

Houston Texans Media Conference

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Nick Caserio

Press Conference



NICK CASERIO: Good morning. Appreciate everybody being here.

Probably echo a lot of the same sentiments that DeMeco had yesterday. We're in a decent spot, a lot of work in front of us, a long way to go. Three wins basically gets you zero in this league. We've got a lot of work in front of us.

I think the focus this week is trying to clean up some things relative to our team, practice tomorrow, try to work on some of the areas that we think we can improve, do a little bit of a self-scout, personnel, are we using the players the right way. Then start to think about Carolina.

Good football team. I know what their record is. You can't do anything about that. But they've got a lot of good players.

Each week is a challenge. Half the league is 3-3 or 3-2, right? Like nobody has done anything to this point.

We'll see how it goes. We haven't done anything. We've earned what we've earned. A lot of work in front of us.

Players have done a good job to this point, but 11 games left, so it's a week-to-week endeavor in this league, and that's how we're approaching it. Nothing more, nothing less.

I'll take some questions here and go from there.

Q. How do you feel about the state of so many of your (indiscernible) working out so well?

NICK CASERIO: Yeah, I think the big thing, it's really a credit to the coaching staff. It's a credit to the players. I think the scouting staff did a great job. Lipp, Ronnie, the pro group. There's a lot of people that deserve a lot of credit.

I'd start with the coaches and what they've done, and the players is ultimately -- we try to bring in the players that have the right mindset, they have the right qualities that we

think can help our football team.

Sometimes it takes some players maybe a little bit longer than others, but we felt that the players that we brought in here could help us in some capacity. Some have done that to this point more than others. Some's roles have changed or increased.

But I think DeMeco and the coaching staff deserve a tremendous amount of credit for what we've done and where we are. I'd say just specifically DeMeco; he's everything that I think we hoped and thought he would be. As good of a coach as he is, he's a better person and human being. Players love playing for him. Players want to be here.

I think there's a lot of other people that certainly deserve credit for the performance of the players and what they've done to this point.

Q. What about the general manager?

NICK CASERIO: I try to stay out of the way. That's a big thing.

Q. Do you have a satisfaction with where you are and the role you've played?

NICK CASERIO: Yeah, look, I think everybody has an important job with any organization. I think the goal and the hope is for whatever your role is, you just perform it to the best of your ability and just try to be the best version of yourself on a day-to-day basis. Nothing is perfect. We just try to make hopefully good, sound decisions. There's a lot of thought process that goes into it.

DeMeco and I talk on a fairly regular basis about the team, about where we are currently, maybe some things moving forward.

I think there's a lot of people within the organization that deserve a lot of credit for the job that they do in supporting the players and helping the players, and ultimately it's a players' game. We can only do so much once the players are on the field, including the coaches. It's up to the



players and the trust and the belief that they have in one another around them.

We have a lot of players, a lot of pride with the right mindset that care a lot about football, that have been in winning programs. So they deserve the credit for the wins. I'll take the criticism for anything that goes wrong around here, so I guess that'll be my responsibility.

Q. With CJ specifically, what have you seen is maybe the biggest reason why he's found such early success?

NICK CASERIO: I'd say his work ethic, his confidence, his demeanor, his belief. I think DeMeco has talked about this quite a bit in terms of your belief in yourself, belief in your teammates, belief in what you're capable of doing.

I think the more you just focus on what you can control, which is your mindset and your performance on a day-to-day basis, any player, specifically when you're a younger player, are you learning on a day-to-day basis. There's always something new that's going to take place or happen the first time that you go through it. Can you not make the same mistake over and over, and can you build on some of the things that you've learned.

I think the big thing with him is just his confidence, his belief in himself, his competitiveness, his pride, and the respect that he's earned with his performance from his teammates.

Being a captain is not a popularity contest, but when you're a captain as a rookie, which both he and Will are, it's really more about what you do and how you handle your job necessarily than what you say.

But he cares a lot. He has a lot of pride, and he wants to go out there and perform well and do the best thing and the right thing for the team, and he's shown the propensity to do that.

I think from really May until August, you saw growth and development, and then we've seen growth and development from Baltimore to New Orleans, whoever we played last week. There's still 11 more opportunities in front of us, so the challenges that we face next week against Carolina are going to be some of the challenges some of the other teams have faced.

Can you learn each week; do you understand the opponent; do you understand what's being asked of you. I'd say he's done a pretty exemplary job of that to this point.

Q. You said a minute ago, we haven't done anything yet. However, to have already matched the win total from all of last season is a pretty big jump. Did you expect for things to be going so well this early this season?

NICK CASERIO: I think you have to look at each year at its own entity. When we put the team together, we felt that we would have a competitive team. How that manifests itself in terms of wins and losses - I've said this, I said in the spring when I was asked about it - we have no control over that. That's all we can control is our performance and our attitude on a day-to-day basis.

I think the expectation and the focus is on what can we do this week to get better and improve, and then the focus next week will be what can we do to prepare for a good Carolina team.

Wherever we are at the end of the year is where we're going to end up. We can't control that right now. Nobody has a crystal ball. Again, I think it's a credit to the players and the coaches for what we've done to this point.

The only expectations that you have are just are we doing the best that we can on a day-to-day basis, number one, to help the players. Are the players doing as much as they can to make themselves better players. That's where the -- it's a day-to-day focus. Anything beyond that is kind of a big waste of time.

Q. You were talking about CJ, his competitiveness, his ability to get the respect of his teammates. Has that surprised you at all early on? What do you think about how quickly --

NICK CASERIO: Yeah, there's no timetable or expectation on anything. I think when a player walks in the building, they have to be who they are, they have to be true to themselves, and they have to do the things that they feel are indicative of who they are and what they want to be represented by, like how the players perceive them.

I think every player is different. Everybody has to focus on who they are and what they bring to the table and not worry about a bunch of external factors or things that, quite frankly, don't matter.

I mean, CJ was that way at Ohio State, so I don't think anything that he has done from that perspective has surprised us.

I think sometimes people get caught up in they have to do something or try something different. DeMeco has talked about this, as well. If you do certain things a certain way in

practice, how they're coached and the technique, then you get in the game and do something different, I mean, you have to ask yourself, like why would you do that.

There's no magic formula. There's no magic fairy dust that anybody is going to sprinkle or anybody. Show up, do your job, have the right mindset, have a good attitude, go out there. Whoever the opponent is, make sure we're doing the right things, and then flip the page the next week and get ready to go.

I'd say from CJ's perspective and a lot of the rookies and a lot of the players that have come into this building, they've certainly done that.

Q. With the rookies, with Will Anderson, Jr., has Will done everything you'd hoped for like CJ so far?

NICK CASERIO: Yeah, Will is a good football player. He was a good football player at Alabama. When we drafted both players, we drafted them because they're good football players. I mean, that's why they're here. If we didn't think they were good football players that could help our team, then we would draft other players.

Q. With the trade deadline coming up, with the success this team has had, how much does that go into (indiscernible) what y'all may or may not do?

NICK CASERIO: Yeah, zero. We're going to look at our team, figure out is there an opportunity to add a player that we think can help us. If there is, great; we'll pursue it. If there's not, then we won't.

Like we feel comfortable with the players that are in the building, that are on the team. I'd say we've had to use our depth across positions here, whether it's the offensive line -- we've brought players up from the practice squad that we've elevated that have impacted us in the kicking game like D'Angelo Ross as an example.

We've talked about this. It's really 1 through 70 or 1 through 69, however many players are in the building. So focus on those players, and if there's somebody externally that we think can come in here and really have a defined role and have an impact, then we'll certainly look into that. If there's not, then we won't.

There's always a financial component to this, as well. There's a certain cost associated with a contract that you take on. So how much are you paying for that player, what's the cost, can you fit them under the cap. We have, I would say, a pretty good working budget for the duration of the year, so we can take on a certain level of contract, but if it's more than that, then, okay, we cut half the team or

have to do a bunch of cap manipulations, which you just push everything out to future years. It's not a good way to run a team, not a good way to run a business.

Try and make good decisions, try to identify some players that may or may not be able to help us, might be on the practice squad, might be on the street, might be on a roster. Whatever happens at the trade deadline happens at the trade deadline. I would say over the last couple weeks, there's been a handful of trades that have taken place. There may have been basically six, seven flips or late-round picks, really for nothing. If there's a player that maybe fits that bill, fits that category, we'll look at it. If there's not, then we won't do anything.

Q. What's your approach to in-season conversations with players about contracts for the future with your organization? How does that go? Is that something that you bring to representation or representation reaches out to you?

NICK CASERIO: It's a great question. It's very organic. It can go both ways, quite frankly. We've done it a few times here over the last few years, Cashman as an example, a player we extended, added a year to his contract in November.

There's some give-and-take that's involved. If the player is doing well, maybe the agent will reach out, try to get the ball rolling. We may be internally already having those conversations. But we know we have a certain number of players whose contracts are going to expire at the end of the year, and sometimes you have to let it play itself out and then have those conversations in February and March. Maybe there's some players where you go to them and say, hey, would you be open to potentially adding a year or two to your contract.

So there's always some moving parts on that.

I think we've been pretty open-minded. We're not going to eliminate necessarily anything, but honestly, it's a great question because there's no right or wrong answer, and it depends on, A, the player, depends on the team, depends on your philosophy and your mindset, and it depends on where the agent maybe thinks the player's market is going to be. They may think it's one thing, but in reality it might be something different. You can't necessarily tell them that.

I think you have to be open-minded, not take anything off the table, which I think that's the thing about this league. You just have to be flexible and adaptable, and hopefully we've shown the ability to do that.

As a matter of fact, DeMeco and I visited this morning, just going through the roster, kind of where we are currently, talking about some players potentially for next year. As long as we have a clearly defined role or what we think the role is going to be, then -- but it's something that we'll look at or do.

In the end, you're talking maybe, maybe a handful or less of guys that may fit that bill, and a lot of it is they just trust in themselves and want to bet on themselves a little bit, which you have to respect that.

Reality is we're probably going to lose some players after the season. Might be able to keep some. But we'll just kind of keep moving, focus on '23 but start to have an eye a little bit on '24. Once we get to kind of the beginning of December, once we've kind of gone through the full complement of an advance scouting of the opponents we play at the end of the year, it's in division, so good chance we've seen those teams, we'll kind of transition for agent prep and start to focus on that component of the off-season.

Q. Six games into CJ's career (indiscernible) CJ talks about conversations that he's had with Tom Brady, talks about the advice he's received as a player on the field, off the field, the way he carries himself. Do you see any similarities between them?

NICK CASERIO: One's in the Hall of Fame, one's not.

No, I think that the conversations that they have, whatever they've discussed is between the two of them. I think -- and CJ has said this. He's articulated it. Just kind of keeping the main thing the main thing, kind of his vernacular, his mindset. I think that's the right approach. Just focus on the things that are important.

It's very difficult and you have to be careful about comparing players and then making assumptions or -- I think most players that want to win are highly competitive. Their work ethic supercedes pretty much anybody on the team, especially at that position. So I'd say those are the qualities that I think are important.

I'd say in some respects they share some of those same qualities. Like if you want to win and you want to be the best, are you willing to work, and I think your drive and competitiveness -- you're not going to find a more competitive person or player than Tom Brady. I'd be hard pressed to find anybody at that level. There's a reason that he played for however many years and performed at the level that he did. It's really about a mindset and a thought process.

I think those are the things that you have to establish, especially early in your career. Focus on being a great player. Don't worry about your marketing deal, how many social media hits you have, because it doesn't matter. What matters is are you diligent, purposeful about your work, and if you want to be great, are you doing things to reinforce that notion.

From that perspective, I think CJ -- football is extremely important to him, and he cares a lot about it, and that's a good place to start.

Q. You obviously have pretty high hopes for DeMeco. What can you say about the job he's done so far on the field and just with the organization?

NICK CASERIO: Yeah, I mean, outstanding. Any superlative that you have, I mean, applies to him. I said it earlier; as great of a coach as he is, he's even a better person and a human being.

I think his consistency, his sincerity on a day-to-day basis is real. His energy is real. He probably wishes he could still play.

But that I would say, emotion, that juice, that permeates the building and the players feel that, and it's real. It's not as if it's made up, and he's very consistent.

We were 0-2, and his mindset and message to the team wasn't any different than when we started the season. The message to the team yesterday that we're 3-3 was, you know what, it's nice to win, but there's a lot of things that we can do better.

That's a truth. I think he tells the truth. He keeps it real. I think the players respect him.

It's been outstanding. I have a lot of respect, appreciation, admiration for him, and it's only grown over these last however many months that we've been together. Anything that I can do to support him, then I'm going to be there for him.

Q. When you look around at the division, what stands out to you about the AFC South and how you stand?

NICK CASERIO: I think it's a lot like the league. It's very competitive. A number of good teams. We played Jacksonville; Jacksonville is a really good team. Played Indianapolis; they've done a really good job, and they've dealt with some different things, had some injuries. We haven't played Tennessee yet, but I think we understand the program that Mike is running in Tennessee.

I would say from our perspective, each week is a challenge. Not necessarily worried about what's going on in the division. We're certainly cognizant of it.

The next opponent is Carolina. We're kind of working through -- we're playing the NFC South I'd say over the next couple weeks, so focus on the NFC South, and then we'll worry about the rest of the AFC South when we have to play them.

But a lot of respect for the programs in this division. I think Doug has done a great job in Jacksonville and what they've done here. They're 4-2, leading the division right now. Him and Trent put together a really good program. Chris and Shane have done a good job, and Mike and Ran, you have a good program that they're running.

A lot of respect and appreciation for our opponents, for the competition, but I think the most important thing for us is focusing on the Houston Texans and focusing on the things that we can control, and if we do that, then we'll let the rest kind of take care of itself.

Q. You talk about not being able to control the record, but obviously as the season goes on, the expectation does have to change.

NICK CASERIO: Yeah, I think one thing that we've learned, those of us that have been in the league for a long time, is I'd say each week takes on more significance because there is less games, so when there's less games, they take on more importance. You're just trying to hopefully put yourself in a position where you have a shot to compete, and where that takes us, none of us really know and can't really spend too much time thinking about that right now. We're 3-3; we're a .500 team. Done some good things. There's certainly some things we can do better.

Half the league is basically right around .500, so some of those teams are going to shift one way, and the other teams are going to shift the other way.

I think the focus is day-to-day and just our overall performance, focusing on what we can control, try to have a good day of practice tomorrow. The players will be off here for four days, whatever it is. Come back Monday, bonus Monday, start to get ready for Carolina.

There's no weeks off after that, so it's 11 games in a row, so each week is going to take on more importance.

We've got to put everything we have into each week, and one is not going to be more important than any others, I'd say, but as you get towards the end of the year, certainly

division games are going to take on more significance because your division ultimately is going to determine a lot of things.

Q. What do you think of the job that DeMeco has done as far as some of these players that are not -- I don't want to say typical stars, but (indiscernible)?

NICK CASERIO: Yeah, it's a credit to the coaching staff. I think anybody that walks in the building, everybody has the same opportunity. Whatever your role is, it's going to be earned. So nobody is going to be handed anything, regardless of where you were drafted, how you got here.

There's a player, Khalil, that was playing in the USFL or one of these kind of offshoot leagues. Has been in the league, he's bounced around here a little bit. We brought him in I think it was in training camp or -- I can't even remember when it was. But he's going out there and he's taking the coaching from Jacques and Rod and he's put that out there and applied it. Even DeMeco showed a clip yesterday, it was a 3 technique, talk about front, they're responsible for setting the edge of the defense, so you're just setting the edge on a guard, you're setting the edge on a tight end, you're setting the edge on the secondary on a swing pass on 3rd down there to Kamara, Jimmy set the edge. Are you playing the right technique? Are you playing with the right fundamentals? Are you doing what you're asked to do?

The players that are willing to do that are going to be on the field because they've earned that, and they've earned the trust of their coaches, they've earned the trust of their teammates.

Again, it's a credit to the player and it's a credit to the coaches, and it doesn't really matter where the players come from. There's no favorites, so you earn your role, you earn your opportunity.

Certain weeks, some players that played the week before are going to be inactive. We've got to make seven or eight players inactive. Whatever we've got to do that week, we'll get the best 48 or 47 to the game, and then each week we'll take inventory of where we are.

Khalil has worked very hard to give himself some opportunity, and candidly, he's probably earned more opportunity. We'll see how that goes here moving forward.

Q. Talk about Tank and how he's played in terms of route running, catching, everything that he's done?

NICK CASERIO: Yeah, Tank was a good player at Houston. He's a good player, he showed at the Senior

Bowl. I think what we've seen from Tank is no different than what we've seen here from the March process to the spring to where we are now.

There's a lot of players that have come in here and helped our football team and made some plays. Tank has got a great attitude, cares a lot about football, cares a lot about winning. Very competitive.

I'd say he's very driven. He's very motivated. Love having him on the team. Love his mindset, love his attitude, and he's producing when he's been on the field.

When you have the right mindset and you go out there and produce, then you're going to get more opportunity. Doesn't matter where you come from. Just like the start of the question there, however you get here, doesn't really matter.

But I think the big thing is can you sustain it over a long period of time. Anybody can go out there for a week or two, make a few plays, fill up the stat sheet. Can you do it the next week, can you do it the following week, can you do it over the duration of the year, can you stay on the field, can you be durable, can you be available.

Those are the things that will be important.

Q. Where do you feel you've made the biggest changes from last year, in what particular areas?

NICK CASERIO: Yeah, I don't really know. I mean, last year doesn't really matter. What's happened in the past doesn't really matter. I think the players that have come in here, some weren't even here. It doesn't really matter what happened last year.

I think the players came in here in the spring with the right mindset, with the right attitude, and I think that's reflective of DeMeco. It's about a mindset. It's about a mentality. DeMeco has talked about it from day one, it's more mindset and it's more mentality. I think the players have embraced that, probably some more than others. There's some players that probably have some catching up to do in that area.

What happened in the past doesn't really matter. That's for you guys to go back and research and spend time on. We're focused on the future, focused on the present, focused on moving forward, focused on this football team and what we can do to make ourselves better this week and then put ourselves in this position to have a good week against Carolina and go out there and play good football. That's what we're worried about.

Q. Coach said he told the players during the bye week he wants them to really get away from football for a second, be with their families, do what they need to do. What about for you? What are you going to do?

NICK CASERIO: Yeah, I think it's a misnomer sometimes, it's like, all right, we've gone to this point and the bye week and all of a sudden we have time for our family. The most fun -- my biggest highlight of this past weekend was my oldest daughter finished fourth in her cross country race. So being able to watch that.

I think all of us like want to be great husbands. We want to be great dads. You need to be present, and you just can't turn it on and off like a switch.

Really what this time enables you to do, you have a few extra hours, a few extra days. You don't have to, okay, wake up, need to be in the building, need to meet, get ready to play. You just have bit more time, I'd say, than you have for yourself and for your loved ones.

I mean, it will be good to kind of just -- we're going to do some things as a family here over the weekend. Maybe we get away for a little bit.

But I think sometimes it's like this mindset of, well, you don't see your family from August until the end of the season. Like if that's your mindset, then you're basically saying it's not important.

I mean, hopefully my wife would say that I'm not that way. She knows that. Our spouses and our wives are a big part of what we do. Their support means the world.

But we'll have some fun. We'll try to get away here a little bit, do whatever the girls want to do because they're the priority. But like I said, last Saturday, I was more excited about what she did on Saturday than what happened on Sunday.

In the end, we've talked about this with the players, talked about it with our staff, like football is going to go away at some point. Hopefully I'm remembered for the type of person and husband and father I am, not I was the general manager of the Texans. I'm certainly appreciative of the opportunity, but in the end, nobody is going to really care.

But take some time this weekend, try and enjoy each other's company, do some things as a collective family, and then come back Monday ready to go.

Q. (Indiscernible).

NICK CASERIO: I've been in some of those. Actually so

the same daughter - and I give her credit, unfortunately she's like her father, a rock head - but they practice Monday through Friday 6:00 cross country practice, so there was an opportunity for us to get 10, 15 minutes in the car together. You cherish those times. It's not a lot of time, but it saved my wife a little bit of time getting up in the morning.

Those are the things that -- in the end, that's what it's about. That's what life is about, candidly.

Q. The team has had some success in spite of some injuries. What's that been like for you?

NICK CASERIO: Yeah, you really never know if and when injuries are going to happen. I think what we've tried to do is just build up as much depth across the roster as much as possible, understanding that we're probably going to need everybody at some point. You really don't know when.

We probably were hit harder at some positions relative to others, from training camp and through the early part of the season, which was I'd say the fall process and some of the players that we did there around the cut and right before the end of training camp there.

But kind of like Khalil, it's really a credit to the coaches, just being open-minded and embracing the challenge and embracing the opportunity. Like nobody is going to feel sorry for you. Everybody has to deal with something.

So try to fill the building with as many good players as possible that we think can help us, understand you're going to need them at some point, and we've used a lot of them, and there's going to be probably things that we're not even talking about right now that are going to come up that we're going to have to deal with.

Can't feel sorry for yourself. You just have to embrace the challenge and just try to come up with solutions. Our job is to fix problems and find solutions. Sometimes it's players, sometimes it's scheme. There's a myriad of things that could possibly come up.

I think the players that we've brought in, we brought them in because we thought they could help us, and maybe some have played maybe a little bit more than others, but that's the NFL.

Q. You mentioned DeMeco's energy. When did you realize that his energy was top-notch?

NICK CASERIO: Yeah, he's been like that since the first day. DeMeco is who he is. I think that authenticity from

people, you see that, and players know, too, players see it, players feel it. People around the building feel it.

Again, it's important, just whoever you are, just be who you are. Be wherever your feet are. He's certainly emblematic of that.

Can't say enough great things about him and what he's done and what he continues to do. He cares about winning. He's very competitive. That's probably one of the qualities that the two of us share. Like we're ultra competitive. We probably show it in our own ways, have two disparate personalities, but hopefully we complement one another, and again, my job and goal is to support him and the coaching staff and the people in this building as much as possible.

Q. You talked about DeMeco's abilities as an evaluator. How has he been in that area, and what's it like dealing with him when you guys are talking about personnel?

NICK CASERIO: Yeah, you always have a vision of what you want your team to look like, not only offensively, defensively and the kicking game, then individually by position, certain traits and characteristics that maybe are going to be more important relative to others. Just the more conversations you have about that, and you want that input. You want them to have -- coaches have their sort of input and have their imprint on the team.

You kind of have to piece it together.

Ultimately doing what's best for the Texans is the most important thing. It's not about who is right, who is wrong, who had this player graded a certain area, are we doing the right thing, are we making the right decisions. I'd say for the most part, we've probably agreed on most things. It's not like we agree on everything, but you hash it out and work through it.

But I think how you want -- how the head coach wants the team to look and play, that information is valuable and important, and he has obviously experience at a lot of different levels, specifically at linebacker. He knows what he wants that to look like, what the front looks like, what we need from the secondary, and then doing the same thing offensively. Bobby has a vision of how we want to play, how we want to play, but it all has to be complementary.

There has to be give and take, and there has to be I would say open minded. You have to be willing to listen, and just ultimately do the right thing for the team and the organization and try to make good decisions with the right people and the right players.

