

Las Vegas Raiders Media Conference

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Head Coach Josh McDaniels

Press Conference



Q. You know what these guys can do on tape. You've already watched them all play football. How much is the interview part of the combine?

JOSH MCDANIELS: I think that's really an important part of the impression that we get to make on each other here. To begin, most of these players -- you know, this is the first opportunity for them to meet us. You know, and we started that process last night with the interviews and we'll continue that the next few days here.

You know, it's certainly not long enough to make any decisions or anything like that on somebody. But you certainly get to know their personality. You get to know a little bit about their background, what they love about football. And, you know, that's the beginning of the process for us.

So it's the part that I enjoy the most about the combine. It's really just -- you know, I now have an idea of what somebody is like. And then we just got to dig deeper here the next few months.

Q. With limited visits, can this determine a lot who gets an invite or guys you think you're going to invite?

JOSH MCDANIELS: I think it kind of helps us make that decision process a little easier. I don't know that it -- in an individual interview that it would, you know, nail it down one way or the other. But, certainly, if it went really well and it kind of eliminated some of the questions you might have had about a player, you know, you may not need to use one on them, you know?

And, certainly, if you left the meeting feeling like there was still some meat on the bone and you really needed to know some things, then I think you could use the third visit. Or you potentially would have to, you know, go see them, you know, or Zoom them. And there's a lot of avenues now to gather more time with the players. And we'll use all those avenues as we lead up to the draft.

Q. (No microphone.)

JOSH MCDANIELS: I mean, I think there's always urgency at that position. You know, look, the goal for us eventually is to have somebody that's going to be here for a long time. I think that, you know, you see the teams that are having success right now in our league, I would say in our conference, and specifically in our division, you know, they're young players that were drafted by their clubs and they're being developed there under the same continuity.

And so, I think that eventually, yes. Do I think you, you know, have to do that if you're not sure or sold on the player and now you're making a mistake just to try and say that you're trying to solve a problem? I don't think that's really a smart decision.

So we're going to do everything we can do to evaluate every player at that position, both in the draft and free agency and try to do what we can do to improve the room. I mean, there's certainly going to be a number of players added at that position.

Right now, only Chase Garbers is under contract. So we'll look at everything we can look at. But the goal eventually is try to have a young player here that's going to be a Raider for a long time.

Q. (No microphone.)

JOSH MCDANIELS: He certainly could be. And, again, I think it's a very -- it's very young in the process, if you will. Especially for me, you know, after coming off the season, there's other people in our organization, Dave Champ, his group, Brandon Yeargan, that have scouted these guys extensively. They know more about them at this point in time. But that circle will get closed here shortly.

I'm really excited for this process because I'm going to get an opportunity to sit face-to-face with most of the quarterbacks that are here or at least a good chunk of them, you know? And then we're going to kind of recalibrate and Dave and I will figure out what direction we need to go with this spring.

Q. (No microphone.)

JOSH MCDANIELS: Yeah. Yeah, I think you start with leadership. You know, and you just saw our championship game, you know, played a couple weeks ago and two incredible leaders of their football teams. And I think that's very consistent among the best players at that position. You got to have a great leader, who's got to be able to have mental and physical toughness. No question about it.

There's going to be a ton of adversity in a National Football League season. And whether it's physical things you've got to have to battle through or the mental toughness to endure a couple losses and keep going. And those kind of things are always going to be prerequisites for us. And he's got to be able to move the ball, score points and take care of it, you know?

And so, when you talk about quarterback play, they need to get us in the end zone. We need to protect the ball from the other team. You know, and ultimately, we got to win. So there's a lot of things that go into playing this position really well.

There's a lot of different people that can fit that -- those traits and qualities. And I think we've seen in our league the last so many years, you know, the requirements have changed. You know, height, size.

You know, there's certain people that, you know, can do things with their legs that other guys can't. Big arms, you know, less than that -- something less than that. So it's not one-size-fits-all. But I think there's a lot of things you're looking for if you're going to commit to him.

Q. (No microphone.)

JOSH MCDANIELS: I think you just got to -- you know, you got to go through your process and evaluate the players that are available to you in every avenue, you know? And so, whether that's a guy that's, you know, on our roster -- or, you know, still on our roster today as Jared Stidham, evaluating that opportunity, to potential free agency options, to the draft.

And so, there's so many avenues to acquire players now. You know, I think it's just do our due diligence, try to do our work, get it in, and make the smartest decision for our football team. I think that's what we're going to try to do every day.

Q. (No microphone.)

JOSH MCDANIELS: Yeah, I think the last four years have really been healthy for me. You know, I went from Tom in

'19, to Cam in 2000, Mac in 2021, to Derek in 2022. So, you know, none of those guys are the same, really. And so, I think just being able to shift and focus on the things that are their strengths, I think that's really important for us.

But our system's going to fit the player. You know, it's not a one -- they don't have to just be a specific set of traits. If they have talents that we can use in other ways, then we're going to use them.

Q. (No microphone.)

JOSH MCDANIELS: You never know. Again, I stand up here and, you know, that was a tough decision, you know, with Derek at the end of the season. Because, you know, Derek's done a lot of good things. So, you know, do I want to sit here and say that I hope we can improve at that position?

I hope we can improve at every position on our team, I do. You know, and then that's what we're going to work towards. That's definitely what we're going to work towards.

Q. (No microphone.)

JOSH MCDANIELS: Yeah. Well, at this point in time, we don't know who that player is yet. Once we identify who's going to be there, there's certainly an expectation that we're going to get good play out of that position. We have to get good play out of that position. Because if we don't, it's very difficult to win in this league. So that's my job and that's what we're going to try and focus on.

Q. (No microphone.)

JOSH MCDANIELS: That decision, really, had nothing to do with any other player. We just really -- it was about what we thought was best at the time for us. I'm not surprised -- honestly, nothing would surprise me with Tom.

You know, he's a great friend of mine. And whatever is best for Tom and his family, you know, and in this case, it was to retire. I'm certainly happy for him. And, you know, that's not going to change our friendship.

Q. (No microphone.)

JOSH MCDANIELS: You know, Billy was one of those guys where -- when we added Billy back in 2007, he was a guy that came from college and really wanted to make it in the NFL. And so, it was apparent right away how hard he worked, how smart he was. And you could give him a lot of responsibility and he could handle it.

And so, really, all the things that Billy has accomplished and achieved since then, haven't surprised me at all. Being successful as a coordinator in New England, you know, winning at Penn State, winning in Houston, you know, going down to Alabama and being part of their success there, none of that has surprised me.

He's a great football coach, extremely hard worker. And a lot of confidence that Billy -- Billy's going to do well wherever he's at. And obviously, now, that's in New England.

Q. (No microphone.)

JOSH MCDANIELS: Yeah, no, Dave's a great partner for me and super well prepared. Really, ahead in terms of what's coming next in our calendar year. And just has really been refreshing for me to -- you know, when I'm not at a certain point, I ask a question, Dave's got the answer.

And we can -- the healthiest part of our relationship is we can agree and sometimes we can disagree and we can work through those things and figure out what's best for the team.

And I don't think, really, either one of us has an ego, whose decision it was. It's our decision. And, you know, we're going to try to do what's best for the team.

Q. (No microphone.)

JOSH MCDANIELS: You know, what we said at the end of the year is the same as it is now. You know, would love for JJ to continue being a Raider. I know Dave and his representative have been in contact. They're working through that process together. And that's the hope and the goal, is that he's here for a while. So we'll see how that all plays out.

But, again, Dave and -- him and Josh's representatives have been in contact and that's the goal. That's what we're working towards.

Q. (No microphone.)

JOSH MCDANIELS: The draft class here? There's -- it's a lot of different skill sets. You know, it's -- and I think there's some depth to it, too. I've looked at a number of them so far. I'm going to continue to do that with Dave and our group.

But I think there's depth to the class. I think there's some people that are, you know, more pocket passers. I think there's some guys that can really do some things with their legs, extend plays.

You could probably use that as part of your offensive weaponry. But they're all a little different. They really are. And so, that's a good thing. You know, because you can kind of see how they may fit into your system and then you might tweak your system to fit some things that you hadn't had in it before.

So, you know, I'm excited. I'm going to get an opportunity. Tonight will be my first opportunity to sit face-to-face with a number of them in our interview process. And we're excited to get that process started.

Q. (No microphone.)

JOSH MCDANIELS: I think he's a great coach. And so, Billy's worked with a lot of quarterbacks before and they've all had success, you know? And he's impacted all those guys in a positive way. So knows the position really well, understands the league, understands how to get the most out of players at this level. He'll do a great job.

Q. (No microphone.)

JOSH MCDANIELS: That's -- honest to God, it's -- we're going to try to improve the competition at every position on defense. We don't -- our depth, obviously, is something that we need to improve across the board. But, look, we need tough, smart, explosive players, period. And we need to do that on offense, we need to do it on defense, we need to do it in the return game.

We have some good core components to our roster that we can build around. But we need to get tougher, smarter, more explosive, you know, with the people that are coming to our football team.

And so, there's not one spot that I would say, you know, is more -- that we're going to stress this more than that. We need to get good football players every opportunity that we can and we're going to take every avenue to do that.

Q. (No microphone.)

JOSH MCDANIELS: The only thing I would say about that is if the durability part of it was a big concern. And so far with Bryce, has not been. You know, you -- there's different ways to throw. And so, if you lack height, you have to find some windows sometimes. And, really, it's about their ability to see through the rush into the defense and read the coverage properly.

I'm not sure anybody's done it better than Bryce here for a while, you know, in college football. So height is not a prerequisite. And I think you see that now with -- I mean,

look, Russell's had a great career. Kyle Murray has been really good for his short time in the league. There's other really good players, you know, in the league that lack the ideal 6'4 height that we used to have.

You know, 15/20 years ago, everyone was kind of looking for the same thing. College football is different. It's producing a lot of different types of players. And guys can figure out how to throw the ball. So, to me, when you're watching the tape, if the height doesn't impact his ability to find open receivers, throw the ball well and accurately, and his body size hasn't been a problem relative to overall durability, then I think you just got to evaluate the player.

Q. (No microphone.)

JOSH MCDANIELS: I think you definitely -- you know, you can be served well if you have the ability to do that at quarterback now. We've seen that now. I don't feel as a coach that my job is to put all the pressure on the quarterback by not doing a really good job of designing what we're doing so that he has to move around the entire game and -- you know, because there's nobody to throw to.

So, as coaches, we always want to give our players good options so they don't have to do that. But, certainly, there are guys in our leagues that can extend plays and add time to the passing game, create loose plays, or make yards with their legs.

In general, those are all tough guys to defend. We've played a number of them and they're not easy guys to, you know, put the clamps on.

Q. (No microphone.)

JOSH MCDANIELS: You know, this is a different -- I mean, every team's different. You know, I mean, we look at every player that we have an opportunity to add to our team and evaluate them. We go through an entire process and try to make decisions based on a number of factors.

You know, I mean, obviously, free agency, costs, fit, those kind of things are really important, the draft. Look, there's only going to be a certain number of players that you can access at each pick. You try and evaluate the guys that fit your culture, your team, that are going to add the qualities and traits that you covet, you know, any position on your roster. And then you try to put together a team that's built in your vision.

And so for us, you know, it's trying to create a tough, smart team that can play well under pressure, that's more explosive, you know, in general terms than we were last year.

Q. (No microphone.)

JOSH MCDANIELS: Yeah, that's -- when I say explosive on defense, I mean, you either got to touch the quarterback or touch the ball. And so, we're looking for guys that can do those things, you know?

And so, to be able to get after the quarterback, to be able to, you know, affect the passing game in that way or to be able to get the ball out, whether that's creating fumbles, touching the ball, deflections, interceptions, you know, certainly, I think we'd all agree that our defense, you know, could improve in those areas. You know, we have some players that did some of those things. We need more of them.

Q. (No microphone.)

JOSH MCDANIELS: Yeah, it's a -- I mean, you know, that's a -- that's always a work in progress. You know, it would be great to have the same 8/10 linemen every year. It doesn't work like that.

And so, I thought our offensive line played well, you know, for a number of games during the course of the season. Certainly gave us an ability to run the football. You know, kept the quarterback upright most of the year.

I thought they really did a good job as a unit. They worked through some injuries. We had some guys change spots, as you guys know. But, look, the goal is to try to find a really good group of guys that's got some depth to it, got some position versatility to it and then we can grow and play with -- play together with.

Because, you know, communication and continuity is important there. So that will definitely be another area that we look to address.

Q. (No microphone.)

JOSH MCDANIELS: I think -- you know, I've -- look, I've -- nobody's perfect at this thing. And I certainly gained a lot of experience through my failings and the things I learned and the lessons that I learned. I mean, there's too many to talk about right now.

But, you know, I've seen a lot of different things. So nothing really surprises me much anymore. I have a great group of people around me that I, you know, delegate many responsibilities to and just try to be a resource to them.

You know, look, there's never really going to be a great

head coach without having a good group of people around him and a really good group of players in the locker room. So we got a really good owner who gives us every resource we could ask for. Very thankful to have this opportunity. Got a great group of people and great group of core guys in the locker room right now that we're trying to build around.

So it's really not about me. I'm just going to try to do the best job I can of, you know, helping us through this offseason process.

Q. (No microphone.)

JOSH MCDANIELS: I don't really know much about him. That doesn't count, Will. (Laughing.)

Q. (No microphone.)

JOSH MCDANIELS: Look, I think you -- you know, there's certainly things you want all your players to have. Again, we can't build a tough, smart football team without getting tough, smart players. So those things are kind of, you know, at the highest end of the spectrum for me.

But when you talk about certain players that you're trying to add to your roster, you know, explosive players on offense or defense, I mean, that's what our league is now. You know, it's more of a space game, it's more of an ability to make plays with the ball in your hands or to create disruptive plays on defense. So it's close to the stop.

Q. (No microphone.)

JOSH MCDANIELS: Yeah. Yes, I do. You know, that's -- it's, obviously, you know, one of the biggest factors that will certainly impact our season, let alone our offseason. But, look, there's nothing we can do other than go through our process and really do a good job of evaluating our opportunities and our options, make smart decisions about what's best for the Raiders every step of the way. But there's definitely going to be some bodies added at that position. That's for sure.

Q. (No microphone.)

JOSH MCDANIELS: I think Darren -- I know Darren fought through a lot of injuries and those types of things last year. But I have a great deal of confidence in Darren Waller. I felt like he ended the season the right way, really playing well. Still, you know, fast, explosive, great teammate, very smart. And he'll be a big part of what we're going to do going forward. Thank you, guys.