

New York Giants Media Conference

Monday, March 25, 2024

New York, New York, USA

John Mara

Press Conference

Q. Just in terms of coming off of the season, it's been a while, but in terms of where you guys are headed and we know last year you felt you were headed in the right direction, what's your pulse as to where things are, and are you happy with the front office and the coaching staff?

JOHN MARA: Yeah, certainly last season was a huge disappointment to me, especially coming off of a playoff year. I still believe we're headed in the right direction, and I have all the confidence in the world in Joe and his staff and in Brian Daboll and his staff.

I think the communication is terrific. I think the process they go through is great, and I do think we're headed in the right direction. Obviously until we start winning games not everyone is going to buy into that, but I happen to believe it.

Q. Regarding Brian, do you think he needs to change or reassess how he comports himself on the sideline, interacting with his coaches, his demeanor, and his tone?

JOHN MARA: There are times where I wish he would tone it down a little bit, but I'm also in the team meetings, and I see how he acts around people and his coaches in the office. He always maintains his cool there.

Does he get excitable during the games? Yeah, so do I. I don't think it's a major issue.

Q. Where were the issues within the coaching staff last season, and what is your reaction to it?

JOHN MARA: I was surprised when that came out because, again, I'm there every day, as you guys know, and I'm in the team meetings. I think it was over-blown in terms of the relationship that he had with Wink during the season.

I mean, were there some times they had some



disagreements, yeah, but not to the point where it became an issue. After the season did it blow up? Absolutely, it did, as you know, but I never felt like it was a big issue during the season at all.

Q. The way that ended, was that not good for the image of the franchise?

JOHN MARA: Well, I wish it would have ended differently. I happen to like Wink. I think he did a real good job for us. I was hoping he would be back this season, but he made the decision he did. I respect him for it, and we move on.

Q. It wasn't just Wink, though, or his guys that came with him. There was other coaches who also weren't exactly ecstatic with everything that kind of went down and the way he kind of handled himself. How much does that concern you, and how much did you realize that?

JOHN MARA: He wanted to make some -- he being Brian Daboll -- wanted to make changes with certain members of the staff at the end of the season. I always believe that you let the head coach pick his own staff. Obviously, you don't want to have as much turnover as we had, but he wanted to make some changes. So we let him go ahead and do that.

I wish it would have been a little less public, but I don't believe it was a major issue. I don't believe it affects the culture that we have in the building at all.

Q. How much do you blame do you think he deserves, Brian, with what happened with Martindale and the coaching staff ultimately?

JOHN MARA: We were 6-11, so nobody was happy with that. I still very firmly believe that Brian is the right guy for us going forward. He and Wink had his differences. It really didn't become obvious to a lot of us until after the season was over.

So I don't think it had much of an affect, if any, during the season. I saw how they communicated on the field, in the meeting room, and they were fine for the most part.



You know, when you are going through a losing season too, there's always going to be disagreements among coaches. I've been around a long time, and you see that. If there's not when you are losing games like that, well, then something is really wrong with what's going on.

I never saw them have any major disagreements during the course of the season. Obviously it blew up after the season was over, and sorry it happened that way, but we all move on.

Q. Shane monitored kind of the situation and the game management for about four weeks there. It seemed like he was aware that something needed to be --

JOHN MARA: No, I think that started, if I'm not mistaken -- you'll have to ask Joe that, but the view you get, as you know, in Washington from that press box is so big. You can't see anything. I think he wanted a better view of the game.

He kind of wanted to see what was going on during the game, see what the communication was like, and he did that. I think he did it for a few games after that and then stopped. You'll have to ask him about that because I didn't consider that to be a big deal at all.

Q. Have you or do you plan to speak to Brian about things you want him to change, whether it is sometimes his behavior on the sideline, with the staff, or is it that's who he is, you kind of have to let him be?

JOHN MARA: I speak to him all the time. I want him to be himself at the end of the day. If I ever get to a point where I think he's acting irrationally and it's affecting his performance, I certainly would have a word with him about it, but I have not seen that.

Q. So you expressed a lot of confidence in this regime. Do you have to give them assurances, because it can dictate how they build their roster. Do you say, Joe, you're going to be here for X amount of years? Did you do that at the start of the season?

JOHN MARA: I think you always have to give them positive reinforcement, and I think I have done that. Have I made them any guarantees? No, I haven't, but I think they both know that I believe in them.

Q. So if this season looks like last season, can we be talking about different people at this time next year because it's kind of like is this a rebuild, or how do you view this in terms of a (indiscernible)?

JOHN MARA: I view them as we're trying to build a team and we're trying to make progress over the year. It's not always going to be a straight line of going up. Obviously we took a step back last year, but I have every confidence that they're on the right track with that.

I don't give them any mandates. You have so many games. I say the same thing every year. At the end of the year I want to feel like we're moving in the right direction. We had a couple of things happen during the year. We're building something here, and I want to feel that way when I walk off the field the last game of the season.

Q. Would you be okay with them drafting a quarterback after you made that investment in Daniel a year ago?

JOHN MARA: If they fall in love with a quarterback and believe that it's worth pick No. 6 and we're moving up, I certainly would support that.

I let the general manager and the head coach build the roster. We have operated the same way for many years here. If they have a conviction about a player, I'm not going to get involved.

I'll question them about it, make them defend their position, but the only time I'm going to get involved and exert any influence is if I think it's a conduct issue off the field. That's happened not with this group, but in the past on very rare occasions.

In terms of them evaluating the players, if they have a conviction about a player and want to draft one, want to get one in free agency, then all I want to make sure is that they're both on the same page.

Q. There's obviously a huge difference because there's a huge financial factor with Daniel being involved there. If you do draft a quarterback, how much does that play into it for you?

JOHN MARA: I don't think it has any affect if they have a conviction on a quarterback and they fall in love with a quarterback, I'm certainly not going to stand in the way of them.

Q. You signed off on the deal for Daniel obviously to have the big contract. This regime analyzed him for a year and said, We want to invest 160 in him, per se. How is that analysis in your mind, and do you trust them to now maybe pick another quarterback? Do you regret that this whole thing with Daniel was \$160 million?

JOHN MARA: No. I know a lot of you killed Daniel for his performance this year, but we had the perfect storm this year. Everything that could have gone wrong went wrong.

Guys got hurt. The wrong guys got hurt. Let's face it, for a while we couldn't block anybody, and Daniel was getting hit all the time. I still have every confidence in the world that Daniel. Let's put a better team around him. Hopefully he'll get healthy, and I think the real Daniel Jones is the one that played in 2022, particularly down the stretch in the playoffs.

Q. If you draft a quarterback, you are essentially are giving up on him?

JOHN MARA: I don't think so. Why not let them both compete and let the better man win?

Q. Has that been a discussion so far about drafting a quarterback?

JOHN MARA: I know they're looking at the quarterbacks, yeah. You've seen that. They've gone to some of the pro days. We've had a couple of those guys in. I don't think they've made -- they're even close to making a final determination yet as to which way we're going to go on that, and those discussions will happen over the next few weeks.

Q. As you go through this process, do you reflect at all on it was 20 years ago you had a quarterback that had won some playoff games, brought to you a Super Bowl, and you fell in love with somebody else in the draft and had to move on. Do you think about that at all?

JOHN MARA: Oh, sure, you do. Listen, everybody in the building wants Daniel to succeed, but you can never let that get in the way of if you make a judgment that there are people coming out in the draft that have a chance to be really good franchise type players.

We had that discussion I remember very well back in 2004. My father was a huge Kerry Collins fan. We all were at the time. He was reluctant to pull the trigger on such a big trade for Eli Manning at the time.

The feeling that, of course, he had, that Tom Coughlin had, that a lot of people had was, hey, we have a chance to get a long-term franchise quarterback here who can help us win Super Bowls. So we went and pulled the trigger on him.

Q. Is there also a lesson there that if the guy you like

is at the top, go get him?

JOHN MARA: I think that's always going to be the case if you have a chance to do that, depending on what the price is and everything.

I don't want that to be interpreted as, oh, we don't have confidence in Daniel. We do have confidence in Daniel, but if you have a chance to bring in another quarterback and the head coach and the general manager have a conviction about him, then you go ahead and do it.

Q. How hard was it for you to see Saquon leave?

JOHN MARA: It was tough. It really was. Everything he did for us on the field, off the field, he was a class act in every respect. I hated to see him leave. I certainly hated to see him go in the division.

On a more personal note, I have 14 grandchildren who have a 26 jersey, and it was tough breaking the news to them too. Saquon was everything you want a player to be. I hated to see him leave.

Q. Going with that, was it a tougher pill to swallow that he did sign with the Eagles?

JOHN MARA: Yeah, I think so. Let's be honest, I would have preferred if it was out of the division, but I have enormous respect for him.

The people that are criticizing him for doing that to me are way off base. These guys, their careers are so short. I understand you've got to take the best deal that's out there. That's what he did.

I mean, he grew up in the Pennsylvania area, so I don't begrudge him that. I'm not looking forward to having to play against him twice in a year, but I'll always have enormous respect and appreciation for everything he did for us.

Q. There was talk last year, at least from Saquon and his team, that they almost hoped without saying it directly that you would get involved because of the popularity that he has in the franchise. Did you have to hold back a little bit and let the process play out? Did you get involved at all? What was your role in this whole thing?

JOHN MARA: I certainly was aware of what was going on. We had made a pretty good offer to him a year ago and then at some point during the season as well, but at the end of the day the feeling was that our resources needed to be allocated elsewhere.

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

Whether that ends up being the right decision or not remains to be seen, but was I hoping that he would be back? Absolutely, I was.

Q. What's your take on the tampering aspect of that that's out there?

JOHN MARA: You'll have to ask the league about that one. We're staying out of that one. That interview came out with James Franklin, and the league I guess is investigating it, but I've not had any involvement in that.

Q. On the field what are the signs of progress to you that this team is headed in the right direction?

JOHN MARA: It starts with winning more games.

Q. I mean what you saw on the field last season. When you say at the end of every year you want to feel like you see some of the signs, what signs do you see on the field for your team right now?

JOHN MARA: I think primarily the fact that the players continue to play hard for him. I see that in practice. You can tell. That's one of the reasons I go to practice every day. You can kind of tell when players are tuning out a coach, and that's not the case at all.

These players I think believe in Brian. I think that's reflected in the survey that the Players Association did also. I think you have to understand that there are times where you have injuries, where other factors come into play. At the end of the day if the players are still playing hard for him, I think that goes a long way towards telling you that he's the right coach.

Q. You talk about a reallocation of resources. When did they come to you and say, Hey, we need to do this, we're going to have to move on from Saquon, this is the plan that...

JOHN MARA: It was kind of an ongoing discussion through the year that it could come to this. They knew my feelings that I was hoping it didn't come to this, but again, at the end of the day I know sometimes every once in a while I read that, Oh, he's meddling, he's meddling.

No, we've run our organization the same way for many, many years. If the head coach and general manager have a conviction about a player or a group of players, I'm going to let them go ahead and make those decisions. That's what I pay them for.

They ask my opinion, I'm certainly going to give them my

opinion, and Joe knew that I wasn't going to be thrilled with him going within the division, but at the end of the day the opportunity to acquire other players, Brian Burns being one of them, that was the direction they wanted to go in, and so I'll support that.

Q. Were you disappointed that you didn't trade him this past season?

JOHN MARA: No, because I hate trading guys right at the trade deadline because it almost signals that you are giving up on the season. Saquon, I was still hoping to be able to sign, so I don't regret that.

It's unfortunate we weren't able to do it, but from his standpoint at least we allowed him to pick where he wanted to go, and I think we owed him that to tell you the truth rather than just trading him somewhere maybe he wouldn't want to go.

Q. A lot has been made. Obviously you made a commitment to change the field surface at MetLife last year. Now with the World Cup coming and there's all the talk from the players about natural surfaces, where do you stand on that for yourself and for the team?

JOHN MARA: I have to say that's a discussion we have all the time, and I want to get to the point where the experts can tell us that late in the season we can have a safe playable grass field. When we get to that point, then maybe we'll make the switch. We're not there yet.

With the amount of events in our building, particularly during the football season, having two teams there, and how many times last year where we had back-to-back games where it rained during the first game. I can't imagine what a grass field would look like on that second day.

The other thing about that is we just went over this again this morning. The injury data this year, there's virtually no difference in lower leg injuries between grass and turf. That's a fact.

In fact, last year there were twice as many ACLs on grass as there was on turf. Now, it's one year's worth of data, and this is research that is done and statistics that are kept in conjunction with the Players Association. There's no mystery about this. Those are the facts.

Players prefer playing on grass, no question about it. I would like to get there someday. We're not there yet.

Q. So are you going to put a grass field in just for the tournament?



JOHN MARA: Yeah, it will be put in. Soccer players will not play on anything else. That type of grass is not fit for football. It's a completely different type of surface. They're more concerned with how the ball bounces as opposed to anything else.

Yeah, it will be a temporary grass field that will go down, and that's great in June and July and stuff like that. No matter how many times you change it out -- we tried this back in I guess it was '99 to 2001. It was not a pretty sight in December and January. Again, I think we can get there someday. I just am not satisfied with the data yet.

Q. Other changes will be made to the stadium, though?

JOHN MARA: There are some changes, yeah. We're talking about some pretty significant renovations at some point, but our plans are not finalized on that yet. They have to take out some seats in the lower level, and we're going to fit the field in, and we'll have to put in temporary seats.

Q. You're talking about in the corners?

JOHN MARA: Yes.

Q. Then you are going to put them back in for football?

JOHN MARA: Yes, yes.

Q. Back to your confidence in Joe and Brian, you've had coaches on different timelines at the same time. Do you view them as a package deal? Could you see a situation where one will outlast the other?

JOHN MARA: I don't see them as a package deal. They did come in together obviously and did work together, but they both have different jobs, different responsibilities, and could have different levels of success. I still have all the confidence in the world in both of them.

Q. One thing you mentioned when Brian was hired, you talked about the continuity that Daniel did not have early in his career with a lot of changes that you guys made, and you felt like you didn't give him a fair chance. If you do draft a quarterback, how much will that impact giving your quarterback-focused head coach a chance to work with that guy and not pull the plug after...

JOHN MARA: Even if we draft somebody, I expect Daniel to be the starting quarterback when the season starts.

He'll still get all the reps in the world. I'm assuming he is healthy, which we think he'll be ready for training camp. So I don't see that being a factor.

Q. You mentioned the inaccurate perception that you meddle. Last year when you guys paid Daniel, how much did your involvement lead to that significant of a contract, or do you think even if you remove yourself completely that, Joe still invests in that contract?

JOHN MARA: That was getting done with or without me, Pat. I spoke to Daniel a couple of times just to assure him that we wanted him here and wanted to get the deal done, but that was getting done with or without me.

Q. Did you talk to Saquon at all during --

JOHN MARA: We texted each other right after -- pretty quickly after the signing period started. I told him I was sick about losing him and everything and told him he was a class -- it was a very nice exchange we had. We'll always have a good relationship.

Same with Xavier McKinney. I texted him. He called me right away. I had a good conversation with him.

That's the unfortunate part of the business. You lose guys that you really like and who are really good players, but players come and go, and you have very few chances to have a Michael Strahan and Eli Manning. It just doesn't happen that often in this business.

Q. Is it any different for you -- you mentioned about the grandkids and the jerseys. I remember you saying the same thing about Odell when you guys traded him. Is it any different knowing that you as an organization made the decision to trade Odell, but here Saquon ultimately made the decision to leave?

JOHN MARA: I'm not sure there's any difference with that. You hate to see guys that you have grown close with go to other teams, but that's just the nature of the league.

Q. You brought up the idea of not blocking well. You mentioned that and how the season did go. What do you make of the investments that you made?

JOHN MARA: That was certainly a priority going into this offseason was to get the offensive line fixed. I mean, you can't win in this league unless you have a good productive, consistent offensive line. It's what we had years ago when we were winning, and we have to get back to that.

I think we have the right pieces in there now. We have a new offensive line coach. We'll see. Life in football starts

on the offensive line. If you can't block them, you're not going to win.

Q. That's been a theme for over a decade really here. Some people say it's ridiculous, it's inexcusable. It seems like every year somebody is saying, We need to fix this, we need to fix this. Should it have been fixed, and do you think it is fixed?

JOHN MARA: You're right it's ridiculous, and it's a continuing source of frustration for me. It's time to get it fixed.

We've invested in a couple of No. 1 draft picks on offensive tackles. We have a No. 2 draft pick playing at center, and now we have spent some money in free agency. We have a new offensive line coach. I expect us to be a hell of a lot better this year.

Q. That No. 6 in the draft, the mandate is offensive line, is that correct?

JOHN MARA: Take the best player available.

Q. Regarding your confidence in Brian Daboll, what level of concern do you have that you have an offensive head coach, but had the offense you had last season? Do you feel like that's an anomaly or going to be an anomaly ultimately?

JOHN MARA: I think we didn't have enough talent on offense, and the talent a lot of times got hurt. Losing both of our tackles at some point in time. Saquon was hurt for a brief period. Some of the receivers were hurt.

In particular on the offensive line, we were hurting there, and that affected everything. The quarterback gets hurt. The second quarterback gets hurt. It's hard to have a lot of success when that happens.

Q. Your big investment then this offseason -- biggest went to the other side. When did that kind of come to your desk, and what did you make of that? It's obviously a really big contract.

Q. The opportunity, I guess, was presented to Joe that maybe Carolina would be looking to move Burns and the opportunity to get that caliber of a pass rusher and put them on one side with Kayvon on the other was very appealing to us. Is it a lot of money? Yes, it is.

I go back to when we were winning. We had all those pass rushers, and they're pretty tough to defend, pretty tough to block. So Burns is 26 years old so, to me was a pretty appealing investment to me.

Q. Was that right at the beginning of the free agent period? Was it weeks before? How did that sort of play out for you?

JOHN MARA: You'll have to ask Joe when those conversations started, but I remember talking to him right as the free agency period started.

Q. You mentioned the idea of doing the homework on the draftable quarterbacks for this year. For you how involved are you on those processes? When guys come in the building, are you a part of the interviews?

JOHN MARA: I meet them. I'm not necessarily going to sit down with them at any great length. If it gets to the point where they are starting to zero in on somebody, I might at some point want to spend some time with them, but it's not necessarily a prerequisite.

Q. Do you think the New York quarterback, thing, just like the Simms, the Manning, is that a different position in your mind? You're not going to probably meet with a cornerback that you'll take, but is the whole quarterback thing something that it all has to fit in a lot of different ways?

JOHN MARA: I think so. I think you have to have a certain kind of makeup to be a successful quarterback in New York obviously. Eli obviously had it. I think Daniel has it. I don't think it's for everybody.

Q. Why do you think Daniel has it?

JOHN MARA: Just his demeanor, his toughness, his mental toughness. I think the way he deals with the media, the way he conducts himself. That's everything that you want.

Q. Did you figure that out during the draft process with Daniel, or when did you uncover that?

JOHN MARA: During the draft process. That was one of the things that Dave Gettleman at the time said, This guy has the right to be here for us and for -- being a successful quarterback in the New York area. That was a big part of his evaluation at the time, and our scouts agreed with that as well.

Q. I know it's kind of still early, but have they told you that about any other quarterback in this class?

JOHN MARA: Really good. Good question. Haven't gotten to that level of discussion with them about that yet.

Q. When you said you expect Daniel to be the starter when he gets healthy, are you saying definitively he will be when he is healthy?

JOHN MARA: That's up to Brian Daboll, Pat. Is it my expectation that he would be the starter? Is it my best guess that he'll be the starter, yes. Yeah.

Q. What do you make of the quarterback class this year, the draft class?

JOHN MARA: They tell me it's the most talented group to come out in years. We'll see. I've seen a number of them play. They're all impressive.

Q. Is there any regret about -- I know you always want to win, but you guys were 2-8, and you are trying to get maybe the No. 1 pick in Caleb Williams. You talk about the guy at the top of the quarterback class. Any regret about the wins that dropped you down?

JOHN MARA: If you think I didn't want to beat Philadelphia the last game of the season after the history we've had against them, you're crazy. There was no regret about that at all. I never want to feel that way where you are hoping to lose.

That's the wrong message to send to your locker room. The players to feel that, and I don't know how they respect you after that.

Q. Have you spent any time with J.J. McCarthy when he visited you guys?

JOHN MARA: I have not spent any time with him, no, not yet.

Q. Are you going to Germany this year?

JOHN MARA: They have not told us that. There was some speculation about that, but I thought they would say something at this meeting, but I have not heard that as of yet.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports