

Houston Texans Media Conference

Friday, April 26, 2024

Houston, Texas, USA

Nick Caserio

Draft Press Conference



NICK CASERIO: So appreciate you guys sticking around. Hopefully a productive couple days here. Selected three guys that we liked at various points in the process. Spent significant time with them. Excited to add them to the team.

I think the big thing for us is just try to create as much competition as possible. You guys can ask me just some questions here, I'm not going to go through a thousand-word intro like I did the other day. I think you guys heard enough of that.

We're certainly making progress. Like I said, a productive couple days. I'd say even though we didn't pick yesterday, we were pretty active on the phones, looking for some opportunities that may have presented themselves. Nothing came to fruition.

We were in a really good position here today. I think going into it, we kind of looked at sort of a block of players and a group of players in a range, kind of draw a square and a box within that band, we felt if we could get three or four players kind of in that area, we'd feel pretty good. I think the players that we picked were players that we identified in those areas.

Done picking here for today. Tomorrow we're set to pick at 1:27. Don't have a fifth, two sixes and two sevens. There will still be some opportunities for us to add to the roster.

Can't say enough about the work the staff has done. I know I mentioned it the other day, but I mean, it's a credit. Honestly there's so many people that deserve a lot more credit for where we are just as a team in terms of the players we identified. A lot of communication, a lot of good, constructive dialogue. Certainly receptive and open to everybody's input and ideas.

DeMeco is happy and excited. Anytime a head coach is happy and excited, that's a good day, a good night.

Certainly go ahead and ask some questions, kind of go from there.

Q. How did the influence of offensive players in the first round affect your thinking?

NICK CASERIO: The activity yesterday doesn't change our thinking at all. I think you saw, what was it, 14 offensive players in a row, which is a record. You just adjust to the circumstances. As a result of certain players getting picked, other players may be available maybe that you hadn't anticipated.

It's funny. We were probably as active yesterday, even though we didn't pick. Our responsibility, our job is to try to look for some opportunities in trades. I've talked to you all about this. Trades are a function of just opportunity and a willingness on the other side, as well.

We talked to quite a few teams at various points, including today as well. Nothing came to fruition, so we picked and we were comfortable. You always have to be prepared to pick where you're scheduled to pick. If you feel you can move, then you'll explore it, which we certainly did. Didn't work out.

Honestly, it didn't affect I think our thought process and our philosophy because of what happened in the first round. I think you saw some trends, so it was kind of 14 offensive players, then there was a little bit of a spread there from kind of 15 to 32 there at the end.

Today you saw a few receivers I think that went really at the top, then a run on defensive players, specifically in the secondary. Then kind of the next run was offensive line. You started to see those players come off the board.

You're looking at it as you go and saying, Okay, if you bypass X, then what is the opportunity cost associated with that? Our approach is just very pragmatic, very thoughtful, very rational: just pick players that we feel are a good fit for our program. That's what we tried to do.

Q. Is it fair to say you were more honed in on maybe needs or wants, those boxes being tighter?

NICK CASERIO: Yeah, we don't really take a



needs-based approach. It's more football-player-based approach. You just can't have enough quality football players.

There might be a situation where a player maybe doesn't play this year, but maybe his opportunity potentially could be more next year because of maybe how the roster is constructed.

We don't have a crystal ball. We're not going to make any predetermined decisions about a player's role, who fits where. Honestly the competition will sort itself out.

I think what we've done, hopefully what we've done, is create a sense of urgency. You have to play well and perform well in order to stay in this building. If you don't, then we have to keep the 53 best and however we put the practice squad together.

I think overall you're just elevating the entire team to the best of your ability. I think that's what good teams try to do. Like, we feel we have a good team. We feel like we'll be competitive. What does that look like? We're all going to find out here shortly. We'll have a better idea once we get into training camp.

You never force anything. We look at needs or what we think can help our team. If we were to come out going into the day, DeMeco and I sat, said, If we were to come out with X, Y, Z, how would we feel? It was funny, we were just talking in the draft room. Had a good conversation. I said, How do you feel? He said, I feel pretty good.

In his mind kind of things came out maybe the way we had hoped or anticipated. Frankly, we're not really that surprised how the draft kind of fell. I mean, it went about how we thought it was going to go, including when we look back at where we were scheduled to pick at 23, what the options would have been, who we would have picked. You all were doing that. We're doing the same thing. You're looking up there going, All right, well, if we had a pick, what would we have done?

You just keep moving forward and you keep planning for the next day. At 42 we knew we were going to get a good football player, at least that was the hope. Hopefully we did that.

Q. What did you see in Kamari in the SEC?

NICK CASERIO: It starts with Coach Smart, the program that he's put together, he's assembled. I think when you look at the number of players, I don't know how many players, Georgia players, were drafted today, but it was a pretty significant amount. They had a number of players

that played dual rolls. Tykee Smith, Bullard, Kamari got picked, Lassiter has played in the perimeter, played inside the formation.

I'd say he plays with a linebacker-type mentality. He's a corner, but he tackles. He's tough, physical. I'm sure there will be a question about his speed, how fast he ran. But he's not slow. The speed really wasn't a concern of ours. The time is the time. We're drafting football players, we're not drafting track teams. I know speed is important. I'm not saying speed is not important. We don't feel that's an issue for this particular player.

When you watch him play in the SEC, you don't walk away and have that concern. He's physical, he's tough, he tackles. He has position flux. He's well-coached. I think Kirby is as good of a coach, him and Coach Saban, are as good of secondary coaches from a technique standpoint, how they play the ball.

He played a lot on the line of scrimmage. He played a lot of press. We have a little bit more flexibility in our coverages. Maybe some of the things we are going to ask him to do are conducive to his skill set.

Good football player. He's probably one of the top I would say makeup kind of players that we identified throughout our process. He's a football player. We're drafting football players 'cause we're trying to put together a good football team.

I'd say that's kind of where he fits.

Q. The way Calen finds the ball, what did you see?

NICK CASERIO: I mean, it shows up. Whatever his production is has been pretty significant. He's rangy. He covers ground, he plays the ball well. He has good movement skills for a safety. He started his career as a corner. Not saying he's a corner, but he moves well for his size.

He's 6'2", 192 pounds. Honestly some of his best football probably is in front of him. He needs to get stronger. He'd be the first to tell you that. I think there's some developmental opportunities with him relative to his frame. You are talking about a guy that is 6'2", 192, ran 4.5. He moves well for his size, plays the ball, is instinctive, an eraser in the deep part of the field. Has to improve as a tackler. Hopefully our program will be beneficial to him in that respect.

He's still an ascending player. He's only 20, 21 years old. He's a young player. Been in college for three years. Played as a true freshman. Versatile player.

I can say that was certainly a player that the head coach was excited to get on the team. Anytime you can do that, it's probably a good thing.

Q. And Blake Fisher?

NICK CASERIO: Good football player. Started his career at left tackle. Moved over to right tackle. I think we've always been a big believer you can't have enough tackles on your football team.

When you look at however the last many years, whether it's Charlie Heck, George Fant, Jones, Tytus and LT are good football players. You need three tackles, three or four tackles, that you feel can go out there and play.

I'd say in Blake's case, 6'5", 315 pounds, long arms, plays strong, physical. Played against good competition. Well-coached with the offensive line coach. Former offensive line coach at the University of Wisconsin. Played with J.P. I mean, I think our program will benefit him.

You can't have enough tackles in your building. I mean, right now we have really four, including Charlie and David Sharpe, who signed. Blake is another tackle. We're going to carry probably four tackles. You're going to need three.

You all have seen his play. At some point they're going to have to play. Even going back to '22, we had to play multiple tackles. LD didn't play, had to move Tytus over. You're going to need tackles. Can't have enough good ones on your team.

I'd say once we picked Blake, I don't know how many offensive linemen went after that, but it was close to double-digits. I don't have the exact count, but it might have been six or eight.

Rosengarten went, the kid from BYU, the guy from Pitt went. Those teams have tackles, as well. You need three tackles, probably need four, might need more than that. Here is another young player with experience, a lot of good qualities and traits. That was the reason behind the pick.

Q. Calen and Kamari, whether they play in the slot, corner, they were special teamers. Do you want to allow them to have some role on the team even if they're not starters?

NICK CASERIO: Yeah, philosophically, you're a starter on defense or on offense or the kicking game. Probably more defense than offense. The reality is the number of offensive players that have a role in the kicking game around the league, it's minimal. We're fortunate. Dare is a

good example. There's a running back that has a good value in the kicking game. Not all running backs have that value in the kicking games.

Most of your depth in the kicking game is going to come from the linebacker position, the safety position and the corner position. That's always a component because you only take 48 to the game. You take 20 to 22 players on defense. Your special teams are going to be important.

I would say we certainly place an emphasis on the kicking game. It's a big part of the game. It's probably going to be a bigger part of the game here this season given some of the rules.

How big of a role they have in those areas, we'll see. You have to find the right fit. Are they perimeter players? Corner roles in the kicking game? Are they safeties that can handle responsibilities in the core of the formation on the punt team? MJ is a personal protector. Eric Murray has played on the wing. Dare has played on the wing.

I'd say with your corners and safeties, where do they kind of fit? There's a good chance on the perimeter. You're going to need them on coverage units, kickoff coverage, which I'd say will be at a premium. Players that can run and tackle are going to be important.

Then on the return teams, you just have to be able to do enough in some of those areas. It's a part of the calculus. I would say these particular players probably add a little bit more value on defense than the kicking game. Hopefully they can carve out some roles for themselves in the kicking game because that overall depth of your team on game day is going to be important.

We'll see how it all shakes out. They'll be competitive hopefully for some roles in that phase.

Q. At the NFL Combine, you mentioned wanting to find someone to start opposite of Stingley. How close do you feel this team is heading in that direction?

NICK CASERIO: Yeah, we'll see. It will be competition. Jeff and C.J. have played a lot of football at a high level. They're both big and fast. They've been here in the off-season program for the last few weeks. They're working hard.

DK, we resigned Desmond. Myles Bryant is a guy that has a Swiss Army knife safety, nickel flexibility. Lassiter, corner to nickel, nickel to corner. Bullock safety to whatever else he can do.

You're going to need six to eight defensive backs that can



go out there and play. I mean, look, you're going to have to cover people. You have to run, cover, tackle. Somebody is going to have to chase Worthy down the field when Mahomes is launching a ball over his head this season. It's a space game, it's a speed game, tackling game.

What happens relative to opposite Derek, we'll find out. There's nothing that's predetermined. So we'll have a better idea I think in training camp how it's going to transpire.

There's a good chance we're probably going to have five or six corners on the roster. Two or three are going to play on defense. Whoever four, five and six are are going to be backups. How diverse are their roles? Going back to the question here, kicking game to defense.

It will be an interesting exercise here. I think we've created a significant amount of competition in that area, which is a good thing.

Q. (Off microphone.)

NICK CASERIO: Yeah, there's some opportunities there. There's a number of players that we liked. We didn't have the opportunity to add them to our team.

I think we're excited about the players that we've added. We've signed some players in free agency. We signed Foley, Tim Settle. We signed Denico. Some players that have flexibility in the front. If we had to go out there and play football, we'd be able to put a team out there regardless of whoever we drafted here. Nothing's really changed.

There will be opportunities I'm sure between now and September to add wherever we feel necessary. So if we feel there's an opportunity, a spot that we need to add somebody, there's going to be players available. We'll try to make good decisions. If there's a situation that makes sense, we'll certainly pursue it.

Q. Coming into the draft, I think you had three or four guys in the defensive back room that were signed through 2025. How much did that factor into wanting to get some guys that you could develop while having a cost-effective amount?

NICK CASERIO: It never really drives your decision. I think you have to take the player in and of itself, the football player, evaluate him, what do you think the role is potentially going to be, kind of focus on '24 and then we'll deal with '25 in '25.

Like most teams, you have players that are under contract for '24, then you have players who aren't under contract beyond '24. You're going to figure out a way to replenish your team, whether it's in the draft, when we get to free agency next year... You're not making decisions solely based off that.

I think everybody's going to add young players to their team. We're not doing anything different than any other team is doing. So, yeah, I mean, it's getting people in the building. Once you get 'em in the building, then the competition will sort itself out. We'll keep the players and the best people we feel can help us.

Q. Can you see Blake moving inside if need be? Is he strong enough to be able to come inside?

NICK CASERIO: Blake is really a tackle. You never want to say, Well, we're just going to move a guy inside just because. The player may be able to handle it, may not be able to handle it. Not just Blake. Generally speaking, not all tackles can move inside.

Sometimes there's this propensity to move certain players inside because of their size. Matt Light was called an undersized tackle in New England. Played tackle for 10 years, so... Sometimes you get a little bit too cute. You say we're going to bump this guy inside just because.

I mean, Blake is a tackle. Can a player do something beyond what his original position is? That comes through time, that comes through practice. There's a lot of different dynamics that go into that.

I think Tytus is definitely unique. Tytus is a better tackle than he is an inside player. I think that's how we feel. Tytus is honestly one of the better tackles in the league, so...

You look at your group, you have eight at the game. All right, you have to have a backup tackle. You have to have backup for the inside spots. Are they a backup guard only? Are they a three-position inside player where they can put their hand on the ball? Can your next tackle also play left tackle? There's a lot of machinations that can take place.

You always want to put a player in a position to accentuate the things he does well and not just force feeding a guy. There's too many examples too many times that you do that, it's not fair to the player.

We'll see how it goes. Blake's experience specific to him is as a tackle. Treat him as a tackle. We always say they're a tackle until they're not.

Q. When you look at day three compared to day two, when you saw the run on tackles, teams traded up, do you view the same way when you see a run on a certain position that maybe you want to move up on day three?

NICK CASERIO: Yeah, it's really just about supply and demand. Honestly at this point it's where you have the players graded. You have a certain player graded at a certain level. Once you lose that category, where is the next break point, how many players are you actually going to have available.

One of the things we'll do in the morning, 1:27 we are, realistically what are our options going to be. It's not like we're trading up because we want to trade up. It's to trade up just for positioning for supply and demand. It's not necessarily about one player. It's more what are your options, what are you looking at.

That's how we've always tried to approach it. So we'll see what happens tomorrow.

Q. You said in the past going into the draft, it's like a crapshoot, you can be lucky, unlucky. When you're drafting these guys, when you look at them, did you see that they had that mindset that you all were looking for?

NICK CASERIO: Yes, honestly that's a huge part of it. I would say Lassiter, I mean, there's no question about it. This is hands down. It's actually a huge part of the calculus. I think our players understand that, as well.

When a player comes in the building, they know, they're aware. Are we consistent with our messaging? Are we doing what we say, what we believe in? Are we espousing our philosophy at all levels? They know.

Our responsibility, DeMeco's and I's responsibility are to one another, to the coaches and in turn to the players. If you bring in a player that maybe has some question marks that you know ahead of time, the players are going to look at you and say, All right, wait a minute, what's going on here? Do you practice what you preach?

I know not to oversimplify it. It's a huge part of the decision making. I would say specific to these three players, Lassiter without question. Bullock, I mean, great kid. He's young. But he's a great kid. Cares a lot about football. I'm sure you guys will hear about his story. The fact that he's actually in the position that he is is honestly like mind-blowing, what he's had to endure, what he's been through. Fisher is a really solid kid.

Going back to what we talked about the other day. I mean, using information and talking to people. I mean, J.P. was a teammate of Blake's. That's a good resource. You can get all the information you want. Talk to the school, talk to whomever. When you talk to somebody who is actually in the meeting room with him, what are your thoughts? That carries weight.

Again, it reinforces, All right, you know what, this guy fits what we're about, fits the culture, the swarm mindset. If you start there, then you can put your head on the pillow at night. It doesn't mean you're not going to take chances or risks, but you have to take calculated risks and ultimately decide does this make sense for the entire building and the organization and for our team.

To answer your question, it's absolutely important. We certainly prioritize it because we should. Honestly, if you look around the league, look at how these teams are even put together, more and more teams are prioritizing.

In the end, you're going to want the people. When a game is on the line, are they dependable, reliable, are they going to do the right thing, are they going to be consistent, handle the pressure, handle adversity? I mean, that's real.

We can say all we want about how much talent they have, all that. In the end it's about mental and physical toughness and your ability to perform under pressure when the stakes are the highest.

Q. You have your philosophy and how you approach the draft. How important is it that you stay true to whatever your philosophy is?

NICK CASERIO: Yeah, it's important. I mean, you want to be consistent year after year. Are you practicing what you preach? We've been fortunate. We feel we have a pretty good infrastructure in place. We have a really good coaching staff. Have a great head coach. Have a supportive ownership group. A lot of other people in support areas that are a big part of what we're doing. All that factors in.

I've said this from the beginning. That's all we're really trying to do, is just put together as consistent a team, consistent a product year after year. Give ourselves an opportunity where we have a chance for success.

We're not guaranteed anything. It doesn't necessarily mean we're going to go out there and be 13-4 or 17-0. That's not going to happen. But do you put your team and organization in a position where you have an opportunity and are you doing it with the right people? Are you doing

things that you actually say that you're doing, that you believe in?

I think everybody that's affiliated with our program, whether it's in the scouting department, whether it's in football ops, they see that. When you stay true to your discipline, let's say the belief continues to build.

Belief starts with I would say in our situation with DeMeco, I'd say everybody believes in him and what he's doing. It goes back to the consistency. There's nobody more consistent than DeMeco Ryans in everything that he does, that he believes in. The players see that. We all feel that. It starts there.

Then ultimately it's the responsibility to the players. In the end we can say all we want to say, but they're relying on each other on the field. When there's 80,000 people, nobody can hear anything, but you can hear the guy next to you.

You're trying to stack as many blocks in place over the course of time. When you look at some of the better programs in the league, we're not there yet, I'm not saying we're in that position, hopefully we're heading that way, but when you look at some of the better programs, that's what they've done.

There's no better example than Kansas City. You put them at the top of the list. You put Baltimore at the top of the list. What Sean and Brian are doing in Buffalo. There's the competition.

Are we putting ourselves in a position where we have an opportunity to compete with those teams? We'll find out. The AFC is as competitive as any league in sport.

We know what the challenges are in front of us. We're not going to run from them. We're going to try to do our part. We're excited about the opportunity in front of us. Hopefully we just keep doing the right things and making good, sound decisions along the way.

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