

Houston Texans Media Conference

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Nick Caserio

Press Conference



NICK CASERIO: Welcome. Good afternoon. I know this is kind of funny, this is actually my first time behind the podium after being in the league 20-some years. I know Phil Perry is smiling over there.

Before we get started on football, I want to take it away from football for a minute and just have some reflection and perspective about some of the things that are going on in the world, some of the things that are happening in eastern Europe.

I think it kind of puts some perspective kind of on what we're doing here. Like this is important but it's really not important, so I think thoughts and prayers to the people of Ukraine and some of the things that they're dealing with. I think we kind of lose sight of what goes on in the real world when we're worried about football and testing and combine and people running.

I think it's appropriate to take a few minutes and reflect on that and just realize that our thoughts and prayers are with the folks there. I think there's been a half a million people that have left Ukraine, the refugees. Again, like what we're doing, like it matters but it really doesn't matter in the grand scheme of things.

Excited to be here. Good opportunity for I'd say our entire organization to kind of start our planning process here a little bit for the off-season. It's been a couple weeks with the new coaching staff in place, with Coach Smith. Hired Lovie a couple weeks ago. Have some experience with him obviously being in the system at a program for a year.

Then obviously this week it's really about information, trying to get organized, and I think there are going to be some players that work out and there are going to be some players that do certain things.

I think it's really about what you take out of this week. You can get as much done as you need to and not get caught up in the things that aren't happening, who's working out, who's not working out.

I think we're excited about the opportunity to continue to build the team. A lot of changes taking place. I'd say organizationally over the last, call it 12 months, it's hard to believe it's been a year, so they've been on the job -- did some decent things as a team last year. Had a lot of new players. Have a number of players that will be free agents this year, so we'll be using the off-season here, kind of rebuilding the team.

But looking forward to free agency and looking forward to some opportunities here in the draft once we get started.

Appreciate everybody being here.

Q. You mentioned (indiscernible). What do you think of the market right now at that pick, and what's the situation at the quarterback position and what does this mean for that group?

NICK CASERIO: Yeah, sure. It's pretty early in the process I would say more than anything. You kind of know who's picking where right now if nothing changes.

I think speaking specifically to this week, I don't think there's anything that happens or takes place here relative to what players do on or off the field or what happens in a 20-minute interview is going to change what your philosophy on it, on moving back or making trades or those types of things.

I think the most important thing for us is to kind of know as many players as possible. I'd say relative to last season we're in a little different position relative to eliminating call it 55, 60 players last year that we knew we weren't going to have access to.

Now I'd say the pool players is a little bit wider. Just trying to get as much information. I'd say the group that probably is most pressing are the underclassmen because this is really the first opportunity to spend extensively with them face-to-face. A lot of them weren't at All-Star Game. I'd say you're kind of in the infantile stages.

As far as trades or movement and those types of things that take place, those are things as you get a little bit closer

to the draft you're having dialogue or discussions with other teams about that, which probably doesn't make that much sense, but philosophically in terms of team building, the people that have followed us, we're pretty open minded, we're pretty flexible, like whatever means necessary, so whether it's trade, whether it's move back in the draft, whether it's move up, whether it's trade with another team in the league, whatever it is, we're going to explore all avenues.

Q. (Indiscernible).

NICK CASERIO: Yeah, I'd say generally speaking, we saw some progress from the rookies, not just Davis, but I'd say Nico kind of as the year progressed. Garret Wallow had an opportunity to play a little bit later in the year.

The one guy that played the most snaps and was the most consistent from beginning to end was Roy Lopez, and he was picked in the sixth round or something like that, whatever it was.

So I think the big thing, you're just looking for some level of improvement and progress from year one to year two. We've had about, I don't know, 25, 30 players that have been at NRG over the last two to three weeks, so they're hungry, they're excited for the off-season, so they're kind of starting their training regimen, so they're kind of turning the page to next season. So I think the biggest thing is taking advantage of their opportunities between now and the start of OTAs.

Our off-season program will start, I think it's going to start April 11th-ish, something like that, so we've got a couple weeks early relative to maybe some of the other folks.

Just try to be smart and hopefully those guys can see the gains that they made during the season and hopefully continue to build on the things they did last season.

Q. What are some of the things that you're looking for as far as intangibles?

NICK CASERIO: Yeah, great question. I'd say philosophically in terms of players, like competitiveness, toughness, I would say consistency and grit and a certain level of aptitude or intelligence, so when you have a one-on-one conversation, those are some of the things you might be able to glean. The way we're set up is try to steer it towards football as much as possible, so let them kind of teach us what they know because everybody's baseline of understanding what they were asked to do is different. What one receiver is asked to do at one place is different than another receiver, and when you're just watching them play, you don't really have an understanding of what

they're asked to do.

You just try to ascertain some of that information, try to get a baseline of understanding. The reality is the baseline of where they're starting when they walk in our building is pretty low, so then it's going to be a matter of how quickly are they going to be able to make progress and learn. Everybody has different stages of learning that they're going to go through.

You really don't want to jump to judgment too quickly about, okay, a 20-minute conversation, and so we're going to eliminate him; he made a bad impression. Okay, let's do a deeper dive, maybe there's something that we have to find out a little bit more as we go.

But I'd say some of the intangible elements and what we look for in players in terms of what we want in the building on a day-to-day basis, those are the things that are going to be important to us.

Q. Do you expect next year for Rex Burkhead (indiscernible). What's your outlook?

NICK CASERIO: Sure, number of players at that position that are going to be free agents, guys that made contributions for us last year. We were able to re-sign Rex at the end of the year, kind of extend him into this season. I'd say Rex's role grew as the year progressed, probably more out of need more than anything else.

But that's probably a position that we'll evaluate as we go. We only have three players under contract currently; Rex is one, Scottie Phillips, and then Darius Anderson, who kind of signed as a reserve future player there after the season.

It's probably a position that we'll kind of evaluate here during the off-season, how we build it out. I think you have to be determined.

Q. (Indiscernible).

NICK CASERIO: Sure. You know, we ended up with five draft picks and then six or seven undrafted players that we signed after the draft. As you look at where we are roster-wise currently, I think we have 47, 48 players that are on the roster, so to go from 50 to 90, we're probably not going to do it all in free agency, and then we have, call it nine draft picks right now, and then there's probably more of an opportunity for some of the undrafted players after the draft.

I would say we probably spend as much time on that group of players, certain -- we have a grade that's commensurate with that round or being post-draft. You really have an



opportunity to really identify some of the players that maybe you want in your program that maybe aren't going to get drafted. And there's different ways to get players on your team, and I would say spending as much time on that group of players, knowing that group is just as important as knowing the top 50 players in the draft.

Again, it really speaks to more of a comprehensive deep dive of knowing the overall board. Like there's -- however many players get drafted, 200, almost 300, and then there's going to be another large group of players that are signed after the draft.

You don't want to kind of cast that group aside, but we were fortunate, going back to our time in New England and even going back to Roy last year, those players are going to be an important part of your team because there's a certain cost associated with that. So you have to be able to build kind of your team out. You can't pay every player X number of dollars, so you kind of have to spread the cost out and asset allocation as best as possible.

Q. (Indiscernible).

NICK CASERIO: Yeah, I would say that situation, we've talked about this with our group. We're day-to-day in terms of handling that. Once the information becomes more relevant or prevalent, then we'll handle it accordingly.

My philosophy from the beginning has always been to do the right thing by the Houston Texans organization, and we're going to continue to do that here moving forward.

Q. How much of a strain has the whole Watson situation had on you?

NICK CASERIO: Yeah, I think the only strain is the discussion that you all had -- you guys have probably spent more time on it than we have, I think. Once the season started, our focus going back to last season was kind of on our team and just preparing on a week-to-week basis, so trying to control the things that we can control.

I'd say our players did an awesome job of focusing week to week on just the task in front of them, which is getting ready for the opponent. We've kind of transitioned into kind of the 2022 season, so we're excited about Lovie and the staff that he's put in place.

So again, we're going to take it one day at a time, control the things that we can control and just try to do as good a job as possible starting to put together the team for next season.

Q. When you kind of look at what Lovie said about

maybe a more running-centric offense next year, they want to run a little bit more 12 personnel, what did you see from the tight ends in this group and also the ones in free agency?

NICK CASERIO: Yeah, it's a little bit similar to the running back discussion we just had. A number of those players are free agents. The only player under contract at tight end is Brevin, who had an opportunity to kind of play there a little bit. It's a position that we're certainly going to evaluate.

I think what you're trying to do is when you're in 12 personnel, you're trying to make a determination of what the defense is going to do and how you want to play. When you look at the league and what's happened, teams have to make a decision about what they do against 12 personnel; do they want to put base defense on the field? Do they want to play with nickel defense? If you put nickel defense on the field, maybe you can create some match-ups in the running game.

A lot of the running game is a product of who you have kind of on the line of scrimmage, and the offensive line is a part of that, as well, and really it's a function of what's going on on the other side of the ball, as well.

I would say similar to the running back discussion, that's probably a market that we're going to evaluate and just try to figure out who makes the most sense for our team here. Again, we only have one player on the team right now, so I would expect there to be some new faces on the team here at some point.

Q. What are your impressions of Matt Groh?

NICK CASERIO: Yeah, Matt has had a unique, I'd say, background. I'd say my first recollection of Matt was it was the year Chris Long actually came out in the draft. At the time I think Matt was either helping Al or Al was at University of Virginia at the time. So we actually flew in to work Chris out that morning, and Matt picked us up at the airport and drove us to the workout. So that was kind of my first introduction to Matt.

But to make the transitional leap from his legal background, which he obviously had a career and certain aspirations, to kind of transition into football, I would say it's fairly rare, but he wasn't opposed to kind of starting -- he's starting in the same role I started in when I was in New England in 2001 as a scouting assistant.

Matt is really smart. He works hard. He has a good grasp of players. He has a good understanding of football. He's been around football a long time, whether it was his dad or

his brother Mike, so he's been around the game, and his growth and development is really a credit to his work ethic and his thoughtfulness and his intelligence.

I think a lot of people in the building in New England have a lot of confidence in Matt and what he's capable of doing. So really happy for him and the opportunity he has in front of him. There's still a lot of great people in that building that I'm close with. Matt is one of them; Cam Williams is another one. He kind of started in the scouting assistant role, has taken on some more responsibilities.

So there's a fair amount of us that have left, but there's still pretty some good ones there, so excited for the opportunity that Matt has in front of him for sure.

Q. With the number of New England guys that are now running front offices, does it make the competition for players relatively fierce?

NICK CASERIO: Yeah, it's a good question. I think you might be looking for some of the similar traits and characteristics, maybe going back to Vanessa's question in terms of the intangibles, but then you have to look at what are some of the things you're doing offensively, defensively and in the kicking game. So what Pat is looking for defensively, are those the same things that we might be looking for and the same players in Lovie's system. It may or may not.

I would say the traits that are important to you in terms of the overall makeup, in terms of the football characteristics, non-physical related, those are the things that we're going to value, how you value players, how you grade players, the system that you use to arrive at that end point, there's probably some similarities. But in the end, there's 32 different buildings, 32 different ways of building your team. They're going to do the things that they feel make the most sense for their team; we're going to do the same thing on our end.

I would say the one thing it does, it certainly opens some dialogue, having discussions, whether it's about players, whether it's about a trade. You know who you're dealing with on the other end of it. There's a relationship there. What I'm trying to say, football in the end is a relationship business, so the more relationships that you can create over the course of time, whether it's in one building, then they relocate to another building, so it gives you an opportunity to maybe have some dialogue and discussion with some other teams and folks maybe that you didn't as much contact previously.

Q. (On the GMs from John Carroll).

NICK CASERIO: Yeah, there's a lot of us John Carroll folks that are out there. I think he'll do an awesome job. My relationship with Dave and Josh goes back a long way. I've known Josh since 1995 and then Dave came to John Carroll since 1996. Both were great people. They were good players. They both have been really successful in this league to this point.

I would say Dave is very smart. He's got a very wide-ranging background, a lot of diversity in terms of experience, whether it's working in Denver when Josh was there; he worked at Iona; he's worked a number of different jobs; he's taught; he's coached high school. I think his ability to kind of connect with people and kind of see things through a different lens is something that's unique to Dave.

Always academically did very well. I think he was an academic All-American at John Carroll, so that kind of speaks to his intelligence, speaks to his work ethic.

I think their relationship, anytime you start a new program from the ground up, when you have two people that kind of speak the same language, I think it's going to be beneficial to everybody involved. I'm rooting for him. I'm excited for him and happy that both of them have the opportunity. They've earned it and they deserve it.

Q. Where do you evaluate your (indiscernible) situation? And also in your time in New England, what did you learn about how you place certain players and that overall philosophy?

NICK CASERIO: Yeah I'd say cap-wise we're in a little bit better situation than we were kind of the start of last off-season, so I think we're honestly middle of the league right now. That's before we do anything.

You can create cap space in many different ways, so you want to have a manageable amount. I'd say your cap situation is also going to dictate the pool of players that you're going to maybe have an opportunity to add to your roster during free agency, but I'd say philosophically our belief is the value of the player commensurate with the role, and you try to match those up. Okay, so the role is X; okay, that role is worth X number of -- is worth this. Okay, if the value of the player goes beyond what the role is, then you have to make a determination, all right, is it worth pursuing that player or you know what, we're going to have to let him go and try to find somebody else that maybe fits the role that we have in mind.

I would say kind of looking at the economics and being fiscally responsible is certainly something that has always been a big part of something I believe in. It doesn't preclude you from signing somebody that maybe is going

to be cost prohibitive, but it's going to come at the expense of maybe X number of players.

You just have to be thoughtful of the ramifications it has on the overall team, not specific to the one player.

Q. (Indiscernible).

NICK CASERIO: Yeah, great question. I would say just personally speaking, I have a lot of respect and admiration for Brian. I think he's one of the better coaches in our league. We had a lot of time together there in New England. Ultimately as we went through kind of the hiring process and the hiring cycle, my responsibility to the organization and the ownership was to make the decision I felt was in our best interest. Brian was certainly a part of that process.

Brian is a great coach, and I know he'll do a lot of good things with the Steelers, I'm sure, and he'll be in this league for a long time, but ultimately in the end, we just felt that Lovie made the most sense for our team and situation at the time.

Q. (Indiscernible).

NICK CASERIO: Yeah, ultimately Cal kind of put it on my shoulders to make the decision I felt was best and to bring candidates to the table. Cal was very, I would say, supportive and open and certainly put a lot of stock in the things that I had to say.

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