

Thursday, September 2, 2021

COACH MICHAEL CLAY



THE MODERATOR: Hey, coach. Thanks for taking the time today.

MICHAEL CLAY: Oh, thanks for having me, guys. I hope everyone is doing all right with the weather last night. I hope there's no bad damages and everyone's safe.

THE MODERATOR: We'll get started here with Les Bowen and then Zack.

Q. Hey, Michael. Yes, I've been able to get out of my basement in South Jersey. So all is well.

I wanted to ask you: We all know there's a -- when the 53-man roster is formulated, there's a sort of push and pull between backups at positions and guys who are really good on special teams. Ideally, you want both. But did you feel like you got the guys you need out of this process? And what do you think your special teams will be good at? What will you be noted for here looking at this group as you head into the season?

MICHAEL CLAY: Yeah, I thought, you know, a collective effort out of Nick and Howie and all the coaches like putting their input in. And I thought we did come out with the guys we wanted.

And we're going to go out there come Atlanta week and put, you know, our best 11 in each phase out there to help us win as a team. And we all know special teams is a big component.

Especially now we're getting into the regular season. And in terms of what units we want, we want to be good on all six of them. That would be good for us.

But, you know, it just starts off with these guys wanting -- you know, getting a taste of what a game plan was going to look like and buying in, which I think they all are.

I think we really want to excel in everything and we really want to help the team flip the field on the coverage standpoint and flip the field in the return standpoint.

You can see on our roster we've got a lot of high quality returners that we're going to try and put in the best possible situation. But it's not all on their shoulders.

It's the other 10 that are going to block for them, it's going

to be the whole 10 outside the kicker -- on kickoff covering well. Outside of Arryn punting, it's going to be everyone out there.

We all got to be a collective and be on the same page, help this team win in any capacity we can.

Q. And who do you see returning? Who's at the top of that group right now?

MICHAEL CLAY: You know, we have a good mind. You know, we don't want to give the Atlanta a special inside. But I -- as you saw, we rotated a lot of guys through preseason.

There was a lot of guys that have dynamic speed, dynamic cutting abilities. So we have a good thought as terms of a coaching standpoint who we want to throw out there. But we have a nice room to pick from.

THE MODERATOR: Go ahead. Zack and then Martin.

Q. Hey, Michael. Happy belated birthday. Welcome to 30.

MICHAEL CLAY: Thank you. Thank you.

Q. As you saw in that Patriots game when Jake was down, we didn't see any, you know, field goal or extra point situations there. But there has been situations in the past year where the kicker, punter and long snapper have all gone down in game. What are your contingencies at each of those spots going into the season?

MICHAEL CLAY: Yeah, and often on the off part of the field, we have our backups ready to go. We have backup, long snapper -- we actually have a couple. We got a backup holder that -- you know, when it does come push to shove, we have a backup kicker for extra point situations or field goal situations.

But when it comes to that, you know, you always want to be ready. We'll always give them a couple snaps during the week, a couple kicks during the week, just to get it going.

We have obviously have Arryn to take care of kickoff



opportunities if need be. He showed that in the preseason where he's able to give our coverage teams some balls to cover down there.

So we all have a contingency plan between myself, Coach Sirianni, Tyler Brown, and Joe Pannunzio. So we have a contingency plan just in case worst comes to worst out there.

Q. (Question concerning punting.)

MICHAEL CLAY: You know what, he put in a lot of effort coming out of college to now. And he's taking leaps and bounds to probably what he thought he could be. So he just keeps getting better and better in both the punting situation and these extracurricular situations in terms of kickoff and kicking.

So the more time he spends just getting better he's going to be more a complete player.

THE MODERATOR: Martin and then Tim.

Q. Hey, Michael. One of the things Howie and Nick were telling us the other day was that one of the reasons why J.J. Arcega-Whiteside made the team was because of his work on special teams.

So I was wondering if you could kind of address just, like, how far he's come, you know, on special teams and what kind of role you see for him on your units this year?

MICHAEL CLAY: Yeah, I thought J.J. did an unbelievable job. Obviously, coming from San Francisco, everyone had basically a clean slate with me.

But he came in every day from the offseason to the training camp and he just -- he put on his hard hat and came out to play. And he kept getting better and better.

And it's not just him. I think everybody that was on the team got better and better. One, it's a new system from coming from -- playing with Phip and everything. So it was just a little something new.

But I thought J.J. did a really good job, in terms of embracing it and getting better and better. And I always tell these guys, When you get that first tackle, they start come in bunches.

And he had that one in Pittsburgh. And it's one of those things like, All right, this is actually kind of fun.

But outside of J.J., I thought everyone started to get better and better as the preseason went on, as the training camp

went on. So it's always good, from a special teams coaches standpoint to see the leaps and bounds guys go from, you know, not really playing special teams to actually, like, embracing it.

And seeing it as, you know, it comes down to the core of why you're a coach. You just want to see guys get better and better. Which I thought everyone did, including J.J.

THE MODERATOR: We'll go to Tim and then John.

Q. Hey, Michael, how did Jake end up injuring his ankle? How is he now and what have you seen through the course of the offseason?

SHANE STEICHEN: I think Jake has done an unbelievable job. It's something minor. You guys, obviously, saw in the last preseason game, he was out there kicking. The ball still jumped off his foot.

So it's just one of those things where, as a kicker, you kind of need your feet. So he'll be just fine in a couple weeks.

But I thought this offseason with Arryn and Rick getting back down to the operation, then when he did -- when he was out there for Pittsburgh and the New York Jets, you saw that ball jump off his foot. Something you guys are familiar with.

So he's just been outstanding and he's all about football and getting better and, you know, taking care of his body. So with Jake, he's been nothing but a joy to work with so far.

THE MODERATOR: Go ahead. John and then Dave.

Q. Hey, Michael. Happy birthday, as well.

MICHAEL CLAY: Thank you.

Q. Can you kind of take us into the cut to the initial 53 from a special teams coordinator standpoint? Obviously, we have seen, especially in Philadelphia, when you're a great special teams player as you had when you were here previously -- (Loss of audio.)

Do you kind of pound the table for certain guys? I don't want names. Just kind of the philosophy of how things are for you as you guys near that cutdown?

MICHAEL CLAY: Yeah, I think it comes down to, like, regardless of what coach you are, there's some guys where you're, like, yeah, this guy I would like. But, you know, it's a collective effort.

And Howie and Nick have done an unbelievable job from taking the input from just not myself but to everyone in the building, not just the 53 but the best 70.

If you look at the practice squad -- because you guys know with COVID and everything that happened last year, if you're out in the 70, you could be up that next day. So it's getting the best 70.

And I think they did an unbelievable job with that to get these guys ready to be in special teams.

And, like, you reiterated, we had the -- (indiscernible.) But it's got to be a collective effort, really. Whether you're a starter or a backup.

But as much time we put into offense and defense, we put the same amount of time into special teams. The players do the same thing and they're ripping to go out there and help the team in any way possible.

You never know who's going to be a starter week in and week out. So it's our job as coaches to get these guys ready two, three deep just in case there's a pinch.

They're on their Ps and Qs. They're not sweating about it. They know what they're going to do and they're going to do it at a high level.

THE MODERATOR: Go ahead, Dave.

Q. Hey, Michael. Getting back to the returners. I know, obviously, their usage on offense or defense will dictate whether or not they're available to you. But would you prefer to have certain guys just established in those roles or will it be dictated by situations?

MICHAEL CLAY: I think for me personally it's getting all these guys ready for the opportunity. You know, we're able to have, at least on this team, a lot of returners that are good enough to do it and be effective at doing it.

So, for me, it's making sure they're confident and ready to go out there. Regardless of the situation they're in, you never know what's going to happen.

There could be an explosive play on offense and we can't use them in the special teams situation. That's why we have another guy in the holster ready to go to excel at the same, maybe even better at that level.

So, for me, it's just making sure everyone is comfortable and ready for when their number is called. And I think everyone is being embraced, regardless of the situation, if I go out there, I'm going to put my best foot out there to help

the team.

THE MODERATOR: Are there any additional questions for coach?

All right. Thanks for the time, Coach.

MICHAEL CLAY: Thank you. Thank y'all.