

Chicago Bears Media Conference

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Ryan Poles

Jeff King

Draft Press Conference



RYAN POLES: I want to hit a couple of updates, and then I'm going to pass it on to Jeff to come up here and hit the draft process. He'll answer any questions you have for the draft.

First, I want to say congratulations to T.J. and Colston for being this year's recipients of the Piccolo Award. I think it speaks volumes from our team to vote for them to get that award. Really cool to see Colston a part of that. It's amazing how quick this time comes back to you in terms of the draft being here already.

We just picked Colston it felt like yesterday, but for him to have that type of impact to his team is really cool to see. His work ethic, how he plays the game, his teammates see that, and he'll continue to lead the team as we move forward.

In terms of offseason program, it will be good to have everyone back. You can feel the energy shift in the building. Coach has got a really good program for those guys trying to get on that path to a championship. They're working through their action plans, where to improve their game. They're meeting with their position coaches. They're with their performance team, working on their bodies to get in shape for this upcoming season to stay healthy.

The majority of the guys that were here last year for the offseason program remained healthy, so those guys have had some pretty positive impact on our team in terms of their preparation.

Then most importantly, the thing that Coach hit the other day in the team meeting was taking the time to bond and come together. Last year you all heard about how close this team was. It was very intentional. They were intentional about it. They got together. They golfed together. They had barbecues, dinners at the house. We want to encourage that this offseason to continue to build a strong locker room.

In terms of our roster updates, feel good about pretty much everything. Darnell we picked up as a fifth-year option. We'll work on a potential extension here in the near future and see how that goes.

Comp picks was a hot topic at the league meetings. Obviously our appeal got denied, but I appreciate the Commissioner and his staff meeting with us and going through that process. Really not going to even talk about that much any further other than I'm really happy with the development of our staff and how we're doing things internally. That, at the end of the day, is the only thing that really matters.

In terms of the draft, before I hand it over to Jeff, we feel prepared. We put in the time, have done a great job. I have an unbelievable staff around me to help put this thing together, including our coaches, who did a ton of work this year. So when we're on the clock, I got a ton of confidence things are going to work out just the way that we planned them to be. If things start to shift and move, we're agile enough to make adjustments, if that's moving up, moving back. We'll be ready for anything that comes our way.

I'm going to hand it over to Jeff, who has been an awesome partner and has already helped tee up two big trades for us. It's comforting having someone like him by my side as we go through this process. So, Jeff.

JEFF KING: You guys done mock drafting (smiling)? I think it was interesting. I was talking to Pat earlier. The Bears have been a part of every draft, so I think this is our 91st. Am I right, Pat?

Q. You're right.

JEFF KING: He said his favorite was the 1975 class, which was headlined by Walter Payton, so we have some work to do.

This is my first time addressing you guys in this role. So I'd like to start with some thank yous. First to Ryan. Coming up in multiple regimes, different roles, you know, opportunities like this don't always happen that way. So I want to thank him for being open-minded, the willingness to pour into me for my growth and the trust that you've placed in me. I appreciate that. That means a lot.



Second, to George, the McCaskey family. Kevin Warren. You know, this is the only organization I've known in my second act here on the NFL journey. This place invests a lot in their people and their families. I think it's rare in this culture to feel like that you're a Bear first and your role second, and that's how I feel. That's important to me and my family.

Lastly, I would be remiss if I didn't thank my girls at home. You know, Katie and I have been on this journey since 2004 at Virginia Tech, a long time ago. Getting drafted, being on a roster bubble, moving teams, the wins, the losses, retiring. What are you going to do now? Then 12 years here, starting as an intern and working all the way up.

Now three girls in tow with Corlyn, London, and Berkeley (phonetic). I think she's the one who has probably sacrificed the most to make everything else work. I think I don't take that for granted.

Now let's turn to the draft and this process that's led us to here. It's an exciting week ahead. I think it's the result of a lot of contributions across the building. I think you feel that as you go through the process.

I'll start with our player wellness group: Andre Tucker, Carla Suber, and their whole staff and the doctors. The medical and the ortho grades drive a lot of sound decisions that we have to make. They're a big part of that.

Sports performance: Brent Salazar, AJ Lamb, Adam Sundh. The insight that they provide for development for the players that we could possibly acquire is huge in our process. We believe in it.

Erika and Brice McAllister, who are valuable assets to the locker room, and then the developmental programs that we put our guys through. They also touch the players as they come through on top 30 visits.

Analytics, tech, how far this has come over the last couple of years: Mike Santarelli, Richard Hildebrand, Ryan Hubley, Luke Rogers, Andrea Wright, Fabian Martinez. We ask a lot of this group. You guys live in it, AI, technology, where it's going. They've done a lot to simplify but also push things forward.

Football operations: Kyle Kelly, Jay Nickell, Nick Carlson, Ashton Washington; and our scouting assistants, Ryan Brosnan, Pat Holly, James O'Shaughnessy and that group as well. They're the catch-all for everything this time of year. If you want to have something done, like, they're probably the ones that it falls on the most.

Our coaching staff led by Ben. We've asked a lot of them the last few weeks. Playing longer into the playoffs, but they haven't blinked. They've evaluated. They've pressed. They've stacked guys. Their vision is the main driver to the success of the players that we're going to acquire, and that's how we feel about it.

Finally, our scouting staff. Both pro and college. Hopefully you guys will get a chance to meet most of them. They'll have a chance to talk this weekend. It's a strong, close-knit group, passionate, convicted, committed to one thing, which is winning.

I can't thank them enough for them and their families, the sacrifices they make throughout the year, for them and the team and each other.

Then as we head into this weekend, we're prepared. We'll be adaptable. We'll make the best decisions for the team today and going forward.

You know, the goal by the end of the weekend is to add talent, competition, bring the right football players and the right character into the building.

I'll leave you with this. We're after competitors. The best players and teams I've been around and been on compete daily. Not just on Sundays in the fall. It takes more than talent just to win in this league, in various conditions throughout the season.

There's been a lot said about this draft. I think there's a lot of good football players in it, players that can help us and fit our culture. I'm excited to see how it unfolds.

With all that, I'll answer your questions.

Q. Is your board complete right now? That is to say, if the first 24 picks go exactly as you predict, do you know who you are taking at 25 right now?

JEFF KING: If it goes exactly the way we think. Yeah, we'll be excited to pick at 25.

Q. Jeff, obviously it's a unique space at 25. What's a rough estimate of the number of guys and all the simulations you've done that are never there at 25, that you don't expect at all to be in play?

JEFF KING: You know, it's hard to say. I think if you combine everything, you know, you don't know what other teams' injuries, medical, the background that they've did on the player looks like. We're pretty confident that our board looks different than every other board.



Yeah, we have ranges of where we think guys could go, but it could change. We're not blind to that fact.

Q. Knowing this class, when you look at the four picks in the top 90, what is your sense of what can be accomplished between now and the end of Friday night?

JEFF KING: Create competition for the roster. Create hard decisions that we have to make come the start of the season. Add guys to our building that compete daily. That's our goal.

Q. When you talk about looking for competitors, through your scouting experience, what are the things that you look for that kind of fits that from who you talk to, what you look for on tape? What are the things that add up to --

JEFF KING: I think it's the silent tape. I think when you cut on tape, and the guys that we probably get excited about the most, is you don't have to read the character. You can see it. You can see how they compete, show up in big games, pick up their teammates, raise the level of their teammates' game.

We can read everything we want, articles and all this, but what people show, what players show on tape is usually the product that you're going to get.

Q. How did you guys evaluate Tyreek at the end of last season? What's your feeling for the depth chart at cornerback at least on the outside as you sit here today?

JEFF KING: I think Tyreek is no different than every young player in this league. He's had ups. He's had his moments of downs. It's our charge to help him through those. He's made some great plays, like probably the fumble versus Dallas changed the trajectory of that game very early in that game.

You know, we're never going to put a ceiling on a guy's upside. We're not going to put Tyreek in a box and say, you know, you're going to be this. He's still growing. He's still learning. You know, he's shown those flashes of being a great player, and we have a lot of hope that through this offseason that he's going to get there.

We saw him in the building yesterday. He looks great. He's done a really good job this summer -- or this spring of getting in shape.

Q. As you enter this part of your competitive window

with goals of taking that next step, how do you align the goal of best player available with the positional needs that are still there? How does this draft align with that, in turn?

JEFF KING: Yeah, I think it's based on the sequencing of how we go through it. You know, if it's equal, the need may come into play here or there. But at the end of the day, you're not going to go wrong by taking the best football player. I think we all believe that.

So, you know, if it's somewhat on the same plane, like maybe the positions come into play, but as we see it, we're going to take the best football player for now in the future.

Q. What impact did the offensive players you drafted last year have in year one? Is there a world where you are looking for the defensive kind of version of that this year?

JEFF KING: Well, the offensive players, obviously you start with Colston and Luther, Kyle. You could throw Luke Newman in there as well as a guy who earned a role. They had a huge impact for us.

I think it started with the character, like what I said about the competitors. I think you all saw Colston Loveland shows up every week. Luther Burden shows up in big games at critical moments. Kyle Monangai carried the load when we had to lean on him. That goes to more their character than their talent. They're really talented.

Yeah, if it lines up like that defensively, sure. But, you know, we're going to have to not lean on last year either. Like, we have to divorce ourselves from that success and start all over. What this team looks like, we may have more weapons. I don't know. We'll see how it goes.

Q. With Brisker and Byard and their departures and the hole that creates in the secondary, do you anticipate -- or I guess how would you anticipate maybe the heightened urgency to find a starting-caliber safety in this draft?

JEFF KING: Yeah, I think, you know, Coby provides us with a ton of flexibility, versatility. We can mix and match back there. Cam started the playoff game for Denver at safety. Elijah Hicks has started games here.

You know, I think that we are in a position to where we can add to the room, for sure, just like any other room. But we feel confident of the guys that we've acquired and that we've had in the building that if we had to go play tomorrow, we could play.



Q. (Indiscernible) increased clarity that's surfaced with year two of this coaching staff and understanding exactly what they're after. What has been your experience over the last few months and watching that come together the second time through it with this group?

JEFF KING: Yeah, I think you're starting off at second base, right? There's not a getting-to-know-you period. There's not a, hey, do you like this? Yeah, that's what they like. That's what we envision.

But I think the other part of that, though, Dan, is, you know, Ben and Dennis and HT, they're not done. They're not done being creative, which makes it fun for us. We're not looking to just put a spot in a spot.

You know, if we can be -- if we have to be a little bit different, if we have to look a little bit different, be a little bit more versatile here and there, they're willing to change. They're willing to adapt, and we have to move along with that. So that's the fun part.

Q. What has having Ben as your coach allowed you to do perhaps in the draft that maybe you couldn't have done in the past?

JEFF KING: Probably have to make sure he keeps his shirt on (laughing). No, I think he has clear conviction. He has clear vision of players.

I think most really, really good coaches in this league have a vision for players, offense, defense, special teams. They get the big picture of how to construct a roster.

To my point to Dan earlier, they know when to pivot, they know when to be maybe ahead of the curve, when they feel like they're behind the curve. When you are building a roster, that helps, because we can now anticipate and stay ahead of some roster decisions down the road.

It's his ability to adapt on the fly, both on Sunday, but now when we're going through the draft board.

Q. How long ago did you know you wanted to pick up Darnell Wright's option, and how does that fit into your big picture for the offensive line?

JEFF KING: Yeah, I think Ryan hit it earlier, but Darnell has been a day-one starter since he's been here. He's been a good player, and hopefully he'll be here for years to come.

Q. Assuming you still put a special designation on the players in the draft that are the exact perfect fit for the

Bears in terms of character and stuff like that, how would you estimate roughly how many guys in the draft you give that designation to?

JEFF KING: There's a lot of guys in this draft that we like that we think fit our culture. I don't know the best number, but we're not going to pick on Thursday, Friday, or Saturday without a guy that we really like there.

Q. A couple of GMs predicted that there could be a lot of trades on draft day. Do you have a sense of what it will be like?

JEFF KING: I think they say that now, and then you get on the clock, and it's, like, well, what do you want? Well, we're not doing that. We're going to stick and pick. I think it's for you guys to write about now. Not to say there won't be, but it's just hard to say.

Q. You mentioned the conviction that Ben has. How much of a say does he have in who you guys pick?

JEFF KING: Like all of us. We take his opinion and weigh it heavily. What he thinks matters. He's the head coach of the football team. He's an offensive play caller. He has a good feel for the team, and we take that very seriously.

Q. What are the challenges to scout the center position?

JEFF KING: What are the challenges?

Q. Yeah.

JEFF KING: There's not very many of them. I think that, you know, the thing that you're starting to see now is guys staying in school longer. This is really across all positions, but it really comes into play at center I think.

They're staying in school longer. There's less of them coming out in the draft. You know, you saw Linderbaum get his deal. They're just getting harder and harder to find.

I don't know if they're getting developed and cross-trained as much in college as they maybe used to be, but it's definitely something that we've talked about is there's a little bit of a limited supply coming out of college now.

Q. Is that a function of the scheme in college?

JEFF KING: I don't think scheme is part of it. I don't think scheme is part of it. It's just kind of the way that it's gone here.

Q. There are players in this draft are maybe a little bit

older coming in. By the time they're playing, they'll be 25. Does that factor in at all for you where you are looking at a player who shows you the talent, but by the time he gets to that second contract he'll be 29, 30 years old?

JEFF KING: I think that's going to become more the norm, right? You know, with NIL, five-for-five probably coming, and the way guys are going back to school, we're going to probably have to think about that more and more. I think the last three years it's gone up, like, every year of guys coming in the league at 24, 25.

You know, I think it's case to case, though. How much tread is on the tires? How did they play? What's their journey like? Have they had injuries? I think it's always case to case, but something that we'll definitely have to deal with going forward.

Q. Maybe a criticism on this draft is the lack of blue chip talent. As you evaluate guys who have first-round grades who get that Grizzly Bear head put up next to their name, roughly how many are there?

JEFF KING: Again, enough for us to pick. Like, we're not going to get to 25 and say, well, we don't have any first-round picks, we're not going to pick. We feel really good about where we are. We feel really good about if we have to move back, if we have to move up. We're going to stay adaptable. We're going to listen to the board and pick the best players available.

Q. You mentioned technology a little bit earlier and how much it's increased. What strikes you the most about the way technology has expanded, particularly in this space as it pertains to the draft?

JEFF KING: How much time do you have, Dan?

Q. I got all day.

JEFF KING: Yeah, I think we've talked about it a lot, like the little wins, summarization reports, what questions to ask, buzzwords. There's a lot of easy, quick wins that you can get done now through technology.

When it comes to player development, I think that's a whole other space that you can get into. It literally touches every single bucket. It's just going to be more and more of it as we go.

Q. You've had players talk about the idea of exceeding what you did last season, getting beyond the divisional round. As a front office staff, do you appreciate or like the challenge of knowing that you're not just building

the roster, you're trying to fortify it for years to come here?

JEFF KING: Yeah, I think it means a lot just based on the journey I've been here. I want to build a consistent or help build a consistent winner here in this city. I've seen lows. I've been highs. I've been in the middle. The fact that we can steady the ship and be a part of being a consistent winner here means a ton.

I think it's one of the best football cities that you can be in when you're winning, and that's our charge to keep it there. But that doesn't come easy, you know? We have to reset, we have to restock, and we're going to have to start over. So I think Ben hit it, Ryan hit it. Last year is last year.

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