

Las Vegas Raiders Media Conference

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Antonio Pierce Champ Kelly Press Conference



ANTONIO PIERCE: Thank you, first and foremost. Thank you to Mr. Davis. Josh McDaniels, Dave, Patrick Graham for bringing me here and giving me this opportunity. It's never easy when you lose a teammate, a co-worker, somebody that you're close with. We take that very seriously. There's lives and families that's affected by this, and we understand that.

But it's a new day, it's a new chapter, it's a new era, it's a new mindset. What is that mindset? It's that of the Raider pride, the commitment to excellence, and making sure our alumni, our fan base, and Raider Nation are proud of what they see on the field.

What does that look like? Tough, passionate, effort, energy, and that enthusiasm that you see when we all watched our kids and these young men who are now pro athletes play when they were in pop Warner, having that love for the game.

We're on the same page, Champ and myself. Our staff is connected. We had a great team meeting this morning. Everyone was steely eyed and focused. We walked in with a smile on our face. The synergy and energy in this building, the personality of our players will reflect on who we are as Raiders.

This is a great opportunity for myself. I'm humbled, I'm honored, and I don't take it lightly. I'm sure there will be questions about why, how. Those will all get answered, but this is about the players, this is about the Raiders, and this is about this organization.

We're tired of losing. It's not a good feeling. We're a production-based business. We're about competition, being competitive, and play with an edge and a swag and a certain confidence that, when we walk out that damn tunnel, that everybody watching TV can see it and the product on the field is something we're proud of.

CHAMP KELLY: I had a few things before we move forward. Again, to Josh McDaniels, Laura, and the kids, David Ziegler, Carissa, and the kids, I love you all dearly, so much respect for you. My thoughts and prayers are with you, and I'm forever grateful.

For those of you who know me, you guys have seen me with my three daughters. They are my everything. Today my middle child turns 10. Her name is Chloe. So happy birthday, Chloe. Today you are my favorite daughter. They are the best parts of me.

To my wife Stephanie, like I'm not here without your support. Like she's the real GM, and I love her dearly.

Although the circumstances are not ideal, there's always like an opportunity in difficulties. I couldn't be prouder to accept this opportunity as the interim general manager for the Las Vegas Raiders. I'm so eager and excited to get to work.

To Mark Davis, Sandra Morgan, Larry Delsen, thank you for believing in me, and thank you for this opportunity. I promise you that I won't squander the moment.

Make no mistake, I'm prepared for this position. I believe in the power of intercessory prayer. I know people all over the country are praying for me in this moment. I received so much support from colleagues, GMs across the league, former players, coaches, advisers, family, friends, my Champ Camp Warriors. I promise I'll get back to you. I'm one of those guys, when I see the little dot of missed messages, I have to get to all of them. So I promise I'll get back to all of you.

I'm prepared for this because I know what I don't know. There will be hiccups. It won't be perfect. But I'm wise enough to know that God equips those He calls. I'm perfectly imperfect, but I know the source.

To Raider Nation, in the squad meeting this a.m., we talked about committing to three things -- trust, pride, and poise. We talked about having a commitment to excellence. We talked about confidence, just winning.

We're going to put our blinders on, and we're going to run our own race. We don't get to pick the terrain. There will be hills. There will be potholes. We've got to run on some pebbles. And the race is not always won by the swift or the strong, but it's won by those who persevere.

To our fans, I hear your concerns. I share your frustrations. We're going to work to present to you a product worthy of your support. Thank you for sticking with us. I look forward to seeing you fill up Allegiant Stadium on Sunday.

With this, I open it up for questions.

Q. Antonio, you just outlined a mantra and a mindset that you want this team to be about. What can you do to immediately get that message across to the players that that's what they put out on the field on Sunday?

ANTONIO PIERCE: The power of your coaches and the players in the building to have a dialogue and the trust and accountability for one another where we can start to make change. That's first and foremost. It starts when we walk in this building, enjoying and loving the fact that you're a Raider, embracing the fact that you're a Raider, loving the fact that you're next to your brother.

When you start doing those things and you start playing together, that energy, and what I talked about with those guys, the synergy in the building, now we have a connection, and now we can start growing from that.

But at the end of the day you understand, just like I do, it's a production based business. We have to produce. We have to play hard for 61 minutes, which we'll do, and we have to play with the effort that everybody is used to the Raider Nation playing with.

Q. On a human level, how do you go about compartmentalizing thoughts that you may have about obviously this team is in a situation after this season where they're looking for a new head coach, a new GM, focusing on the present but also maybe thinking forward to those types of things to maybe be considered for those openings?

CHAMP KELLY: The reality for me is I'm focusing on one day at a time. We say, we're a team, no sleep. We talked late last night, woke up early this morning, got together excited to bring this vision together. But we're not looking forward to tomorrow. Let tomorrow worry about itself. We're focusing on the now.

Our team is focusing on the now. Those players are focusing on right now, and that's all we have.

Q. Antonio, when you got into coaching, was this a goal of yours to eventually become a head coach? What does this opportunity mean to you on a personal level?

ANTONIO PIERCE: Yeah, I've been fortunate. I played at a high level, went all the way back to my roots and coached at Long Beach Poly High School as a head coach there. I was at the New York Giants in 2017, then college for four years. I had opportunities to leave and go to other organizations. I decided not to.

The short story, the matter of fact is I grew up in Compton, California. I was born a Raider. I was born with the Raiders rolling in the Coliseum in L.A. I was rolling with NWA, talking Straight Outta Compton, rocking Raider hats.

So when the opportunity came to work with Josh and Pat Graham and Dave, I jumped on it. So that's what set me up for this. I was born this way.

Q. How surreal is it going to be to coach your first NFL game against a team that you won a Super Bowl with as a player?

ANTONIO PIERCE: How about that? Couldn't write it up. But it's not Antonio Pierce versus the New York Giants. Las Vegas Raiders versus the Giants, coming to our house, a much needed win for us. We've had two ugly losses. It's time to change that.

We're in the second half of the season. It doesn't matter what or who Antonio Pierce played for. It's about the Las Vegas Raiders. Those players understand that. This is about them. It ain't about me.

Q. These things happen every year throughout the league, not often on a short week in the middle of a season. When you understood this was happening or you got the call, were you surprised?

CHAMP KELLY: I was definitely surprised. I don't think we saw it coming. But I plan every day of my life to be prepared for any situation, putting my trust in the Lord and allowing him to guide me.

So whenever these situations arise, I feel fully confident that He will equip me and we're ready to roll.

Q. Antonio, you obviously bring a certain level of intensity to the table, and I'm wondering -- you're very demonstrative, very expressive, and I'm wondering if that's the kind of fit the team really will respond to and needs at this point.



ANTONIO PIERCE: We had a good team meeting this morning, had a full house, and I think I got everybody's attention and I had their eyes. I'm not a long winded person. I'm not going to give you a dialogue or write an essay. I get right to the point. It's black and white. You know how I feel when I walk out the door.

I've been around these guys for two years now as a linebacker coach, and I made my presence known both in the linebacker room, the defensive line room, the quarterback room, the running back room. I'm a former player. I touch former players. I can relate to them. I've done the same things they've done. I walked the same paths they walked. I felt the same pain they felt.

So there's nothing or any emotional ride or roller coaster that they haven't gone through this year or the two years I've been with them that I haven't felt. My personality will come out and reflect on this team. Hopefully we see that on Sunday.

Q. Antonio, talking to players now, you've got to look around and say there's just too much talent on this team for it to be this difficult and to be struggling the way they've been struggling. Do you share the sentiment that those answers are in that locker room and that they can get unlocked?

ANTONIO PIERCE: No question about it. We can talk about players and go down the roster and say, wow, Davante Adams, Josh Jacobs. You look at our O-line. You look at our quarterback. You look at the way our tight ends are playing, defensively how we're playing. We've done really well on special teams throughout the season.

It's funny what a little belief and --

CHAMP KELLY: Confidence.

ANTONIO PIERCE: -- confidence gives a group. This is just what we're going to believe and what we're about is about them being themselves. I told them, when they walk in this door, I need to feel them. They're going to feel me 100 percent, but I've got to feel them. I need that personality. This building needs personality.

When we walk in here, everybody should be smiling. We've all got a job. We're covering the greatest game in the world, the National Football League, and if you're not excited about that, there's something wrong with you.

Q. Was there a lack of excitement before. Being that it's something that needed to be addressed, what was the atmosphere like before?

ANTONIO PIERCE: I don't think it was not addressed, but you've got to embrace it, and it's being embraced now.

Q. A quick question. When you talk about personalities and this being so human, what was the reaction of the players when you gave them the news? Obviously you're all smiling, as you say you want us all to smile. It's been a few weeks, rough, kind of difficult to smile. So what was their reaction like, and what do you think is the priority moving forward towards the New York Giants other than winning the game obviously?

ANTONIO PIERCE: What are you mad about? You know what I mean? I just said it, like we're playing a kids game. We're getting paid millions of dollars to do it. We're fortunate to play for an alumni base, an owner, a fan base that live and die Raiders. When we walk in that stadium, it's got to be electric.

What I told these guys, it's simple, listen, who knows? I'm not promising we're going to go undefeated. I'm not promising we're going to redo the record books. But I can promise you this, we're going to have fun doing it. I know when we start having fun and you guys start believing in one another and you start really engaging each other and believing in what the coaches are telling them and understanding it's in their best interests, that we are in this together -- when you put the we aspect and us and team into it, it changes all that from the eyes.

Q. What are your thoughts on the quarterback position going forward?

ANTONIO PIERCE: It will be Aidan going forward.

Q. Why?

ANTONIO PIERCE: We just feel like it gives us the best chance.

Q. What was the reaction like in the locker room when you made that announcement?

ANTONIO PIERCE: Very supportive.

CHAMP KELLY: The guys are rallying behind him. They're excited to watch him get his opportunity.

I was there as A.P. was speaking to the team, and he had their eyes. There was an energy that was tangible in the room. There was a true excitement. Guys are geared up to prepare for this weekend.



Q. How much does it help that Coach obviously played in the league and did at the highest level and has a ring to prove it?

CHAMP KELLY: It's no better form of teaching than modeling, right? So this guy did put on those pads. He strapped it up. He played in high level football games. They know that. He's carried himself just like this every single day, authentically himself.

That's what we promised these guys. We're going to be honest. We're going to be authentic. A guy's never going to bless who you pretend to be. So we're going to be ourselves in this situation. We're going to have fun with it. I think they were excited to hear that.

Q. The new offensive coordinator, what do you see out of him?

ANTONIO PIERCE: We talked about it. The key thing is we just talked about a lot of weapons on our team and how to get to them. We're going to start a young quarterback, got to protect him. Last outing we didn't protect him very well, didn't protect the football.

So for our entire offense, turnover-free football. Get back to playing that kind of style of football where you kind of impose your will and play with ill intent. You can do that with offense. You can do that with skill guys.

We've got Jakobi Meyers. If you haven't watched him crack a defensive back or a linebacker, you're crazy. He's not afraid to throw it in there.

And we've got still one of the best running backs in the game. He understands that. He knows his role and what's going to happen going forward, and that's what's going to help the quarterback.

Q. Your defense is playing well this season. What do you expect from them moving forward?

ANTONIO PIERCE: More, more. We've got to create turnovers. We've got to stop the long drives. Penalties have been the biggest things that have hurt us in those situations. We've had great moments, and then we've had other moments like what the hell?

Just being consistent, first and foremost. Being a defensive player, you stop the run, you build the wall. We make them one-dimensional, and like I tell Max, go eat. Go eat. Party at the quarterback, and let's celebrate and have fun doing it.

What I'd like to see those guys keep doing, and Patrick

Graham, let loose. Put your ears back, let the dogs loose. When the Raiders are rolling on defense, you guys see it. It comes through the TV. Max Crosby's energy, I'm trying to match his today. I've got to match that for the next 10 to 12 weeks.

Q. We see what we see on Sundays, but then there's your side of the building or upstairs. How did that go with the staff that you now oversee?

CHAMP KELLY: We've put together some -- the fortunate part is I've been here since the beginning. We've put together some very good practices and policies for evaluating players and acquiring players. So we feel confident with the people that we have doing the job. We feel confident in the process.

So it's more status quo on our end. The guys are excited to work. They're excited to keep grinding. They've been given the same mandate. You walk into this building appreciative with a smile. We want to have positive energy, and they're going to do that, and we're going to capitalize off of it.

Q. Some of the members of the locker room have been in this situation before -- Max Crosby, Josh Jacobs -- back in 2021, when Jon Gruden resigned halfway through the season. Does it help with keeping the locker room together and informing them how to handle it that they've sort of been through this in the past?

ANTONIO PIERCE: We talked about that last week as a team. And a couple guys brought that up that's been here. They've been through this. They understand what it's like, a coaching change in the middle of the season. And I'm relying on our leaders to lead.

I'm coming in here with the game plan. This is the picture we're trying to paint. But they've got to carry it throughout. The best teams that I've ever been on as a player or as a coach, player ran. Player ran, bottom line. Davante knows what it is. Max Crosby knows what it is. Robert Spillane knows what it is. Our captains and leaders know what it takes.

They've got to go out there and do it, and they've got to carry that message to make sure that resonates and we block out all of this outside noise, because we're going to get some over the next 72-plus hours. And it's us against the world. That's our mentality right now, us against the world, Raider nation against everybody else.

Q. There's still nine games left on the schedule, but you're not out of it by any stretch of the imagination.



Do those immediate goals become the bigger goals as well? Are you looking at the big picture or just week to week now?

ANTONIO PIERCE: Trying to get through today. Trying to get through this media conference, this press conference right now. It's been a whirlwind, I'll be honest. You're not prepared for this.

I was doing my DC notes the other day, and all of a sudden you get a phone call. Are you crazy to turn down this opportunity to work with Champ Kelly? No. To work with the players and staff we've got?

We have the team. We have the people in this building, we have the players in this building to win. We've just got to go do it. Enough talk. Enough sitting here having these little cliques in the corner. That's what I told the guys. Put the goddamn pads on, let's go out there and work tomorrow in practice and let's get to it, bottom line, and let's see where the results go on Sunday.

Q. You probably have a lot of people back in California that are -- what do you think they're -- I'm sure you've talked to a bunch of them, but there's got to be a great response by your family members and friends back there.

ANTONIO PIERCE: Ticket requests, I don't know, we could pack the stadium. I'm going to need another 20,000. We'll be fine. Raider Nation does a great job. They come wherever we go. They travel well.

We've got a big test this week with the Giants coming to town. A great opportunity for us to get a fresh start and get back on a winning track.

Q. Coach, you talked about what you wanted to see from your offense. How much of a challenge is it from now, with the influence that Josh had on offense, from now till Sunday to get a plan together and what you guys want to do and accomplish?

ANTONIO PIERCE: I started this press conference by saying it, new day, new month, new chapter, new mindset. So whatever we did in the past doesn't matter. I wish I could say we're 0-0. We're not. But we're approaching it that way.

Bo went in here today, the offense, I spoke with those gentlemen. They know exactly the task and the plan going forward and what kind of offense we want to portray. No, are you going to sit there and rip up the whole playbook? No. But you better go to your key guys.

I'm not a fool. I'm a player. Remember I was a player before I was a coach. Player ran business.

CHAMP KELLY: I've had the privilege of working with Bo in three different buildings now. He's not afraid of the moment. So we're confident in him. He's going to be authentically himself in this situation. So you'll see Bo.

Q. As a player, you had various experiences, several coaches throughout the years, and working at Arizona State as well. Is there any particular person who had an influence on you and how you approach your coaching style?

ANTONIO PIERCE: Too many to name. I was fortunate to play with other organizations, Marty Schottenheimer, Marvin Lewis, Joe Gibbs, Gregg Williams, Steve Spagnuolo, and Tom Coughlin, and finish that off with Herm Edwards. What you're going to see from A.P. is a chameleon of all those guys put together along with my personality.

I learned so much through my time either as a player, as a coach going through the ranks. Probably the biggest thing I got over the last 16 or so hours is text messages from those gentlemen, and I'm so appreciative of them because there's no A.P. without them. The knowledge, the support, the love they gave me when I was a young rookie or an opportunity to get into the coaching world, I'm forever grateful.

Q. You mentioned the team meeting that you had last week and it's a player driven business. How much do you think it helped to hear from the players what was going on in their minds in that meeting?

ANTONIO PIERCE: It was good. It was direct. It was blunt. It was needed. And everybody heard them. Everybody in the building heard them.

The good thing about, when you allow that to happen, you've got to sit there, and you've got to brace yourself. Sometimes you don't want to hear it. There's probably going to be a moment I ain't going to want to hear that kind of stuff. But you've got to have thick skin, and you can't take it too personal. It's an emotional business.

These men in that locker room go through hell and back to get dressed and play every Sunday. We're on a short week this week. Guys are nicked up, banged, and bruised. They get up there, they put their cape on, and they become a superhero again.

So what they said was loud and clear. My message to them echoed their statements from that day, and we'll

continue to grow from that.

CHAMP KELLY: I think what's good about that is I think what we have to do here in these next weeks is to create a culture where it's safe to have those conversations. Like we want the truth. We're going to give them the truth. It's going to be real, and it's going to be raw, and it's going to be uncut.

So that's the type of environment that we want. I think that's where you thrive at. We're building a community. There has to be conflict, but there also has to be commitment and extreme communication. So if we have those three things, we can have success.

Q. Coach, I was just wondering, you seem like an enthusiastic, excited guy. The interim head coach now, was there a point when even yourself, when you were with the players and you're seeing them day in, day out, you're saying, oh, this thing is starting to spiral out of control? It's not working. Something's got to be done. It was done, but could you almost kind of sense that something was happening and a change needed to be made?

ANTONIO PIERCE: I just knew the last two weeks we weren't ourselves. Obviously I was focused on the defensive side of the ball, coaching the linebackers, so my focus was there. But you could just sense it as a team. You could feel the aura in the building. You could feel the aura in the locker room when you're around the guys.

Did I have a good sense of it? Yes. Was it my place to talk about it or discuss it with anybody? No.

Q. Champ, you were in Denver 2009-2010, you had to be part of that cleanup effort there when that happened. How do you lean on that similar situation there to get things rolling here?

CHAMP KELLY: I've been through a few of them unfortunately. It wasn't the only one. Just focus on communication. Sympathetic, because here's the reality, most people see us on Sundays. They see guys in helmets, pads. They see coaches on the sideline that they think don't have lives outside of here.

The reality of it is there are families involved. There are wives who are planning -- like my kids have to go to school today and learn about a situation where we don't know what's next, right?

Josh McDaniels' family, David Ziegler's family, what's next? There's a reality of that that goes on any time you have transition and change.

So sympathy to everyone's space and their situation, but extreme communication so people can relieve some of the uncertainty that they have. Then after that, you just attack the moment with confidence. So that's the stage that we are in right now.

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