

Houston Texans Media Conference

Saturday, April 30, 2022

Houston, Texas, USA

General Manager Nick Caserio

Draft Press Conference



NICK CASERIO: Appreciate everybody's time and cooperation this weekend. I would say pretty wild three days. Exciting. Culmination of a lot of work and a lot of effort by a lot of people. Just can't say enough about the work that I would say our team has done, organizationally just from the different areas, the different departments. It's not just scouting. It's medical. It's data technology. It's all the areas of the building that support one another working in unison, and I think the draft is no better example of that. For the amount of things that take place and happen over the course of three days, I would say, at a pretty rapid pace and speed, you have to have a lot of really good people around you that you can count on and depend on. Personally I'm thankful and grateful for those people because without them, none of this would be possible.

As we've talked about over the last few days, I think we're making some progress with the team. Continue to build the team here for the 2022 season. I would say there's definitely work in front of us. I'm sure there will be some transactions that take place once the draft is over, once the weekend is over, all throughout the spring leading up to camp, all the way to the start of the season, whatever the day we play and whenever the schedule does come out.

I think this is a culmination, specifically the draft, of a year-round process, year-long work from a lot of people. It's three days, but it's more than three days. I would say it's pretty comprehensive. It's pretty detailed.

The investment of energy, time that our people, specifically the scouting staff, put into this and then to see the excitement and joy on their faces and the conviction that they have in players, when you have a discussion with them, that's all it's about. My job is to synthesize all the information, process it and try to make the right decision for the organization. Hopefully we've done that here over the weekend.

Specific to today at the end of the day I want to say with five picks, I think we had the third, the two fifths, the two sixes to start. We had the second pick there early on. I would say one of the things that's probably a little bit

different this year than most years is typically the first eight to ten picks you'll see a decent amount of movement. Teams want to come up. I think one of the things this year some of the teams behind us had multiple fourth-round picks, so they didn't feel maybe inclined to move to get a particular player. Just sit and pick or maneuver around, position around.

We had some discussions and dialogue with some teams, but nothing substantive. As we always talk about with our staff, we have to be prepared to pick. Kind of went through our process last night into this morning about the group of players that we have to choose from or pick from. I had a real good dialogue and exercise with everybody. Ultimately, decided to pick with Dameon, the running back from Florida.

I would say those of you that spoke to him on the Zoom, I would say his energy is -- that's who he is. He plays with a lot of joy. He plays with a lot of fight. He plays with a lot of toughness, and his personality, I would say, transfers over to the football field.

Kind of played a little bit of rotation down there at Florida this year, so they had him and another back. They rotated in. What's the reason? Again, that's ultimately up to the coaching staff for them to determine how they want to deploy their players, but talking about a guy that's 5'9", 217 pounds that's built strong, low to the ground, has good contact balance, good lower body strength, good lateral quickness, maybe lacks a little top-end speed and has decent hands. I would say his mindset and skill set potentially projects to a role in the kicking game. So we talked about a player trying to create multiple roles for themselves on a roster, so I would say in Dameon's situation, I think he'll have an opportunity. I don't think this is going to be all about offense and who is going to carry the ball, and he is going to be lead runner. That's a bunch of BS. I think he has to earn his opportunity on the team and create a role for himself, and I think his ability to potentially play on four downs is probably what's more important than any particular thing about how many yards he is going to run for in early downs. We have a lot of good backs in this building, and I would say he is a part of that group, but I wouldn't say he is any better than the guys



that we have in the building. We'll let the competition kind of play itself out and see what happens.

Then we had the two fifth-round picks there. There was quite a bit -- a sizable gap from 107 to, what was it, 166 and 170. We felt like we were probably going to lose a significant amount of players. So the cost of moving up a few spots to pick Booker, we thought it made sense. We didn't want to put ourselves in a position where we were holding on to picks, kind of holding on to your ass and hoping a player is going to be there. Just felt could scoot a little bit and move. I think Booker was the next pick, right? We traded up to get Booker a few spots.

With Booker, his system a little more of not a three-man front, but kind of odd space front. He kind of projects a little bit more kind of to defensive tackle in our front, kind of potentially one technique to three technique. 6'3", 310 pounds. Ran sub-5 flat or right around there. Runs well. Is smart. Good lateral quickness. A player that we visited. A lot of quality, I would say, things going for him.

Obviously, went to Stanford, so he is smarter than probably half of our team. Maybe him and Davis can compete to see who is the smartest guy on the team. Smart, productive player.

I would say his skill set and playing style kind of fits some of the things we're doing defensively. So decided add him to the group.

We picked Thomas, and then -- excuse me. Took Booker, and Teagan was the next pick. Teagan was a guy we were kind of talking about throughout the day. I think the offensive staff, it was their equivalent of the Christian Harris pick last night. They were really excited when we picked him. 6'5", 265 pounds. On the line of scrimmage tight end who plays tough, strong, and physical. I think the tight ends will be a part of the offense here in the season, whether it's two tight ends, one tight ends, three tight ends, however we do it.

He was a player that there was definitely a lot of conviction for what potentially he could bring to the table. Kind of meat and potatoes. He is not going to, I would say, run past a lot of people down a field in the passing game. He plays strong. He plays physical. He plays with tenacity. He plays -- hopefully it will give us a presence at the end of the line of scrimmage. Similar to a guy like Pharaoh and players like Anthony. That was I would say the thought process behind that pick there.

Then to do -- going back to a little earlier with the Booker pick, we took one of the sixes we had and used that to go up. One of the things we talked about, we had the two

sixes going in. Depending how it went, if we were to just sit at 205 and 207, maybe taking one of those six and pushing it to the seven, kind of two for one, so we just said, all right, well, let's just move the one six to the -- as a part of the trade for Booker, and then we had 205 left or whichever one we didn't trade, and then we had some discussions actually about going two for one.

So do we two-for-one the six for two sevens and maybe hope we get a group of players, or why don't we just go ahead and pick a player who we think we like and we have some conviction behind? I think he is a player that we were interested in regardless, so instead of waiting and I think come to find out, if we didn't pick him where we did, Austin, we probably would have lost about every other player by the time we got to those seventh round picks that we were thinking about moving. The teams that were even interested in doing that, that never came to fruition. They kind of bowed out and dropped out. Kind of the same thing. All right, here are the scenarios. If we pick, here's who we're going to pick. If we move, here are our options. We just said we're going to sit and pick, and we picked Austin. One of the few players that I would say Cal McNair has a lot of common with, since they went to the same high school. That was a pretty funny moment on a call when they shared that tidbit. I think he is a little better player than Cal was. No offense. I am sure Cal will crush me for that.

You're talking about a guy that's a four-year starter in the SEC and played, I don't know, 50-some odd games, whatever the heck it was. Pretty consistent player. 6'5", 310 pounds. Got 34 inch arms. Runs 5-flat, which I would say for an offensive lineman, that's pretty good. Played mostly on the right side during his career, so whether or not he can kind of flip and play both sides, we'll see.

Once we finished picking there with Austin, then kind of started working through the post-draft, free agency process. I would say we'll probably end up with, I don't know, 10 to 12 of those guys. I don't think anything is really done-done. I'm sure just some names floating out there, but I wouldn't put a lot of stock in it just yet. I think we still have a lot of work to do on that. We'll probably add 10 to 12 more players, and then kind of look at where we are over the weekend. Evaluate the team, make some decisions moving forward.

Again, I think this weekend is as much about the players. It's about the players, but I would say it's as much about the organization and the people that are involved in this process than anything else. Without them, I certainly wouldn't be able to do my job. With that, we'll open it up to some questions.

Q. Generally speaking, you went in with a list of priorities. How do you feel like you checked those boxes?

NICK CASERIO: I mean, it's not, well, if we have to pick this position, pick this player. I don't think it's that. It's all right, what are our options? Who do we feel are good football players? How do we think they might be able to project on to our football team? You don't guarantee that -- even you said, okay, here are the priorities. We're going to do this. If for whatever reason it doesn't work out, then you shift your priorities.

I think the consistent theme is pick good players, be committed to our process, and then just try to make the right decision at the time when we have the opportunity to pick. I think that's really the approach. It's not about -- I would say some of this is coincidental to picking a bunch of players from Houston. I mean, it's great, but not just because they're from Houston. It's because they're good players. Look, I would say this: There's a lot of good football players in the state of Texas and specifically in the city of Houston. It's probably a good place to start.

The fact that they're homegrown here is probably more -- their families are probably more ecstatic than I would say anybody else. I would say some of that is coincidental more than anything else.

Hopefully we've accomplished a few things. We've added good players to our team who are good people that we think are going to help build our program or continue to build our program. That's really the priority and the focus.

Q. You talked a little bit about Pierce, but what do you think you can do to a team having a guy with that kind of attitude and he plays seemingly with the safe kind of intensity and excitement as he acts? How can that help especially a young team trying to build a culture that you keep talking about?

NICK CASERIO: Football is a mindset. Football is a tough ass game that requires mental toughness, physical toughness, and competitive stamina. That's what football demands.

You have to have the requisite physical skills along with those types of qualities. The more players you have like on that on your team, when you turn to either side of you and you see that's the mindset and that's the mentality and that's the work ethic, you don't have a choice because if you don't do that, you're going to stand out like a sore thumb.

I would say specific to running backs, this is more of a

general statement. When you have players like that that carry the ball, whether it's Burkhead whether it's Dameon, I would say Marlon, offensive linemen want to block for people that have that mentality. We talk about straining. We talk about finishing and getting the extra yard. When you see a player that does that, that does everything he can to try to gain extra yards, it says I'm trying to do everything I can to help this team gain basically another yard, another inch, so you add up the inches and add up the yards. That can maybe make the difference in a score at the end of the game.

I think one of the highlights they showed and a guy's helmet was ripped off, but he kept running. He doesn't care about his physical well-being. He is trying to be a football player. I would say the one thing that's probably pretty consistent with the players that we've drafted is that mindset. Whether it's Jalen, whether it's John Metchie or Dameon Pierce, Deculus in that category. They share that and they see that in their teammate, and they think this is how we need to play. Kenyon, big ass physical offensive lineman that moves people. You want to be a tough team. You want to be a physical team. You better have tough, physical players that adopt that mindset and then see what happens when we get on the field.

Q. You talk a little bit about the undrafted process. What is your mindset going into that? How do you kind of set that up so you're ready to make those offers when the draft ends?

NICK CASERIO: It's a great question. Honestly, we probably spent as much time on that area, Sarah, as any others. You have an idea of some players that you have earmarked, and you want to be realistic too. Oh, we'd like to sign this in the draft. He is going to get drafted in the fifth round. We're wasting our time. You feel that out as you're working through the process, and you earmark certain players, and maybe there are some players that you say, you know what, the fact that he didn't get drafted, we'll start with that. You might have to shift your gears a little bit or shift your priorities, but I would say the same thought process and mindset those players permeates that process just like it does the players that are drafted.

I think our scouts specifically take a lot of pride probably in that group more than anything else because you're finding players even though they weren't drafted, but they still have the opportunity to make your football team. I would say that's an in-depth a process as any other. It's exciting. It moves pretty quickly. You're going to lose players. You think you have a player, okay. Gotta wait until the end of the draft, and then gets drafted, and then you have to go to the next player. Well, you're not sure if you can get him.

Like everything, you just have to be flexible and ready to pivot and be able to duck and move a little bit, and when it's time to make a decision and make a commitment to somebody, make that commitment. As long as they reciprocate on their end, then we have an agreement and move on.

Q. Do you have any idea how many players at each position you want to add or anything like that?

NICK CASERIO: It's not, I would say, specific to position because even if there's a player maybe at a position where you maybe have enough bodies or enough players, but if you think he is a good player, you add him to the mix, or maybe if you have players on your team, you might say, you know, if we add this player, we can offset that or move on from said player.

You kind of look at where are your numbers? We have an idea going into the camp, let's call it 88 to 90 players. There's going to be -- let's call it roughly, I don't know, 43 on offense, 43 on defense, three specialists. Each position is going to have certain numbers associated with that. Fill some of those slots and fill some of those numbers just for practice purposes, but you don't want to fill them with guys like me and Mark. You want to fill them with good football players. Sorry, Mark. We're purposeful with that group as well.

I'm glad everybody can get a joke. Smile in here. It's okay. Sorry, Mark. (Laughing).

Q. With Booker, with that pick, you say he is more on the interior. What have you seen in football how maybe there's more pressure in the back field coming from interior guys than maybe before?

NICK CASERIO: It's a combination of. If you have good edge rushers, you can create pressure on the edge. A lot of teams try to pressure the interior over the pocket, so whether it's with the four-man front, whether it's odd space front where they put the linebackers in the A-gaps, I would say Miami is as good of a team probably when you watch the way they pick stun inside. So you are use a linebacker and trying to create a pick stun with the zero technique or three technique. The quickest path to the quarterback is inside the pocket.

On the perimeter of the pocket, if the end beats the tackle off the snap, then obviously, he can get there, but the tackle, if he can at least get in the way and cut off the junction point and then wherever the launch point is for the quarterback, you are trying to force that player around it. Okay?

Try to protect -- your mindset in pass protection is inside-out, okay? Where does protection start? It starts inside. Inside-out, if you get the inside, the quickest path to the quarterback is from point A to point B right down the middle. If you have a good pass rusher, it doesn't mean you can eliminate them. Not saying that, but they have to take a little bit more of a circuitous route to the quarterback, and you have a tackle that can at least force it outside. You see a lot of ends, they start to the outside shoulder of a tackle, if a tackle oversets them, they end up back inside. The notion of creating pressure on the inside part of the pocket I would say just to get quarterback off the launch point, I mean, I would say, like, that's a factor for every team.

If you have a mobile quarterback and you force a guy off the spot, you got to make sure that you have contained in some kind of presence on the outside of the formation.

However you create pressure, you are going to create pressure. You are going to create it with a four-man front or three-man front or odd-space front with two linebackers in the A gaps. You're going to put five down on the line of scrimmage and play a diamond. How do you create pressure on a quarterback? You need good players, but there's a schematic element that's involved as well.

Q. Obviously, you had more picks this year than last. Is it easier? Do you feel like there's more things can you do to trade down and use those? How much more effective was some of your strategies that you normally do this year than --

NICK CASERIO: You just have more opportunities. It just gives you more flexibility to move up and down. Some teams, I would say are more willing than others. Some teams want to move back. Some teams want to sit and pick. The more resources you have at your disposal, just gives you more flexibility to kind of use the assets accordingly.

Q. When you look at the draft class as a whole, six players from the SEC, are you noticing something different between these players? Are they more NFL-ready? Do they fit the system better? What goes into that process of maybe seeing how many players from one certain conference?

NICK CASERIO: We talked about this a little bit last night. SEC, see him against good teams. Good football players are good football players. Whether they play in the SEC, whether they play in the ACC, or whether they play in the PAC-12, or whether they play in the Colonial or whether they play in the AAC, a good football player is a good football player.

One of the things you have to be conscious of is evaluating that player and the competition that he is playing against. I mean, that's a fair part of the evaluation. You can't totally discard that. It's a part of it.

Then you actually have to look at the player. Do the skills that he shows regardless of level of competition, are those going to transfer over into our level? You kind of have some ideas. Some players are able to make that transition better than others, but the reality is, okay, the SEC, their careers are over. Nobody cares about what they did now at LSU, Florida, wherever the hell they played. What people care about is what are you going to do when you are a Houston Texan?

What are you going to do with your opportunities? Are you going to make the most of your opportunities? We're trying to carry as much competition as possible and bring in good players. The players are ultimately going to determine how big have a role they have on the team. We're not going to predetermine it.

It doesn't matter what round he was drafted in. In the end, you have to produce and you have to perform. If you do that, you're going to play. If you don't, somebody else is going to play. It's very simple.

Q. Nick, going into that draft do you feel like there was a sense urgency to try to hit on every single one of these picks? Especially considering last year you guys found some really good players given the small draft capital that you guys had?

NICK CASERIO: We're not going to know if we, quote, unquote, hit on these picks for a couple of years. So, look, the draft grades are meaningless. Whatever the draft grades are tomorrow, this team got an A, this guy got a B, based on what? Through what lens? These guys haven't played one snap of football.

Urgency is there every day. As we build the team, urgency to get good players on the team, whether it's a guy that we draft, a guy that we work out as a free agent, a guy we sign as a free agent, a guy we trade for. There's urgency every day. There's urgency in the NFL. I would say there's no additional pressure to hit on our picks. I don't know what that means.

Ultimately, the player's performance will dictate whether or not he is a good player, he is not a good player. If it doesn't work out, okay, we'll move on from that player and go find somebody else. That's our job. That mindset and that thought process is going to permeate our building for as long as I'm in charge.

Q. Nick, with your former employer, you helped build a dynasty. How much of that experience that you used going into this draft and evaluating the players this time around?

NICK CASERIO: I mean, I wouldn't say very much. I would say more than anything my training is my training. Look, I was a small part of -- the players ultimately determined how successful an organization is. What we try to do is try to put a good plan in place, try to have a good process, be very thoughtful and purposeful. I would say just stay consistent and disciplined to the things that you believe in and that you think go into putting a good team together.

I think that's probably where I was most fortunate is to see how we put the team together, and it's about the players. The most important thing is it's about the players and how they play, and ultimately, they're the ones that are going to put the banners up there. It's not going to be me.

Those 20 years of experience I would say were invaluable just from a teaching and learning standpoint and how we apply principles and things that we're going to try to apply, but you don't just drop one program into a new building and say here it is, well, it's going to work because this is what we did there. I think you take the things that you learned. I think just more than anything thought process that goes into the why.

And I would say one thing that probably Bill doesn't get enough credit for is his ability to just continually pivot and adjust and stay ahead and not just kind of follow the curve and not just do things because it worked six or however many times it worked. I think you've got to be humble. It's a humbling sport. It's a humbling game. Just when you think you have it all figured out, you get smacked in the face.

I think, look, the reality is it's a great weekend for the organization. We're all excited. We're excited for the players that we brought in the building. Hopefully our team is excited, but the reality is there's a lot of work, and it's going to be about how hard we work, how well we work, and what we do when we're ultimately on the field.

Q. As far as your undrafted free agents, is there anything more important to add at quarterback?

NICK CASERIO: If we feel it's something that makes sense, we'll look at. I think the three players that we have at that position right now, we feel good about working with them. Like any position, Mark, if there's a player that we feel makes sense to add to the mix, we'll certainly consider

it. If it doesn't really fit or make sense, then we won't, so always be open-minded. Never going to pigeon-hole ourselves and just always be just alert for opportunities that we think make some sense.

Thanks, guys.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

