

New York Giants Media Conference

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Kayvon Thibodeaux

Evan Neal

Draft Press Conference



Q. I'm sure from a young age you were thinking about holding up a jersey of an NFL team. What did it mean to be up there doing that and also having some family members here?

EVAN NEAL: It means the world. That's something that you grew up dreaming about, idolizing about, and for that to happen, it's a blessing and just a testament to all the hard work that it took to get here. So I'm just thankful.

KAYVON THIBODEAUX: And to build on what Evan said, it's just a blessing. Your family puts in so much to get you here. Seeing your mom, your family, all the sacrifices that they made, and now to be able to rejoice with them and really celebrate this moment.

Q. What have these few days been like for you guys? Sounds like you've been enjoying it.

EVAN NEAL: Yeah, these few days, they have been awesome. They have been long (chuckles) but they have been awesome. Everything that I dreamed it would be and everything that I expected it would be.

KAYVON THIBODEAUX: I would say the music has just been hitting differently. So that's why my voice is gone because I've been singing along and singing my heart out. But just enjoying it. Like I said, trying to be in the moment.

Q. What did you think when you flew in this morning and saw New York and the skyline?

KAYVON THIBODEAUX: For me it's actually crazy that you talk about it because New York is a place that I've traveled in the past year, maybe in the past two years, I've been to New York more times than any other place. And it's so random. It was just so random. But touching down it was like, you know, it's meant to be.

Q. Kayvon, there's been so much talk about your

brand. What does that mean to you? What are your off-field aspirations?

KAYVON THIBODEAUX: It's just so crazy, so when they handed me the playbook, it was in iPad form. And me, I learn best writing. So for me, it was like the brand went out the window, right. The only thing I can think of now is the playbook and really get into it and dive into it and make sure that I know everything that I can going into training camp.

Q. Wink is known for edge rushing, zone technique. Giants run multiple schemes. How do you feel getting bumped down to three or five tech?

KAYVON THIBODEAUX: I love it. I feel like that's a testament to the versatility I'm going to have and I'll continue to be able to work, and then I'll always be sharpening my tools, so I'll never go dull because Coach will be moving me around. I'll know a lot of the defense.

Q. How much football have you really talked about already with Coach Daboll and where do you see yourself already contributing to the team?

EVAN NEAL: Yeah, I talked a good amount with Coach Daboll and the O-line coach. Got on Zoom a couple times and installed the playbook, and it's crazy that Coach Daboll was also a coach at Alabama. So a lot of like scheme things and concepts kind of aren't foreign to me. I've seen them before, so it's going to be a real help coming in and trying on the playbook for sure.

KAYVON THIBODEAUX: For me I was able to chat it up with Coach Wink and just seeing everything they did with the Ravens and their time, it was unbelievable. So just being able to see the guys who did great things, and then envision myself and all the great things that he has that I'll be able to learn and grow.

Q. How familiar are you with the history of pass rushers that the Giants have had? I know you know Michael Strahan but beyond that, they have a history of great guys here.



KAYVON THIBODEAUX: I'm not -- I would say that's really the only thing I'm ignorant to is when it comes to my football history. So I will be picking it up. I was just telling Dion in the back, I have to do some research before I get in front of all these cameras.

Q. At the Super Bowl you were at a party and you said back then you thought the Giants were going to take you. Why did you think that so far ahead of draft?

KAYVON THIBODEAUX: You guys won't believe this, all right, but I'm a big believer in God. And it's a testament to it, so I got a tattoo, and the tattoo is five stripes. It's tally bars; one, two, three, four and five on the cross, and when I got it was because I had five friends that I knew I was going to become successful with.

But when I really thought about it was more the five of us so I didn't really have a purpose. But this was three years ago. And now I've been picked, selected as the fifth pick in the NFL Draft, the New York Giants. So to me it's just a testament of God and everything and the legacy that He bestowed me with just fell in line.

Q. We already learned that Graham Gano is a tough negotiator, he has No. 5 here. Where do stand on that and the number and wanting to wear it? Have you talked to him?

KAYVON THIBODEAUX: It's funny, you guys just know, this is real now, we're talking real numbers. And I haven't even thought, when you say -- when you tell somebody 250, I don't know what 250 means. You forget all the zeros behind it (Laughter) things are a lot different now.

But yeah he's a great guy and we obviously are going to build a relationship, and I'm going to be able to really get into it and we're going to talk about it.

Q. But you would like to wear that --

KAYVON THIBODEAUX: That is something -- that is something I'm pursuing. Obviously he's a vet and he's put the work in, and he's got five kids, so you know there's a whole lot of negotiating that's going to have to happen before anything shakes.

Q. How does 55 sound?

KAYVON THIBODEAUX: It doesn't sound as good as 5, but hey, the number don't make the player. The player make the number.

Q. Strahan, how did you get connected with him?

KAYVON THIBODEAUX: I have some good people at Oregon who already has envisioned me being like him one day and how big he's become. So we've had mutual friends through Oregon and the people there and they connected us. I was able to get on Zoom with them, chop it up with them. I think this was when I was still in school.

So I would say last year, probably fall camp, actually, was when I first had the first Zoom with him and then I got to meet him. Now, actually seeing him and really talking to him and building that relationship has been dope.

Q. What did he tell you about playing here? What did he tell you about playing well here and what that can do?

KAYVON THIBODEAUX: Just to keep the main thing the main thing and that's kind of been the focus of all that. Football is going to be that avenue. Football is going to be that terminal for everything you want to do after, so long as you keep the main thing the main thing.

He also shed light into the idea that people thought the same thing about him. Like, man, you must have had this planned out. But for him, he shared with me that it took him being great to really cultivate everything he did off the field. It kind of just fell into place.

Q. What would be more important to you: To have Strahan's football career or Strahan he's post-football career?

KAYVON THIBODEAUX: I mean, he's -- they are both -- they are both ridiculous, but for me I feel like I kind of want to pave my own way. You know, he's done the great things. He's done because the work he's put in. So I got to go put the work in myself and build that legacy for myself.

Q. Do either one of you guys, this entire pre-draft process, you're training for the Combine and doing everything like that is there any type of relief where you feel like you know what, I've got to do my football stuff now and I've got to get back to being a football player rather than training for a Combine and numbers?

EVAN NEAL: Right, the uncertainty of the pre-draft process is all over now and now I can really just get back to the main thing which is football. So it's a really good feeling for sure to be able to come in and work as hard as I can and just help the team for sure. It's definitely a great feeling.

KAYVON THIBODEAUX: I was just going to agree with



what he's saying, like, damn, we're ready. Just being competitors, it's hard; it's not fun competing with the clock. But when you compete with somebody next to you with a heart and a brain just like you, it's a whole lot of fun.

Q. When it came to like the top tackles in this draft, how much did it matter to you, or was that your goal, to be the first one drafted? I know it didn't -- the way it worked out --

EVAN NEAL: My goal was just to be drafted, man. That's what I've been playing football my entire life for. So I'm just thankful that the Giants organization gave me an opportunity to do that. I'm definitely going to make the most of it.

Q. We usually see you very quiet, reserved. Your high school coach told us about a video you sent them earlier, I guess last season, to hype up the team for a game.

EVAN NEAL: Yeah, that was Evan in his football mode. I had turned the switch on, just fired the guards up for sure. It was a pretty special moment for them. I forget what team they were going to play. But I'm thankful I got the opportunity to share a little bit of wisdom and just help motivate those guys going into the game.

Q. How often does that personality come out?

EVAN NEAL: Every time I line up on the football field.

Q. When teams are interviewing you during this process, did you interview them, too, for yourself? And if you did, what did you learn about the Giants that you think makes this a good fit for you?

EVAN NEAL: Of course. You definitely want to ask questions going through this process and one thing I take away from the Giants organization is that they are really trying to get back to that winning culture, and that's something that I really respect.

So I'm just thankful and glad to be a part of it.

KAYVON THIBODEAUX: You know, when I come to it, I like to see how people think and see what's their train of thought.

So for me just coming in and seeing, like -- you know, I would ask different things, what's their perspective on the Draft, how do they think it's going to play out and what's their perspective on the upcoming season and changing, bring guys in.

But they really have it down to a T. And when you talk about men with a master plan, they have the master plan and now it's just about, you know, really, for us to buy into that culture and be a keeper of the culture.

Q. You guys talked about this the other night, but you came in together, you're two draft picks apart and you probably faced each other in practice. How much is that going to push each of you during the course of your careers?

EVAN NEAL: I believe it's going to push us tremendously. I believe in iron sharpens iron. So what better place to get better than the New York Giants. So I'm just excited to go out there and just compete, compete my hardest, man and hopefully we make each other better.

Q. We saw a video of you two guys in high school going against each other. What do you guys remember of that?

EVAN NEAL: Yeah, yeah.

KAYVON THIBODEAUX: I think it speaks volume to the competitiveness. It speaks volume to wanting to be better. For me, him, every time we came to a camp, we knew it was like, okay, you know how they going to set us up, you know. But it was that, like, okay, he's the best; I'm the best. Now let's get better, you know what I mean. Like really, let's prove to ourselves on why we got this far.

Q. How ironic that you two are here, considering they matched you up every time you showed up and now you're here?

KAYVON THIBODEAUX: It's not ironic.

EVAN NEAL: Yeah, crazy.

KAYVON THIBODEAUX: It's not ironic, though. It's God. I'm telling you, it's God. It's God.

Q. Wink is known for loving the blitz and being really aggressive on defense. How exciting is it for you going into a defense like that?

KAYVON THIBODEAUX: Wink is going to look out for me. Going against him (Evan) I'm going to need a couple blitzes and some extra people to throw him off so I can get them extra wins. I think that's the greatest part.

Yeah, Wink has just been, his mindset, the scheme, like football field is mental. So just him being able to give those different looks, put guys in different positions and keep the offense honest, I think that's really going to be, you know,

beneficial for me and obviously for the guys in the locker room.

Q. Does a rookie have to come in and be humble?

KAYVON THIBODEAUX: I feel like a rookie got to come in and grind and everything is about what you do. I feel like one thing with me, you can't be a guy who blows smoke. I can't be a guy with nothing to show for it. I can't be a guy who people look at and don't believe in, right.

So for me, no matter what I say, I know I got to go put in the work.

Q. I read you were 390 pounds in high school. How did you manage your weight to get it to where it is and what is it now?

EVAN NEAL: To be honest with you, Bro, I've always been just a really big guy. In the eighth grade, I weighed in at 378 pounds but always carried my weight well. I can move, whenever we would run, I would always be in the front of the pack with the O-Line. It was really important to me to not allow no one else to outwork me.

So yeah, I just come from a really big, athletic family. And going into college I knew I was going to have to shed some weight, but it wasn't like, I didn't look at my weight as like a project or anything like that. I just had to trim a lot of that baby fat off. Whenever I came in here, weight in here, think I weighed in at 340, 342. Last year I played around the 340, 345 range.

Q. Do you good in that 340-ish range?

EVAN NEAL: I feel good at that for sure.

Q. Back at the Combine when you had your press conference with us, you revealed the Giants gave you a hard time in that meeting. When you left that meeting, did you feel like you won them or did you feel like there was something left?

KAYVON THIBODEAUX: There was definitely still something left. The job is never finished. Obviously at that time that was kind of our like first initial meeting with everybody but for me, and I feel like even Joe has this and Wink has this, they all know it, but you can't fake it. You can't fake it, you know.

So for me, I felt the energy in the room and I knew, when someone is willing to give you -- and that's me -- and that's how I know because I'm that guy, I'm going to give him a hard time every day. Every day we come in, I'm going to give him a hard time but it's because I know how great he

can be and I know how great the guys around me can be. I think that's a testament to brotherhood and that's a test amount to love.

Q. Have you talked to Azeez?

KAYVON THIBODEAUX: He did just reach out. I just got here. I landed this morning but I'll definitely be in touch with him later on today.

Q. Did Michael give you any advice on how many sacks to guarantee your first year?

KAYVON THIBODEAUX: I know one thing I do got to guarantee is that I'm going to know that playbook before training camp starts.

Q. Have you talked to Andrew Thomas at all?

EVAN NEAL: I haven't. Today is my first day here. But I'm sure I'll see him around and get a feel for him.

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