

Houston Texans Media Conference

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Nick Caserio

Draft Press Conference



NICK CASERIO: So kind of went into the day slated to pick twice, so kind of just repositioned ourselves here a little bit, had a pick and two players. So the trades were probably more maneuvering than anything else, just trying to figure out what made sense.

The trade there for Juice, kind of moved a few slots there. I think we felt it was something that made sense as we were kind of working through that round. He's a player that our staff really, really liked, multi-position player. He's played center. More center than guard, but has some position flexibility on the interior.

Great kid. You'll learn about his story, but dealt with some adversity there early on in his life. Really worked his ass off to kind of get to the point where he could actually go out there and be a good productive player.

Good program. He participated in -- I want to say he was at the East-West, had a good week there. A player that we spent a decent amount of time with here during the course of the spring. Great attitude, great kid, great story. Gives us some flexibility there on the interior of the offensive line. So added into the mix.

Then try to keep our streak going here of trying to add as many local flavors to the roster as possible. Everybody's seen Tank play and kind of seen Tank and talked to Tank and know his story. I would say, look, what he's accomplished and overcome to get to this point is incredible and really speaks to who he is as a person more than a football player.

Had him in our building. He just has an engaging personality, and there's a lot of depth to him, and he's a real kid who cares a lot about football. He's small. Okay, you can't change. It's kind of like what Bryce said, you know, he's 5'10", you can't change your size, but you figure out a way to be productive and be a good football player.

Tank's been as productive as any, I would say, offensive skill player in the country over the last two years. Went down to the Senior Bowl, and frankly like nobody covered

him. He's small. Like, yeah, he's small, but I would say good players come in a lot of shapes and sizes. He's proof positive of that.

So I think he's a player that brings an element to the team and to the offense from an explosive standpoint that there's potentially an opportunity there to enhance some of the things we do. So between offensively and maybe a role as a returner and ball handling. So I think that's something we'll see if he can do.

He's an awesome kid. I would say these four kids that we've selected at this point, and you had an opportunity to listen to Will and C.J. today, it's really emblematic of the type of people we want to have in this building. When we put together who they are as men and whatever their skill level is on the football field, so you tie it all together, it's kind of how we want to build a program because in the end that's how you sustain something over long periods of time.

So try to avoid the ebbs and flows, and just try to keep it moving in the right direction. Those four players over the last couple days, they have a lot of depth. They're great human beings. They're good football players. They want to compete. DeMeco's talked about that. He kind of mentioned that on a couple of different occasions.

It's about consistent, diligent effort. It's about competition. It's about willingness to get better and want to get better, and just be the best version of themselves. I would say Juice and Tank are certainly emblematic of that as well.

I have a couple of picks at the top tomorrow, 104 and 105. We'll be ready to go early. Probably get some calls on those picks. Some teams will probably want to move up a little bit, so we'll take a look at it. What we have to do is weigh how far we want to go back and the cost of players we might lose. We'll take a look at that tonight. We have eight to ten players there we've sort of earmarked.

We'll meet tomorrow as a staff, here's where we are on the roster, here's our opportunities, and keep adding good football players to the team. We have the two fourths, a handful of thirds, and I think there's a seventh somewhere in there. Sixth, as we sit here today. Tomorrow will be



more about repositioning than just trying to do a trade to get some draft capital. It's really not about that.

So that's how we'll approach it. Try to get a good night's sleep here tonight. Come here in the morning and be ready to go. Chicago will pick, and then we'll be on the clock. Everyone is looking forward to the opportunity to continue to build the team. Take some questions.

Q. When you have a guy like Tank who, like you said, is small, do you feel like it adds maybe an edge that helps to make you successful at this level?

NICK CASERIO: That's actually a great question. I would say players like that and/or when you see players picked here on the third day, they're inherently maybe a little more of a chip, whether or not they thought they should have went earlier or not. You can't change your size, so whatever you are.

But what you can do is maximize what you have as an individual and as a player. So I think Tank takes a lot of pride in who he is, what he's about, what he's overcome, and I think he views himself as a football player. I've had the good fortune of being around a lot of really good football players that maybe weren't the biggest players. Guys like Danny Woodhead, guys like Kevin Faulk.

You guys know Wes Welker as well. Wes is one of the most productive receivers in football for a period of time there. He's a slot receiver. He'll probably get pissed off if you say he's a slot receiver. Wes is 5'7", 175 pounds, he wasn't drafted. Danny Amendola wasn't drafted.

Each player is going to be motivated differently. You can't change the circumstance. What you can do is make the most of what you have. I think Tank's tried to do that to this point, and his mindset probably won't change here once he walks into our building.

Q. And him being in town and being right down the street, did that help?

NICK CASERIO: I don't know if it helped. We had a lot of exposures to him. We saw him play a bunch of times. Our area scout was over there. Lip was over there. Tom Hayden was there. I wandered over there a number of times. Houston's done a good job. Dana's done a good job with the program. They've produced some players over the last few years. Tank sort of fits the profile, and they've got some other players who will probably show up the next day or so that don't end up on teams.

I don't think it helped other than like he's close, but wherever he was, we probably would have found him

regardless.

Q. With Tank during the scouting process, the Senior Bowl, how much did that jump out to you with some of the drills? Also, when you were really up close with him in the drills (no microphone)?

NICK CASERIO: I think Senior Bowl is always a good measure of competition, Senior Bowl, Jim does a great job. They usually get the best players. So you're seeing kind of good-on-good. When you get to see one-on-one or an individual drill -- I would say not a lot of colleges do one-on-one, say pass coverage, route running and pass coverage.

Then when you're able to do it in that environment, it's another opportunity to evaluate the player. Maybe there's some nuance or something that you see, not that Houston doesn't do it, but something a little bit different.

I would say, speaking to the individual workout, with returners, special teams coaches, there's certain drills they want to see the player perform and do different things with them, and that's part of the evaluation.

So I would say being a returner is very nuanced, and even if you haven't done it, it can be trained or something that can be taught and something that can be learned. A lot of it is positioning, setup, ball placement, seeing the flight of the ball, seeing the ball off the foot of the punter, the spin, and where it's headed.

So there might be some things that you want to drill or see. It's not the reason that you're drafting the player, but you're trying to project him into a role, and if you think it's offense to potentially returner, all right, do we think he's capable of handling that role? So we think he is, but we'll find out a little bit more when we get here.

Any time you have an opportunity to do something kind of in a one-on-one basis, it certainly helps with the evaluation.

Q. When drafting Scruggs, just the overview of addressing the offensive line since the moment you got here. What was kind of -- it seemed like a pretty long game to get things to this point. Could you talk about that and how you've done that and how Scruggs fit into this and what's left with the position movements needed here?

NICK CASERIO: I wouldn't say anything specific. I think it's just you evaluate your team. You evaluate where the club is. You evaluate who's under contract, who's going to be here, what are opportunities to add?

This year's line is going to look different than last year's line, and next year's line could look a little bit different. So it's really consistent with the team of just trying to add good football players to the team. I wouldn't say it's anything in particular.

I'd say Juice is a player that Chris and Cole identified as somebody they thought fit what we're trying to do. Then we evaluate the player. We grade them. We put a value on it and just add them to the mix. The competition is going to sort itself out about how he fits. I would say his particular case has some flexibility, probably more than just a center.

I would say Mason and Kenyon are really guard only, and Quess is kind of more center than guard. Deiter is somebody that has some experience playing multiple spots. When you look at the offensive line, you have five starters, and then six and seven, one of them is going to be your next tackle and be able to swing, and one of them is going to be your next inside player. You can take eight to the game. Eight is just your extra guy.

You want somebody, whoever the starter is, center and a two guards. Next player in the game, you have to move the guard to center, or bring another player in to play center so you don't displace the guards. When you look at overall positional value and what they provide, that's part of the overall evaluation. I think in Juice's case, it's probably more center than guard, but if he had to go there and play guard, looks like he'd be competitive.

Other than having your hand on the ball, it's some of the same things that are going to go on inside. The more you can identify guys and have position inside versatility, it's going to enhance the value of the group and in turn enhance the value of the team.

Q. What's the value between taking more of a risk on a guy that has a better athletic profile versus the guy that seems to be a good football player but limited in terms of athleticism?

NICK CASERIO: We're going to stay true to our formula, so evaluate the player. What are their strengths? What are their weaknesses? What's their grade? What's their role? Do they have a role in the kicking game? Do they have a role on the defense? Do they have a role on offense? I wouldn't say we're a roll the dice type of mentality. Try to be very thoughtful, sound reasoning behind it, and try to make good, sound decisions.

The same thought process we've applied the first few days, it's not going to change when we get to four, five, six, and seven. Just try to stay true to our process, try to stay true

to our formula, and just continually talk through it and have constructive dialogue, which I'd say going on today, we probably started talking, I would say, in the 50s.

We knew we were at 65. The chances of moving up substantially in the second round. So once we got to 50, started to play out some scenarios, what are some opportunities? If we trade here, here's what it would cost. What's realistic? Where can we get? Who are the players? What are options? What are some teams maybe doing around us? Not that you know everything, but you're trying to speculate as best you can.

We started talking kind of 48th, 49, 50, and players are coming off the board. I think at one point we might have had six or seven trade scenarios up on the board, not that we had trades in place, it was just, well, here's the cost. Here's the team that might be willing to move. So those are the discussions. It's very active. It's very collaborative. It's pretty lively. All trying to get to the same endpoint where take a player and then move to the next transaction.

Even in that situation, so move from 65 to whatever it was, 62 or whatever the trade was with Philly when we were at 73. Then, all right, we bump back up there to 69, 70, whatever it was. So just kind of keep it moving. Kind of like we talked about last night. The transaction, go from one to the next, keep it moving, and then pick players. Then go from there.

Q. Today we had a chance to talk with C.J. and Will. When they were interviewing with you, when they were in interview mode, they were applying for the job. When we met them today, they already had the job. Did you find out anything different about them once they were drafted compared to before?

NICK CASERIO: They're the same people. So what they showed you all today is what they showed us in the building, is what they showed us all throughout the course of the spring. I think you're looking for that consistency in their behavior.

Look, they're two impressive kids. They're not kids. They're adults. But they're very impressive. I think the things that they stand for, the things that are important to them, how they were raised, you saw kind of that on display here today, and they showed that -- Will's, I would say, energy and Juice when he was here -- again, he was the first visit that we had, and he was the only person that was in the building.

Kind of the way we do our visits I think is a little bit different and unique, kind of how we set it up, it can be imposing depending who the player is. Again, you're just trying to

get a gauge of how different people handle different situations. Will was very consistent from the time that he was here in March to the time we talked to him over the course of the spring to the building here today.

The same thing with C.J. So I think more than anything, they probably get a little bit worn out, so you see some strain that they go through, and you have to understand it's a lot. I think C.J. articulated it very well, from the time the season is over to this point, what the players have to go through, it's a lot. You're measuring kind of how they carry themselves, how they handle that situation, and the reality.

It's going to be hard. What they're doing is going to be hard. This league isn't easy. You're going to probably lose on average seven, eight games a year, give or take. That's the way the league is set up. I think the margin of victory this year was 9.3 or whatever it was, which is the closest it's been in however many years. So the margin of error in victory is very small, and it's going to be really, really hard. So you're going to be stressed. You're going to be taxed on a day-to-day basis.

So as best we can, we're trying to simulate that and put them in similar circumstances and see how they handle it. How they acted today, how they handled today was the same as how they handled when they were in our building. That's what you're looking for. When you start to see discrepancies, we've got to ask ourselves, all right, what do we have? Because ultimately we're trying to create a profile of what we think we have. Once they get here, essentially we're starting over.

Q. Nick, did you get a sense that teams were interested in Juice as well as Tank?

NICK CASERIO: I would say I don't think those players are mysteries to teams around the league. I think Tank was probably pegged in this general vicinity when you look at some of the information that we get. Not specific to teams, but I would say just -- a lot of information that we look at, probability, pick probability, try to use some of the mock draft information, and then see if it's applicable. You need to find some guys that are mocked here, and then they go 50 picks earlier.

But I'd say both of those players, from the discussions we had over the last week, probably were going to settle in this general vicinity. So we kind of anticipated that. So it's just a maneuvering, how you want to maneuver to have the players -- there's probably a player or two, if we had the opportunity to pick, we would have liked to have picked today, but can't pick everybody.

Again, these guys aren't mysteries to the league. I think

everybody -- Tank was at the Senior Bowl. Juice was at East-West. The whole league is there. These are players that everybody is aware of.

Q. You mentioned yesterday that some things you wanted to see C.J. kind of work on. I'm not saying exactly what you said. I'm trying to paraphrase. What was the idea that you'd like to see over time?

NICK CASERIO: I think the big thing is all players, they have a lot to learn. They have a lot to improve. What they need to focus on is just getting better individually as a player. Start with your position. Start with the skills that are required to play that position. Ultimately the coach is going to work with them to try to work on some of the things they can improve.

So I think it's really more of a general, each player has things that they can work on, and I would say the big thing for all these rookies once they get here is they're not going to be in real good condition because they've had a big gap. It's kind of the pace with which we operate, the pace where we train, the pace where we practice. Try getting up to speed from that perspective.

And then the skills that go along with how we play that position, like how Bobby and Jerrod and Shane and Bill are going to coach the quarterback might be different than how Ryan and the staff at Ohio State coach the quarterback. So try to figure out where's the middle ground, but there's some things that go into that position that you're going to have to do well.

It's the same thing on the offensive line. There's things Juice will be asked to do that maybe he didn't do at Penn State, maybe has a different style.

So everybody has something they can work on and improve on and get better, including our players, including our returning players. Nico Collins has plenty of things he can work on. Dameon Pierce has things he can work on and get better. That's your job as an NFL player. What can you do to improve your craft and make yourself a better player? That's your responsibility.

If you don't know the answer, then we have resources in the building, people to help you get better in that area. How you sleep, how you train, your nutrition. I think C.J. made a comment about nutrition staff and the visit here. So the fuel that you put into your body impacts how you recover, impacts your training. So all these things are tied together. That's where I would say they have a lot to learn just overall, not, well, we're just playing football.

You're playing football, but there's a lot that goes into

playing football.

Q. Nick, you alluded to the character in the case of Juice (no microphone)?

NICK CASERIO: I've never been one to say, well, we knew so and so was going to pick a player, so we traded in front of them. I think that's ridiculous. What you have to do is take the information you've accumulated and make your best guess about, A, where you think the player may go, and just looking at teams that maybe that's a position that we've identified, our pro scouting staff has identified.

Again, we don't really know the answers, but that's part of their job and their evaluation and say look at each team. We actually do, the Monday before the draft, we go through each team, all 31, and identify from our perspective here's what we perceive is their top four or five needs. Here's what they've done. Here's how they've constructed their team. Here's what they've done in the off-season, which could lead you to potentially this group of players.

It's not specific to Juice. It's really specific to, I would say, each team and each player. Then we have to take that information and either you trust the information -- is it accurate? Is it not accurate? You don't want to be like competing against yourself. But I would say by the same token if you have players you like and you've identified them and you figure out a way to get them on a team, then it's about positioning yourself accordingly.

That's really where the focus is as opposed to, well, we thought so and so is going to draft Mr. X, so we traded in front of them. We're not smart enough to figure that out, at least I'm not.

Q. When you drafted some players, you mentioned not only are they good players, but they're also good people. Is there one certain identifying trait that you've noticed in every single one of these players that you're trying to build for the future of this organization?

NICK CASERIO: Yes. I would say competitiveness, consistency, dependability, competitive stamina, grit, and toughness, and the willingness and want to get better as a football player. Like I would say that's what we're looking for. That's what DeMeco has talked about.

And you can find those players with those traits and characteristics. So they have those traits and characteristics, then where are they from a physical standpoint, from an athletic skills standpoint relative to their position? That's part of our job is try to identify that to the best of our ability.

So I think that's the mindset, that's the thought process that, when you walk in this building, you're going to feel that, and you're going to feel the pressure from your teammates around you and you're going to hold each other accountable and hold them to a high standard because in the end it's about the players. They're going to hold each other to a high standard on a day-to-day basis, and if you have enough people and players with the same mindset, then they're going to trust and respect that the guy next to them is going through the same thing.

So if we bring in a player that doesn't have those traits and characteristics and he stands out -- like the players know. Players are smart. They pick up on things. He's not a good teammate, doesn't put the team first, they're going to know. So then it goes back to us. Well, why did we bring that player in the building in the first place? That's our responsibility to the players. That's our responsibility to the coaches. That's our responsibility to the rest of the team.

So I'd say it's kind of a nuanced answer, but going back to those five, six attributes at the top, those are the things I would say are important. If you're a Houston Texans football player when you walk in here, that's the expectation and what you're walking into.

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