

Carolina Panthers Media Conference

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Brandt Tillis

Weekday Press Conference



BRANDT TILLIS: Hey, everyone, thanks for being here. We're really excited about what we accomplished in free agency, the direction our roster is headed. We think that the players who we acquired are going to add to the culture of competition that Coach Canales created. We're looking forward to the draft obviously.

For now with free agency, we're just super excited about the players who we got. Just a couple of shoutouts here. It was a great organizational effort from everybody from the coaches to the scouting staff to our support staff. You know, I'm very thankful to have somebody like Justin Davidov who helped me with contract research and just understanding what these markets are going to look like.

Claire Stokes, who was incredible with making sure the trains were on time and all the logistics of bringing all the players in and getting them in and out on time.

And then our pro scouting staff of Lee McNeil, Juston Burris, and Adam Maxie. They did a lot of work on the front end to help us understand what's going on around the league as far as where players are from a talent standpoint, what players could be available.

So anyway, then of course we had great leadership with Dan and Coach Canales so we could execute their vision.

So with that, take any questions you guys have on free agency.

Q. When you guys are working in the kind of volume you guys were working in the other week, how do you sort of take the emotional aspect of all the negotiations that are happening at once and stick to an absolute value on certain things?

BRANDT TILLIS: Yeah, we do take the emotion out of the free agency room when we're talking the decision, because we're able to have a very good collaborative and honest dialog as an entire organization beforehand.

So what you see with what we execute takes a lot of work,

a lot of discussion, and by the time it comes time to make the actual decision we can do it unemotionally.

Q. Is that hard from the standpoint of when you're in an active negotiation with somebody that you obviously have interest in to be able to pull back and say, no, not right now?

BRANDT TILLIS: Yeah, of course. It's hard to walk away from a deal. At the same time, when we have a clear vision of what we want and we have standards as far as value and things like that, it's easier to walk away.

Also, it's easy to make those decisions when we have the support of leadership, which is what we have got here.

Q. So as far as like a lot of your contracts go, whether resignings or signings, they're all very heavily incentive based. At least based on our reporting and reporting elsewhere. That's not a new thing. How do you guys establish the philosophy towards that, understanding both sides need this to work out in order to accomplish the end goal for both sides?

BRANDT TILLIS: So with the incentives, what we tried to do with the incentives is, okay, here is the base of the contract, whatever it is; this is what we expect out of that base level of compensation.

The incentives are if he exceeds what we are expecting, then we're going to be willing to pay for it. To an extent. So it was a give and take, and some of this was also just the market.

So understanding that in free agency, hey, this player has this offer that includes incentives like this. If we want to acquire this player, we're going to have to go there.

Q. And then you had a couple safeties in for visits this week. Probably not going to want to talk about an open negotiation, but what did you look to get out of those visits from your perspective?

BRANDT TILLIS: Yeah, how they fit with our coaching staff and just getting to know the person a little bit better.



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You know, at this point in free agency, players are signing for opportunities, so let's all make sure that we all agree on what this opportunity looks like.

Q. There were reports during the -- at the beginning of the legal tampering period that ya'll were in on a deal with Milton Williams. It ultimately fell through. I'm curious to see how you reflect on that.

BRANDT TILLIS: Uh-huh.

Q. Is there any part of you that after you look at the huge contract that Milton got, it kind of presented itself as an opportunity, okay, we didn't get him but we got this opportunity to fill so many other holes with that money we would've spent on him?

BRANDT TILLIS: Yeah, so in free agency things tend to move fast. We have scenarios planned out ahead of time as far as acquiring this group of players, this group of players, that group of players.

So when the Milton thing didn't go our way, it was -- we were just following a plan. Even during the, if you want to call it a frenzy, whatever it was, we never felt like we had an agreement with Milton. His agent never gave us that indication.

We were just operating our plan and going through our process in talking to all the defense players and just trying to take the resources we had and put them to the most optimal use.

Q. And then I wanted to talk about another defensive lineman, Turk Wharton. You have experience with him in the Kansas City organization. Just simply put, what did you see in him? Like do you have any cool Turk stories?

BRANDT TILLIS: Yeah, so as far as a cool Turk story goes, Turk went to Missouri Science and Tech, which was a small school in Missouri, and we signed him in Kansas City during the COVID year.

So there was no pre-season. There was no visibility into what was going on other than our practice fields, so before training camp even start we said to ourselves, okay, if any of those free agents show out well in camp, we could probably get them through to the practice squad. They're unlikely to be claimed because nobody knows they exist.

Turk was so good in camp and so clearly one of our best players that we couldn't do it to the rest of our roster and have any semblance of credibility of our team if Turk didn't

make our 53.

So that's just the kind of person and player he is, that he went in it, did the work, and performed. So that was exciting.

But as far as what we saw here, Dan and Coach Canales can speak to all of the football evaluative pieces of it. All I know is what I have our pro scouts coming into my office during the season asking me about Turk and what's he like and what do I think he's worth, and then after the season I got Dom Capers and Todd Wash coming into my office asking me about Turk, EJ stopping me in the hall, that's very clear there was a lot of love for him and a lot of excitement about him.

Q. I jumped on late. Apologies if you addressed this. A number of your contracts were set up where that third year there is not guaranteed money. How much of that was with an eye on possibly reaching that stage with Bryce's contract where you're going to be extending him around that time?

BRANDT TILLIS: The contracts that we did, we actually -- we didn't think too much about Bryce and where he is. I think that's still TBD. We're super excited about Bryce.

But for us, it was just about doing market deals. So the length of the deals were whatever they were, and the guarantees were whatever they were based on the market.

With three-year deals typically you'll have the first year, year and a half, two years depending on the size of the deal and the quality of the player that will be guaranteed, and the third year is almost never guaranteed.

So we were just going to the market on that one.

Q. Did you address earlier Jaycee's negotiations?

BRANDT TILLIS: No.

Q. Curious how those went with -- David is his guy, right?

BRANDT TILLIS: Uh-huh.

Q. How did that go? Obviously a big contract. What sort of the appetite -- clearly you did the deal so had the appetite. Any reservations going as high as you did?

BRANDT TILLIS: We are extremely excited to have Jaycee under contract. I won't get into the specifics of the negotiation, but from our perspective we just really wanted



to get the deal done before free agency so we knew where we stood from a cap perspective and we could spend our money appropriately.

And then as far as the decision of extending or not extending Jaycee, we got to a point internally where we said, okay, here is a player who worked his tail off to be healthy for most of the season. Got a little unlucky in the end. Was able to play in the Pro Bowl.

How do we want to go about this? This is a core player for us. Are we going to bet on Jaycee or bet against him? We elected to bet on him and we're extremely excited to have him here for the next five years.

Q. From a wide receiver perspective, we're seeing kind of the market explode obviously. Tee Higgins getting a lot of money, then Stefon Diggs. I'm curious how you, as the guy who has to look at all the timelines with Dan, looks at the money allotted to that position in free agency and trades, balances that with the value of wide receivers in the draft and having nine picks?

BRANDT TILLIS: Yeah. It's hard to answer with specifically receivers. The thing that Dan and Coach Canales and I talk about a lot is just adding impact players to our roster and paying them accordingly.

Regardless of position, we're looking to add really good football players who make an impact on the game, our culture, the community, all those things. If it happens to be a receiver, then great. If it happens to be a safety, then great. Whoever it is, we're going to be interested in inquiring them.

Q. You mentioned the value of the collaboration between the three of you. You also talked about the emotion of this period. Curious how important that collaboration, communication is between the three of you to keep that emotion out of it, especially in your role with that eye on the numbers and down the road?

BRANDT TILLIS: Yeah, it's critical and it's built on trust and respect and communication. You know, we have all three of those things together, all three of us do. I'm very fortunate that they let me in at that level, because there are organizations who do operate a little differently than that.

I think it helps us make really good decisions, and I just can't speak highly enough of both of them as leaders and people.

Q. Just wondering if you could address the salary cap situation for the remainder of this offseason, and more importantly where it stands next year and the year

after? Thanks very much.

BRANDT TILLIS: Yeah, hey, Jeff. Yeah, so right now we have a little bit of room to spend. Not a lot. So I think we're going to be very intentional how we spend our money going forward. Not that we weren't before, but I don't think you'll see us bringing in five, ten guys a week.

As far as next year and the year after goes, we have a lot of flexibility. I don't know where the numbers exactly stand, but we're pretty excited about the ability to keep our core players, to add others, and just continue to build this thing.

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