

NFL PROJECT: JUNE

Panthers coach Dave Canales is an anomaly



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USA TODAY

Editor’s note: This story is a part of a series by USA TODAY Sports called Project: June. We will publish at least one NFL-themed story every day in the month because fans know the league truly never sleeps.

The NFL has played 105 seasons, and 531 men have served at least one game as a head coach. Before last year merely four – or 0.75% – were Latino. The Carolina Panthers last season hired Dave Canales as the fifth. He is Mexican American and has the coveted reputation of quarterback whisperer. His schemes are fluid and multiple, concepts blended from different systems to better suit his players.

The team in 2024 went 5-12, but toward the end of last season you saw some of the Canales effect. Second-year quarterback Bryce Young struggled as a rookie, but in his final three games last season Young completed 65% of his passes for 612 yards, seven touchdowns and no interceptions. That was good for a 111.6 passer rating.

What does this all mean? Canales got the opportunity many Latino coaches in the NFL do not, and he’s making the most of that chance. His path is also something of a contradiction, one that perfectly captures the complicated state of the Latino experience in today’s NFL.

From the moment Carolina hired him, Canales became a symbol of seismic progress. His hiring came just 17 days after the Commanders fired Ron Rivera, the fourth Latino head coach in NFL history. Moreover, Canales rode a path observed almost exclusively in the career arcs of white coaches; before getting the Panthers’ gig, he had spent just one season as an offensive coordinator.

But from the moment he was hired, Canales also became a more uncomfortable marker, an acknowledgment of acute scarcity. He remains the only Latino head coach in the NFL. His appointment in Carolina came during a record NFL hiring cycle in which four men of color were named head coaches, signaling further progress. But a harsh reality remains: Given the extremely low number of Latino coordinators and assistants, it might be several years – perhaps even much longer – before we see the NFL’s sixth Latino head coach.

“My grandfather came from Mexico,” Canales told the Panthers’ official website. “He made a life for himself in the Central Valley in California, joined the military to get citizenship. He and my grandma just breathed life into their children that anything is possible. For me, I found football early on and I was able to chase that dream – it’s that Mexican American in me, that willingness to take a job and just apply yourself to it and take real pride in your work, just show up every day and take advantage of opportunities that come along.”

Those opportunities, by and large, have been atypical for Latino coaches in the NFL. A lack of exposure and lack of institutional support for candidates, racial biases in hiring and a lack of diversity at the ownership and executive level have complicated pathways for Latino assistants to ascend into coordinator roles, jobs that USA TODAY Sports research has shown are springboards for head coaching positions.

Canales is an exception. From 2006 to 2008, he was



Panthers head coach Dave Canales was hired in 2024 after one season as offensive coordinator for the Buccaneers in 2023. ERIC HARTLINE/IMAGN IMAGES

coaching at El Camino College, which is more or less a straight shot down I-110 from the University of Southern Cal. At the time Canales was at El Camino, Pete Carroll was coaching the Trojans, and Carroll ran summer camps for high school and elementary school players on USC’s campus. Carroll hired Canales to be a coach at these camps and it was then that Carroll became his mentor. In 2009 Carroll hired Canales to be USC’s assistant strength coach, and when Carroll bolted for the Seattle Seahawks the following year, he once again brought Canales.

Canales spent 13 seasons in Seattle, grinding from offensive quality control assistant all the way to quarterbacks coach and passing game coordinator. Before the 2023 season, he broke away from Carroll’s mentorship when the Buccaneers hired him as offensive coordinator. He starred in the role, resurrecting the career of Baker Mayfield. Then he got the Panthers’ job.

What the recent history of Latino coaches shows is that Canales is a distinct anomaly.

‘Does it feel good to be a trailblazer?’

There have been few Latino assistants in the NFL with coordinator level titles. What happened to two of them in Vikings defensive coordinator Brian Flores and former Commanders run game coordinator Juan Castillo shows how difficult it is for Latino coaches.

Flores, 44, was already a head coach, for the Miami Dolphins, for three seasons. He went 24-25 in Miami before he was fired in 2021. He has an open class action lawsuit against the NFL and three of its franchises, alleging the league is “rife with racism,” particularly in the hiring and promotion of Black assistants.

Rivera, 63, wasn’t hired as a head coach in the NFL after his last head coaching stint. He’s currently with the University of California as the football program’s general manager.

That leaves Castillo, 65, a veteran assistant with over 30 years in the NFL and one who has extensive experience on both offense and defense. He has worked under three NFL head coaches, and some of the game’s brightest minds: Andy Reid (Chiefs), John Harbaugh (Ravens) and Sean McDermott (Bills). Castillo told The Philadelphia Inquirer back in 2011 that he dreamed of becoming a head coach. At the NFL Scouting Combine later that year, Harbaugh said he was “a supporter of Juan” and that he thought “he’ll be a head coach in this league someday.”

Castillo told USA TODAY Sports that he was never asked to do a single head coaching interview. When the Commanders fired Rivera in January 2024, they also released Castillo, and many others, too. After spending last season with UCLA, Castillo is now an offensive analyst for the University of Michigan.

In 2024, the NFL, for the first time since the Rooney Rule was implemented in 2003, did not feature a single non-white offensive coordinator. Currently, there are only two coordinators who identify as Latino or Hispanic. Flores identifies as Latino and Mike Kafka, from the Giants, has previously told USA TODAY Sports through a team spokesman he identifies as Hispanic. While Latino and Hispanic are often colloquially used interchangeably they can have different meanings.

An increasing Latino fan base

In 2023, only 23 of the 844 NFL assistants (2.73%) for which there were data identified specifically as Hispanic or Latino(a). That’s according to The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport (TIDES), which publishes annual report cards on racial and gender hiring in the major U.S. sports leagues. (The most recent year for the report is 2023.) That figure was three more than the year prior, a 0.2% increase.

For NFL players, the number is even lower. Only seven of 1,536 (0.5%) for which there were data in 2023 identified specifically as Hispanic or Latino(a), according to TIDES.

“I don’t think the public thinks of Latinos when they think of head coaching jobs,” Dr. Richard Lapchick, the director of TIDES, told USA TODAY Sports. “I don’t even think most people know this topic as a point of discussion in their fandom, whereas they might have a passing knowledge of people pushing for more Black head coaches. It’s just not on the radar.”

Playing is arguably the quickest pathway into coaching, and the consistently low total of Latino players explains in part the lagging number of Latino coaches. But this is where everything becomes further complicated.

Per the SSRS/Luker on Trends Sports Poll, there were 34.6 million Hispanic NFL fans in the U.S. in 2023, the most ever. That was up 13.4% from last year’s 30.5 million. In fact, compared with a decade ago, when there were 26.3 million Hispanic fans, today’s figure represents a colossal 31.6% increase.

Chad Menefee, the executive vice president of strategic intelligence at SSRS, told USA TODAY Sports in an email that Hispanic NFL fandom is outperforming all other demographics the company tracks. Since 2014, there were 8.2 million new Hispanic NFL fans recorded, while there were 1.9 million new non-Hispanic Black fans. Non-Hispanic white fandom has remained essentially flat.

These millions of new Hispanic fans are flocking to a league where they increasingly will not see themselves represented on the sideline. For the moment, Hispanic fandom is a booming market for the NFL, one the league has tried to monetize with International Series games, targeted commercials and other initiatives. But there might come a time when these new fans abandon the sport, perhaps in search of something where they are more robustly represented, something with stronger cultural ties to their heritage.

That also might never happen. But as these new Hispanic fans converge in this space, they may encounter something all too familiar, for the obstacles facing Latino assistants in the NFL are precisely the same forces that often keep Latino people in the domestic workforce from ascending in their industry.

FOR THE RECORD

All times ET SOCCER

**FIFA Club World Cup
Tuesday’s Scores**
Group C
CA Boca Juniors 1, Auckland City FC 1
FC Bayern München 0, SL Benfica 1
Group D
Chelsea FC 3, Espérance de Tunisie 0
CR Flamengo 1, LAFC 1
Wednesday’s Games
Group E
CF Monterrey vs. Urawa Red Diamonds
CA River Plate vs. Inter Milan
Group F
Ulsan HD vs. Borussia Dortmund, 3 p.m.
Fluminense vs. Mamelodi Sundowns, 3 p.m.
Thursday’s Games
Group G
Al Ain FC vs. Wydad AC, 3 p.m.
Manchester City vs. Juventus FC, 3 p.m.
Group H
CF Pachuca vs. Al Hilal, 9 p.m.
Real Madrid C. F. vs. FC Salzburg, 9 p.m.

**MLS
Wednesday’s Games**
Nashville at New England
NY Red Bulls at Toronto FC
Atlanta at Columbus
Cincinnati at CF Montréal
Houston at Minnesota
Philadelphia at Chicago
Orlando City at Saint Louis
Charlotte FC at Sporting KC
San Jose at FC Dallas
LA Galaxy at Colorado
San Diego FC at Vancouver
Saturday’s Games
Cincinnati at Orlando City, 7:30 p.m.
Portland at Toronto FC, 7:30 p.m.
Colorado at New England, 7:30 p.m.
Minnesota at NY Red Bulls, 7:30 p.m.
Atlanta at Inter Miami CF, 7:30 p.m.
Nashville at D.C. United, 7:30 p.m.
NY City FC at CF Montreal, 7:30 p.m.
San Diego FC at FC Dallas, 8:30 p.m.
Real Salt Lake at Sporting KC, 8:30 p.m.
Saint Louis at Houston, 8:30 p.m.
Charlotte FC at Chicago, 8:30 p.m.
LA Galaxy vs San Jose at Stanford, 10:30 p.m.
Austin FC at Seattle, 10:30 p.m.
Sunday’s Games
Philadelphia at Columbus, 6 p.m.

Vancouver at Los Angeles FC, 9:30 p.m.

MLB

AMERICAN LEAGUE East Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
N.Y. Yankees	45	34	.570	—
Tampa Bay	44	35	.557	1
Toronto	42	36	.538	2½
Boston	40	41	.494	6
Baltimore	34	45	.430	11
Central Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Detroit	50	30	.625	—
Cleveland	39	38	.506	9½
Kansas City	38	41	.481	11½
Minnesota	37	42	.468	12½
Nashville at D.C. United, 7:30 p.m.				
NY City FC at CF Montreal, 7:30 p.m.				
San Diego FC at FC Dallas, 8:30 p.m.				
Real Salt Lake at Sporting KC, 8:30 p.m.				
Saint Louis at Houston, 8:30 p.m.				
Charlotte FC at Chicago, 8:30 p.m.				
LA Galaxy vs San Jose at Stanford, 10:30 p.m.				
Austin FC at Seattle, 10:30 p.m.				
West Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Houston	46	33	.582	—
Seattle	41	37	.526	4½
L.A. Angels	39	40	.494	7
Texas	39	41	.488	7½
Athletics	32	49	.395	15

NATIONAL LEAGUE East Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Philadelphia	47	32	.595	—
N.Y. Mets	46	34	.575	1½
Atlanta	37	41	.474	9½
Miami	32	45	.416	14
Washington	33	47	.413	14½
Central Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Chicago Cubs	46	33	.582	—
Milwaukee	44	36	.550	2½
St. Louis	44	36	.550	2½
Cincinnati	42	38	.525	4½
Pittsburgh	32	49	.395	15
West Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
L.A. Dodgers	49	31	.613	—
San Francisco	44	35	.557	4½
San Diego	43	36	.544	5½
Arizona	41	38	.519	7½
Colorado	18	61	.228	30½
Tuesday’s Scores				
Texas 6, Baltimore 5, 10 innings				
Toronto 10, Cleveland 6				
Detroit 11, Athletics 4				
Cincinnati 5, N.Y. Yankees 4				
Atlanta 7, N.Y. Mets 4				

Arizona 4, Chi. White Sox 1
Seattle 6, Minnesota 5
Tampa Bay 5, Kansas City 1
Milwaukee 9, Pittsburgh 3
St. Louis 8, Chicago Cubs 7
Houston 1, Philadelphia 0
L.A. Dodgers 9, Colorado 7
L.A. Angels 3, Boston 2, 10 innings
San Diego 4, Washington 3
Miami 4, San Francisco 2
Wednesday’s Games
Arizona at Chi. White Sox
Pittsburgh at Milwaukee
Boston at L.A. Angels
Washington at San Diego
Texas at Baltimore
Toronto at Cleveland
Athletics at Detroit
N.Y. Yankees at Cincinnati
Atlanta at N.Y. Mets
Seattle at Minnesota
Tampa Bay at Kansas City
Chicago Cubs at St. Louis
Philadelphia at Houston
L.A. Dodgers at Colorado
Miami at San Francisco
Thursday’s Games
Toronto at Cleveland, 1:10 p.m.
Athletics at Detroit, 1:10 p.m.

Seattle at Minnesota, 1:10 p.m.
Philadelphia at Houston, 2:10 p.m.
Tampa Bay at Kansas City, 2:10 p.m.
Chicago Cubs at St. Louis, 2:15 p.m.
L.A. Dodgers at Colorado, 3:40 p.m.
Miami at San Francisco, 3:45 p.m.
Atlanta at N.Y. Mets, 7:10 p.m.

WNBA

Tuesday’s Scores
Washington 68, Minnesota 64
Chicago Sky 97, L.A. Sparks 86
Dallas 68, Atlanta 55
Indiana 94, Seattle 86
Wednesday’s Games
N.Y. Liberty at Golden State
Connecticut at Las Vegas
Thursday’s Games
L.A. Sparks at Indiana, 7 p.m.
Washington at Las Vegas, 10 p.m.
Friday’s Games
Minnesota at Atlanta, 7:30 p.m.
Indiana vs Dallas at Dallas, 7:30 p.m.
Chicago Sky at Golden State, 10 p.m.
N.Y. Liberty at Phoenix, 10 p.m.
Connecticut at Seattle, 10 p.m.

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- 3) RFP OD-429-25 Athletic Equipment, Supplies, and Related Items;
- 4) RFP OD-430-25 Drones for Law Enforcement & Emergency Response;
- 5) RFP OD-431-25 Law Enforcement & Emergency Vehicles, Upfitting, and Related Services;
- 6) RFP OD-432-25 Modular & Portable Buildings for Classrooms, Offices, and Storage.

Vendors are invited to respond electronically to RFPs through the PCA website portal at www.pcamerica.org/solicitations.
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Multiple Opportunities Available**
Proposal Deadline: Monday, August 4, 2025, 5:00 p.m. CT

The Alliance for Innovation, acting as the Lead Contracting Agency and Cooperative on behalf of Edge Public and participating entities—including all local and state government agencies, higher education institutions, K–12 schools and nonprofit organizations—is seeking proposals from qualified vendors for a range of RFPs:

- RFP-2025-107 - Computers, Peripherals and Accessories
- RFP-2025-105 - Electrical Supplies
- RFP-2025-106 - Plumbing Equipment and Supplies
- RFP-2025-108 - Automotive Parts and Accessories
- RFP-2025-109 - Filters, Filtration Systems, Related Products, Services, and Supplies

Contracts resulting from this solicitation may be awarded to multiple vendors. All RFPs are subject to the Lead Contracting Agency's General Conditions & Requirements to Offerors.

Full specifications and proposal documents are available via the AFI's Procurement Portal at <https://indigo.bonfirehub.com>. Only proposals submitted through this portal will be accepted.

Deadline for submission: Monday, August 4, 2025, 5:00 p.m. CT

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Multiple Opportunities Available**
Proposal Deadline: Monday, August 4, 2025, 5:00 p.m. CT

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Only proposals submitted through the Sourcewell Procurement Portal will be considered.

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