

# Houston Texans Media Conference

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**Nick Caserio**

Draft Press Conference



NICK CASERIO: Appreciate everybody sticking around. Before I kind of get into the players, just can't say enough about the work and the effort of the scouting staff and the coaching staff to arrive at this point.

There is so much discussion, so much dialog that takes place from March through April, during the draft, in the draft room. You know, it's such a collaborative effort. The work they put in, the pro staff, understanding their teams, understanding where players potentially could fit, where is there a gap, where is there a player that could potentially be a conflict for us where we might have to move and get in front of.

The college scouting staff, they know the players better than anybody. They've been studying these players for as long as anybody. I think the last pick was a good example of talking through it and not being afraid to speak up and say, hey, what about so and so.

It just speaks to the team nature of the building, how we operate, what we do, and then you see that on display, and that comes to fruition all at once. There is so much that goes into the execution of the pick, but the work that goes in, really can't say enough about the people involved in that process.

As it pertains to the players that we picked, let's say it really speaks to people and programs as much as anything, which is important. I have a tremendous amount of respect and admiration for Coach Campbell the way he runs his program, the types of people he brings in, the way he develops players.

I would say Coach Fleck is the same way at Minnesota. These players have been coached, trained, developed; now they kind of to restart that here a little bit in those specific examples.

When you pick players it's as much about their belief in those players and they -- some of them understand the program that we're building and what DeMeco and I expect from the players and the fit. They'll be honest. They're not

afraid to say, you know what, he may not be for you, and here is the reasons why.

You can't help but respect that information and that communication, because it makes a difference.

You know, as far as the picks are concerned, I mean, I know we moved around a bunch a little bit there, five trades, whatever it was. Kind of stuck in and picked Higgins there, moved up to get Aireontae; stuck and picked Jaylin; and then moved a little bit with the other Jaylin. I know we got Jaylins and we got all these guys around. It's going to be hard to keep them straight.

But we feel we've added youth, toughness, speed, athleticism, overall competitiveness on both sides of the football, and hopefully that just enhances overall the performance of our football team. I think practice is going to be a lot of fun. There will be a lot of talking back and forth, whether it's Jaylin Smith, I know we'll talk about CJ, DJ there. Be involved in some of that.

These guys are going to want to compete, and it's only going to make each other better. I mean, we are not even talking about Kamari Lassiter, who is as competitive as any player we have in the building.

So the idea was to try to add good players, good people that are young, tough, hungry, that want to win, that put the team first. Makes these picks exemplify that.

I'm not going to go through a breakdown of each individual pick. I'm sure I'll get some questions about some of the players. Kind of go from there.

**Q. Can you talk a little bit about having a guy, say, already having a player from, say, out of state and you talk about the coaches. Does that give you a better sense of what you might be dealing with by getting more players from the school?**

NICK CASERIO: Yes and no. If it's the right player and the right people. Coach Campbell was spot on about Hutch, and Hutch has been outstanding for our program. He has been one of the best teammates; embraces his



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role; works his ass off; everything you want; good teammates. Goes out there, and performs when he's called upon.

Coach Campbell, I talked to him a little bit earlier today and went through some of the players on their team. He was effusive in his belief and praise of both Higgins and Noel. They're different kind of in terms of their skill sets, how they play.

But it's a good example of like, well, you guys drafted a receiver; why would you draft another receiver. Well, because Jaylin is a really good football player. Inside receiver, plays outside of formation, punt returner, handles the ball. He's tough.

We got some feedback from some teams, you know, just unsolicited. Literally one of the best 30-man visits -- this is after the draft -- that they had.

So it speaks to who Jaylin is. Get him on the phone and talk about the pick he's crying because he just poured so much into it. He cares a lot.

Like I said, going back to the beginning there, what Coach Campbell says carries a lot of weight and I have a lot of faith and confidence.

We're respectful of our relationship with the college coaches. It's a two-way street. We want to work with the schools, the colleges, and we're honest with them and hopefully they're honest with us. Then you build equity over time.

**Q. You say you don't really draft for -- like you draft for like the best player available. When the two align, is that the dream scenario building the team that you want?**

NICK CASERIO: I mean, we've never talked like what do we need. I've said we need good football players. Doesn't matter the position they play. Get them in the building; sort it out.

Like we need good football players. The whole perception of you need this position, that position, I mean, that's made up. We don't approach it that way. Doesn't really matter. I would say today was another good example of follow the grades. We kept coming back to, well, here are our grades on this player. Okay, well, all right. If he's the best player and he has the other qualities we covet, then we pick the player. The competition is going to sort itself out. We're not going to control the competition. The players are.

So can we draft another receiver. I don't know, sure, if he's

the best player and graded accordingly. Doesn't matter where they come from.

DeMeco said it, I've said it. This whole concept of drafting for need, honest to God, I don't know what it means. If someone can tell me that I would love to hear it.

We need to keep drafting good people and football players that will enhance the overall culture of our building, and we're not going to stray from that.

**Q. When it comes to some of the performances, competition noise stands out, game tape. Did the Penn State game jump out to you? (Regarding Abdul Carter.) matched up with him and a bunch of other pass rushers.**

NICK CASERIO: It's not necessarily one game. There are a lot of good players in the Big10. Huskies got a bunch of players. There are a bunch of players on different teams.

I would say Coach Bielema has a bunch of players on defense. You're watching those players, and let's say Tae has a body of work. So Tae, similar to I would say Iowa State in some respects, Coach Flecks' program is a developmental program. They are not taking necessarily five star players.

So Tae has some things he does well and he has plenty to work on. His mindset, attitude, competitiveness, his physicality, his toughness, like you see that on the tape.

So there are certain things he does well; other things maybe needs to work on.

That's where DeMeco has talked about this. This is why we coach. This is their job as coaches, is to enhance the strengths, try to improve the weaknesses, and get them to perform at whatever optimal level that is.

Sometimes it takes a year. Sometimes it takes a little bit longer. Sometimes the guy is ready to go a little bit sooner than later. The player is going to improve based on how much he's willing to put into it.

You saw that, whether it was in the Penn State game, whether it was in all the other games in the Big10, Senior Bowl, so those are all evaluation opportunities for them.

We take everything into consideration.

**Q. Obviously ya'll did have a lot of time to think about your first pick of the second round. Why ultimately was Jayden Higgins the right guys for you guys?**

NICK CASERIO: Because he was the best player and the highest graded player on the board. What else is there?

**Q. Seeing him in the Senior Bowl, was there anything that stood out in particular during the pre-draft process that you really liked?**

NICK CASERIO: Pretty much everything. Watch him play. Here is a guy that basically made himself into an NFL football player. He was under recruited; basketball player in high school; went to Eastern Kentucky. Not too many from Eastern Kentucky make it in the NFL.

Wanted an opportunity to go somewhere, because Eastern Kentucky, you know, there are better programs. Wasn't afraid of the challenge. Went to Iowa state. Very productive player.

I mean, go watch him play. Went down to the Senior Bowl and had a good week. Why did we pick him? (Video glitched.)

**Q. What kind of goals do you guys process and figure out who has the right mindset that would fit?**

NICK CASERIO: It's a lot of work. So school, watch them practice, watch them compete at the All Star game, eat with them at the All-Star Game, talk to them at the combine. If you bring them into the building for a 30-man visit, talk to their coaches and other people around them. What's his pattern of behavior over time.

You're trying to create a picture of here is what you're going to get when you walk in the building. That goes back to the work that scouts put in in August, September, when they're on campus when nobody is really talking about anything, finding the right people. Honestly, in the end it's up to them to see it with their own eyes.

He had a coach say he was competitive and tough. Well, did you actually see it in practice. What are his habits to back that up. There is a myriad of checkpoints we go through.

I mean, Higgins, Noel, Tae, Jaylin, I mean, they all passed with flying colors otherwise we wouldn't have picked them. That's a very extensive -- it's not one particular thing, but it's a culmination of things over time.

**Q. You talk about how in the draft there are sometimes a player moves down and that could change the way you go about your draft board. Was Noel one of those guys that you didn't envision to be there at 79, but seeing what his value was, you had to pivot towards him?**

NICK CASERIO: We felt that was probably about the range where he was going to go. I think there was certainly interest in the player. If we didn't pick him probably somebody else would've.

It's the same thing. We're picking. What are our options. How do we evaluate the players. If we don't pick this player, what do we pass up. Is there a supply and demand issue.

In the end, what's our grade. What do the coaches think. What do the scouts think. Okay, all that matches up. All right, ready to go. That's how that one probably came together.

**Q. I know how and you DeMeco approach these drafts the last two years. How instrumental was Nick Caley in also helping evaluate some of wide receivers that you got tonight?**

NICK CASERIO: All the coaches are involved in the process. It's no different than last year, than the year before, and DeMeco's first year. We give the coaches players to evaluate. Coordinators will look at them on a big picture level. The position coaches are going to study them on their level. Coach Caley, Coach Schuplinski, Coach Lazor, Coach McDaniels, they're evaluating all the players.

Scouts are evaluating them. DeMeco and I are evaluating them and taking all that information and putting it into a profile. Hey, what do we think.

That's how we arrive to the end point. It's not about one coach, one evaluation. We take all the information. At some point we got to make a decision. DeMeco and I continue to talk and then we make the decision. Then ready to go, put the pick in. On to the next one.

**Q. Do you all envision Aireontae as a tackle or somebody that can play multiple positions?**

NICK CASERIO: He's only played tackle. What can he do? Nobody thought Titus could go inside and play guard until he went in and did it. Never going to put limitations on what a player can or can't do. He's a tackle until he's not. If a player can handle more, it's all based on what they can handle.

Tae has a bunch snaps at tackle, so we feel like we got pretty good competition at tackle. Pretty good competition inside. Who are the five best lineman. Honestly, as we sit here today, none of us have any idea. We're going to find out. Whoever the five best are, we'll go in there.



Titus has done a hell of a job with his opportunities going from tackle to guard. If Titus is better inside and someone else is better outside, great. If Titus is better outside and someone else is better inside, so be it.

Whoever the five are, they're going to determine who is actually on the field.

**Q. Last year you guys talked about Calen being a multi-dimensional player. (Regarding cornerback and safety.) Do you feel like that's the same player you're getting with Jaylin?**

NICK CASERIO: Similar but different. Jaylin is probably more of a corner to something else. Calen is really a safety to probably safety. I mean, Calen probably more in the safety bucket.

If you saw Jaylin play in the perimeter formation; saw him play inside that formation. Frank thinks he can have an opportunity with the kicking game with his speed and toughness to maybe help us on the perimeter, whether it's on punt coverage or kickoff coverage.

So I would say they're similar but different. I mean, I think Calen was with Jaylin tonight, so no surprise there. I mean, birds of a feather flock together.

**Q. Nick, when you think about size, and Bill Parcells used to say this, the size advantage, big people usually beating smaller people in football. When you look at the matchup with two big receivers, Nico Collins and Higgins, does that come to mind that you're going to have such an advantage it's going to be hard to match up?**

NICK CASERIO: Yeah, I think sometimes size is a little bit underrated both ways. Some of the best football players we had in New England were some of the smallest guys on the team. How tall was Balker (phonetic)? 4'1". Doesn't matter the size. It's what they do with their attributes.

Whatever they can do well, hopefully -- I mean, Nico is as example of a player who was big but didn't always play big. I mean, now you need 20 people to tackle him. That was developed over time.

Size is just one element. It doesn't determine anything, other than here is their measurables. What they do with them is up to them.

**Q. All of your selections today come with a lot of college playing experience. A lot them three, four year starters. Was that important in the evaluation**

**process?**

NICK CASERIO: Yeah, playing experience matters. So the more opportunities you have to see a player do something, maybe have a better sense of how they potentially could translate over.

All those players you alluded to, again, it's emblematic of the programs they were in as well. Going back to Jaylin Smith, he wasn't very big coming out of high school. He's not the biggest guy. Kind of lean, kind of frail. Took him a little bit of time here to get to the point. He still has some room to put on some size and strength.

But the more you see somebody do something, more opportunities you have to evaluate, the better for them. But there is no substitute, and I've talked about this. You look at the landscape of college football, the guys that are actually staying and playing, it might be helping them more than people think, not detracting from their overall opportunities they're going to have next year or whenever it is.

**Q. Nick, some of the guys that were drafted tonight, like you mentioned Higgins, two star coming out of high school; Aireontae dealt with some homelessness during his younger days; and then you see the emotion of Noel when you called him and the way he just embraced his mom. What does it mean to you and DeMeco to be able to make these guys who have come through this type of adversity's dream come true?**

NICK CASERIO: Yeah, you see how much it means to them. They've earned it through a lot of work, a lot of people around them. There are a lot of people that have enabled them to get to that point.

Just goes to show you where you start is not necessarily an indication of where you finish. I think I read a stat about what, 75, 80% of the guys picked in the first round are like five star recruits. That's great. There is a whole other population of players in the NFL. There are only 32 first round picks. I mean, there are 200 or so other players. No star, two stars, one star, honestly, stars don't matter.

It's what you do with your opportunity, and it goes back to like work works. So if you want to work and you want to get better as a football player and you are willing to be coached, like you're in the right spot.

That's what DeMeco believes in, we both believe in. DeMeco was that way as a player and we're looking for a lot of those qualities. We feel like that's what works in this building. If you don't have it, probably going to be hard to stay in this building.



If you come in and put your head down and work and just get better, take advantage of your opportunities, you're going to have a shot to have success and do a lot of good things for the organization.

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