

Philadelphia Eagles Media Conference

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Michael Clay

Weekday Press Conference



MICHAEL CLAY: Good afternoon.

Q. Did every member of special teams get that sweater?

MICHAEL CLAY: No. This was a buyout that Tyler Brown had with the rest of the specialist group. He had lost a bet within our room between the Michigan-Michigan State game, and he couldn't hold his deal. So there's a little buyout he had to do.

Q. We saw, obviously, Kenny and Jalen back there. Was that a this game specific thing, or is that something you're going to do going forward?

MICHAEL CLAY: No, that was more of a game plan type situation. The Giants this year, they've been doing a really good job of pinning opponents back with pop kicks in kind of that dead area. So we wanted two returners to kind of discourage that. So it's just one of those things game plan to game plan where we had Kenny and Jalen there just in case they wanted to pop kick, there were two guys who are familiar with handling the ball there.

You never want to put a Jack Stoll and Tyree Jackson. They do handle the ball, but probably not as much as the running back and wide receiver.

Q. How much do things change as the weather turns for you guys? Not only for the way you scheme and the way you see teams scheming you?

MICHAEL CLAY: It puts a lot of pressure more on your cover schemes. The ball doesn't travel as well as it does in the earlier months. So you've got to get ready for that. You know you want to put your guys in the best possible situations.

You may move some alignments on your kickoff coverage. You may do some different things on your return phase, just knowing that the ball is not going to travel as well and guys are going to try to get more hang time to allow their

guys to get down there.

So it's just as the weather changes, you kind of just -- you're just not a wholesale change. You're just trying to tweak some things that will cater to the guys.

Q. You mentioned about the pop kicks and everything. Even in the opening kickoff of the last game, Monday night's game there was one. Do you see this thing as trending to lead to force teams to try to return it and not let the ball cross the 25?

MICHAEL CLAY: I think it all depends on who they got back there and who their return game is. It is the NFL, and guys are going to challenge you until you can prove you can do something. I think, as history repeats itself or coordinators, if you get popped one time, you've got that scar. All right, let me kick this out the back of the end zone.

I'm sure a lot of people don't want to pop kick to Cordarrelle Patterson or Deonte Harris every time, but they may try to add an upback to see what happens. You get a lot more running back and fullback types as your upback. They're well versed in handling the ball, and they can get the ball to the 30, 35 yard line. It's almost like was it worth it to do it? It all depends on who your opponent is and what your philosophy is.

Q. When you guys put the gameday actives together last make, what made you want to promote Jared Maiden from the practice squad to that spot?

MICHAEL CLAY: It was just a conversation. With Daevion going down, it kind of alters a little bit of the special teams and who takes on that full core load with that. Obviously, Jared, I had familiarity with him in San Francisco, and he had played for us a little bit. It was just one of those things where you get a guy who has a little more with some speed and some physicality.

More praise to Jared coming out, and that first kickoff, there was a lot of good things on that first kickoff, and he got that tackle in there. It was just more him being ready, him just being a pro.

Like everybody else in this building, you never know when your number is going to get called from week to week, day



to day at this point. You never know what's going to happen. For some odd reason somebody gets COVID in the middle of the week or something like that. It's just more him being professionally ready and he performed at a high level. We're more happy for him more than anything else.

Q. How did Jalen do with the return game this week?

MICHAEL CLAY: We saw it. Nothing to write home about, but nothing to scold him about. The two kickoff returns he did, he got to the 26 and to the 30, which helped us in the field position battle a little bit.

For the punt return, there was some good communication out there, especially the plus-50 ball where the punter hit a what we call like a banana ball. It's no different than a little leaguer seeing a knuckleball or a curveball the first time. It's just something different. Not that he's not versed in that. Aaron gives him a couple of those throughout the week. But he communicated with our vice guys to get out, poison, poison, poison.

Just took a fortunate bounce for him and hit at the 15 and bounced eight yards to the 7. It is what it is. I thought it was solid. Nothing good, nothing bad. Just a very solid performance by him.

Q. On the final return, what did you think of that one? Was there more yards to get?

MICHAEL CLAY: Are you talking about when he brought everyone down, the last punt? I thought he did a great job. Obviously, time is of the essence at that point. The defense did a good job of stopping him, getting to a fourth down. They had brought their gunners in, so we brought our vice came in and kind of held him up.

It's a short low punt. When you see these big returns, the 60-yarders have a low hang time. The ball was 39 yards at three-something. The guy was still on you pretty fast. He got nine yards and got the ball to the 41. I think, if you were to ask any offensive coach with 1:20, 1:15, whatever the time was, and they only have to go 59 yards, I think they'd be pretty happy with it.

I thought he did a good job with that, getting as much as he can and getting out of bounds and shaving seconds off the clock.

Q. You've been around Jalen for a while, and there's going to be mounting pressure on him based on what happened on offense. How do you think he's prepared to handle that?

MICHAEL CLAY: That's a very good question. It's a

case-by-case study. Being around Jalen now the last few months, what I've come to realize with him, he is tough skinned out there. I'm not going to speak for him, but for myself, it's just keeping this guy in it. And he's always been, in terms of special teams, he's doing a very good job of kind of compartmentalizing a kickoff return and a punt return from offense.

As you can see, he's catching the ball really well on punts. Obviously, it takes the other ten guys to give him some big lanes on punt return. But for him, it's just myself personally, it's just being in his corner, keeping him energized, keeping him ready for the game plan because, just like anything in life, day to day, week to week, some things could be going wrong for you, some things could be going great for you.

So it's just him, keeping him energized and keeping our confidence with him. So just throughout this whole time being around Jalen, he's a great kid, great to talk with and just keep him energized for our special teams game plan.

Q. Following up on Gainwell, what has he shown in practice to give you guys confidence to put him out there situationally?

MICHAEL CLAY: Once again, when it comes to inactives, it's all a numbers game and everything like that. Obviously, J. Howard was down last week. But with Kenny, he's a tough minded kid as well. We told him, I talked to him on Monday. Tuesday I said, hey, I'm going to put you at these spots, bang, bang, bang. He took the game plan in stride, and I thought he did a really good job.

You saw on punt return, he had to hold up one of the wings, and he was getting after him a little bit. He did everything we asked on kickoff return. Obviously, the one the guy stopped at 17, that was all about -- that was my bad right there. It was a bad call. I should have called something else right there. He did what he had to do, got as much yards as possible, held on to the ball. That one fell on me more than Kenny or the kickoff return. I've got to get better at that.

I thought Kenny did a very good job in terms of accepting his role on special teams. Boston was on our kickoff team, and Kenny was the first guy to come up to me and say, hey, does Boston need one? I can always run down on there. He's always in tune to the game plan and is looking out for his teammates as well.

Q. You mentioned that stop he had. How has he developed blocking in the return game? Obviously, the passing game is different. But blocking overall, how has he progressed in that department?

MICHAEL CLAY: Yeah, I try to keep it as simple as possible with these guys. With Kenny on the back side, you have a specific number right there. I thought he did a good job. It's a little bit different with the rules and everything with the back end guys to the front line guys. Can't get that illegal double-team.

I thought Kenny did a good job, when he did have to get in the fray, to avoid the front line guys so they don't get the double-team. I thought Kenny did a really good job with that.

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