

# Chicago Bears Media Conference

Tuesday, February 24, 2026

Chicago, Illinois, USA

## Coach Ben Johnson

### Press Conference



**Q. Your rookies came on late in the season, Luther Burden, Colson Loveland. What can you do for them in year two, and what can they do in the off-season to make themselves into superstars for this team and help take this team to the Super Bowl next year?**

BEN JOHNSON: Yeah, so that's the good news about going into year two is you've got a much better feel for the players on the roster, and certainly the two guys that you mentioned are guys that we looked to target in the draft last year, and they're going to be a big part of what we're doing going forward.

Neither one of them had a full off-season with us because they were both coming off some injuries. Colson had one earlier in the season and then Luther got dinged up a little bit as we were training in the spring.

But we look forward to getting them through a full off-season program and seeing where it goes from there.

**Q. Is there anything else you can take from last year's draft process to go into this year?**

BEN JOHNSON: No, we've got a vision. Ryan does a great job of stacking that board, him and his crew, and was able to sit with some of the scouts earlier, and I think they do a great job bringing the information to the table, and we'll proceed business as usual.

**Q. Ryan said this part of the year it's important to detach yourself from guys on the roster that you like, guys that (indiscernible)?**

BEN JOHNSON: Yeah, I think that's a challenging thing because, like I said, it's completely different than a year ago where you're coming in with a blank slate; you really don't know the personalities, and you haven't really -- you appreciate them for what they put on tape but not so much for how they interact day in and day out in the building, so there's certainly relationships that are formed.

I'll say that this is one of the closest knit groups I've ever

been a part of, last year's team, and that's hard to generate. I wish there was some magic stick that you could just float on out there to make that happen, and yet we had a lot of high-character players that came together, and they wanted what was best for the team and for their buddies.

That's a hard thing to replicate, as I mentioned, but we have to do what's best for the team, and as we stack back up the 90-man roster again, we've got numerous holes to fill, and I know Ryan and I are committed to making it the most competitive roster we can.

**Q. What's your vision for the left tackle position?**

BEN JOHNSON: Yeah, we've got some opportunities there, whether it's free agency or the draft. Certainly some of our own in the building, as well, that we're looking to continue to develop. We look at all the opportunities out there, and we've got a lot of conversation going on for what that's going to look like.

It's not just that one position. It's really a lot of them. We have a lot of guys currently that are free agents that we've got to make some tough decisions on, and if we can't bring them back -- like I told them at the last meeting, I wish we could bring everyone back, but that's just not how it works. So if we can't bring them back, then we certainly have to look to fill that void somehow.

**Q. Going back to square one this off-season, even after winning the division for the first time in seven years, what does that look like for you guys, especially during the draft process?**

BEN JOHNSON: Yeah, you know, each phase of the off-season kind of brings its own challenges, so right now we evaluate our own roster. I think our coaching staff has done a fantastic job evaluating the free agents that are out there, and now we're starting to dive into the draft guys. It doesn't really change anything from our process or our procedure, but it's always exciting this time of year. I know our crew is going to do a great job with that evaluation.

**Q. What are you thinking right now in terms of 12 or 13 personnel? What do you like about that as a play caller, and how do you think that impacts the draft?**



BEN JOHNSON: Yeah, I think overall -- I've been 14 years now in this league, and you certainly see more 11 personnel on 1st and 2nd down over those 14 years. So what has happened is rather than base defense being the primary defense for most defenses, it's now nickel defense or some variation of that.

There's always a yin and a yang to it, and because of that, I think a lot of teams now install nickel defenses. They're day-one install, and they have a lot more defense, and they give offenses a lot more problems out of that.

Naturally, I think offenses have tried to counter that by getting them back into base defense by going heavier. Sometimes 12 personnel will do the trick, sometimes 13 will do the trick. But I do think having some versatility at that tight end position, that's hard to find. We certainly are very fortunate to have a roster full of some really good players that we feel good about locking in line to lining out wide as a receiver to being back in the backfield. So when you have that versatility, it really opens up Pandora's box.

**Q. (Indiscernible) longest tenured play calling offensive coordinators in the league, heading into their second (indiscernible). What does that say about the ability of guys around the league to establish continuity?**

BEN JOHNSON: Yeah, I think it's certainly different than what it used to be. When I first joined the NFL, some of the older veteran coaches have kind of -- I don't want to say faded away, but they've stepped to the side a little bit, and it's been a little bit younger. I think you've seen the age of offensive coordinators or play callers go down over the course of the last 20 years or so, and I think teams have kind of seen this model of where if you can make your play caller the head coach, then you can have continuity with your quarterback for an extended period of time, which is a valuable thing.

The play callers that are not head coaches, they tend to get plucked pretty quickly to become head coaches of their own, and it kind of leaves the previous team in limbo to figure out the next course of action.

**Q. What advice would you give Drew Petzing?**

BEN JOHNSON: Drew doesn't need my advice. Drew does a great job. He's a dear friend of mine, and I know he's going to knock it out of the park there in Detroit.

Very happy for him and that opportunity. There's a ton of really good players there. There's some coaches in that building that I care deeply for. So I think they're in good hands.

**Q. You talked about young coaches. From your first year as a coach, what do you think you've learned about the (indiscernible)?**

BEN JOHNSON: Yeah, you've got to do whatever it takes to get the job done. So each day is kind of its own story that way.

But I'm not going to get into specifics as to how long I was in the office or anything like that, but we've got a great staff and we're all committed to getting whatever work done that's necessary. But at the same time, we do need to bring energy in for the players each and every day, as well.

**Q. What will you guys miss with Bieniemy gone?**

BEN JOHNSON: We'll miss a ton. The guy is a phenomenal football coach. That coaching staff a year ago, and really similar to this year, is there are a lot of guys outside of my circle that I didn't know very well, so he was really through reputation, we had a lot of productive conversations before he decided to join on board, and then I was just blown away from the impact he had, not only in that position room, which Swift had probably the best year of his career, and then seventh rounder Monangai had a hell of a year himself, not just that room but the entire offense.

He brings a demanding presence. The standard is the standard with Eric Bieniemy, and those are big shoes to fill. Fortunately, I do feel strongly about Eric Studesville from Miami, a guy that I worked with before. He's been around the block a few times. He's been a part of really good rushing offenses in his past, and I know he's going to bring a great flavor for us.

**Q. What was the rationale for Press Taylor?**

BEN JOHNSON: Well, I think last year was pretty much an audition as far as I'm concerned. I was blown away with what he was able to do in the building day in and day out, things that maybe not everyone else could see.

He's very thoughtful, very detail oriented. For what we were looking for from that role, he really fits the bill perfectly.

**Q. (Regarding phone calls about Tyson.)**

BEN JOHNSON: No, I love Tyson. That's one that kind of pulls at your heart strings a little bit because he's someone that you care about so deeply. He's a hell of a football player that at some point you want to see him have a chance to do it himself.

We'll always do what's best for our team and our organization. I do think there's a lot of merit to having a strong No. 2 quarterback, which he certainly fits that bill. I'm of the mind that he's probably one of the best 32 in the NFL. His preseason tape over the last few years has probably confirmed that in my opinion.

But if I took myself out of the equation, I want what's best for him. If he would like an opportunity to start, I certainly hope he can get that somewhere.

**Q. Your receiver depth chart, do you look at this off-season evaluating the off-season like you might have some expendable pieces in that room or just trying to free up maybe not having as many top-tier receivers?**

BEN JOHNSON: Well, you can never have too much talent. I know what you're getting at there, but I feel really good about the players that we have, and like I said, we've got such a better feel as a staff now than what we did when we started a year ago.

Each guy brings something different to the table, and that's really what we're looking to generate from all of our skill positions. How can we get complement each other; who's got the speed. We need versatility, guys that can line up all over the place, certainly guys that have great hands.

But yeah, I think when you look at a 17-game season or 17-game plus when you make the postseason, you need all hands on deck because the truth of the matter is not everybody is going to stay available throughout that duration.

**Q. It seems like a dream scenario to win a Super Bowl with a quarterback on a rookie contract. How come you think nobody has been able to do that?**

BEN JOHNSON: Yeah, I don't know that so much. We're just really focused on building the best roster we can right now, to be honest with you.

**Q. How much of a challenge is it to retool this defensive side of the ball, and how big of a voice are you about specific players and trying to (indiscernible)?**

BEN JOHNSON: Yeah, well, I think we feel a lot better about having the health of our secondary be a lot better this go-around. Last year between Kyler and Jaylon, we didn't feel like we were at full strength there on the back end for the majority of the season. I do think that's going to help out. I think there's ways we can generate more pass

rush up front. That'll help out significantly, as well.

But certainly it's something we're looking at, how do we upgrade the personnel in certain spots. There's a number of guys that are up, contract-wise, so there will be a retooling there to a degree. But I know DA is looking forward to the opportunity to get his hands on these guys one more time and see what that looks like.

**Q. What stood out to you about Declan last year?**

BEN JOHNSON: Yeah, Declan is a phenomenal football coach. If you didn't know that he was 29 years old, you wouldn't blink an eye. The guy is seasoned beyond his years. This has been his calling. He's known for a long time that he was going to be a football coach, and he's prepared himself accordingly. Very detail oriented, extremely smart, has a great way of communicating. He's very clear. So I think those guys are getting someone really, really good.

I'm disappointed that we lost him as quickly as we did. I was hoping that we'd be able to hold on to him for longer.

**Q. What's stood out to you about Bilal?**

BEN JOHNSON: Yeah, my experience with Bilal has been as a player, but you could kind of tell early on that coaching was going to be in his calling, as well. He's got a unique ability to relate with those guys, and it doesn't matter what position it is. Those guys, they all rally to him. They certainly did that when he was a player. He elevates the people around him, and I think that's always the biggest compliment you can give somebody.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports