

# Houston Texans Media Conference

Thursday, April 27, 2023

Houston, Texas, USA

**Nick Caserio**

Draft Press Conference



**Q. (No microphone). When you traded back, that was really the bonus move. So it was historical here. Tell us what went into that. You said you'd been talking to the Cardinals about it to actually pull the trade. How did you pull that off?**

NICK CASERIO: It's kind of a loaded question there, but I would say start with C.J., really productive player. We had him in the building for a visit. He's, I would say, as competitive a player, has an edge about him in a good way, loves football, wants to compete, wants to be great. Good size, comes from a good program.

Ryan does a great job with the program down there at Ohio State, or up there at Ohio State, certainly with the quarterback as well. C.J.'s been a productive player. He's been an accurate player. Certainly has a long way to go. I think he'll admit that. I would say there's no timetable on any player.

The goal is for the player whoever they are, to come in and work hard, earn their role on the team, whatever that entails. But he's a player that our coaches spent a lot of time on, spent a lot of time with, had a lot of constructive discussions, and we felt that was the best decision for us to make.

As far as the trade is concerned, it really comes down to doing what we feel is best for the football team. It was an opportunity to get a player who we thought very highly of. We knew he wasn't going to last, and we felt that adding him to our football team was something that we wanted to do.

Can't say enough good things about Will, just the person that he is, the human being that he is, his leadership, and unsolicited before the draft, we received just commentary about just the praise was just incredible. But it was -- we've talked about this. Whoever they are as players, they are as people as well, and when you see a consistent pattern of behavior and every step of the way the messaging is the same, then that says a lot about who that individual is.

Really the trade in and of itself is just about doing what we felt was best for the team and the organization, and I would say trades are always a product or a function of the player. I would say just from our perspective, it's not about what the points tell you on the chart. If you have conviction about a player and you want a player and you think the trade is the right thing for you to do, then you go ahead and do it, which is what we did.

So I would say we're certainly not worried about what the points are and what the trade chart says. I mean, it doesn't really mean anything. So the trade was really driven more by this is a player we thought would bring a lot of value to our team. So that's why we went ahead and did it.

**Q. After three tough years around here, to be able to get, to address your need at quarterback and get perhaps the top defender in the Draft, I know you've been in the Draft room, but do you feel the excitement from the fan base? Are you excited to give that to them? Are you excited about it?**

NICK CASERIO: I haven't been out of the building. It's hard to say you've addressed a need when a player hasn't walked in the building. I think we've identified players that have traits and characteristics that we think we want to have in our building, and it's not just about what they do on the field. It's about other qualities that they possess.

I think one thing that's going to be important is for whoever we draft tonight, and then the future days here, is they have to earn the respect and the trust of their teammates, and they haven't really earned anything to this point, or they're certainly not entitled to anything. So I think we're excited about the opportunity that's in front of us. It doesn't mean really anything at this point.

We know that our opponents and the teams in our division, they're going to add good players as well. All we can do is focus on the Texans and what we're trying to do. If the fans are excited, that's great. I think they'll be more excited when we win games. We're a long way away from playing our first game there in September.

I think this is about just repetitive action over the course of time and being consistent. We're not going to solve anything in one draft, one player, one night. It's going to take a series of actions over time with the right people, with the right mindset that believe in the things that we're doing, that believe in what we're trying to build, and then hopefully that will manifest itself on the field when we actually do play.

**Q. The last couple of years, you've acquired a lot of assets, especially draft capital, to make this move here using what you had. What about the context of this year made you prepared for that? Next year you would have had two picks. What about this year and the team made you comfortable to make that move this year?**

NICK CASERIO: Every year is different. Every draft is going to be different. You can't really project what's going to happen in 2024. We talked about this before the draft. I think we put ourselves in position and created some optionality for ourselves. So we felt, if there was an opportunity we could take advantage of, then we were in a position to do it.

I would say the way kind of the chips fell, that kind of happened to work itself out. Again, we haven't played a game yet. These players haven't been in the building. They haven't done anything to this point. They've been productive players in their respective programs, but the reality is they're starting over.

What we'll try to do is just create flexibility for ourselves. You can accumulate as many draft picks as you like. How to utilize those draft picks, ultimately you have to take the information, process it, have constructive dialogue about it, and then kind of go through what if scenarios. If you make this move, here's what it's going to cost. Are we comfortable with it? Do we have conviction behind the pick? Do we have conviction behind the player?

I would say staff involvement in that is a part of it. So it's player, how we feel the player is going to fit our program, what do they bring to the table? What do we have to give up in return? And we're either comfortable with that or not.

I think from an ownership perspective, the McNairs have certainly been supportive of what we're trying to do. The one thing that they enable our staffs to do is really do our jobs and give us the ability to try to make good decisions for the organization. So from that perspective, we're certainly appreciative of that. I don't want to speak for DeMeco, but I know he feels the same way.

**Q. When you had the chance to draft C.J. Stroud at 2**

**overall right after Bryce was off, how much was it that you felt you scouted both guys and had an understanding of both quarterbacks, and once one's not available, you could take the other one?**

NICK CASERIO: It's not really specific to the quarterback position here. Our responsibility in the job is to know each position top to bottom and know who the players are, what are their strengths, what are their weaknesses, what's the role that you potentially could envision for them. It doesn't really mean anything until they actually get here.

Having an overall understanding of the board top to bottom and then across positions, that's our job, that's our responsibility when we scout and evaluate players.

I think we've done that along the way. We've talked about this. Lip and the college staff do an unbelievable job, but that's what they're here to do. Everybody has a job. Everybody has responsibility. Every player is important. So however many players we ended up on the board, the final count, whatever that was, we're going to know those players.

Over the last week or so, we've talked about players that are not going to get drafted that we would want to add to our team. It's not like, well, let's focus on these two players, these couple players in this position. We really focus on, let's call it, however many players there are, it's probably 150 to 200 players, including the undrafted players.

So our job is to know those players, what they bring to the table, what's the opportunity, when can we add them to the team? Once they actually get here, then they're essentially starting over, and their progression is going to be based on how quickly they assimilate to our culture, what we're trying to do, and then their performance on the field will ultimately dictate who's going to play.

**Q. At what point did you feel like you all had a sense of convictions on C.J.? What in particular did you like most about him during the evaluation?**

NICK CASERIO: This process is always fluid. You never get to the light bulb goes on and, okay, here it is. It's constant discussion, constant dialogue, constant research, really up until the draft. That's what you're supposed to do. That's what our job is. You don't really settle, okay, we have enough.

Well, let's just go back, and let's confirm. Here's what we think it is. We've accumulated maybe some additional information. Let's confirm it. What does it tell us? Is it consistent with what we heard previously?



Really you arrive at an endpoint saying we know any player. We know what the player is. We know what they're about. We're comfortable with it, right, wrong, or indifferent. Every player has strengths. Every player has weaknesses. You're essentially saying whatever they have that you're comfortable with when they walk in the building.

There's never an endpoint where you say, okay, all of a sudden, we're good. You're really never good up until you pick the player. Then once you pick the player, then we kind of recalibrate. Now the next step is they come in the building. Rookie mini camp is in a couple weeks. We'll do some sports performance testing, kind of get a baseline of where they are from the strength, from their endurance, from their power. We'll see where they are on the field.

We'll go out there for rookie mini camp. Probably won't do anything too substantive, but we'll get a workout. Really they're going to go into phase 2, so they're behind our players. It's constantly moving. There's never an endpoint. It's like what are you going to do when the draft is over? We're going to flip the page, and then we're going to focus on phase 2, we're going to focus on our players, and we're going to continue the team building aspect, whatever that entails.

Specific to C.J., I think I alluded to that in the opening. His toughness, his competitiveness, his leadership, his accuracy, those are all strengths of his. There's certainly things that he's going to have to work on. There's things that he's really probably never seen defensively, what some of the other teams are going to do. He's going to have to learn our vernacular, our vocabulary of how we call plays. Our offense is probably a lot different than what he did with Coach Day at Ohio State. It doesn't mean one's better, one's worse. It just means you're essentially starting over.

It just means when you go from college, or go from high school to college, it's like you're starting over. When you take your Intro to Finance class, it's probably different than what your econ class is in high school, if they even teach that. Everybody is starting over. C.J. has qualities that we like, which is why we felt comfortable making the pick we did.

**Q. Could you explain the mechanics of exactly when you had both the second and the third pick.**

NICK CASERIO: We made the pick with C.J. there, and Arizona was on the clock. Then we were on the clock, and we were really going back and forth on the trade compensation. I would say with the trade itself was actually consummated with about 1:30 left on the clock.

So it's us to Arizona, okay, we have a deal. Us to the league, okay, we're doing a trade with Arizona. Here are the terms. Here are the parameters. They have to match it up. Okay, you're good. You're on the clock. Be ready to submit the pick.

So there's a lot happening in short period of time. We were under five minutes and then really under two minutes. We had to get the pick ready to submit on the computer. So as soon as we were on the clock, it was ready, go, get the player on the phone. So we had dueling phones working there a little bit. I'd say we probably made the pick with less than a minute left.

So the clock didn't run out. At least we were able to make the pick.

**Q. When you came in the office today, did you have a feeling you were going to make picks 2 and 3?**

NICK CASERIO: We didn't really know. We thought maybe there's a possibility. Our job and part of my responsibility is to explore every alternative and every option. I'll say throughout the course of the day today, there was exploratory discussions not only with Arizona, but with some other folks. We're at 12. If we're going to come up from 12, what would it take? Here's what it would take. Let's see how it goes. That was really up until.

Then I think, as soon as Arizona was on the clock, then I would say the pace of those dialogues and discussion picked up.

**Q. What would you say is the discussion?**

NICK CASERIO: We'll spend time with both players, but I think their job, their responsibility is to come in with the right attitude, understand they have a team, understand they have a home, and understand they have the trust and the confidence of the teammates around them. They have a lot of work to do. I think they understand that. They think they just want to be a part of the team and want to be a part of the solution.

So we're not going to use any labels. We're not going to put any terms on anybody or put any timetables on anybody because, quite frankly, it's not fair to the players. It's not really responsible to the rest of the team. So the expectation for the players in our building is the same.

DeMeco is going to lay out the expectations about what he expects, and the job of the player in turn is to respond and to be a good teammate, do the right thing, put the team first. Focus on your job. Focus on improvement. Focus on getting better. Focus on taking advantage of your



opportunity, whatever those are. That's going to be expectation, whoever's in this building, between now and the start of the season in September.

So that's where the focus is. It's not on any vernacular or about what their future is or their rolling organization. Quite frankly, they haven't earned it yet, and they have to earn that when they get here.

**Q. Blake this past season mentioned you started the scouting process a little bit earlier than you typically have before. Was tonight maybe validation for you, or this process leading up to tonight almost validation for you with what you initially thought you were going to do with that No. 2 pick?**

NICK CASERIO: Yeah. I'd say this process is really just about work. It's about constant, consistent work, and it's not about creating any sort of expectation. Every draft is different. Every player is different. This is part of our job and responsibility. I think a lot of people put a lot of time, a lot of effort into this, and it's just one draft.

There's going to be future drafts ahead of us. I think our job continually over the course of time is just add good players that are good people that are going to do the right thing in the organization.

You're never going to rest on your laurels. There's never really any validation. It's not about that. It's just about those of us that are fortunate to be in the positions that we're in enjoy what we do and understand it's a process. You just have to find ways to continually improve and just try to make good, sound decisions over the course of time.

If something doesn't go the way you expect or it doesn't work out, okay, why didn't it work? What happened? Let's try to mitigate the risk. Let's try to mitigate the downside. There's really no guarantee.

It's funny, I was listening to a podcast a few weeks ago about two professors. They had done a research paper about the Draft and just the probabilities and different things. I've even said this. I know everybody looks at me like I have ten heads when I say this, but a draft is a 50-50 proposition, I mean, it's a coin flip. That's just the reality. Nobody is really smarter, or in my case, probably dumber.

There's a lot of risk, and you're not really sure how it's going to go. So you try to take the information. You try to process. You try to make good, sound, smart decisions, and hopefully that manifests itself in positive results. So really not going to know the answers to that here for a little bit.

But I think we positioned ourselves decently. It's all about taking advantage of our opportunities. That's the only thing that we can do and the only thing we can control is our performance. Everybody in the organization, the only thing they can control is their performance on a day-to-day basis and do it consistently, do it to the best of your ability, and that's all we can ever ask.

**Q. Congratulations. I was at the draft party, and you talked about the mechanics you're giving to the trade and such. When C.J. was picked, then when there was a trade possibility, everyone was stirring, then when the deal was done, the clap was twice as loud. What was it like inside that draft room? I know you need to stay even keel, but what was the emotion?**

NICK CASERIO: It's pretty subdued, quite frankly. You kind of move from -- it's very transactional, unfortunately. It's very transactional. You go from one transaction to the next. Transaction at 2, now we have a transaction at 3, until, I would say, there was an emotional outburst at the end when we actually consummated the trade. There's natural excitement.

People should be excited. People put a lot of time and a lot of effort and a lot of work into this. When you see something come to fruition, you should have some emotion. I get emotional as well. I know it doesn't appear that way.

But I think you also have to be realistic about where you are. It's exciting. I'm probably better off not being at the draft party, but we have a job to do. So I know not to take the excitement out of it. We should be excited. We should be appreciative about the opportunity, but really it's one transaction to the next. You've got to flip the page, and you can't get too high or low.

Then I think once we got to the end, there's certainly some natural excitement probably because you we knew they wouldn't have to stick around too late because we weren't picking the rest of the night.

**Q. Were you showing teeth?**

NICK CASERIO: I don't know. We'll see when the video comes out if I was showing teeth or not.

**Q. I know guys haven't gotten in the building yet, but to that excitement part, what excites you the most about doing what you need to do to add to this roster?**

NICK CASERIO: Yeah, hopefully we're adding good players. I just think that who they are as people is certainly significant. Their stories, which everybody will have an

opportunity to see their story and what they're about and their roots. I would say C.J.'s mom's influence in his life is significant. Hopefully we have an opportunity to meet her tomorrow.

We're all a product of our upbringing and the people that are around us. I think for them this is a validation of all the work and the time and the effort that people poured into them. At some point, people poured into us and poured into you over the course of our life. This is a momentous occasion, I would say, for the player and the individual because it's their dream becoming a reality. It's what they've worked their whole life for.

So now that the reality is here, now the reality is it's about work. I think that both players have a certain amount of pride, a certain amount of mental and physical toughness, which to play in this league, you have to possess those.

Hopefully they're excited about the opportunity in front of them. They're excited about the work that they're going to have to put in. And I'd say both players aren't afraid to hold other players accountable. They've shown the propensity to do that with their respective programs.

Now, whether or not they're actually going to do that here in their rookie season, but I'd say leadership is more about your actions than your words anyways. So if you put in the effort, you put in the time, you put in purposeful work, your teammates see that, that's how you earn the respect of your teammates.

So Will and C.J. should be excited. They've earned this opportunity. I think they're excited about coming to Houston. I think they're excited about playing for the organization. I think they're excited about playing for DeMeco and the coaching staff, which is good.

But in the end, it's about work. Now this is their job. This is their life. They're only going to get as much out of it as much as they put into it.

**Q. (No microphone)? What about C.J. Stroud can push this offense forward?**

NICK CASERIO: We'll see exactly what that looks like. It's going to be a new system, a new offense. I think the job of the staff, and I think in San Francisco, they showed the ability to do that. You build an offense around your players. It's not the other way around. The players, what do they do well? How do we put them in a position to do the things that they do well? So not just the quarterback position.

So C.J. has a lot of good traits that go along with playing

that position, so how that fits with what we're doing offensively. There's probably going to be some things that are easier to do than others for him. What's the fit? How's that going to look? We'll see. We'll find out. That's part of growing, part of learning, part of adapting, part of adjusting. That's what the NFL is about.

There's going to be things he's probably going to be asked to do that he hasn't done before. Maybe there's some things mechanically he hasn't done before that we're going to coach him on. That's part of being a pro. That's part of learning your craft and just trying to figure out, okay, what do they want me to do? How does that feel? How does that fit?

Then just from a coaching standpoint, let's put the players in the best position to try to accentuate their strengths. Same thing with Will. Will is going to be playing in a different system than he played in Alabama. Our defense is different than Nick's difference. Now we're in our defense. How is that going to translate over? We'll find out.

There's an ebb and flow. It's going to take time. We have April whatever today is, May, June, six to eight weeks of work, then take a little break, and come back for training camp. Training camp is where we're going to build a foundation, and we're going to really get a better foundation of where the players are, and we'll see who's most ready to play come September or whatever, whoever the opponent is.

**Q. You can always go ahead and move up or down on the Draft board. When you look at the level of talent in certain positions that will be available when you're on the clock next in the third round, do you like the depth?**

NICK CASERIO: It's a good question. We've actually looked at that and kind of -- we know where we're positioned. So we have 65 and 73 and then the two fours, the fifth, the three sixth, the two seventh. We have a little bit of flexibility. Tonight we'll go back and kind of see what's left, understanding there's probably going to be another 30-ish, 35 players that are probably selected before we pick.

Could we move from 65 into the second round? That's a possibility, but that's going to be player driven. So I think we've identified players that we like. We also understand we're going to lose players. That's the reality of it. We're going to lose players along the way.

I think, in that general range, kind of how we have the players graded relative to their value and potentially what



their role could be, we think there will be an opportunity to add some players to our team that we'll be happy to have in the building.

**Q. This team is still in a rebuilding process, and you all have a high draft pick, but there's a lot of holes that still need to be filled. You took a quarterback even though you have two quarterbacks on the roster. Do you feel that you took a day one starting quarterback in C.J. Stroud?**

NICK CASERIO: To the initial part of the question, I've never uttered that phrase or used that terminology about our program. I think we're just trying to build a program and just trying to put as competitive a team out there as we can.

What a player can do, ultimately it's going to be up to their performance. We're not going to put any labels or timetables on anybody, any particular position, any particular player. We'll do what we feel is in the best interests of the team. DeMeco will make the decision and the coaching staff will make the decisions that we feel are best for the team. We'll put the best players out there that are ready to play and prepared to take advantage of the opportunity.

To Omar's question, we're really not about labels or terminology around here. We're about consistent, purposeful work, trying to build a program that's sustainable over the course of time. So whenever we get to that point with whoever those players are, ultimately, that's what our intention and our goal is going to be.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports