

Houston Texans Media Conference

Wednesday, March 2, 2022

Houston, Texas, USA

Lovie Smith

Press Conference



LOVIE SMITH: Proud to be the new Texan head football coach. First order of business was to get the staff in place. We completed our staff. Next order of business is about personnel.

Coming to the Combine is the first opportunity, I feel like, to really kick start that next year. There's a lot of information you can get from here. We're having meetings, of course, at night. Can't wait to see some of the workouts on the field. So the process has started. Again, there's a lot of excitement.

You know, personnel first, it's about the Draft, free agency, all of those things. Can't wait to get started with those.

Q. How has the priority of positions on defense changed over time and where is it now?

LOVIE SMITH: I don't think priorities have changed much. The engine of every defense is the defensive line. There's a certain look we would like it to have, a certain guy we would like to coach it. We have a profile favorite position up front.

This past year, of course, me being a defensive coordinator, we got a jump start on letting guys see exactly how we're going to play defense. We had a few players that had pretty good years based on the first time out, some potential. Normally that improvement from anything -- Game 1 to Game 2, first year to second year -- can't wait to get started on that.

Q. How encouraged are you on Davis Mills' development? What are you looking to see from him this off-season?

LOVIE SMITH: We don't give starting positions out this time of the year, I'll start with that. But I got a chance to see Davis in a lot of different situations last year. Early on, he wasn't starting, so he worked against the one defense quite a bit. I love his demeanor. He's a smart guy. He went to Stanford, right? Smart guy. Teammates buy in to him.

And I also got a chance to see a lot of the young quarterbacks in the league play, and I thought Davis played about as well as most of them. It was important too of course to keep Pep Hamilton on board, them being able to work together two years in a row.

Again, I'm pumped up that he'll be leading us and excited about his future.

Q. Lovie, you mentioned the defensive line being the engine for the defense. What do you think about defensive line prospects Aidan Hutchinson and Kayvon Thibodeaux?

LOVIE SMITH: Both of those are -- I can't talk in specifics about players. Of course I'm aware of -- I'm a fan of college football in general. Both of those guys had outstanding college careers. Both of them are going to have outstanding careers in the NFL, along with quite a few others. I think there's a pretty good defensive line class.

Again, starting the process of seeing them here in this environment, seeing hopefully some of them workout, and in their pro days, they'll tell us an awful lot.

If I'm a defensive lineman, I would like to come to a place like the Houston Texans. We start up front. Again, it's about, as I said, about the defensive line. We kind of read on the run, athletes getting up the field, making sacks and things like that. I think it's a defensive line friendly system.

Q. Caserio said that he's open to bringing Justin Reid back. There's conversations happening. How much have you talked with Justin? Depending on how that goes, how does that affect how you might fill that position?

LOVIE SMITH: Justin Reid is an outstanding player. I'll start off with that. Being with him of course one year, he's a football guy. He wants to know every little detail about why we do things. I love that in a football player. He fits the profile.



When you get in the NFL and you play the amount of time he has and you get an opportunity to be a free agent, so you're excited for him in that sense. But the business part takes care of itself. We'll be pretty happy if Justin ends up coming back with us.

Q. What have you and Pep talked about as far as the offensive identity of this team?

LOVIE SMITH: Well, Pep and I have been together for a long period of time. We've had a time to talk during our time together in Chicago on how we believe offensive football should be played, a big emphasis on the running game. And just how we're going to score points, talking football throughout the years and even last year.

So we've had a chance to talk quite a bit about that. I really like our offensive staff too. We talk about the offensive line, of course, getting George Warhop, a guy that was my offensive line coach my last NFL job.

I think you'll like what we're going to do. It's one thing about the running game, but you've got to be able to pass the ball too. I think we have some pieces in place, but we'll continue to add.

Q. What are you looking for in the cornerbacks in free agency?

LOVIE SMITH: You said looking for in the cornerbacks? I think like most people, in an ideal world, receivers are getting bigger and bigger, but if you can find a 6 feet corner that is faster than most people, that's pretty special.

We put a big emphasis on ball skills. To me the object of the defense is every snap is to score and take the ball away. We put a big emphasis on that, but we won't try to bring anyone in, add them to our mix if they don't like to tackle. We ask our corners to tackle. They have ball skills of course, but it still comes down to whether you can play man coverage a lot. That's a hard guy to find that I'm talking about.

That's why it's good too to have Dino back in the system again where we're all on the same page to be able to find those guys.

Q. Danny Barrett was saying he would to build up at the running back position?

LOVIE SMITH: We would.

Q. And do you believe the Draft gives you a chance to augment the position?

LOVIE SMITH: Well, I like some of the choices. One thing about having the type of year that we have, there's a lot of options that you will have. Just like most positions, we weren't satisfied with what we were able to get production from in that running back position. If you're running a football team, you have to have build, and we're going to address probably three guys each week, and they need to be able to contribute in some way.

I'm kind of stating the obvious right now, but just like most of our positions, we need to add depth, and not just depth, we need to add good football players there. Dan is an excellent football coach, and I'm sure we'll be able to do that.

Q. Do you expect Deshaun to be on your roster this year?

LOVIE SMITH: I have no idea, and the good part about it is time kind of takes care of everything. I just know -- I know Deshaun is an excellent football player. Excellent football players need to be playing somewhere in the NFL. Hopefully that will happen. If it's not with us, somewhere else. As I see in this situation, both of us are going to benefit from this situation, and I just can't wait for it to speed up a little bit.

Q. With this being your second year in Houston, what did you learn?

LOVIE SMITH: You say my second stint? My third stint?

Q. Your third stint as head coach, your second year being in Houston.

LOVIE SMITH: What I got from that year -- a lot of times, when you're a new coach coming in, you don't know anything about how things operate. I got a chance to see a lot of the players that we'll be bringing back. I've been with them for a year, know a little bit more about them, how things work in our organization. Get a chance to see our competition in our division on who we're catching.

So all of those things have to benefit the second year round. A lot of coaches on the staff, I worked with them already. So many things that kind of gave us a head start on where we are and to also see what we can become. We won four games, everybody knows that. But we had options. Could have been a little bit more.

I think from the Rams winning the Super Bowl to some of us that weren't in the playoffs gives us hope, and I think we can catch up quickly.

Q. You've had several great linebackers in your time



coaching. Where do you see that position right now, and what's the value of that position with the defense?

LOVIE SMITH: I talked about the defensive line being the engine of the defense, but maybe the brain trust, of course, is at that linebacker position. I've had the opportunity to be around some great ones.

I love some of what we got last year, some players, and it was mentioned we brought in some guys on one-year contracts. I knew a little bit about them, the Christian Kirkseys of the world, the Kamu Grugier-Hills of the world, Garret Wallow's played well, I could keep going down the list, KPL. But what we need, of course, is hopefully get some of those guys back because I think they can play, but the profile is in place, and I think you can find those type of guys.

I talk about it being a defensive line friendly system. I think it's a linebacker friendly system. Some of the guys you referenced, they made their money and they're in the Hall of Fame and different things like that based on a lot of playing in this system. So we're excited about that.

Q. Could you talk about Maliek Collins and the defensive line.

LOVIE SMITH: Well, you know, talking about guys that are unrestricted, and it's hard. For you to ask that question, you saw some of the things that Maliek was able to do. He's an excellent football player. He fits the profile. He's athletic. And I'll talk about the engine, the brain trust of the defense, but if you say one position where it all starts, it's our three technique under tackle position.

So if we can get Maliek back, most of these guys we're talking about, they know -- the ones that a lot of you are talking about, they know how we feel about them. I think Maliek was just at the tip of the iceberg on what we can be. There's so much more that he'll be able to do going forward.

Q. Tim said that the offense is very tight end friendly. When you look at Brevin but also the free agency route, what's your ideal option?

LOVIE SMITH: Well, ideal option, looking from a defensive point of view, if you're 21-person, you kind of know what the fullback is doing, but if your offense is set up to be a 12 offense with 12 personnel, then what is that other tight end doing? Brevin is pretty flexible in what he can do. He's probably not the ideal inline Y.

So with that combination of, to answer your question, I believe in having multiple tight ends. One more of a Y.

Other one the move guy, and then that third guy kind of a combination of both. We had some pretty good tight ends, I thought, this past year. Of course, free agency, some of them are out there with it.

We'll kind of see how it plays out, but the tight end position will be a big part of what we're going to do.

Q. What is the relationship between you and Nick when it comes to building the roster?

LOVIE SMITH: It wasn't like we went on a blind date since we were together last year. So that kind of helped us an awful lot. I got a chance -- when you're coming in, as a defensive coordinator, hey, Nick, here's what we're looking at at this position, got a chance to see. We've gone through this rotation one time before. That has helped an awful lot.

What I found out about Nick is he's a football guy. He does an excellent job, of course, getting personnel. Again, once you get on the same -- I found in my time, being in the NFL as a head football coach, once you can get on the same page with your GM as far as what you're looking for, that's a step in the right direction.

I feel like we were already there, and we've just been grinding finally getting the dots to connect and looking forward to knowing what we have to do to build our roster up and go forward.

Q. Lovie, you didn't hire a defensive coordinator. Are there any of those duties that you'll assign to other staff to take on?

LOVIE SMITH: Yeah, I've been in this position a number of times, third time being a head football coach. Each time, you say okay, what would I do differently? One of the things I always said, if I did get another opportunity, instead of pointing, I want this done, a lot of times guys become a head coach and they quit coaching. That's just not me.

I coached the nickel position last year, and I was always going to be a part of it. People always say, what are you going to do, time, game management, and all that? There's enough time to do that. But as far as delegating, we hire guys and put them in a role and expect them to do theirs. There will be some delegation going on as far as roles, but we feel like we have a pretty good handle on that.

Q. I know you say you have no idea whether Deshaun will play football for you. How important is that resolution to be able to move the roster forward?

LOVIE SMITH: You say how important is that? I'm agreeing with what you said, yes. We would like a prompt resolution to it. But I'm also a patient man too, and time normally takes care of everything. We understand this is year two, and I know Deshaun wants to play, and we want ours -- it will come to a head. I have faith in that. We just have to give it a little bit of time, and hopefully everybody will be happy with it. I'm sure that will be the case.

Q. Talk about Tavierre Thomas.

LOVIE SMITH: Tavierre Thomas, last year coming in I didn't know anything about him. You can find athletes that love football. Tavierre Thomas fits the profile. He was just a sponge for information, and that's what you're wanting all the guys to be, with talent. We feel like we have a system that can bring some of those things out.

But those are kind of the rewarding things you get from being a coach. When you see a guy that no one -- Tavierre, most people didn't even know how to pronounce his name, and he just came in and went to work is what he did. His future's bright still. Guys like that are out there, and we have to find them.

I know Nick and the crew are looking hard for some more Tavierre Thomases. Coach talk, you have 11 Tavierre Thomases, you don't lose a game. I'm definitely saying that.

Q. What have you learned about the NFL Combine in your history as head coach?

LOVIE SMITH: That it's important. There's a lot of different ways to do it too. I know some staffs have all of their coaches here. Some staffs don't have any of theirs. We have a combination. Being a new staff, there's a lot to do. Most of our coaches are back evaluating our season, video, there's a lot of things to do when you're a new staff coming in.

But the Combine is important. It's one thing to have an interview and you see it on video, but another to watch it in its entirety when a player comes into the room.

One good thing about me in college, my time in college too, a lot of these guys, we interviewed and kind of recruited them. I feel like I have a head start on some of that too. There's a lot of value you can get. Of course the medical stuff, and then the workouts.

I tell guys this is probably the most important interview you may ever have in your life. So I just feel it's really important.

Q. New way of defense and Cover 2 defense?

LOVIE SMITH: The new way? Now you say two high safety? Now you know who I am, right (laughter)?

Q. Like you're seeing a lot of safeties --

LOVIE SMITH: Yeah, I'm just kind of messing with you a little bit. I think some form of Cover 2 is going to be around. It's been around since the beginning of time, and it's not going anywhere.

Just think about it. The receivers now, there are some special guys out there, and to just say that a defensive back can guard that guy man-to-man by himself without any help, that's asking an awful lot. That's what Cover 2 kind of gives you a little bit, a way to double cover some of the special athletes that we have in the NFL.

It's been a part of our system every year since it seems like I've been in coaching. People say times have changed. Yeah, I sit and listen to R&B music, old school music pretty much every day. That hasn't changed, good music. Cover 2 is not going anywhere. There's a place for it, and it's good that more people acknowledge it now.

Q. What do you listen to?

LOVIE SMITH: What do I listen to on game day? I'm not listening to a whole lot of rap. I'm having to put up with that from the young generation. When you say old school, you can kind of tell what type of music I'm listening to. Some type of R&B music is usually on my iPhone.

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