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ESPN Monday Night Football Conference Call Transcript **Mike Tirico, Jon Gruden, Lisa Salters and Producer Jay Rothman Discuss 2015 MNF Season**

ESPN conducted a media conference call on Wednesday with *Monday Night Football* producer [Jay Rothman](#) and commentators [Mike Tirico](#), [Jon Gruden](#) and [Lisa Salters](#) to discuss the 2015 NFL season. ESPN kicks off the 46th year of *MNF* on September 14 with a doubleheader: Philadelphia Eagles vs. Atlanta Falcons (6:55 p.m. ET) and Minnesota Vikings vs. San Francisco 49ers (10:15 p.m.). [Full audio replay](#); [MNF TV schedule](#) and [photos](#)). Transcript:

JAY ROTHMAN: I guess to start with the numbers game really quick – the 46th season of Monday Night, the 10th on ESPN. It's the seventh year that Mike and Jon will be together in the booth, the fourth year that Lisa will be on the sidelines with us, and I'm proud to partner with Chip Dean our director. It will be our 25th season covering football together. We have a special group. We have a blast together. We love what we do, and Monday Night is very special, and we never take it for granted each and every game. So we're fired up to get going again.

Each year our goal is to keep innovating. This year just a couple of new things. We have a new graphics and animation package, a new look for Monday Night Football, a new show open that still fits into the legacy and tradition of Monday Night. We're excited to put that on the air. We think it's a very sleek and high-end primetime look that will separate our show. We feel good about that.

Innovation-wise, one item we've been working on, which the league has approved for use starting in Atlanta, will be Pylon Cam. We started testing in February at ESPN's Wide World of Sports facility in Orlando while we were taping Jon's *QB Camp* shows, and worked very hard since February with the league to innovate and create these pylon cameras that will have four cameras in each pylon in each end zone shooting down the sideline, the end zone sideline, the goal line, and the top of the pylon, and we do think, not being a gimmick, but more of a definitive look, crossing the plain, in or out of bounds, that sort of thing, that we think will help the league and help our coverage a lot. So we're really excited about that.

They were first used on our College Football Championship last year in Dallas, though I don't think made air just because no play was relevant. But we've taken that model and really stepped it up. As I said, with the league's approval, we'll begin that in Atlanta.

One thing to note, obviously, we lost a dear friend and colleague in Frank Gifford a few weeks ago. We'll be honoring Frank throughout the season. Mike and Jon will be wearing his No. 16 pin throughout the season to honor him. We've painted his number on the back of all of our production trucks as we traipse the country back and forth, and Frank will be featured in our open as well as some vignettes along the way. So we haven't forgotten our dear friend and what he meant to Monday Night Football.

But that's really it for me. We're fired up about the schedule. Each and every game is our Super Bowl. We treat it as such. I'm proud that we never give up on games, and we place a huge importance each and every Monday night in every opportunity we have, and there is no better group to be doing it with. And with that, I'll pass the baton.

MIKE TIRICO: Hi everybody. I know all these guys and ladies have a ton of questions for Jon on your teams and on the season, so I will try to get out of the space as quick as possible and be available from here, at US Open Tennis, to answer any questions you might have for me along the way.

The series of comments that I normally make are always similar. The one point I do want to make is congratulate Jay and Chip, our producer and director on 25 years of TV. There are few teams that I think of, (Sandy) Grossman and (Bob) Stenner from the CBS days early on and FOX, but a few groups of producers and directors that have worked together covering football at the highest level, championship games, big games, network, primetime shows that are a breed apart. If you love football, and I know a lot of the writers do, and if you are part of the television world, you need to do yourself a favor and spend some time around Jay Rothman and Chip Dean. They are exceptional at leading women and men, and building a team every year and push us to do the best we can and never to be satisfied with what we do day-in and day-out to try to make it better. It has been the highlight of my almost quarter century at ESPN to work with those guys. They make Jon better. They make me better. They make Lisa better. They make all of us better. It's a privilege to be a small part of their 25th year on TV. And I hope if you're looking for a story during the year, it's a cool one to share, because they've given viewers so many great moments of television, college and pro football over the years.

Jon's the best. Nobody works harder to get us prepared. I know more football than I've ever known in my life. Lisa and I have worked together for a long time, and it's a thrill to work with the rest of them and our Monday Night family. Monday Night is still a traveling show, if you will. When you come to the city, people cut out of work early. They plan their week

early and it's their chance to be alone in the spotlight of sports and the NFL, and it's our great privilege to carry on year 46 of this. Can't believe it's been 10 at ESPN, but we look forward to making every game and every night special. Thanks.

JON GRUDEN: Good morning. Just happy it's football season, very happy about that, and honored to be on Monday Night Football again. Really excited to be on the team with Mike Tirico and Jay and Chip and Lisa and everybody involved. We've got some new technology and look forward to sharing some good games with our fans of football out there. Thank you.

LISA SALTERS: As always, can't say it any better than the guys have already spoken ahead of me. But I will underscore, it's certainly my privilege and my honor to be able to work with the team that we have. Mike said it best, Chip and Jay, no one can do it better than they do it. They make us all better. They push us, encourage us, scold us when we need scolding, and, again, make the product the very best that it can be.

Again, my honor to work with Mike, who I work with during the NBA, doing football with him. Again, he pushes me and makes me better and it's a privilege to work with him, and like he said about Jon, no better teacher. If you want to know football, learn from Jon Gruden. He teaches me, and I get to school a little bit of that knowledge to my family and my friends. This is what Jon said this week. This is what Jon told me about this. He's great at what he does, and it shows on television each and every week. So, like you said, glad to be back doing what we love to do.

Q. This is for Jon. It seems like there is an inordinately high number of quarterbacks this year who are in sort of critical improvement-type situations. ... What does that say about the difficulty of finding the right guy for that position?

GRUDEN: I think that's true every year. It's more complicated now, I think, the way that coaches change teams. Not just the head coaches but some of these teams have five or six different offensive coordinators in the last six or seven years. It's harder to develop a quarterback going that route. It's also harder to develop a quarterback with this CBA that we have and when it's training camp and a lot of the work you can get done. But I think once Peyton Manning, Eli Manning, Philip Rivers, Drew Brees, Tom Brady some of these veteran quarterbacks leave the game, we're going to need a lot of these young guys to step up. So let's not pull the trigger and give up on them too quickly. But they do take time. Unfortunately situations are making it harder and harder to develop them like we did years ago.

Q. Jon, now that you've seen the Eagles in three preseason games, what do you make of the changes Chip Kelly has made this season?

GRUDEN: They're using a couple of different personnel groupings. They're using, I see (DeMarco) Murray by himself a lot. I've seen two halfbacks together, (Ryan) Matthews and (Darren) Sproles. They utilize Darren Sproles as a slot receiver. I've seen him running patterns that you would see Wes Welker, (Julian) Edelman, some of the very good slot receivers run. So obviously Sproles' role has expanded, and I do see Sam Bradford's ability to throw the football accurately, and that's what he's always been able to do. They have kept him clean. He's been under very little pressure so far. It will be a challenge though to see how it looks in the regular season. But I like how they've expanded Darren Sproles. I also like the improvements they've made in their secondary on defense a lot.

Q. Jay, I want to ask you an open-ended question. How critical can your broadcast be of Roger Goodell?

ROTHMAN: Well, I think Mike and Jon need to shoot straight in their opinions. I don't think we're out there to blast Roger or blast the NFL. We're there to cover a football game. But if there are things that we don't agree with and Mike and Jon don't agree with, we certainly encourage them to have the forum to express that. But we're not out there – our goal is not to lambaste Roger. We're there to cover the games.

Q. Coach Gruden, how lethal can the Matt Ryan-Julio Jones combination be if the falcons are able to improve the block and have a running game with that this year?

GRUDEN: You know it can be lethal. A couple years ago they proved that. Julio Jones is one of the top three or four receivers in the game. Glad he's healthy. He's previously proven he's a 1,000-yard receiver. But you're saying if, if they can run the ball. They haven't run the ball very well in a long time. They didn't run it well in the three preseason games I've looked at, and they haven't been committed to running it either. Their offensive line right now has a lot to prove. So it will be interesting to see. Those are two big ifs. But if they can pass block and run block and run the ball, Matt Ryan and his receivers can rip you. They're very talented.

Q. Jay, you mentioned those pylon cameras for the season. Where do you see those having the biggest impact, and will they affect at all how you use any of your other specialty cameras?

ROTHMAN: They're not a live camera. They're meant as a first or second look. We had it in the preseason right away in the first series in Tampa. We used them in our second game and Jameis Winston went for the pylon for the touchdown. To help give that definitive look certainly in a scoring situation, again, the goal line or end zone sideline as well as the sideline from the pylon looking down, foot in, foot out, two feet in, completion of the catch, that sort of thing. So I think

they're going to be extremely helpful in critical situations when you're looking at the four corners of the end zone and at the goal line.

Q. And will you still be using a lot of specialty cameras like your 4K and your aerial and that kind of thing?

ROTHMAN: We do. We have two 4K cameras at the goal lines, we have a 4K camera in the end zone. We experimented a bit more with using SpiderCam live with Jon's encouragement and his passion for that angle. You know, adding the 1st and 10, and placing where the ball is, we may in critical situations, certain situations, use that camera a lot as a play-by-play look, which we think is a compelling look as long as viewers know where the ball is on the field and don't get confused or lost. So, yeah, we're loaded and ready to go.

Q. You guys have the Bears on Nov. 9th. Obviously our expectations (in Chicago) aren't high here. Jon, just kind of wondering what you've seen of preseason and how much should we expect of the Bears?

GRUDEN: Well, it's hard to say in preseason because I haven't seen Alshon Jeffery play or their first-round pick, (Kevin) White, from West Virginia. I don't know the status of those two. And obviously they really would impact this offense in a positive way. But it looks like they're committed to running it. It looks like Jay Cutler fits the new offensive scheme by Adam Gase. They pass protected a little better with their first group than they did later in the season last year, but I think it's going to come down to defense, how well they can transition to the 3-4 run by Vic Fangio.

They've got to address their secondary. They just released Tim Jennings and they have new faces in the secondary in the deep end. They have a lot to prove on defense in year one under John Fox. But knowing Fox and Fangio, they'll find a way to scrap and be a good defensive team. They'll compete and make it tough on offenses with all the different things that they do. But I have a lot of questions about their defense, and this receiving corps, if they're going to be a prolific passing team like they have been a couple years ago.

Q. As a follow-up, you had that Bears game last year and (Jay) Cutler had a terrible game and you didn't hide your disliking for what you saw. Is there a chance that this guy can still be a solid NFL quarterback?

GRUDEN: I think he's got talent. I don't think anybody would dispute the talent that Cutler possesses. He's smart, he can run, he can throw. He's got to win some games. He's got to win over the city. He's got to win over the team. He's got to be consistent, No. 1. He's got to eliminate turnovers. Until he does, the Bears are going to hover around mediocrity. He has the talent to be great, but for whatever reason, Marc Trestman, Lovie Smith, name the coordinator, it hasn't worked out yet, and I have a feeling that this is a good year for Jay.

Q. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being best, maybe you can assign a number to the chance of you being part of an NFL telecast somewhere in LA in 2016, and why you would rank that number?

TIRICO: I'll give you an 8. If all the people who are involved in the conversations for LA have put significant money and planning and have really turned the pressure up, and when you see the owners get together with a meeting specifically about LA, you know you are at the doorstep of something truly happening after decades of talks. So I think the chances are pretty strong, and if not '16, then in '17. I don't know logistically if time will allow for it to happen in '16. But too much noise with the San Diego open situations, and obviously in St. Louis, the ownership there has taken a very strong interest in acquiring land and having a potential destination there. So I think we're reaching the time where the conversation is going to turn into construction for the LA project going forward. Whether it's nine months or 18 months, I don't have any insight on that. But I'd say if not '16, I'd be pretty confident in '17.

GRUDEN: I would comment on that, but I really have no idea. I have a feeling just being with the Raiders for a few years that something's going on down there. I have a couple of my sources down there that say it's inevitable, but to give it a number, I'd say it's a 10. It's going to happen. There's just too much going on in that Hollywood Park area. And hopefully it works out and they get some real enthusiasm for football in Southern California. I think it's a great place for action down there.

Q. Jon, with Miami with the addition of Jordan Cameron and the new receivers, do you look at them as a fringe playoff team? What things do you like about them and what concerns you about them?

GRUDEN: I like this team a lot because the development of Ryan Tannehill. He has, I think taken a real positive turn. I like watching him play the position. He takes care of the ball. He's a threat to run a number of different kinds of plays. He's not just a bubble screen, read-option quarterback. He can drop back to pass. He can function in the pocket. He's accurate. He's gotten better throwing the football. Their arsenal around him has improved. Not a lot of people know that when Lamar Miller's a 1,000-yard rusher.

If Branden Albert can come back, be the left tackle, and (Ja'Wuan) James can continue to develop on the other side with (Mike) Pouncey in the middle, this is a good offensive team that's balanced. And this front-four can rock you, man. These guys are really good rushing the passer. I just watched them against Atlanta. They can create a lot of problems with their games, with their energy, and I think it's going to come down to their secondary. How deep are they? Can they hold up? This is the year of the Dolphins, I think, in the AFC East, given all the circumstances that I have.

Q. Brian Hoyer over Ryan Mallett has been the central story of the Texans training camp. I wanted to get your thoughts on that decision. Also, I'm curious to know how you would have fared had you been placed with a Hard Knocks concept when you were coaching?

GRUDEN: I've been approached to be on Hard Knocks a couple times, but I don't think that would have been good TV. I think that's why we probably chose to opt out of that. You have to give Bill O'Brien credit. He had two quarterbacks that he was familiar with from his days in New England. So obviously he was able to set his offense up to their strengths, and was able to work on their weaknesses while he did that. And he distributed the reps pretty evenly. I thought both guys had a chance to take the job, and Tom Savage is coming on also in the games I've seen.

I think Hoyer, his experience, his ability to use the personnel around him. I think (DeAndre) Hopkins is going to be a superstar in the league. He threw the deep ball pretty well, and I thought they did a nice job in the absence of Arian Foster. But their defense will carry them. I think they trust Hoyer's game management and his playing experience. I think that's what won out for him.

Q. You mentioned the CBA, to what degree is quarterback development still affected by the way the game is played in college football?

GRUDEN: It's just hard to get any reps for the second quarterback. We used to have two practices a day, now a lot of times there is one practice and a walk through. There is a mandatory day off during the week now that never existed. Practices aren't as long, and there's no contact with players during the month of February, during the month of January, the early part of March. You're not allowed to use the football on the field with your quarterback for a while. That's when a lot of the hands on, private tutoring, private work happened. Now you see a lot of these quarterbacks going to Tom House to work on their throwing motion, or George Whitfield to work on different fundamentals. They had different independent quarterback coaches, but they're not really learning their offense and what they need to do to get better handling protects and audibles and all those types of things.

Q. Jon, I know you've been a big Kirk Cousins fan in the past. What do you think the prospects are in that offense now as a starter, and what do you think the next step or future holds for (Robert) Griffin?

GRUDEN: I like Cousins coming out of Michigan State for the same reason a lot of coaches did. He was a three-time captain. He had prototype size. I think now that he is the starter and is going to get the majority of the reps, he has a chance to tune-up the offense to suit his strengths and the things that he likes. There will be more input and more opportunities to reverse things and get things right. I don't care what anybody says, I think repetition is the mother of learning. You have to have that for your quarterback.

So I think he's going to benefit from that. He'll be able to exert himself as a leader. He's just got to prove he can take better care of the football. You saw it last year. When he was on, he was on. That performance, at Philadelphia, against Jacksonville was unbelievable at times. But he proved that the turnovers, the inconsistency weren't good enough. I'm excited for him. He's a young guy with athleticism, and he has, I think, a good handle on this system.

In terms of Robert, he's just got to keep working. He's a fourth-year player. He's had a number of injuries. I've said it a lot of times, his inability to stay on the field has derailed him. The knee, the concussion, whatever the injury is, it's derailed him. So he's got to keep working. He's got to not listen to the elevator music. He's got to get focused and determined and concentrate on stringing good days together and good things will happen.

Q. One of the things we've seen in the preseason is poor offensive line play that comes from some good teams like Seattle and Indianapolis and some of the teams that maybe you'd expect. I'm curious your thoughts on why we're seeing so much poor offensive line play, and if there are a couple of lines around the league that you're especially concerned with?

GRUDEN: That's a very good observation. I know a lot of quarterbacks have been under siege. A lot of quarterbacks have been hit hard. A lot of the poor offensive line play has to do with poor quarterback play. You've got to be able to direct these protections. You've got to make the right calls. You have to make sure everybody's on the same page. You also have to throw the ball away and not hold it very long in pro football. So I think the quarterback at times is truly responsible for the negative outcome on some of these plays I've seen.

But you're getting a lot of young offensive linemen out of college these days that have never been in a three-point stance, have never been in a huddle, they don't have a real good background in how to get the stance and get out of a stance and pass protect let alone pick-up stunts, blitzes, handle audibles. It's a whole new world. I think late in the season, no one's wearing pads on the practice field. They don't pad up on the practice field in training camp nearly like they used to. There are a lot of linemen changing teams more so than I've ever seen before. But it's a great point. I think that's why you see a lot of teams running dive options with built-in bubble screens.

Q. Are there any lines that you're particularly concerned with that you've seen so far?

GRUDEN: Well, I don't want to be the negative dark shadow here, but watching the Atlanta Falcons over the last couple days, I hope that they're better than they played against Miami. They've got to play better to get this running game going, to get this quarterback to a level where he can play at. I think there are a number of offensive lines that I've seen this year that would have to play better, but I would call out Atlanta first because I've seen them play the most.

Q. In the last five years what are the most predominant new things you've seen strategically popping up in the NFL that you think will have lasting influence over time?

GRUDEN: I think the first thing is the emergence of the no-huddle offense. I think you're going to see more and more no huddle offense as teams try to get more and more plays run, more touches for their skill people. That's No. 1. No. 2, you're seeing way more sub-defenses than I've ever seen. You might have a 3-4 base defense, but you might play it seven times a game. You rarely see it. And the proliferation, the change in plus-five red zone goal line offense, it's nothing like it used to be. You're seeing a wide open, shotgun, no-back formations at the 1-yard line, not the conventional, power-I-formations that you would see running the football and special teams are totally different than I've ever seen. The way you rush the kicker, the way you kick off what yard line you kick from. The rules are obviously much different. This is a completely different game. We probably need to get on a cruise ship and cruise down the beach and talk about it for the next couple days. It's a completely different game, and when you throw in the changes that the CBA has brought, hey, it's a whole new ballgame.

Q. Quick follow-up, if you could make a couple of strategic changes in the next five years that maybe we haven't seen yet, where might you go there?

GRUDEN: After they move the extra point back and it's a 33-yard extra point anything goes. I've seen guys run back kickoffs from nine yards deep in the end zone. I'm seeing 33-yard extra points. I'm seeing guys hold iPads on the sideline watching instant replays. I've seen Cowboys Stadium, I don't know, we're on top of ball compression now more than we've ever been. Anything goes right now, brother, anything goes.

Q. We've got a pretty intriguing match-up in Tampa week one with Tennessee and Tampa. Jon, which young quarterback there has the better support group? Could that game kind of set the tone for both of those quarterbacks?

GRUDEN: You have two teams that are 2-14. Obviously both took quarterbacks. You've got to remember both teams are 2-14 for a reason. Tampa Bay struggled to block last year. Quarterback got hit a lot. Didn't run the ball very well. They turned it over. Tampa Bay has to pass protect better. They've got to get Doug Martin going and help this quarterback. Because I think (Jameis) Winston has a very good support system on defense. I think Tampa's going to be a good defensive team. These second-year teams always do that. And I love Vincent Jackson and Mike Evans. I think these two are tremendous down the field receivers. And I like their supporting cast around Winston I just concern myself with the offensive line. A rookie quarterback with two potential starters up front, that's a scary thought. Haven't seen that happen ever. And Tennessee, they didn't play a very good defense last year. They're transitioning from a four-three defense, to a three-four defense, and they gave up a lot of big plays in the passing game. I'm concerned with how much better they can get. The addition of Dick LeBeau certainly will help. But I like Marcus (Mariota) because they have a good offensive line. I think Taylor Lewan is going to help solidify that blind side. I just think Mariota and his skill set, the deception that he'll bring with the zone read and the scrambling ability will be a real tool for him. They have issues on defense, a lot to prove there. Who is the running back, who are the receivers? Some of the skill sets need to step up as well. But I like Winston a little better. You just have to concern yourself with how fast can the offensive line get better?

Q. Is there a real danger with these young quarterbacks? If they get hit too much as a rookie, could there be a long-term affect? Is that an overrated aspect?

GRUDEN: I don't think it is. I don't think it's overrated at all. They have to be able to protect themselves. By that, I don't mean scrambling, necessarily. I mean do you see the double corner blitz? Do you see the all-out blitz? They're not coming to play two-hand touch. They're coming to knock you down hard. And they have to be, I think, well-versed in how to handle blitzes. What audibles can they get to. Can they find the hot receiver inside adjustments? It's up to the coaches to gauge however far along they are because every veteran defensive coordinator that I've ever known is going to test every young quarterback until he proves he's got some answers to problems?

Q. Jon, you've always spoken favorably of Geno Smith and his potential. But I'm wondering how, if at all, your opinion of him has changed in the aftermath of the locker room incident with his teammate? Do you think he could have handled it differently? And the follow-up to that, do you think they might be better off with Ryan Fitzpatrick?

GRUDEN: You know, Rich, I like Geno because I know what kind of talent he has. And there are tapes last year, I think in the Miami game, there are films where you see this guy does have the ability to run and throw, he is tough. There are some throws he made at New England last year that were unbelievable. He came from a no-huddle offense with no background whatsoever and got thrust into the starting quarterback job of the New York Jets, and he had some limited options, I think, to throw the football to.

But I don't know the severity. I don't know the exactness, I should say, much his role and what happened. But there is a lot of smoke there. Wherever there is smoke, there's fire. I've never heard of anything like this. But I do think he's a young quarterback with talent. I think Fitzpatrick on his fifth or sixth team is going to be a good, I think, bridge to the future. But you still have to find where the future is. Is it Geno Smith? I think it's too early to give up to him. But hopefully Fitzpatrick can play solid football until they have an opportunity to decide for themselves.

Q. Jon, Matthew Stafford, he's a guy with a lot of talent and lot of weapons too, but he hasn't won big yet or even much, I guess. Why do you think that is? And second, if the Lions need him to carry them more this year after losing Ndamukong Suh, what gives you pause about that or why do you think he's able to do that?

GRUDEN: You know, Aaron Rodgers has a lot to do with his inability to get to another level in that division. Normally to be a great quarterback you have to be able to win a lot of games and it starts with winning your division. They have to find a way to solve Green Bay on the road, in the playoffs, wherever it is. But their offensive line, I think, has been a big area that they need to improve. They addressed it in the first round of the draft.

Stafford, as you all know, is an outstanding pocket passer. I think Tate, Golden Tate came in and gave them a legitimate number two option. If (Eric) Ebron can come alive and be a factor like they thought he would, this could be an outstanding offensive club. But Stafford is going to have to carry them. I thought they did great things last year. Lot of people thought they should have won that game in Dallas in the playoffs. The pass interference that wasn't called or was called, I can't even remember. But it's his time.

Andy Dalton, Jay Cutler, Tannehill, Stafford, lot of quarterbacks have been very solid statistically in the regular season. It's time for these guys to push it in gear and take this team to where they need to go in the playoffs.

Q. Question about Sam Bradford. He's sounds like the guy that you were talking about earlier that got caught up with a bunch of changes with the offensive coordinator and stuff like that in St. Louis even before the injuries. Where do you see him as a quarterback at this point, and how do you think he'll fit in terms of his skill set and what Kelly's offense requires?

GRUDEN: Remember Sam is very comfortable in a no-huddle offense. I remember when he came in here he was very comfortable in this up-tempo, speed-style of offense. He looks at home in Chip Kelly's system, at least in that Green Bay game. Not many guys go 10 for 10 at Lambeau at any point, let alone for three touchdowns. But if you get them open and get them protection, Bradford is a pinpoint passer. The question is can you get him open all the time and can he stay healthy? Can you protect him as you have throughout the preseason? That is the only question I have with Bradford. Can he stay healthy and play 85 snaps a game potentially for 16 weeks and into the playoffs? Obviously, St. Louis didn't think so.

Q. I know you won't have Peyton Manning until the end of the season. But what gives you confidence that he will rebound this season in this new offense of Gary Kubiak? And secondly, what have you seen from Brock (Osweiler) as far as preseason that gives you something to hold on to?

GRUDEN: I'm excited about Osweiler. I watched him against Seattle three days ago, and just the life in his legs, the size that he has. I forgot how big he was. He sees the field well. It's like he's making some changes at the line of scrimmage effortlessly. They have a running game and nice play action off of it. I love Gary Kubiak's film. If there were two offensive coaches that I'd grab their tape right away, Kubiak's one of them. It is a great play-action passing game, lot of diversity in formations and personnel groups.

So I think Osweiler seeing Peyton Manning at close range, and I think he's closing in on preparing himself to be a front line starter in the league. I really don't have much concern about Peyton other than Peyton being the evaluator of himself. If Peyton's thinking he can do it, he's going to keep doing it. And I would not doubt "The Sherriff."

Q. Jay, how are you embracing multi-platform viewing this year? Is there anything different from last year?

ROTHMAN: Just stepping up our social efforts throughout the game. We don't have a deal like NBC has a deal to do a simulcast with camera feeds and things of that nature. That's what they have exclusive. We don't have that. So it's more on a social front that we'll be stepping up our efforts in conjunction with the telecast.

Q. Jon, have you seen Marcus Mariota much during the preseason, and what do you think realistic expectations are for Marcus Mariota as a rookie?

GRUDEN: Yes, I have seen him and I think his mental toughness has been on display, number one. You saw him turn the ball over against Atlanta a couple times, I think, in the first 10 or 15 plays. Then you saw him string together some really good football. Saw him fall way behind on the road against Kansas City. He hung in there and engineered a couple of really good drives. I like the way he's playing under center. Ken Whisenhunt has put him under center a lot. He looks like he's in rhythm. He is seeing the field. He's doing some really good things. I think he's impressed a lot of people with the way he's thrown the football, and a lot of people are shocked that he hasn't taken off in the run yet. I think that's when

you're going to see the greatness of Marcus Mariota. He is a double-edged sword. He's a great competitor. I like the way they're bringing him along. If I was a Tennessee Titans fan, I'd be really, really happy.

Q. Do you have an early pick for rookie of the year?

GRUDEN: I'll pick Mariota. I'll take Marcus. I'll stand by my guy. I've been wrong several times, but I think this time Marcus has a chance of proving me right.

Q. Jon, back in 2013, ESPN ranked Andrew Luck and Griffin, Wilson, Kaepernick and Newton in that order among the top young quarterbacks. You've got two of them on a Monday Night game this year. I'm curious how would you rank those five now and why?

GRUDEN: Well, the No. 1 guy in the NFL, I think if you put all the players on the board, offense, defense, any player in the league, I'm taking Andrew Luck. I don't think anybody in football would argue with that. I don't know. Who were the other guys that you said? Russell Wilson? ... I'd pick Russell Wilson second, clearly. I think his ability to make plays in any circumstance. He's unbelievable. He's a winner. Luck and Wilson are two phenomenal talents. And Cam Newton, if you're willing to set your offense up around him, he is physically different than any man I've seen play quarterback. He looks like Charles Oakley or a power forward. He is built to last. I think if he can stay healthy, he had a terrible offseason last year, I think he can throw the football better. After those three, I think it's a crapshoot. But I'll just stick with those three.

Q. Jon, another Sam Bradford-related question. If you had been in Kelly's shoes in March, would you have been willing to trade Foles, who is just two years removed from the 27-touchdown, two-interception season, for a guy coming off back-to-back ACLs, even if you thought that guy was a potential franchise quarterback?

GRUDEN: I think everybody goes back to 27 touchdowns, two interceptions. He didn't play as well the following year, and he was hurt two years in a row. Sam's had injuries, but so has Nick Foles. Nick Foles has gone down in '13, and he's gone down in '14 and had injuries as well. I don't think very many people come across the road that can throw the ball like Sam Bradford. If this kid ... if this kid stays healthy and they can protect him, Kelly's proven they can get open targets for him.

And if Sam Bradford gets protection, he can shred you really bad. He's a phenomenal passer. He's just been hurt. I think Chip Kelly with Mark Sanchez in the house, they've had (Matt) Barkley developing, he probably thinks Pat Shurmur knows Sam Bradford, the offensive coordinator has a great history with him. I'm sure it wasn't Chip Kelly alone that made that decision. There are a lot of people that think a lot of Bradford and are really excited about him.

Q. I wanted to get your impressions of how the NFC West may have changed this year with the Seahawks ending the way they did at the goal line, the mess in San Francisco. They're trying to get it done again in Arizona, and what do we make of the Rams? You can either pick a team or give me your overall thoughts of that division.

TIRICO: Seattle is still the best team in the division. Obviously once you get people in a situation where they get paid you don't have as much flexibility, and their success will certainly depend on the great football culture and what Pete Carroll likes to talk about the football character of that group and see how they go forward.

I think Arizona's right there. If Carson Palmer was healthy, who knows what they would have done in the playoffs last year. St. Louis needs to show consistency on offense before you believe in them. You know they can do good things up front. And the type of team Jeff Fisher has got on defense and the type of team Jeff Fisher's trying to build. And San Francisco could be in position for a precipitous fall. And they've been in a pretty high spot over that Harbaugh era in that run, and it's a very difficult situation, first-year head coach and the number of people who are not around that used to be there, plus the change in offensive systems as well. I think Colin Kaepernick for me is one of the most interesting players in the NFL to watch this year. He's a quarterback who started in the Super Bowl. Didn't necessarily take a step forward last season, and now it's a very new era in terms of the entire team around him and the new offense that he'll work with.

So that's one of the situations to watch for a team that could take one of those significant falls. But I think still your class is Seattle and Arizona. Seattle games head-to-head will be entertaining games this year because of the quality both teams bring back. At least in my opinion.

SALTERS: I think that Seattle's the team to beat up there, and it still kind of amazes me that Russell Wilson's gone to the last two Super Bowls. To me, just the lack of credit that he gets for doing that at his young age. So to me I would still see Seattle as being the front runner out there and the team to beat.

GRUDEN: I would just say it's a great defensive division. Even though San Francisco lost a lot of players, that's a very good defensive place, I think. There is a tradition there, a recent tradition of dominance on defense. I think Arizona's an outstanding defensive team. The Rams might be as physical and deep as any front four in football. We know Seattle has played great defense. I think the wildcard is Russell Wilson. If you put all four quarterbacks on the board you're going to pick Wilson first. He's just consistently made more plays running and passing, and they find a way to win some ugly football games at times, but I still give Seattle the edge.

Q. Jay, looking forward to Super Bowl 50, are you doing anything special as we get closer? The NFL's already making a big deal out of it, obviously. Looking back over the 10 years, what do you think has had the most impact or maybe the biggest changes in the way you bring the game to viewers: Technology, social media, that sort of thing?

ROTHMAN: I'll start on the last part first. I honestly believe Coach Gruden has really stepped up our coverage and our presentation the last 10 years. I say that because of his incredible knowledge, his incredible teaching. For how we cover the game, his innovation, his look, his entertaining style and his flair has been tremendous for us and really kind of helped settle us into a dynamic booth with Mike, who Mike over 10 years has had different folks in the booth and had to handle that. But I think Mike would say the same as well that Jon's presence on Monday Night has really elevated our coverage and has just made it a joy. So I would say he's had the single most impact in the 10 years of Monday Night.

Then as it relates to Super Bowl 50, that's CBS's baby, so CBS has Super Bowl 50. I know our studio efforts will be there in San Francisco and Santa Clara to do a bang-up job around Super Bowl 50. We do have a couple of Super Bowl rematches on our schedule and we'll be doing our part for the league when it makes sense to showcase the 50th Anniversary of the Super Bowl coming up and that nature. For example, our week 2 game with the Jets and Colts, it's a little bit of a funny one because it was the Baltimore Colts and not the Indianapolis Colts, and Colts lost to the Jets. So I don't know how enthused the Colts are in us celebrating the 50th Anniversary or them doing anything, for example. No disrespect to them, but it's a little bit of a tricky-type deal. But we'll do our part within the course of the season when and where it makes sense and support the league and the 50th Anniversary as best we can.

Q. Jon, where do you feel Drew Brees is right now? Obviously there is a lot of wondering if he's in decline or he was a victim of circumstances around him last year, and what you think of Drew Brees and Sean Payton's ability to produce a good offense even after they traded Jimmy Graham and Kenny Stills this off-season?

GRUDEN: I don't think he's in decline. I think some of the decisions that he made, the interceptions and some of the decisions, people are probably questioning. But I have a lot of confidence that Drew Brees is going to have another 4000, 4500, 4700 yards passing. He's probably going to throw 30 touchdowns again. Lot of people hadn't heard of Lance Moore, hadn't heard of a lot of players, including Jimmy Graham. They've done an excellent job over the years developing unknown players – (Pierre) Thomas, a lot of these players that have flourished in New Orleans were players that people thought not much of. I've got a lot of confidence in Sean and Drew's leadership. I think Drew has taken great care of himself and in that Dome where the conditions are perfect, he's going to be a handful to deal with.

I like the fact that they got Max Unger. I think the center position has been a problem for New Orleans. They've had too many people in the pivot, and that's been a real problem for them. I like the idea of them drafting an offensive tackle in the first round to give them some pep and some future at a position where they need it. Jimmy Graham was a great pass receiver, but I think they're looking more for a guy that can be an in-line blocker, a more dual-threat-type tight end so they can run the football and take a little pressure off of Brees and shorten the game and maybe take a little burden off of their defense as well. They've got to play better on defense. They've got to prove a lot, but they're not far ahead. This NFC South belongs to anyone. It's anyone's league.

Q. Jon, I was curious to get your thoughts on Kyle Shanahan's development over the years and how long do you think it will be before he's a head coach in this league?

GRUDEN: Well, he's had a lot of jobs. I think to be a head coach he's probably got to settle down and stay at one place long enough to really string a couple good seasons together. He's been the offensive coordinator, I think, of three different teams in the last four years or so. That's tough on anyone to really get a gauge as to where you are. But he's obviously very creative. He's got great football genes, and he's had a lot of different kinds of experiences. I'm sure he's excited to showcase what he can do with Matt Ryan, a veteran quarterback who can really handle the pocket and get to these receivers that they have in Atlanta. But he's a young guy that's certainly on everybody's radar.

Q. I heard your earlier comments about the Dolphins and Tannehill. He's a guy with a 23-25 career record. On the other hand you know his numbers from last year, 4000 yards passing, 27 touchdowns, 12 interceptions. The question is for Tannehill to have a successful season, does he have to get to the playoffs or can he be good consistently and not make the playoffs and still be trending upward?

GRUDEN: Well, I don't think you can just use statistics as a gauge to see where these quarterbacks are unless we're playing fantasy football, of course. But winning is certainly the number one objective of all these quarterbacks. Many of these games are decided between six points, seven points and less, and the quarterback is the only guy that touches the ball on every play offensively. So I agree this is I think year four of Joe Philbin, I think year four of Ryan Tannehill, so it's his time. With the turmoil in New England, new coach in Buffalo, new quarterback in Buffalo, I mean the quarterback of the Jets has a broken jaw. I think the stars are aligned for Tannehill to bust through the door. I'm counting on Miami winning the East this year.

Q. If you were making decisions for the Browns and you had Terrelle Pryor who is trying to switch from quarterback to receiver and hasn't played in any of the preseason games yet, do you need to see him in preseason or could you make a projection even though he missed most of training camp and those three preseason games with a hamstring injury?

GRUDEN: Boy, that's a really big projection for me. I know Terrelle Pryor has the athleticism to probably make this change. But you haven't seen him on the field let alone the practice field. To put him on your 53 you're guaranteeing him a salary. I don't know.

The Browns need a big target. They need a big receiver. I know they've got Dwayne Bowe from Kansas City. But when you look at (Travis) Benjamin and (Taylor) Gabriel, and the guy they got from Cincinnati, they need a big target. But I just don't know how much they know about Terrelle Pryor as a receiver.

Q. From your time working with Johnny Manziel at quarterback camps and everything else, is there anything about his throwing motion that concerned you, because he's having this elbow soreness now? He's been shut down for the last two preseason games. He says it's tendinitis. The Browns seem to think rest is going to be the trick. But, first of all, did you detect anything? And second of all, does any of this concern you considering he's 22 and this has been an issue since his freshman year in college?

GRUDEN: Yeah, this is a little bit of a surprise to me. I don't remember hearing about a lot of arm problems until recently. I have not. I've not had that brought to my attention, so I would be very concerned. His arm never came up when I met with him. But he does have a lot of different awkward deliveries that he makes. I mean, he is almost double-jointed at times. Running to his left, throw the ball against the grain awkwardly, side arm. Hopefully it's nothing severe, but I'd be very concerned any time a young quarterback or any quarterback is on the shelf for arm reasons. I haven't seen that anywhere else in pro football this year.

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