

# Houston Texans Media Conference

Wednesday, February 28, 2024

Houston, Texas, USA

**Nick Caserio**

Press Conference



NICK CASERIO: Happy almost leap year. Good to be here. Hopefully it's a productive week for us. Excited to be here.

It's really -- the combine is interesting because it gives us an opportunity to really learn a player's stories. I'd say that's really the big thing.

The on-field workouts, I think that's more for you all to watch and figure out who runs fast and who doesn't, but the next time we use how fast an offensive lineman ran a 40 in our evaluation, it will be a first.

Excited about the opportunity here in front of us to try to continue to build a team. A number of players that we have on our roster that will be free agents. We probably have, I don't know if it's as many free agents as any team in the league, so we have a number of players that will be free agents. So we're working through that process here currently and just working on building the 2024 team and roster.

Excited about what happened last season. Players and the coaches and the staff should be proud of what we accomplished. At this point we're kind of moving forward and looking ahead to the 2024 season and all the things that go along with it.

With that, I'll take some questions.

**Q. (Inaudible.)**

NICK CASERIO: Yeah, I think the big thing with this whole spring is just try to improve the team. Build the team, improve the team. We have certain areas and certain players on our roster that made significant contributions. Happy they're on our team. But the big thing DeMeco and I have talked about on a consistent basis is just trying to build as deep and consistent a roster top to bottom. There's going to be certain players whose roles are bigger than others, but the roles that some players have are certainly going to be significant, so we're just trying to optimize our opportunities, try to take advantage of our

opportunities to add players to our team.

The free agency, it's a process. Nothing is going to happen overnight. I'd say we've had constructive conversations with a number of agents. Starting with our players, we'll have an opportunity to visit with the agents of some other players that may want to be Houston Texans. Whether or not there's a mutual interest, we'll find that out here as we go.

I think it's just finding the right people with the right mindset and the right mentality that fit the program that we're trying to build. That's the most important thing.

**Q. (Inaudible.)**

NICK CASERIO: Yeah, haven't been able to keep track of all the moves, but anytime that you give up an asset, you're getting assets in return, and what you do with those assets, it's all about the decisions that you make.

We're fortunate that we've added players that have been able to help our team. Each year is going to be different, but that's in the past, and where we are today we have a number of players that we've been able to acquire, that have helped our team. Hopefully that continues moving forward.

But have a lot of respect for Cleveland, the organization. They have a good football team. They've won a lot of football games. Deshaun is going to be a good player in this league for a long time, so we're focused on the Houston Texans and what can we do to continue to build our team so we can put the best product out there on a weekly basis.

**Q. (Inaudible.)**

NICK CASERIO: You never really know. When you go back and look at last year, there was a lot of new people. Coaching staff, new players. But we felt comfortable with the -- DeMeco did a great job putting the staff together. Offensively specifically starting with Bobby, coaches like Bill Lazor, Shane Day, Jerrod Johnson, and when we put the staff together in February, we didn't know what our



team was going to look like, who the quarterback was going to be.

We knew that we were going to evaluate a number of players during the course of the spring. You really don't know.

There's a lot of work that goes into it. You learn about each other from where we were in May to where we ended up at the end of the season, almost like night and day.

There's things that we learned this year that hopefully we can utilize. There's some areas that we hopefully can improve, some of the things we didn't do as well.

I think the one thing we're excited about is we were able to continue with some degree of continuity relative to seasons past, so even with our coaching staff specifically, we had a number of coaches interview for other jobs. Some of them made a decision to stay and be a part of our program, which is a credit to them. It's really a credit to DeMeco, and it's a credit to the players.

Anytime you have continuity from one year to the next, it's important because at least it gives you a foundation in place. The team is going to be different, the opponents are going to be different, so there's going to be a lot of things that are different, but to be able to keep a number of things at least similar or the same hopefully will be beneficial to us.

**Q. (Inaudible.)**

NICK CASERIO: Yeah, I'm not really sure what that means. I think our focus is just trying to put the best team together possible, and sure.

**Q. (Inaudible.)**

NICK CASERIO: Free agency is case by case, so you look at the player, you look at his role, what's the value of the player, have an understanding of the market, what are your options, is that the best thing for the football team.

In the end, we're going to do what we think is best for the Houston Texans team. DeMeco has said this countless times, I've expressed this countless times. It's not about one person, it's not about one person. Every year is different. We're not really believers in windows. I'm not really sure what that means. It's about the 2024 season, trying to put the best team together.

What are our options? We'll explore our options and we'll try to make good sound decisions that make sense for our team.

**Q. (Inaudible.)**

NICK CASERIO: Every year is important. Every year is different. There's going to be challenges that we face this season maybe that we haven't faced in the past. We're going to play a lot of good teams this year, and even if you look at our season, there were like eight or nine one-score games, so a number of games could have gone either way.

It starts with the people. So do you have the right people with the right mindset with the right mentality? They obviously have to have a certain level of skill to go out there and perform their jobs at a competitive level.

The team-building process, it's not one period of time. Free agency is free agency. The draft is the draft. There's a number of players that we added at the beginning of the season, during the course of the season that helped our team.

I think just maintaining as much optionality, being adaptable, being flexible. Your circumstances may change. You may be forced to make a decision about a position or about a player.

The big thing that we emphasize is just good sound consistent decision making and let the process play itself out, and we'll have a better understanding of what our team looks like probably once we get to training camp.

**Q. (Inaudible.)**

NICK CASERIO: Yeah, I'd say the league is always better when people like Bill Belichick are around. You look at this off-season, Coach Carroll, Coach Belichick. Coach Belichick is the best coach in the history of not only football, sport in my opinion. He's a big reason that I am where I am today, so I have a lot of respect and appreciation and admiration for him.

There's a number of folks in New England that they have in place that they feel comfortable with. They have a lot of talented people. They're probably going through a process of trying to figure things out, and I think all of us, that's what we do each year; you just sorta try to figure things out.

Certainly wish them nothing but the best. I'm appreciative of my 20 years, 20 seasons that I had in New England, but the game is better when people like Bill are around. I'm sure he'll figure out what he's going to do in the spring, and we're all going to benefit from it.

**Q. (Inaudible.)**

NICK CASERIO: In terms of what do I think is going to happen? We're all going to find out. Free agency is just -- it's what does the market tell you, and then any player, what are you willing to pay that player commensurate with their role.

Every year markets change, and I think sometimes what happens is I'd say with some of the tender numbers, you sort of get pigeonholed or benchmarked because once you establish a certain financial commitment level, it's almost used as a starting point, so you're either comfortable paying him that level or you're not, and it's all about resource allocation.

Our job is to try to find good football players and add good players to our team. We have a couple free agents at that position, so we're going to evaluate that position like we do other positions, as well.

DeMeco talked about this yesterday. Motor had a great year, did a lot of great things for us. Motor is a free agent. We'll see how it goes. There's a lot of good players that are out there. There's a lot of good players that are out there at a number of different positions, and our job is to evaluate, try to make good decisions.

**Q. (Inaudible.)**

NICK CASERIO: We'll see.

**Q. (Inaudible.)**

NICK CASERIO: Yeah, Nick is great to talk to. I mean, it's similar to Bill in some respects. They have such a library and history of players that you can benchmark against one another. You're talking about two of the best minds in football. I've had a number of conversations with Coach Saban before the draft, not only the last year but previous years, and his insight is very valuable and useful.

I think everybody who spoke on Will's behalf and the way Will was presented, we saw that in spades, and maybe it was even better than we maybe even thought. We're happy that Will is on our team.

Henry did a great job this year, as well, kind of in his role. Kind of came in as a backup. He was forced to play in the middle of the year, I want to say weeks four, five, six, where we had some players that were injured and he went out there and had some productive play.

Excited about those two players and their growth, and really from year one to year two, really try to improve on some of the things they did last year.

**Q. (Inaudible.)**

NICK CASERIO: Yeah, it's a part of it. It has to be a part of your calculus. It's really a fixed number. Anytime you assign a tag to a player, it's essentially you're committed to that value.

Now, it doesn't mean you can't work out a long-term contract extension with that player, but it's sort of a fixed number. I would say kind of like I talked about a little bit earlier, it's almost a starting point in a negotiation. So you have to figure out is that valuable, does that make sense, or let the player get to the open market, let the market dictate what the value is.

Honestly, it's a little cat-and-mouse game, so you try to take the information it, have a general understanding of the market and try to make a good decision.

We have some flexibility relative to financial commitments that we might be able to make, but you don't necessarily have to use all your money up in one year. I've talked about this previously, you really look at your team in sort of two-year increments, so whatever you don't do this year, that money is going to be used in future years.

I'm sure I'll get a question here very soon about Nico Collins. That's coming. That could be a player that maybe he's a part of the future.

You're dealing with the present. You're focused on the short-term. But part of our responsibility is to kind of think ahead a little bit and just try to make good sound decisions for the team and the organization.

**Q. (Inaudible.)**

NICK CASERIO: Yeah, I would just caution people this time of year to not pay too much attention to narratives that are out there about players or what teams are doing. I would just say going back to last year, there was quite a bit of misinformation out there about what happened or what the Texans were going to do. Really the only people that knew what the Texans were going to do were Coach Ryans and myself.

All I'm saying is we made the decisions that we feel are best for the Texans, and I'd say I'd be careful just to read into too many narratives about what a team is or is not going to do.

I've said this, this is silly season, unfortunately. It makes for a lot of fun, makes for a lot of dialogue. Sometimes it's true, sometimes it's not. We just try to focus on ourselves and try to make the right decisions for our team.

**Q. (Inaudible.)**

NICK CASERIO: Yeah, it's interesting. So it doesn't necessarily change how we're going to approach this off-season. We were already in a decent position, and I would just say it probably potentially could be more of a one-time thing.

Depending on what the number is, maybe it gives you a little flexibility. Could be add a singular player, could be add multiple players at a certain tier level, whether or not to use the money this year and push it to next year and roll it to the next year. I would say the result of what happened the other day doesn't necessarily change our thought process about how we were going to approach free agency.

**Q. (Inaudible.)**

NICK CASERIO: Yeah, I mean, the receiver kind of has two jobs: Get open and catch the ball. When you talk about separation, typically where that manifests itself the most is on 3rd down because typically there's a lot more man coverage played on 3rd down, the coverage is going to be a little bit tighter. Some come with in quickness. Some come in with their size. Some come in with their speed.

I think it depends on the player and his skill set. How Tank Dell gets open and runs routes is very unique. How Nico runs routes and gets open is very unique to him.

How you're going to use that player, how you're going to deploy that player, do you need to formation a certain way, can you only align him in one spot. You just have to look at the player. But in the end the job of a receiver is to get open and catch the ball however they do it, so however they create that space and separation is going to be unique to whatever skill set they provide to your team.

**Q. (Inaudible.)**

NICK CASERIO: Yeah, really just their background, who influenced them in terms of their development, who helped them the most, some of the things that they had to endure and overcome. I mean, without getting into any players in particular, but we had a player the other night that was talking about his house was shot. He was in the house while there were shots fired on his home. Another player had a commute on a daily basis from one city to the next to go to a certain high school.

Really what you're trying to do is kind of get a picture and a profile of the player, his mindset, his mentality, some of the

things that have led to where he is at this point, and you're not going to get it in a 15- to 20-minute interview, but you kind of get a quick snapshot, and you're trying to get a general picture.

In the end, this is a people business, so when you bring the right people into your locker room, you want to make sure that they fit with the rest of the team and the rest of the program and the culture that you're trying to create, and I would say players are appreciative of one another's stories because in the end this is a players' league. It's a people league. Players are very smart. Players are very perceptive. They know if a player is sincere, if he's authentic, if he's full of crap.

Part of our job is to kind of sift through the noise and then try to create as accurate a profile as we can about what we think we're bringing into the building, and then once we have that identified, then a lot of these guys are starting from scratch, so you find their baseline of understanding of football, what they were taught, what they were coached. They're kind of going back to square one.

There's 31 teams -- going to be 32 teams. Everybody has a different system. Everybody has a different coaching style. We're trying to just understand the person, sort of what makes them tick, and then how that will fit with the rest of the players that we have on our team.

**Q. Along those lines, how much (indiscernible)?**

NICK CASERIO: It's interesting. It's a portion of it. Even if you're at a game, if you were to ask somebody, why do you go to a game, well, you're looking at a number of different things. Maybe it's their habit or their routine pregame, how focused they are. They come off the field off a bad play, how do they react, how do they respond, what do they do on the sideline.

Any little detail or tell that you can get, but you also have to be careful about jumping to conclusions too quickly because you don't want to make just a snap judgment in a short period of time because maybe he was slouched in his chair. You don't know what he'd been dealing with over the course of the day.

But you can get some interesting things in how they approach it and just how intense or how focused they are. We look at everything. There's no question about it.

**Q. (Inaudible.)**

NICK CASERIO: Yeah, at this point last year we had seen CJ play over a couple seasons. We may or may not have talked to him already at the combine, but in terms of

interactions with him, it was very limited from a one-on-one basis because he was an underclassman, so you don't have access to the underclassmen. This is the first year, Jim Nagy changed this at the Senior Bowl where they allowed more juniors to attend. Jim has done a great job at the Senior Bowl, no question about it. It's another opportunity because the underclassmen are typically the people you have to find out the most about.

Essentially at this point we were relying on our information from the school that we've gathered from the scouts and then just from observing the player play, and then we interviewed him here at the combine, and then we brought him into our facility. This was sort of the beginning stage of the process.

There's probably more that we didn't know than we actually knew, and by the time we drafted whatever day that was in April, we knew a lot more than we did when we were here.

I'd say this whole week, this whole spring, it's really a process. It's a process for the players. It's a process for the teams. It's a process for the coaches. Our job is to extrapolate the information however we can do it and just try to make a good decision for our team.

**Q. (Inaudible.)**

NICK CASERIO: Yeah, have a lot of respect for Elliott. We actually interviewed Elliott, it may have been the year I left or the year before. Elliott has been in a lot of good programs. He was in Green Bay for a long period of time. I think at the time he was in Seattle. Very astute, very aware, good understanding of basically the league, and he was just kind of another set of eyes because we had lost a number of folks that had gone on to other teams. I think Mani had left at that time. I'd say Elliott was very respected. He obviously has a great pedigree in terms of his dad and has learned a lot of football, so Elliott understands football. He's got a great demeanor, great personality, great perspective, very self aware, and he has a great demeanor, and I think he'll be able to work in concert with the scouting staff, and I think he'll be a great asset to Jerrod, as well, as he works his way through.

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