

# Houston Texans Media Conference

Friday, April 29, 2022

Houston, Texas, USA

## Nick Caserio

### Draft Press Conference



NICK CASERIO: Hopefully it was another productive night for us. Pretty active. You know, moved around and made a number of different trades there. I think the thought process going in, we had spent some time during the day here kind of putting together some different clusters and groups of players and pockets of players. There were probably about, I would say, 10 to 15 players that we had earmarked and the grades were reflective of if we had the opportunity to pick them in this round, like we thought it made sense to do. Some of this was positioning and some of it is supply and demand, like it usually is.

In the end we made the three picks. We in with three and made three, but just kind of moved around to kind of get to the same endpoint here today.

Kind of start with 37. I think we were pretty intent on picking at 37. There was a little bit of discussion or dialogue with some folks behind us about maybe moving back however many slots it was, but we felt where we were positioned and if we moved back, call it, six to eight slots, that three or four of the players that we earmarked, there's a good chance we would have lost them. Instead of trying to make a decision that we might look back and say, you know what, doesn't make a lot of sense. Try to just pick a good football player.

I think we're starting the Houston Texans Community College by picking a lot of kids that kind of grew up here right around the corner. We called Pitre and asked where he was. He was five minutes down the street. He probably would have sprinted to the stadium.

I would say we'll get to John here in a minute, but I would say those two players are just they're football-playing Jesses. They're damn good football players. They've come from good programs. What Coach Aranda has done at Baylor, I would say it's because of players and people like Jalen Pitre. He meant as much as anybody to that program. He plays with his hair on fire. Versatile player. They used him a little bit inside in the slot. He played safety, so he has some position versatility. I think he might have a role in the kicking game.

Tough instinctive football player. Finds a football and loves playing football. His energy was infectious when he was in the building. I would say you all talked to Kenyon and Derek earlier. I would say Jalen falls in the category of embodying the types of people and players that we want to have in this building. Kind of their vigor and joy playing football. You see it in the way that he plays. He plays with his hair on fire.

Made the pick with him there at 37, and then where we were positioned, we were position 68 and 80, so you are talking, I don't know, however many. I'm not a math major, but it's a lot of picks. It's 35, 40 picks, whatever it was. We were fairly intent of moving back into the second round. We felt we were going to do that regardless. I wouldn't say it was necessarily about a specific player or position. It was more about pockets of players and groups of players with the same methodology and the same mindset.

Going from 68 back to 44 there with Cleveland. Had to give up the fourth, whatever it was, and the fifth -- I can't remember exactly what it was. It was really about positioning to try to get in a slot. It wasn't necessarily we were trying to jump a team or get ahead of anybody. It was kind of this same cluster of players that we were talking about that were graded a certain level. By the time we got to 68, there was no way in hell we were going to see them. It was, all right, let's see if we can move, and let's see if we can get in there and see if we can pick.

Went ahead and did that and picked John. I would say you'll spend some time with him and get to know him. His story is probably as unique as anybody in the draft. Very worldly. I mean, this kid is an awesome kid. Very smart, very studious, tough as nails. Some of the things that he did at Alabama and some of the things he endured and played with, just no normal people would do it. This guy's level of toughness is exceptional.

He was a really, really productive player for them and has some position versatility. I know there's questions. When is he going to be ready? When is he going to be available? I wouldn't put too much stock in what he said. I think when he is ready, he is ready. Whenever that is, it is. We're not



going to rush or push him. When he is ready and physically able, we feel that it's the right thing to do, then he will be on the field. Until then he will do everything he can to get himself to that point.

I certainly wouldn't put any time table on it or any expectation on it. When he is ready, he will be ready, but another player that I would say we like probably as much as any football player in the draft. When you watch him play, he plays a receiver with a mindset mentality that I would say is a little bit different.

When Jamo went down -- or had the penalty in the Alabama game, they lost Jamo, and really it came down to Metchie. When they needed a play, it came down to Metchie. I think he caught, I don't know, 11, 12 balls in that game, and he was going against a really good player, McCreary, who I believe the Titans took.

Kind of like we talked a little bit earlier and even last night, you know, seeing good on good, Metchie on guys like McCreary, Metchie on guys like Stingley, I mean, that's important. We'll see him again. It's a good level of competition. Excited to have John.

Then with Christian we were positioned there at 80. Christian was actually one of the players we kind of had in our cluster from the start of the day. So he was in that group. The fact that he was still kind of milling around there for whatever reason, you know, it's not for me to judge or figure out why. I would say fit the profile in terms of what we want at linebacker. I don't think anybody was more ecstatic than Lovie about that pick, but talking about a guy that's 6-foot, 225, 230 pounds, runs 4.4. Fits the profile of what we want to do defensively at that position.

Kind of a unique story as well. Kind of basically didn't play linebacker until he showed up on the campus of Alabama. He was on the secondary and then moved down. That's reflective of Nick's genius of how he sees the game, how he uses people, where the game is going. Trying to stop offenses like Ole Miss and trying to stop teams that spread the field, have a lot of space. You need players, in turn, that can help defend that space. I would say Christian falls into that category. Should be able to help us a little bit in the kicking game.

I know he was actually in Dallas. The question was asked last night about when you get on the phone with these kids and just what does that mean? I would say in his particular case, he cried in a good way, but he was so, I would say, just ready for this kind of to be over in a good way.

I think everybody felt good about that pick. We picked, I would say, good football players that are awesome people

that have played for some really good programs. Again, what Coach Aranda has done, and what Nick has done at Alabama speaks for itself. They're well-trained, well-schooled, but the reality is they're starting over. Now they're Houston Texans, and now they're going to have to learn our program. Not necessarily change anything that they're doing, but just do the things that we ask of them on a day to day basis, and that hopefully will be good enough.

**Q. How were you able to learn about their personalities? Specifically, the guys from good programs who have had a lot of success in their careers, maybe how well do you know that maybe if things aren't perfect early on?**

NICK CASERIO: There's a lot of layers. That was a question we've asked some people that have played in some programs, like the reality is. Look, our program is where it is for the time being. We haven't had as much success as we all would have hoped here over the last how many years. How would you handle that transition or situation?

You're just trying to get a gauge and a feel to the overall personality and just who they are as people, because who they are as people is going to translate over to who they are as football players. You're just trying to see, look, this is going to be hard. It's not going to be easy. I would say the league is set up for everybody to basically be about .500. Some of these players are going to lose more games in one season than their whole career. It's the reality of the NFL. We can't change that.

Are you going to be able to get up? Are you going to be able to deal with it? Whatever happens on Sunday, can you come in the next day and turn the page and get ready for the next week and have enough competitive stamina, mental stamina, mental toughness to be able to move forward? That's what it's going to take to have a good team over the course of however many weeks it is.

How do you measure that? You really -- it's difficult to measure tangibly. You have to get a feel. You sort of have to do a deep dive. You sort of have to try to gather as much information as can you in that area. Then you have to see it. Then you have to feel it. Some kids are going to come in and BS you, and you have to figure out, all right, is this really who they are, or is this something a little bit different? Some kids are I would say true to who they are. I would say I don't think Pitre, Metchie, and Christian Harris are going to change who they are if we lose some football games. I think they're probably going to be motivated to say, all right, what the hell do we have to do to figure it out to make it better?

That's the kind of attitude and the type of approach that you want to have. That's what their job is. That's what our job is. It's to fix problems. It's to not bitch and moan if things don't go the way we want it to and to come up with solutions. Not to be contrite, but that's the truth.

**Q. Does Ed's speed, leadership and instincts and Pitre and Harris, how much does that mean for you guys as you sort of try to get the defense to the level that you want?**

NICK CASERIO: Look, we have a lot of areas that we can improve as an overall team, and that's what the offseason is for, so hopefully that can translate into results on the field, but defensive football is about being fast, tackling, being instinctive, and then having a certain skill set and being able to do the things that are required of your position. That's what defense entails.

Can you stop them in critical situations? Can you get off the field? Tackling? Lovie has talked about it from the day he walked in the door. It's about taking the ball away, so you want to play with an aggressive mindset and mentality.

It's a passing league. You have to be able to defend the run, but it's a passing league, and you have to be able to defend space. How do you defend space? You have guys that are fast, that are instinctive, that can find the ball and can tackle. Who are those players? That's our job to find them and to fit them in and use them and deploy them accordingly.

**Q. You've talked a lot about the program you want to build here and that everyone wants to build here. Is there anything that's changed from a year ago, your first draft here, with how you bring rookies into the building, integrate them with your team and set them up for success?**

NICK CASERIO: I wouldn't say necessarily change. I would say there's probably elements and areas within the process that we've probably made some subtle adjustments and changes and maybe there's more information or we found a different way to do something or maybe some, whether technology, gives us more information about how we assess the players biomechanically or athletically.

The idea is to fill the building with as many people possible on as many levels and layers as possible, so it's not just about players. If you have a bunch of players that with that mindset and mentality but you don't have people on your staff that have the same thought process and mentality, then maybe it's not going to work the way that you hope.

We all have a common goal. We're all trying to achieve the same thing. We all have to depend and rely on each other, so that personal accountability to each other at all levels of the program, that's what's going to kind of lift us to a level that we think is better than where it is and that we hopefully can sustain for an extended period of time.

**Q. I know it's hard to predict, but do you believe that these guys that you have picked, especially on defense so early, are going to be able to have an immediate impact on improving your defense?**

NICK CASERIO: Yeah, I wouldn't put a timetable on it. I think once they get here, we'll assess kind of where they are, how much they can handle, how far along they are. If you go out there and just do your job and make improvement and take coaching and you perform your job at a level that is better than anybody else at that position, then you're going to play. If there's somebody better at that position that does it better than you, they're going to play.

If you're not playing, what's your supplemental role? If you're not playing on defense, look, you're either starting on offense or starting on defense or starting in the kicking game. We have 48 players that we take to the game on a week-to-week basis. Call it 22 on offense or defense and respective side of the ball and three specialists. What's your role? How are you going to get to the game? How are you going to help us?

If you are really going on defense and that's your role, then be really good on defense. If you are more of a role player defensively or offensively, you are the seventh lineman, then that's your role. Then whatever role you have in the other areas of the field. It's our job to figure out who the players are.

Look, I've been a part of plenty of good teams where players that were drafted in the third and fourth round were inactive for an entire season. James White, let's look at his career in New England. He didn't play as a rookie, literally. He was a fourth round pick. We thought he was a good player. Nine years later I would say he has been one of the best sub-backs probably in the history of that program.

What they do in their first year, I don't think we can get too caught up in that. People change. People grow. They learn at different stages. Maybe they have some setbacks. There's a lot of things they're going to handle.

I would say let's start with the season. There's, I don't know, 21 games, 22 games. Some of these games, they are going to be playing double their season. How do you handle that volume? There's a lot of things that go into it.

The things that you do away from the field, those are more importantly and dictate what you actually do on the field. So what's your level of commitment to be being a good player, being a good pro? Are you going to do everything that's required? I would say those things are more important than let's just roll it out there and see what they do on the field, how high they can jump, and how fast they can run.

**Q. When you look at the big board ahead and especially going into tomorrow, if there is no run at a certain position, does that change your strategy if you aren't seeing a multitude of players that maybe you like at a certain position? Does that maybe change how you approach the draft with certain trade ups or trade downs?**

NICK CASERIO: As far as being position-specific?

**Q. If you're not seeing a run on running backs, does that change your draft strategy in waiting to maybe select one later on?**

NICK CASERIO: I don't think you make it about a specific position. I would say when you look at kind of what happened today, there was, I don't know, 12 to 14 receivers that went. I don't know the exact number, but it was a pretty significant amount.

What you're starting to see is you're kind of starting to see players come from different areas and kind of beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Whatever value that team puts on that player, I think you're at that point. Are there players that are still available that we think can help us? Absolutely. How big of a role or what does that look like relative to some other players in other positions, that's what we're going to look at and evaluate here tonight or tomorrow morning. We're slated to pick there 107, and then we have the two fifth-round picks and two sixth-round picks. If we pick at 107, then there's a little bit of a gap until kind of the 150s, 160s, whatever it is.

There's still certain players that we feel can come in and help our football team to some degree, so trying to make a good decision and pick the right player and keep it moving.

**Q. You mentioned at the beginning of the day you had 10 to 15 players in a cluster that you expected to be there. How diverse is that group position-wise, and maybe even specific to running back, I mean, how do you have those discussions throughout the day about where to go with that and how you all address that in the future?**

NICK CASERIO: Yeah, it's all grade-specific. Whatever the player's grade is, however we valued them, then, okay, these guys are the green group, if you will. Just using numbers -- using colors. All right. How many players within that group?

Are there more of one position than another? What's the likelihood that you have the opportunity to pick this player if you wait? Those are all discussions you have. Look, the reality is you're going to pick one player. You can't -- you're not going to get everything that you hope or that you want. It's just a reality of it. Be ready to pivot and go to the next thing.

Hopefully you've evaluated and identified those players the right way. I would say, again, just a tip of the cap to Lip, John, and Moziq, Tom Hayden, our scouting staff. They did an awesome job. They really did. The last couple days. I think what we've done is the reflective of the work that they've done and the things that we've done during the course of the day leading up to yesterday, the things that we've done leading up to today. Do the same thing tomorrow morning. We'll get together as an entire staff and say, all right, here are our options and some things, and maybe start to plan ahead a little bit to undrafted free agency.

There's no players left this position. If we're going to add players to the team, all right, they're going to have to come from another group. Let's maybe start to do homework and make sure we are organized and add on that. That will be the plan of action.

**Q. Just to follow up and maybe on your thinking of it. This is the second day where a couple of teams have moved ahead of you guys. How much did that influence how you all eventually picked?**

NICK CASERIO: Not at all. That's happenstance. I think, honestly, a lot of that is made up. This team jumped in front of this team because they knew they were going to pick. I'm not that smart.

If they move in front of us, they move in front of us. That's why you have to be prepared. All right, if one of those guys gets picked, who is the next guy? Go to the next guy. There's not enough time in seven minutes to cry over spilled milk, so we're not going to do that.

**Q. Tomorrow's round is four through seven, and then there's the undrafted free agency pool. Do you guys evaluate those players differently from, let's say, the players that you guys selected from rounds one through three, or it still goes into the whole entire situation?**

NICK CASERIO: Great question. Not at all. We spend as much time evaluating those players as we do the guys that we picked yesterday. So that's how much depth and just how much time and just in totality understanding one through, I don't know, 300, 250, 300 players. That's our job. That's our responsibility. To kind of have an understanding, if that group of players goes, all right, we have this other group of players over here. I mean, I've probably spent as much time on that group as I do on guys like Derek Stingley.

I think there are some other things that we're doing with the team, other players that aren't here I would say that are in the league that probably come Monday they're going to show up on our team, so whether or not that affects the planning or goes into the decision-making, I wouldn't say that it does, but we kind of have that in our back pocket a little bit. The way it looks today might look a little bit different come Monday.

**Q. It was easy to take a guy like Derek Stingley Jr. coming off of injury because you got a chance to evaluate him during the pro day, but how about a guy that you haven't seen in the past couple of months in Metchie and coming off the injury. When you go to evaluate and to draft like that, how much of the medical team is there with you evaluating, telling you what is going to -- what could potentially happen down the line?**

NICK CASERIO: That's a great question. We have those meetings. We have a medical meeting a week or two before the draft, and we go through a pretty lengthy list of players. Their job and responsibility is to say here's the player's condition, here's how we project that player, here's what we think it is. I would say with most injured players in every situation, every injury is different, at some point there's going to be a recovery from whatever injury they have. There's a certain timetable that's going to be associated with that.

We've talked about this previously, any time you draft a player, bring a player in the building, you're essentially saying we're comfortable with the situation. We understand what it is. I think the most important thing is for all of us to understand what it is, where he is, and then be able to put an action plan in place to give that player an opportunity to get back to his optimum level of performance.

The medical team is important as it pertains specifically to players that might have some injury, whether it's history or his condition. There was a few players -- again, it was Ojabo was kind of in that situation as well, going back

yesterday with Jamo, Jameson Williams. Take that information, here's what it is, here's what the expectation is. What's the nature of the injury? Okay, here's the recovery. He will be ready by X. Okay, great. Then you sort of plan accordingly. That's kind of how we handle it.

It's definitely a portion of each of the player's evaluation. Some players it has a little bit more relevance than others.

**Q. Just quickly back to the head coach hiring process. You had Lovie Smith involved throughout it and ultimately ended up hiring him. You had three months working with him through draft preparations and everything like that, and now two nights of working with him on draft night, and you have been in a lot of draft rooms with different types of people. What was it like these last two days specifically working with Lovie, talking things out with him specifically? The second part of the question is, was the genesis of the hug that you guys had shared on social media the Christian Harris pick?**

NICK CASERIO: (Laughing). Yeah, that was pretty -- he was excited. He needed a hug, I think, after that.

I have respect for his perspective on players. He has seen a lot of players. He has coached a lot of players. He is the head coach of the football team. He should have input. He is also very receptive to our viewpoints on players and the rationale that goes into it. That's part of the give and take. We're not going to agree on everything. I'm not going to agree with the coaches on everything. You would have to try to create some modicum of balance and create an effort so that everybody understands, everybody hears the opinion of the other party, and then be respectful of that.

In the end it's an organizational decision that we're making, and we all have to be comfortable, and then our job is to once a player comes in, do everything in our power to give that player the best opportunity to optimize his overall individual performance.

**Q. Nick, in taking into consideration the Metchie pick with the medical team and everything, how much of an impact because of the fact that the relationship you might have had with Nick in Alabama gives you a better understanding and a comfort level besides the medical opinion to go ahead and take a flyer on this kid, even though he probably would have been a first round pick if he didn't have the ACL?**

NICK CASERIO: It's a good question. All the information that we gather, whom ever we get it from is important. With each player, whether it's a medical evaluation -- you

know, our relationship with I would say Coach Saban, it goes back. His relationship with Bill is well-documented. I would say I have a lot of respect in Nick. Whenever you ask him about a player, he is very honest. He has a good perspective because he can give you a comparative view of -- he has coached a lot of really good players.

I think you better be prepared when you talk to him. You better know what the hell you are talking about. He doesn't want to waste a lot of time, but when you are in a good program, they built one of the best programs in the history of college football, so they put a lot of demands on the players. They coach hard. They train hard. They play hard. So what that individual says about that particular player, like, we should listen to that information. If we don't, we're kind of being irresponsible.

It's all part of the evaluation. It's all part of the equation. Ultimately, we can take all the information we want from whomever. We have to internalize it, and then ultimately we have to make a decision, and we are either comfortable with the decision or we're not.

Thanks, guys. Appreciate it.

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