

Seattle Seahawks Media Conference

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John Schneider

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Weekday Press Conference



JOHN SCHNEIDER: So, exciting night. We were able to land our number one and two offensive linemen, Grey Zabel. I believe it's the highest player we picked, interior player we picked, since Hutch, which was cool. I was able to be part of that with coach, Ted, Scott, that crew.

It's pretty fun. Hutch loves him. Everybody loves this guy. He's just buttoned up, tough, smart, reliable, our kind of guy.

Really our first exposure was at the Senior Bowl when he had a great week down there. We felt like 18 to where we were, it was like a sweet spot for the interior offensive line. Booker went 10 or 12.

But yeah, really excited. So go ahead.

MIKE MACDONALD: Echo everything John said. Kind of been on my radar since the Senior Bowl. The exposure, that's when we get introduced to the whole process. Just really excited to add him to the crew, get to know him more.

He (indiscernible) the process. Everybody was really excited. Just really excited for him to come in tomorrow and get rolling.

Q. (No microphone.)

MIKE MACDONALD: He's going to start at guard and work interior. But the cool thing about Grey is he can play all five spots. Hopefully we're not moving around much, he sticks at guard for a long time here. But he does have that versatility.

Q. How good of a fit with what you want to do with the offensive line is he?

MIKE MACDONALD: I wouldn't put too much into like, Well, he has to be the wide zone guy. This guy is a great

pass protector, can hit his targets on the move. Very athletic, tough. Finishes blocks, which is one of my favorite things about him. In that way, he's going to fit in great.

Q. This is the highest drafted FCS player. Are you seeing that gap close a little bit with FCS players (indiscernible)?

JOHN SCHNEIDER: Trent was showing me a picture of 2022, their national championship team. All five of those guys are playing in the National Football League. They're coached really well. It's a great program. Great offensive line coach. You can tell when guys are coached up, taught well. That's one of them, regardless of the level.

But yeah, offensive linemen for sure. You're going all over. They come in all shapes and sizes. You have to find the competitors, regardless of the level of competition.

Q. We were blown away on the conference call, down to earth, funny guy. Talk about your experience.

JOHN SCHNEIDER: Kind of has Hutch's personality a little bit more. Fun dude.

MIKE MACDONALD: We totally knew he was going to have a Settlers of Catan game box there at the draft party, which won a lot of points with me, too. Got that going for us.

Q. What did Hutch tell you?

JOHN SCHNEIDER: Just the person, the competitor he's going to bring to the room. He's a little throwback, gets rocking the stash. I'm not sure if he's still rocking it.

Everybody just did a great job with the interviews and Zoom process with him, too. All the interviews, he just exudes this really cool, like, confidence, toughness. Like I said, smart, tough, reliable guy. 35 starts, yeah.

They play good ball, man. That's a really good program.

Q. What kind of resources is it having a Hall of Fame guard on a staff helping you out?

JOHN SCHNEIDER: Yeah, when you see him right now, you wouldn't think... He's so skinny. 225 right now

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(smiling).

No, it's been awesome with Hutch. He's his own pilot now. He flies himself around, checks out the guys. It's pretty cool having him with us.

Q. (No microphone.)

JOHN SCHNEIDER: I mean, he's just a loyal dude. Really close with his family. Just good person. I mean, these guys, he gets recruited there, he's confident, loyal, tough dude.

Q. John, you talked about this might be a need. Now you got your offensive lineman. How does this set you up for the rest of the draft?

JOHN SCHNEIDER: Nine picks now. It's exciting. There's still guys -- had to stop myself there (laughter). Still some damn good players up there.

No, we're excited to keep rocking. We've talked about this before. The first night is like entertainment world. Tomorrow we wait forever to pick. Saturday is like roll up the sleeves. Saturday is the most fun day.

But yeah, tomorrow is going to be fun as well because there's a lot of really good players up there.

Q. There are reports you offered to move back, but (indiscernible)?

JOHN SCHNEIDER: Those were not accurate. We were discussing it, and things did not come to fruition.

Q. John, Jalen played with him.

JOHN SCHNEIDER: Roommates.

Q. Did you learn anything unique about him from Jalen?

JOHN SCHNEIDER: I stayed away from him personally. But the guys, all the guys have talked to Jalen about him. Yeah, he's a great guy. Like I said, he just checks every box. Nothing you can really...

What did you say, he was drinking Busch Light or something? Not checking a box there (smiling). He needs to switch it up a little bit.

College points (smiling).

Q. I'm sure you have six or eight boxes when you're scouting guards that you would like to have checked.

Is there one or two boxes that you say this is the most important thing, we have to have this, non-negotiable? Traits or attributes you're hunting for at guard?

JOHN SCHNEIDER: I would say the physicality, toughness, physicality. The finish, the will to win. It just stands out when you see guys. I'm sure you've noticed this over the years now. When you see guys finishing downfield, it looks rare, guys cleaning up. He's one of those guys.

Q. What about him fits the outside zone?

MIKE MACDONALD: From the question a little bit earlier. I like how he finishes the blocks, then finding his targets down the field in space. He's a really great athlete, how he moves.

It's easy to overlook pass protection when you talk wide zone all the time. You can argue that's really where it starts in the evaluation process. Man, hard to find a rep that he had a hard time winning down in Mobile. He took a lot of them.

Q. You talk about Mobile, you were there in the big circle. He took all comers with every position on the line. Have you seen something like that before?

JOHN SCHNEIDER: He was stealing reps. It was pretty cool. He stood out. He could have left. He was voted practice player of the week. A lot of those guys leave. They don't stay for the game. Improve their draft value or whatever.

He stayed, competed, played guard and center in the game. Like, he stood out down there, for sure.

Q. Mike, what does his versatility say about his football IQ?

MIKE MACDONALD: Yeah, talking about how smart he is. Again, hopefully we find a home for him at one position and he lives there for a really long time for us.

I think it just speaks to his savvy. It's not easy to find those guys that can play interior and at tackle. He's one of 'em. He's ours now.

Q. (No microphone.)

MIKE MACDONALD: Yeah, I wish there was more to that (smiling). I mean, I love that they work out together and they have a prior relationship. Hate to say, probably more of a coincidence than anything else.



JOHN SCHNEIDER: We talked to Abe about it. Abe's scouting report was amazing.

Q. We heard about different attributes for a left versus right tackle. In your way of thinking, is there any difference in attributes for a left or right guard? You said you're going to start him at guard. Left or right guard?

MIKE MACDONALD: I wouldn't say there's a huge difference between either one. We'll see how it shakes out on what side he's going to start. If there's one place that he plays particularly better than the other or the rest of the guys on the roster, how well they play.

We're trying to find the best, cohesive unit right now. There's a lot of competition along our line. To say he's going to be slotted at this spot, probably too premature to give you that.

Q. Thoughts on the first round across the board?

JOHN SCHNEIDER: We had, like, our strategy meeting. I'm losing track, but a couple nights ago. Pro scouts go through every team, rank like the top five needs. They talk about upcoming contracts. Basically like if they're running the team, this is what they would do, right?

I want to say, like, 80% of the top three needs by team was offensive linemen involved. I mean, it was even more eye-opening than I had thought throughout the process. Everybody's looking for 'em, right?

I don't know how many went. I lost track there for a minute at the end. I know Josh got taken right at the end.

Q. (No microphone.)

JOHN SCHNEIDER: Yeah, thanks. Kirk Parrish and Trent went in there. Kirk was fired up, got to call him. Kirk was here when we drafted Hutch. He's a super passionate scout. Like, if people disagree on a player, he still has that old school kind of like he bows up a little bit. It was pretty cool to be able to take one of his guys.

Q. (No microphone.)

JOHN SCHNEIDER: We felt pretty good about if we did trade back that there was going to be a couple guys there that we'd be able to go to. But he was number one, so it was going to have to be a cool deal for us. Yeah, he ended up just being the guy.

Q. (No microphone.)

JOHN SCHNEIDER: You know what, I'd say like 80%. Everybody was talking like they didn't know when the guards were going to start going. We got a little jiggy when Book got taken with Dallas. But there was a couple guys there that we liked, yeah.

Q. (No microphone.)

JOHN SCHNEIDER: Yeah, he's a really good athlete. You could tell just by looking at him, right, with the moustache, the body type. The guy's a good athlete, really quick.

Q. What was John Benton's role in this selection?

MIKE MACDONALD: Whole offensive staff. As much as J.B. can jump right now where he's at, he was doing it. Really excited. The guys are really excited. J.O., Ricoh, Justin, those guys had a really high opinion of him throughout the process, too. Everybody was really fired up.

Q. Being on the phone with him, the personality comes across, but he's a competitor. What does it mean to bring somebody like that into your locker room?

MIKE MACDONALD: Believe it or not, I had to get emotion out of him on the phone. I think I succeeded a little bit. Yeah, I mean, obviously his family and friends were there. It's cool when you're on the phone with them, you go back and they showed the TV clip of the party going on. You just understand how big of a moment it is for him and his family.

Just really proud of all the stuff you got to do to get to that moment. Those are the guys we want in our locker room, that are going to come in and compete. We talked about at length I feel like, the guys that love the process of doing football every day. That shows up in how much you can improve from a day-to-day basis, then how much you love your teammates up, how you're able to connect with all the guys around you on a day-in, day-out basis, just operate the way we want to operate here.

That's one of the reasons we're so excited.

Q. Adding Grey to Anthony and Christian, guys that are all young, what do you think that's going to do to your group to push them forward?

MIKE MACDONALD: Yeah, huge layup question. Look, we're going to get reps here, maximize the time. These guys are going to have ample time to show what they can do.



You want to make decisions in a timely manner so you can gel the group together. We said that. We're really excited about the guys we have, as well. They're going to have ample opportunity to show what they can do. Really confident that it's going to be able to gel, really surprise people.

Q. If Booker was still there, is it still Grey over Booker? If so, why him over Booker?

JOHN SCHNEIDER: I'd rather not talk about Booker, okay? But he was the number one superior offensive lineman. Grey, he's an athlete. Again, he just checked all the boxes. Book is going to be a great player, too.

Q. What kind of opportunity tomorrow is it to pick four guys or...

JOHN SCHNEIDER: If we can find people that want to move around. Pretty quiet tonight.

No, it's going to be great. We feel like we're going to be able to impact our team with our kind of guys, with respect to all the guys that are here right now, bringing in people that we'll be able to work with them, compete with them. Yeah, just continue down that path of competing every day and adding as much depth as you possibly can.

Q. John, you guys have spent a lot of capital in free agency and defense over the last years. Offensive line, now two first round picks, potentially two third round picks. How do you feel about the capital you're putting into the offensive side of the ball?

JOHN SCHNEIDER: I mean, it's not necessarily... It's not something you go into saying...

We're always trying to add the best players we possibly can, regardless of position. Obviously there's positional importance. We don't go into this thing saying we're not going to spend money here, not going to draft here.

We're constantly taking the best players at the best spots and making the right decisions for the organization, whether you're spending money or spending capital.

I would say with Christian, Bradford, Taulia, adding Grey to that group, Jalen, Olu, pretty cool group.

Like I said before, (indiscernible) and Rico and Kube, they're excited about the guy. When they got history, they really liked him. They liked the evaluation going through the beginning of the draft process, through the combine. When free agency started, there's a couple guys we were

interested in.

We also knew how we weigh this in terms of what we can do in the draft and/or players that are going to be (indiscernible).

Q. When you're evaluating players like Grey that have come from growing up on a farm, understanding the work ethic...

JOHN SCHNEIDER: You've been talking to Trent Kirchner.

Q. From that perspective, how much does that go into play when you're thinking about the mindset of the type of players you want to bring in? Does his stand out more compared to others because of that?

JOHN SCHNEIDER: I mean, I'm biased. I'm from Wisconsin. So farms, tough guys. We like those guys.

MIKE MACDONALD: The farm is like one of those prerequisite boxes that you have to check (smiling).

JOHN SCHNEIDER: Especially on a Trent Kirchner report (smiling).

Q. Playing so much tackle, how much was the Senior Bowl that clinched it for you?

JOHN SCHNEIDER: Just seeing him compete against all the guys that were down there.

Sorry, Mike.

MIKE MACDONALD: There were guys playing tackle this year that you project. At guard Taulia was one of those guys last year. Anytime you see it, it's only going to help you.

Q. You said this was your number one interior offensive linemen. Were there other (indiscernible)?

JOHN SCHNEIDER: I mean, our grading scale is based off of our team, not the National Football League. Those grades hook up, need and value. That's where he stood out.

Yeah, there are some good players up there. That happens every year, right? You pick somebody and you're kind of like... Especially you watch these guys go, it's like watching people take food off the table. You're watching it go away. Okay, all right.

Feel bad for the scouts because there's so much time put

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into it on every player. Especially Saturday, the names just kind of rip off. These guys spend so much time getting to know the player, the person, the families, the coaches, all that.

Q. (No microphone.)

JOHN SCHNEIDER: What went into the decision?

Q. (No microphone.)

JOHN SCHNEIDER: I'll keep that in-house. How we feel about the position? We like the position. We'll be looking to add there as we go this weekend or further into the spring.

We usually don't comment on why we let guys go. But Cam is a great guy, really good person.

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