08

Adam

Yeah. Going back to prop bets, I don't know if there was one for Usher to be on roller skates. That's true. But he can move pretty well on the skates. But I'm not surprised because the way the guy moves with no skates on, he is pretty smooth. So appreciate that.

00:30:19:10 - 00:30:22:17

RJ

Yeah, for sure.

00:30:22:19 - 00:30:42:17

Hale

Good stuff. Good stuff. Well, R.J., give us your thoughts on who you think would be a an early favorite to be in the Super Bowl next year if you had to pick two teams. What are your thoughts nowadays? And obviously, if it's the Cowboys, I'm happy. If it's not, you know, I don't think anyone will hold it against you. It's just your unfiltered thoughts here.

00:30:42:19 - 00:31:04:14

RJ

I think my non Chiefs thoughts, because I do think you have to kind of add that lens now just because of who they are, it just feels, you know, Buffalo feels like the Dallas of the AFC obviously in their situation. And Josh Allen's just so talented you know. I believe in them slightly more than I do Baltimore at this point in time I'm not I want to see more from the Chargers to be able to fully buy in.

I have no idea. You know, I'm sorry, Adam, what the Browns are going to look like with Deshaun back in the fold. It's just it's such a interesting situation. Not big on Jacksonville, things like that. So I'd go Buffalo or Cincinnati. I think we're all going to forget that Cincinnati kind of exists again. Sorry, Adam, but, you know, because the way they bowed out so early with Joe Burroughs injury, I think that they'll kind of be hiding in plain sight.

And on the NFC side of things, I'm really fearful that it's going to be the Packers and that we've just begun a whole new era all over again. That's just going to be terrifying and unfortunate. And so I'll say Buffalo, Green Bay, Cincinnati. Green Bay is kind of an honorary, you know, mentioned as a second. But I just have I have a difficult time believing the Cowboys completely through all the weird stories that are going to encircle them this season just because of the contract side of things.

00:31:52:29 - 00:32:23:07

Adam

Yeah. No, speaking of contracts, you know, I was on radio row and had some conversations about contracts and things like this. And certainly, you know, the fully guaranteed contracts. You've got the Deshaun Watson situation out there. Then Cleveland has to have four different quarterbacks to get to the playoffs with a guy who came off his mom's couch. What do you think we're going what do you think we're going to see here in the future of contracts, especially on quarterbacks based off of precedents for, you know, for good or for bad?

00:32:23:10 - 00:32:55:14

RJ

I think that that ultimately is maybe up to the Super Bowl MVP. I mean, I think Patrick Mahomes has the chance to probably, you know, be the first to command a percentage of the salary cap. I know that that's obviously territory that that NFL teams don't want to come close towards. But Mahomes was pretty amicable with the Chiefs the first time around when he did his deal and and obviously it's only age well and I just I mean I remember when Matt Ryan got the 30 million a year and that was just like the dumbest thing possible that that could that a quarterback and that was seven years ago.

00:32:55:17 - 00:33:12:14

RJ

And so the idea that you know Dak or whoever it is could almost hit 60 this offseason is absurd. I mean, we just had quarterbacks hitting \$50 million a year. And so the number continues to grow and it continues to sound absurd and people continue to kind of lean on the number. But from a percentage standpoint, it's the same.

I mean, this is the most popular sport in the world outside of, you know, soccer, which is understandable. And over 100 million people watched the Super Bowl. And so the salary cap will continue to grow. And soon enough, I mean, I wouldn't doubt if in two, three years we're talking about quarterbacks making \$75, \$80 million a year. Nick, I was going to have to hand out deals in all likelihood the Dak and Michael this offseason that are probably going to, from an annual average value perspective, take over \$100 million per year, which is pretty wild. But the salary cap can contain that and that's just kind of par for the course in that sense.

00:33:44:08 - 00:34:05:16

Hale

Absolutely no. Well said. And, you know, the brand is really growing around the world. I love the shot. I don't know if you saw it in the Super Bowl last night of, you know, people in Munich, Germany, and people in Mexico when people and there's a couple other countries listed there. But, you know, just supporting team, Right. Focusing in on, you know, this great American sport that's becoming worldwide and global.

And I love what the NFL is also doing with their international program. I remember back when we were playing, we had a couple of guys who came in who were from, you know, Germany and Estonia and Africa and guys who just didn't have this outlet right to be able to carve their path. Right. So the NFL's really going global. And, you know, like you said, I think it's only the brand is only growing bigger and people are going to see more and more dollars kind of continue to be pumped into the space. And to do that, you got to pay the quarterbacks more. So it'll be interesting to see what happens.

00:34:38:22 - 00:35:00:03

RJ

Yeah, I mean, the accessibility to the NFL continues to grow, obviously. And I know that people have passionate thoughts on this side or the other, but it feels like there's an NFL game on in every timeslot, you know, on every day kind of around the holidays, I would say around Black Friday. You know, I'm obsessed with the NFL, but I almost felt just the tiniest bit of NFL fatigue.

It just kind of felt like, you know, like it wouldn't hurt to watch, you know, jingle all the way with my family right now. You know what I mean? You guys are just, you know, take it up a little bit much of my time. But that being said, I mean, you know, obviously with streaming entering the conversation more and more and gambling money coming in, it's exciting as somebody who's who's loved the NFL forever and who's, you know, been obsessed with it, it is so cool to see it just become this this bigger and bigger and bigger thing with more ways to understand it.

That's again, kind of come back to the main point why I'm such a fan of you all, because it's one thing to just say, the four quarters are playing here and we had overtime and that was cool. But like, you know, we've seen that before. We've seen, you know, teams in the Super Bowl before. But to contextualize it different ways and to understand like, no, you don't understand like new you know, there was a new frontier that was crossed, you know, in this game or in this moment or by this player in the season. Those are those are the new things that I think kind of keep our flames lit all the way through as football fans.

00:35:55:07 - 00:36:15:08

Adam

Now, great point. I mean, look, the shield has evolved so much even over the last five years. And what we're seeing from you know, there is no NFL off season when you look at the Super Bowl ends, you go right into getting ready for the combine and then it's the draft. And the combine in the draft are now all these elaborate events and the coverage is impressive.

They have done a nice job of in bringing in the fans. It is it is pretty neat. And to your point, too, you know the commercials, we didn't talk about our favorite commercial from last night, but one of them certainly was the international with the young boy playing imaginary football and dodging things we've all done growing up in our backyards.

And so is that the five touchdown and that they tackle job with that in Africa in integration there So we're doing good things I know we're not going to give you much longer, but I got to bring up one subject, our DJ for our listeners there. We love this game, but the game is not perfect. The players are perfect.

And so Travis Kelce, over the last course of the year, we've seen him throw his helmet down really, really hard. We saw Mahomes behave maybe not the way that we wanted him to behave when they played Buffalo. And then last night you see Travis Kelce almost body check Andy Reid and get up in his face. Right. And so being a father, being an athlete and, you know, watching with my kids and wanting to see sportsmanship, you see this sort of thing happen in back in the day, somebody might get benched, but that's not how the world works anymore.

When money is on the line and championships in the team, it's about the team. Yet there are lessons that can be learned. But I haven't seen any sort of readouts. But from covering the game like you do, what are thoughts about the actions of these players that many might call a hero? I won't call them a hero, but those that look up to these guys, especially younger kids, what are we seeing and or what do you think needs to happen?

00:37:48:17 - 00:38:09:16

RJ

I mean, that's such a slippery slope. And I think obviously the more recent example is Travis, you know, speaking to Andy Reid and, you know, from their accounts after the game and, you know, I think the accounts are a little bit more soft given that they were on the game as opposed to potentially if they lost maybe it's viewed through a more contentious lens or a contentious lens. But, I mean, I think we're all willing to understand that it's a heat of the moment thing. It's the heat of passion. It's, you know, there's life and legacies and history and money on the line and all sorts of things. And so it seemed kind of in a normal and I don't mean that in a in a in a poor way, but we've seen obviously clips of Travis Kelce or Mahomes, you know, getting emotional before.

I do think I think that in general, football fans have a great sense of accountability that they'll hold people to. You mentioned the Buffalo game that felt that felt like the moment that everybody kind of, you know, kind of checked the Chiefs and said, okay, guys, you guys being a little bit ridiculous, especially because their whole defense of everything was, well, how can you get you know, how can you call back this play?

It was so cool. You know, that was just a ridiculous kind of defense. I mean, and so I think to answer the question more fully that the only real Cowboys example I can think of, I don't know if either of you remember, but after they were bounced by the 49ers in the wildcard round after the 2021 season the game played at AT&T stadium, the Jimmy Garoppolo Niners Cowboys fans threw you know beer bottles and stuff on on the field at refs and stuff like that and felt like the game wasn't officiated properly and obviously officiating is a is an issue that people have at the game but after the game Ceedee Lamb and

DeMarcus Lawrence, they blamed officials and every Cowboys fan thought that that was just really lame and cool and, you know, not what you want to see your favorite players do. And Dak Prescott, who is the most buttoned up dude I mean you will find and I would I would challenge you to find somebody who speaks the company line and who doesn't stray away from it as often as dagger as infrequently is that Dak was asked about that in his post-game press conference and very clearly let the moment just kind of get to him, unfortunately, and said, good, you know, I'm glad they threw it.

And it was just again, you know, that was a divisive figure. So I don't mean to act like his fans have his back entirely because that's just the way the Cowboys are. But everybody, even his most ardent supporters, felt like, you know what, dude, relax. I mean, I know you lost this playoff game and that's really frustrating and that's really unfortunate.

But let's not advocate, you know, violence, let's not advocate being silly. And so in my experience, people tend to be pretty fair with this kind of stuff. And based on my own personal Twitter timeline, I haven't seen anybody too upset at Travis Kelce. I think everybody's just, you know, from the understanding that, you know, he wanted to be involved and it was a close game and thankfully they want it.

00:40:34:14 - 00:40:37:25

Adam

Yeah, sometimes all is forgiven when you win, right?

00:40:38:02 - 00:40:43:16

RJ

History is written by the winners. That's the way it goes.

00:40:43:18 - 00:40:59:01

Adam

I really appreciate your time today. This was a fun conversation. Appreciate the insights. From the Super Bowl to what's going on with the boys in Cowboy Nation. Before we let you go, for those that one, I would love to follow you on your various handles. How can they find you?

00:40:59:04 - 00:41:29:12

RJ

Sure. I'm on Twitter and Instagram at our dojo and those just kind of serve as hubs for everything that I do. Yeah, it's it's a it's an amazing life that I go to that I'm inordinately blessed to get to talk about this for a living and be able to work from home and and do that and just kind of have a job that that I you know, that doesn't feel like work to me and it's aided by people like you all who just provide information to help me sound and seem a little bit smarter than I really am.

And so, again, I know I thank you all a lot, but, you know, it's not enough. Again, this is this is a really fascinating time to enjoy sports. I mean, I'm a big baseball fan and the data and that's what it's just that's actually overwhelming. I don't I can't process everything that's available in Major League Baseball. But but you all do such a wonderful job.

And I don't think it gets seen or noticed as much. And so I'm very happy that you all have outlets like your newsletter and very happy to. In my own small way, help shine a light upon it. Hopefully, and provide people with perspective on who's really doing the work for things like this. And so I'm genuinely and generally in all of you and your team.

And so thank you for for making this season a really fun. On From an informational standpoint, I'm looking forward to the future.

00:42:17:11 - 00:42:52:23

Adam

Outstanding. Excellent. I want to thank Christian Blatner for connecting us with you and getting you on the show today, I think. Hale, absolutely, RJ, we're going to have to get together midseason next year and get a check in on the first half of the season. And then as we look forward to the second half of the future and we're going to talk some serious cowboys, which, by the way, which our second, which our listeners will love to hear, is, as you know, is that the Dallas Cowboys are also a practice client of Zebra where we have our RFID system tracking the indoor and the outdoor practice facility so that the Cowboys data scientist can can look at all of that various data and do the appropriate schema to get them winning each and ready for each and every game.

00:43:02:06 - 00:43:22:01

RJ

You say that and I you know I'm still a little bit upset at the Cowboys but I will defend Mike McCarthy on this he has people here that's terms like players coach he studies that and he is well aware of his players and how hard they are working and how frequently or infrequently they are working. And there's a I mean, obviously, you know, they've had injuries and things like that. But there's a reason the Cowboys have had the success that they have had over the last three years under his leadership and under his guidance. And a big reason for that is his understanding of when he can and when he needs to push them and give them rest. Things that, to your point, would not be understood or able to be digested as efficiently, if not for your information.

00:43:40:07 - 00:43:49:04

Adam

Well, that's awesome to hear. You know, we used to say there's two types of coaches in games out there, those that embrace data, data analytics, and then there's former coaches in games.

00:43:49:08 - 00:43:50:23

RJ

That's really what's that.

00:43:50:26 - 00:44:05:09

Adam

It's the only way. It's training is a tool for the toolbox. But certainly I think what we have seen and what you're seeing in the NFL is that, you know, when you when you scrutinize and you find what's important out of the data, it can make it and it can make a difference in an impact.

00:44:05:11 - 00:44:25:10

RJ

There's a reason that the most highly successful people in any walk of life think can operate this way. And so I know it's a bit of a slow roll for some generations to accept, but this I wouldn't even say this is the future. This is not even the present. This is the past. And so if you if you haven't adjusted to it, I mean, good luck and enjoy. Enjoy the ride, I suppose.

00:44:28:09 - 00:44:33:28

Adam

Well said. And again, thanks for being on the show. Hale, why don't you take us out?

00:44:34:00 - 00:44:54:05

Hale

Yeah, absolutely. Well, RJ, again, thank you so much for taking some time to speak to Zebra Nation. We really appreciate your thoughts and your insight, great, great information about what you're doing and how you're using our data on a daily basis to inform your Dallas Cowboys listeners. So thank you so much again. And I'm Hale Hentges.

00:44:54:07 - 00:44:56:06

Adam

And I'm Adam Petrus.

00:44:56:08 - 00:45:05:23

Hale

And this is it for this podcast we're signing off talk to you guys next time.



NA and Corporate Headquarters
+1 800 423 0442
inquiry4@zebra.com

Asia-Pacific Headquarters
+65 6858 0722
contact.apac@zebra.com

EMEA Headquarters
zebra.com/locations
contact.emea@zebra.com

Latin America Headquarters
zebra.com/locations
la.contactme@zebra.com

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