

Las Vegas Raiders Media Conference

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Josh McDaniels

Dave Ziegler

NFL Draft Press Conference



JOSH McDANIELS: We should start by saying thank you and how appreciative we are to the people that helped us in this process. The draft is always a huge undertaking, and there's so many months' worth of work that go into one selection, let alone the entire weekend.

But Dave and his staff, the scouts, everybody in the personnel department, the coaching staff, the contributions that they made, the people that were here before Dave and I got here, the people that came here after we were hired really banded together and I thought did a tremendous job of preparing us in a short time.

Your first draft is always a tough challenge and you're in kind of a crunch time frame. You're trying to change some things, terminology, changes systems on offense, defense and special teams. There's some inherent challenges that go along with that.

But I thought the attitude and the commitment and the effort that everybody put in was tremendous and representative of the kind of effort that we're looking for from everybody in the organization, and they did a great job of really putting that forward here in this draft cycle here.

DAVE ZIEGLER: Yeah, I concur with all of that. This was a good first run for us, and just like all first runs, there's things that you learn, too, and things that we'll go back. Like we do with every process, we'll go back and look at what went well, what areas we need to improve, and then come up with solutions to the areas that we need to improve.

I'm talking about the whole process that starts way back in the fall and that ends up -- that finishes up today. It was a good experience going through it with Josh. Obviously we've known each other for a long time, but it was a cool experience, too, to do it together, and we had fun, and we'll see where it goes from here?

Q. When you think of how the process started Wednesday, Thursday, when you look at the beginning and where you're at now, are you 100 percent satisfied with the plan you laid out? Were there some things that you had to tweak here and there? You obviously made some moves today. How do you feel after the fact based on the original game plan?

DAVE ZIEGLER: Yeah, I'd say based on the original game plan I feel like things went well, and at the same time feel like there's going to be things we want to improve on from a process standpoint and things that we'll tweak and things that we'll modify.

We haven't spoke about all those things yet. We'll kind of take some time to reflect on it for a few days and go back. But it was solid, and there will be things that we'll want to get better at at the same time.

JOSH McDANIELS: I think there's an element, too, of you stick to your process, and Dave has laid it out for us. We've done a good job of going back and forth discussing who the right people are to take and evaluating all those players, and really there's no right or wrong at this point. We took the players that we felt were the best players at that position when we were picking at that time in the draft, and now it's time to work and develop those people.

What we do from here on out will have a lot to do with how we look back on each selection and what we think of it moving forward.

Q. You guys double dipped at a couple different positions, I think three positions, defensive line, offensive line and running back. Is that just a matter of, you guys reiterate, best possible player at that spot in the draft, or is that indicative of needs at those spots?

DAVE ZIEGLER: I would say that's exactly how it played out. Those were the players that at that time we felt were the best available players, and so we took those players.

That's the philosophy that we talked about going in that we



wanted to stick to. That's what we did, and that's where we ended up at those spots.

Q. Is there discipline needed to sometimes adhere to that as strictly as you guys tried to adhere to it?

JOSH McDANIELS: I think once you make the decision to do that -- I think really it starts a long time prior to the draft beginning and understanding what it is your -- when you say that, what does it mean when we take the, quote-unquote, best player.

Each organization is going to evaluate these players differently, and we're not all going to have the same grades on the same players. We understand that.

We try to do the best we can of evaluating what the player would be for the Raiders. It doesn't really matter what they would be for any other team.

It's in our system, the way we saw the players, the way we scouted them, the way we evaluated them, the way we would use them. This is the grade that was on that player, and there is a lot of work that goes into each grade.

And so when you trust the work and then you get to the draft and you say, listen, the best thing to do for us is to add the best players we can. If you understand that from the beginning the process itself is kind of simplistic.

I'm not saying that there's not guys with the same grade and you have to make a choice, but when you really follow it and you say, listen, let's take the best players that we graded that we've thought all year long gave us the best opportunity to improve our football team.

That's what we tried to do each step of the way, and I think we're happy with -- look, every spot on our team is going to have competition. Whether we drafted somebody or didn't draft somebody, there's competition at every spot on the team. I don't care what the spot is.

That's what we've tried to do at each spot that we could, free agency, draft. We'll continue to try to do that. Dave and his staff are going to comb the college free agent thing. We're going to go into the summer and we're still going to try to do that. So that won't ever stop.

Q. In that same vein you said you picked players that are a good fit for this team, for this scheme. You've got four linemen that can all play the interior on the defense and the offense and a couple running backs who can all run between the tackles. Was that a theme that you saw coming in or did it play out that way?

DAVE ZIEGLER: I don't think it was a theme we saw coming in. That's just how it ended up working out. Those were the players that were available. Just like Josh said, everybody has certain types of players that you look for, right? Certain teams like a certain style of -- whether it be a certain style of running back, a certain style of offensive lineman, defensive lineman, corner, whatever it is.

Those are going to maybe drive in terms of what we like maybe versus what someone else values. But at the end of the day we didn't go in and set out a plan and say, hey, we're going to draft interior linemen and interior offensive linemen and power running backs.

That's how it kind of came together. Those were the players that were there. Those are the players that we felt fit the system, and then we selected them.

Q. When you take a kid like Zamir who's been through so much in his life and adversity, in your dealings with him does that show he can take the hardships of it's not easy to play in this league and a kid like that that can fight through things?

DAVE ZIEGLER: Well, I think that one thing that is an attractive trait is when you have people that have went through different transitions in life and have had to go through different adversities in life and have come out the other end and have succeeded, those are positive traits, whether that's people that we add to our staff or people that you add to our football team.

Because this business, right, there's a lot of adversity in this business. There's a lot of ups and downs when it comes to being a professional athlete or being a coach or just being the football business in itself.

If you've experienced some of those things and you've dealt with them in an appropriate way and your emotional intelligence -- you showed high emotional intelligence to be able to handle those things, I think those are indicators that you can handle the grinds and ups and downs that come with becoming a professional athlete or working in professional sports.

Q. You've been friends for a while anyway, both in football and off. How much fun was this to run a draft together? Or was there stress? Was there back and forth? How would you describe the past three days for the two of you?

JOSH McDANIELS: It was a lot of fun. There was one moment in particular that it was our first draft selection. I thought Dave was getting choked up on the phone when he was talking to Dillon. He was actually choking. He was

having a hard time -- he had something in his throat.

But we had a lot of fun. We've tried to do this, though, I would say every day as much as we can with one another and with the people that are in the building. I think people would tell you that that's kind of the atmosphere that we're trying to create here, and they do a great job of reciprocating it to us. We're not off limits for the fun.

But we've always enjoyed working together, and this was a new opportunity, a new challenge, a new event for us that we've never really experienced together in these positions. We've experienced it together, just not doing it this way.

I would say we enjoyed the process leading up to this draft. We enjoy the people that we've worked with hand in hand to put this together, and then we enjoyed the last three days.

I would say kind of -- these are special events regardless, and so for us to have an opportunity to share this is just one of hopefully many that we get to share together.

Q. With Neil Farrell and Matthew Bullard, feels like both of those guys took turns in the right direction this last year, whether their lights went on or they stepped up their level of play. How important is that in your process of ascending players that are still showing some ceiling along the way and are ascending in the right direction?

DAVE ZIEGLER: Yeah, it's an important quality that you want to see. You want to draft players that are improving. Everybody is developing. College players, pro players, things of that nature.

But obviously you want to see a college player comes in at 18, 19 years old and you ideally want to see a player that has gradually improved their body, improved their football intelligence, have improved as players and kind of have had this upward trajectory.

Having players that have done that, that's an attractive trait and you want to -- you want guys that you can develop and grow, and when they've shown that they've done that at the college level, you have an anticipation you're going to be able to continue to go down that path with them once you get them on your team.

Q. I'm guessing there's players you fall in love with during the process. Was that hard to keep in check the last few days, guys that maybe aren't the best fit but you think are going to be big time players going forward?

JOSH McDANIELS: There's a human element to the draft. We get to meet a lot of players and meet a lot of people going through this process, whether they came here, we saw them at the combine, we did some Zoom interviews with them, what have you.

There's guys that you really enjoy, and unfortunately there's hundreds and hundreds of people that you meet, and we drafted six.

There were a couple, ooh. Like when they get taken off the board at times where you're kind of like, maybe he'll be here, maybe he'll not.

But I think what you learn is to just -- you kind of -- each one of those things happens.

I've always looked at it where the process you go through for the draft, it doesn't end at the draft if the player goes to some other team, because players' careers a lot of times last six, eight, ten, twelve years, and we've had many players that we don't get to draft but then eventually we get to coach them.

The work that we put in, the relationships that you start to build during this process, they don't always end right here. You're going to see them, you're going to compete against them, and at some point or other you may cross paths again.

All is not lost, but yeah, there's definitely some feeling I would say for some guys for sure, whether that be a skill or a talent or just a sentimental aspect of it because of something that they've gone through, and you're pulling for them and cheering for them, and hope they do well.

Q. Was there maybe some pleasant surprise that Thayer was still there in the seventh round?

DAVE ZIEGLER: Yeah, I mean, I knew the offensive tackle position in itself is a position -- like the supply and demand of that position is -- it's tough. You look at it in free agency, and it's a tough position to play.

And again, there's just not a lot of human beings that have that size, length, athletic skill set to play tackle. And to have a tackle like Thayer that was there that played in the Big Ten for Ohio State and played against a lot of good talent and did a solid job in those match-ups, to have a tackle there that had I'd say that resume was an attractive thing.

Now, obviously he'll have to come in and show what he can do at the professional level. His college career is over. But again, seeing a tackle that we both had evaluated and

thought was obviously a good player was good to see.

Q. The fact that he was okay with moving to guard that last year even though sometimes that might -- from you guys' perspective not look as good because you're looking for a tackle, but what does that tell you about him, being able to just be okay with going to guard for his last year and that's the last --

DAVE ZIEGLER: Well, I think he did whatever was best for the team. I don't know the exact details of that situation, but we've talked about it before, and I know most teams do. You want to get your best five on the field and figure out a way to do that.

The fact that he had the flexibility and the unselfishness to do that, that's a positive trait.

Q. Between free agency and the draft, I think you guys have added more defensive linemen so far this off-season than any other position. Why was that such a high priority position group going into this off-season?

JOSH McDANIELS: We didn't have many on the roster to start with, so I think part of it was just where it was. Came in and Hank was an unrestricted free agent and Quinton was an unrestricted free agent. There was a lot of opportunity at that position.

So I think just the combination of when we came in, what the depth chart looked like initially, and then just trying to take a few swings here, whether it be free agency, and then it happened to happen that way in the draft.

Like I said, we're going to need some depth there in camp anyway. We are going to improve the competition at each position that we can, and I think we've put a group in there that'll do that now.

Q. Similar question on the running backs. You guys have a ton on the roster now. Was that an important thing to have going into training camp, have that depth at that position?

DAVE ZIEGLER: Well, I'd say running back is just a tough position in the league. Those guys take a pounding and it's a physical position. Being able to add young players there to compete, see if they can find a role, and again, it goes back to what was available and the best players that were available when it was our turn to pick.

Zamir was there and Britain was there, so we selected those players.

If it would have been different, if there was other players there, if it would have been two tight ends or two receivers that happened to be there who we thought were the best available at the time, we would have taken those players, too.

It was kind of a product of the way that the board fell. But again, you can never have enough good players at any one position. We've talked about it from the beginning, we want to build depth in competition. That's going to be a very important part of this program. It was an opportunity to take some swings and add two good players that happened to be at the running back position.

JOSH McDANIELS: Yeah, most camps we're going to have at minimum six and probably more likely seven at that position anyway. It just so happens that we're kind of at that number.

So we're working towards what we're going to eventually need anyhow, and each position is at a little bit of a different stage in terms of finalizing it. But the backs are one of many that we're going to have to figure out how to fill it out as we go towards training camp here.

Q. About the fifth year option guys, you said you weren't going to comment, but I was going to ask about the running backs and adding to with as many as you already had and Josh saying today that every position is a competition; does that mean that the running backs, it's up for grabs at this point and it's anybody's job as far as the No. 1?

DAVE ZIEGLER: I think what we look at when we evaluate every position -- again, is the way we look at all positions, there's different roles to be filled. You have sub-running backs; you have change-of-pace running backs; you have first- and second-down running backs.

There's going to be different roles to fill throughout that position group. You could look at defensive tackle, you're going to have guys that play in sub, guys that play in base; same thing at linebacker, so on and so forth.

There's different roles and there's going to be competition for those roles, so however that ends up kind of filling out it fills out.

We have a lot of talented players there, and so we always want everybody to compete. Everybody -- we want to have that mentality that they're competing for a spot and are motivated to compete for playing time and things of that nature, and running back will be no different.

Q. Before the draft you talked about the offensive line

being a developmental position. You noted the resume of Thayer has got; Parham also four year starter. How much did that play into the experience those guys have selecting them?

DAVE ZIEGLER: Yeah, well, I think when you have players that have a lot of experience there's a lot of tape to see. You can see that progression and you can see that development that we talked about. I wouldn't say it's like something like specifically that's like, okay, these guys have started this amount of time and that makes them more valuable, but what you do see oftentimes at the college level is guys get to move around and play different spots over their time the longer that they're there, because in college you're bringing different recruits in and you're trying to get the best five on the field.

So a guy ends up playing tackle for a certain amount of time, then he plays guard, then he plays center. Munford played tackle and played guard. I think the longer you're there what's naturally happening a lot of times in college is you're getting an opportunity to see players play at different spots, and again, we've talked about versatility at that position being important.

We were able to see that in those players, and again, that versatility is an important trait.

Q. Going back to Josh's opening comments, you guys jumped in here in January and had to meld together a bunch of different people and philosophies with no time to spare. How seamless was that process? Are you pleased with how that all kind of played out?

JOSH McDANIELS: I mean, it wasn't seamless in terms of just getting everything the way that you want it, but I would say that the part that was seamless for us was I'd say the effort and the attitude that everybody had coming in here every day trying to get it right.

That's all we can ask of anybody, of ourselves, of each other. So I think we're very pleased with kind of the direction we're headed in in that regard.

Now like Dave said, it's going to take us a little time to reflect, take some time to think about each step of the way, and then take those ideas and thoughts together and try to figure out, all right, what can we do next here -- we've already talked about a few things today in the draft room, just minute things, but it's part of the process in terms of trying to improve our process as we go into the draft season next year.

We're going to try to do that every step of the way, and phase 2 will be the next phase, and we'll do the same thing

when we finish phase 2.

Q. Going back to Zamir, what excites you about him as a prospect?

JOSH McDANIELS: He's played against a real high level of competition. He's a physical, tough, downhill runner. He's got burst and speed. He'll be physical in blitz pickup. They didn't throw him the ball a ton, but he's got adequate ability in the passing game.

But just a tough kid who as Dave already mentioned overcame some adversity. Has really made a tremendous career for himself at Georgia, overcoming what he had to overcome.

He's going to bring some skills into that running back room and I know he's going to compete his butt off and try to earn whatever role he can.

But I also know he's an unselfish kid with a great attitude and loves football, and whatever we ask him to do, I'm sure he's going to do it with a great mindset and great work ethic. Looking forward to seeing him here when he gets here.

Q. Josh, at your introductory press conference you were asked about the difference between your first stint as a head coach, and you talked about a lot of the lessons that you had learned. Curious how you went into this draft process. Did you take some lessons learned into this?

JOSH McDANIELS: Yeah, I've thought about it every step of the way here, and I'd say a big part of that for me is just I'm just part of the process. We all are. You know, accepting what's my role in that process and trying to do the best I can, and then having great trust and faith in the people that are responsible for other things.

Dave headed up the entire process in the draft, and so I'm just -- whatever I'm responsible for, I try to do the best I can at that role, and really, like I said, I'm no different than anybody else.

Having a part of the responsibility but also sharing in it with other people and letting them do their job has been great for me. This whole spring has been a growth opportunity for me to try to put some of those things that I've learned over time into place as the head coach, and I'll continue to do that moving forward.

Q. Dave, how satisfying was it to roll your sleeves up and work the phones, make a couple trades and get that extra pick?

DAVE ZIEGLER: Yeah, we talked last night, we made the trade where we added the extra fifth-round pick and we thought that was going to give us some flexibility. It was either going to give us another swing in the fifth round or give us some flexibility to move around the board.

It ended up we were able to use that extra pick and have some flexibility to get back into the fourth round.

Those are exciting opportunities when you feel like you've manufactured an opportunity to, again, improve the team or go get a player that you want.

Overall it was a cool experience. It was a lot of fun to get in there and have an opportunity to be with Josh and kind of head it up together and make some trades, and again, add some players that you were excited to add.

Overall it was cool to go through it. We'll improve it, but we had a lot of fun.

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