

Philadelphia Eagles Media Conference

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Michael Clay

Weekday Press Conference



Q. Oren setting the tone like that, what did that mean to you guys and the team as a whole?

MICHAEL CLAY: Yeah, it was an awesome play out of Oren. Obviously the environment was outstanding, 4:35 game in the Link. To start off a game where we defer and we kickoff and being able to steal possession almost off the opening kickoff is awesome.

It was an awesome hit by Oren right there. One of the cooler experiences I think I've had as a coach just to feel that atmosphere. You could hear that hit from the sideline. I'm sure you could hear it in the stadium. One of those things that Coach harps on is just being tough and physical and nothing kind of more stand out than an opening kickoff fumble recovery and heck of a job by Trot. Anything goes at the bottom of the pile to get that ball out.

Q. How does he emphasize that physicality in the course of the season?

MICHAEL CLAY: Yeah, it starts all the way back in the off-season program, OTAs, all the way through training camp. You see us go through our tackles circuit and our takeaway circuit, and it's just a huge emphasis and it's obviously paid off for us in this latter part of the season.

We really just honed in on those fundamentals getting off block destruction, being good tacklers. It's not something you wake up in the morning and say you're going to be tough. You have to work at it and has to be instilled in you from the time you get in the building to the time you get on the practice field to the game.

Q. Being on the bottom of the pile like that, is there a teaching point there that you guys instruct the guys on?

MICHAEL CLAY: I mean, get the ball away any way you possibly can if you're on defense. I don't know if there's any rules at the bottom of the pile. You've got to ask the players more than else in. I know a lot that does go on in

the bottom of the pile. One rule we do teach you is can't pull anybody off the pile because that's 15 -yard penalty so that's one emphasis. Huge pile, if you're on the top of it, don't pull anybody off. We don't want to get that 15-yard penalty.

Q. Trotter and Burks rotated at linebacker, and Vic said both have special teams roles. How do you evaluate that when there's a clear need on defense?

MICHAEL CLAY: It's just communication between Vic, between Bobby and myself, who is going on, who is going off. Trying to keep those guys as fresh as possible but it's really kudos to the players in here. They are trying to do anything they can to help this team, whether that's playing defense and having to play a couple roles on special teams.

Obviously you saw Zach make a tackle on punt. Nolan made a tackle on kickoff. You saw Coop in there at the bottom of the pile. These guys are so selfless and all they want to do is put this tome in the right spot, like Kellen said, to advance in the tournament. We always are going to try to put these guys in the best possible way to move forward. So it's all kudos to the guys in here to being selfless and doing everything they can to help this team progress.

Q. How early in the week do you start formulating a plan in terms of the snaps and how they break out?

MICHAEL CLAY: It almost happens organically a little bit. You have a plan in your mind on how you want to rotate but you just never know how -- you never know how the game is going to go. At times we've had to only punt once and Zach only has one punt play and you have to kick off a lot.

A lot of it happens organically and it's just through the communication, that's the great thing about special teams is unfortunately when Nakobe went down, warn had to play a lot more defense so there has to be some substitutions there to help him keep fresh going forward.

Q. What have you seen from Trot from the standpoint of physicality, instincts, football IQ, that kind of thing?

MICHAEL CLAY: Instinctually one of the better linebackers instinctually. He keeps getting better and



better. Hes just a sponge. It's always a bonus when you have teammates like Zach Baun and Oren, who has played a lot of special teams rep early on in their career to now they are playing a lot more defensive reps to absorb all that.

Nakobe played a lot of special teams his rookie year. Him embracing his role and when his time comes we'll be rooting him on to play the highest level at defense. He's in a sponge trying to get better, asking questions what do you want me to do here. Trot is outstanding for us and made some plays for us, big tackle against Atlanta, fumble recovery here and there and big tackle against Washington in the first game. We are going to try to progress Trot though advance his ceiling as much as we can as a special teams player and he's done an outstanding job of that.

Q. Nolan Smith on kickoff and a few others that normally aren't there, is it just all hands on deck, and what was the process of inserting?

MICHAEL CLAY: To answer your question, it is all hands on deck. We know there is no next game if you lose. We're always trying to put our best 11 out there whoever is kicking the ball or whoever is covering and Nolan, very similar to Trot and very similar to everybody on this team doesn't bat an eye when I say, Coop, you're up on kickoff this week.

They are raring to go and they are into the game plan, and they do their job at a high level and it paid off. You saw Nolan made that solo tackle in the middle of the field against Keisean at the 29-, 30-yard line. So it just helps and helps a lot of the guys around that they see starters or guys that play a lot of defense going out on special teams to help in any way that you saw in the Washington game and the Dallas game, Reed, who has been starting at safety forever play PP for us and without batting an eye he did an outstanding job. It's just, again, going back to how selfless this team is and want to go progress in this tournament.

He's done it before. Obviously last year, he excelled at that and especially with this new kickoff format it's no different know than him setting an edge and getting off blocks. For him, it's almost like he's going against another tight end or not a premiere right tackle. He's able to use that flexibility to his strength to get off and make plays. He's a tone setter. He has so much energy and guys feed off it. It's one of familiarity with having Nolan play kickoff last year, and given the understanding it is an advantage having a guy like that going out and making plays.

Q. Was that by design? How much of that is pre planned before you go into the game and how much is

discussed, like what kind of kick he's going to execute?

MICHAEL CLAY: When they come in on Wednesday, especially the special, we try to give them a game plan of what we want accomplished from a kicking standpoint.

Going against Keisean next, we knew he was very dangerous. We wanted to try to cut off at least three quarters of the field and if you did want to go back to the field we had enough guys to string it out. You saw Kenny make the big play at the 23-yard line.

But that's the talent that these guys have; that they could put the ball in different scenarios, different situations out there to try to help out this team, and Jake did an outstanding job on kickoff. Obviously Oren sets the tone with the first one but takes those other ten guys, you know, we were scoring at a good clip and going out there, knowing how dangerous Keisean Nixon was took all ten of the guys to work in unison and you saw Tristin and Sidney on the last, kick undercover and get the tackle at the 22-yard line and having that confidence after getting the guy down a few more times to go out there and make a play.

So again, it helped out a lot with Jake getting that location and all the other ten guys being honed in working hand-in-hand.

Q. For a whole season, how do you feel about this kickoff format? Do you think it will stay?

MICHAEL CLAY: Yeah, tease a great question. I don't know what will happen. I'm sure that's a question for the off-season but it is here now. You know, we've got this next game against L.A. They have been able to bust a few big returns.

We have to be able to go out there from a coaching standpoint and put these guys in the right positions and situations to make plays and we have to execute that game plan. It's done some wonders, and there's been big concerns. I think I it's gone back-and-forth in terms of helping the offense and the defense.

Q. What stands out about the Rams special teams unit and any takeaways from the first matchup?

MICHAEL CLAY: Chase has done a really good job with their units. Chase obviously being a former player, they play like special teams, a very good special teams unit. Jake blocked a punt against Buffalo. One of those tough knows guys that gets after it. They have two soul solid gunners in Whittington and Xavier Smith. We have to

make sure one, we protect -- I think they have three blocked field goals. So we have to be honed in on him.

It's going to be a tough match. They have been playing really well especially since the last time we played them, they had some big returns on KOR, a couple down punts inside the five. So we have to make sure we help out this team in the field position aspect any way we can. It's another playoff game. We all know it's going to be added hype in terms of physicality. We have to make sure we're on our details to make sure we help out this team anyway we can.

Q. You spoke about intangible characteristics. What are your observations of the parts of him that can't be measured with the combine testing?

MICHAEL CLAY: Just his energy. He could run 4-2 and not give energy the entirety of your career. He gives energy regardless if it's Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, obviously it's infectious on Sunday. He's in these meetings, he's dialed in. He asks questions. He just wants to help out. I see him up in Coach Wash's room on Fridays after a lighter practice, getting more feedback, what can I get better at.

His intangibles and want to be great is just unbelievable and it shows it helps out the young guys. Jail let me know is up there hanging out trying to be a sponge as much as he possibly can. Nolan is one of those guys that you really are fortunate to be around as a coach.

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