

Carolina Panthers Media Conference

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Dan Morgan

Weekday Press Conference



DAN MORGAN: Just wanted to start off by thanking David and Nicole Tepper for their trust and support throughout the whole process. They're committed to winning, easy to work with, and just can't thank them enough just for the support through the whole free agent process.

Also want to thank the pro department, analytics, Brandt Tillis and his crew, player engagement, football ops, everybody was awesome. Coach Canales and his staff, they were very helpful through the whole process, so I can't thank everybody enough just for everything they've done, all the hard work that they've put in. We've got a great team here.

We were able to retain a lot of our own, go outside the building and sign some free agents that we're really excited about. It felt like having that depth and front-line players that we added in free agency, I think it really gives us a lot of flexibility headed into the draft to draft the best available player.

So again, I'm just excited about the direction that we're headed, that the franchise is headed, and we're on to the draft now, and that's another exciting time where we can add really quality players to our roster. We're ready to go.

With that, I'll open it up to any questions.

Q. With your context as a former linebacker, how does that color the way you look at a Jaelan Phillips, the way you look at a Devin Lloyd and the kind of impact they can make?

DAN MORGAN: Yeah, I think Devin and Jaelan are two guys that we obviously held in high regard during free agency. When you look at both those guys physically, how big they are, how long they are, the effort that they play with, the way they prepare, they were definitely guys that we had our eyes on during free agency.

Me being a former player and watching them on tape, they have everything that you want in terms of the motor, the

effort, the instincts, the range that they play with. So they were really good adds for us and guys that we're really excited about, and they're really going to help our defense moving forward.

Q. Do you ever catch yourself thinking, either one of them really, he kind of reminds me of, fill in the blank, somebody you played with or somebody you've seen along the way?

DAN MORGAN: Not really. I don't really have anybody I would compare them to. I just know that they're two guys I obviously scouted come out of college that I held in high regard then, and to be able to get them in free agency, they're just going to add so much to our defense along with the guys that we already have. We're just really excited about adding them and adding the type of players and leaders they are in the locker room, the way we prepare, the way they approach their day-to-day. They're everything that we wanted.

Q. You were pretty overt in your desire to add a more mobile and younger quarterback. You did that with Kenny Pickett. Obviously there was agreement on a trade with Philadelphia with Andy Dalton. I know that hasn't been completed yet or at least officially. You had said that Andy didn't mind competing and you said you guys were keeping in touch with him. Why trade him now, and what is the outlook for the position heading into the draft?

DAN MORGAN: Yeah, I think we feel good about our quarterback room. Going back to Andy, Andy is a guy that we hold in high regard here. He really helped Bryce come along as a rookie and into his third year. Andy brought a lot to our franchise. I can't thank him enough for what he brought and just the type of man he is, as well.

I definitely wish him the best.

Adding Kenny Pickett, I feel like adding a mobile quarterback, I think, in this league, mobility I think is big in this league. So I think adding a guy like Kenny Pickett that can move outside the pocket if he needs to, create with his legs if he needs to, I think those are all things that were

really intriguing to us.

Heading into the draft, I think there's going to be options there. Whether they're the best player at the time is yet to be seen.

But if we have the opportunity to add another young guy to the mix, we'll do that.

Q. You brought in Rasheed Walker and AJ Dillon on one-year deals, Luke Fortner, as well. But with the Walker and Dillon signings, obviously you have two players coming off injury there. What is your outlook on Ickey a couple of months removed from surgery as well as Jonathan Brooks as he heads into what is an important season for you guys?

DAN MORGAN: Yeah, Brooks and Ickey, they're making progress. They're with our trainers every day. They're looking good. They're working their butts off. I don't have a timeline or that to update you with.

But both those guys, they're headed in a good direction. I think those two guys are guys that we're looking to add to our team, that they're going to hopefully be healthy at some point, and we'll just go from there.

Q. When you say you don't have a timeline for Ickey, do you mean there's one that you don't want to share publicly? I'm guessing you have one internally that's going to shape how you address the draft, and I wonder if you could address that with us, how your view and the franchise's view of Ickey's recovery could impact the ability or potential that you take a tackle?

DAN MORGAN: Yeah, I think timeline wise with Ickey, I don't have any updates. Everybody recovers differently from injuries. He's making really good progress. He looks really good. But in terms of timeline, we don't know that.

Obviously signing Rasheed Walker, we always have to have a backup plan. We've always got to be prepared. There's inevitably going to be injuries in this league, and that's for every position.

In terms of adding Rasheed Walker, we're excited about him and what he's going to be able to bring, and I think that definitely gives Ickey time to recover, and when we get him back, we'll be excited to have him back. But timeline-wise, I don't know that.

Q. On Walker, bringing him on just the one-year deal, does that leave open the possibility -- give you that flexibility that you mentioned in the draft at that position in particular?

DAN MORGAN: I think it gives us the flexibility to really draft the best available players. If a tackle is the best available player at that point, then so be it.

But I think it definitely gives us that flexibility heading into the draft, that we can be aggressive and add really good players to our team.

Q. Lastly on Rasheed, he had a gun charge in January. How much vetting did you guys do, and were you satisfied with what you found out?

DAN MORGAN: You know, that's a pending legal matter right now, so I really can't comment on that. But we did our research.

Q. With the whole situation that Joe was asking about with Rasheed and Ickey, how much what happened with Yosh catch you off guard?

DAN MORGAN: First off, Yosh, obviously, he's a really good person, a player that we did want to bring back. Me being in his shoes as a former player, I really understand what he was going through. He was trying to decide if he wanted to play or not.

Caught us a little off guard, but again, I've been there. I understand what he's thinking. I have a lot of respect for him and his decision.

Just like every position in this league, you have to have backup plans. I think we did a good job pivoting and adding to that position.

Q. Again, you were pretty emphatic what you wanted to improve. It seems like you just got everybody you were looking for. Was there a miss or something that you didn't get that was on your wish list that you hoped to have right now?

DAN MORGAN: Yeah, we feel really good about what we did and what we accomplished in free agency. I think we definitely hit on who we wanted to hit on, and we're really happy with that.

Again, it gives us a lot of flexibility heading into the draft to be able to do what we want to do and draft the best available players.

Q. As far as your draft list, are you planning to bring in 30 now, or where are you guys with your list of college guys you're looking at?

DAN MORGAN: Yeah, we'll bring in guys on the 30 visit,



and we're going to definitely be strategic in who we bring in and why we bring them in. We definitely have a plan and process in place of who we do want to bring in.

Look forward to seeing those guys and talking to them.

Q. On Jaelan, his story is really interesting. How concerned were you with the injury history he had?

DAN MORGAN: Obviously we do our research, and we feel really good about it, otherwise we wouldn't have invested the money that we did in him. We know the type of worker he is and where he is from an injury standpoint, so we feel really good about him moving forward and what he's going to bring to our team.

Q. You touched on this earlier, but I wondered if you could elaborate. Why was Kenny Pickett someone that you wanted to bring in to Carolina?

DAN MORGAN: Yeah, I think Coach Canales, I think Kenny was a guy that Coach really wanted to work with and was fond of in the evaluation process. I'll go back to what I said before. The mobility and his ability to create with his legs I think was a big part of that. Obviously he can throw the ball, and he has a lot of upside. I think, like every player, he knows that he can get better at certain things.

But we're excited about him.

Q. Then I also wanted to ask the same of John Metchie III, wide receiver.

DAN MORGAN: Yeah, another guy that we're excited to have. Obviously Bryce is familiar with him. They played together in college. I know Bryce is really fond of him, not only as a player but as a person. I just think it's another piece that we can add to our receiver room that adds depth and competition in that room. I think that's what we're trying to do at every spot is just add as much depth and competition as we can.

Q. When you and Coach took over, the franchise ranked near the bottom of the NFL PA player polls. Now after signing three immediate starters in free agency and filling key backup positions before the draft, how much pride are you taking in developing a locker room culture that is attracting top talent to Charlotte again?

DAN MORGAN: Yeah, I think Coach has done a really good job in terms of the culture, and you've got to give a lot of credit to the players in our locker room as well. We have really great guys in our locker room. They're not only great

players but they're great people, and that's what we're trying to bring in here. We're trying to bring in not only quality football players but quality people and people that impact the community.

I think that's a big part of the culture around here is that family atmosphere. We're trying to attract players from the outside. They know that when they come into this building that they have full support from ownership, myself, Coach Canales, so we're just trying to build that family atmosphere around here to where, hey, we're not valuing you just solely based on what you do on the field, but we also care about you off the field, as well. That's the message that we're trying to send around here.

Q. Special teams a lot of times can be kind of piecemealed together, but you brought back not only Sam but that core with Incoom and Isaiah Simmons and Akayleb Evans. Why was it so important to keep that group together?

DAN MORGAN: Yeah, I think they're guys that aren't only good on special teams, they can add value on the defensive side and add depth on the defensive side, as well.

Again, they're guys, culture-wise, that we hold in high regard around here, as well. Not only being just great players but just great people.

So it was important for us to get them back and just keep our depth, keep our numbers at the position strong. They're guys that are really going to help us out moving forward.

Q. Just wanted to follow up on Metchie. Just due to injuries and chemotherapy, he hasn't had a ton of production since being in the league. Did you go back and watch that tape with Bryce at all from Alabama or lean on Bryce just kind of for evaluation? What all went into that process?

DAN MORGAN: Yeah, I definitely talked to Bryce about him, obviously the type of person he is and the player. So yeah, I did my homework there, talking to Bryce.

But I think he's still young and a guy that -- he's had some production in this league. Hasn't been as consistent as he's wanted to be, but I think there's definitely a lot of upside there. We'll see where it goes. He's going to have a chance to compete like the rest of the guys, and I'm looking forward to seeing that.

Q. You aggressively approached free agency, getting the defense, obviously a place of need. When you



were talking about Jaelan Phillips and the money you gave him, under the circumstances of his output so far, he had a lot of hurries, but he hasn't had a lot of sacks in his career. So when you're looking at him, how are you projecting what you're seeing now or what he's doing versus getting the sacks, and how important is it for those hurries to translate into sacks for this free agent pickup to be worth what you're looking for?

DAN MORGAN: Yeah, I don't think it's all about sacks. I think Jaelan is a disruptive guy, and that can be just as impactful. Maybe it doesn't look sexy on the box score at the end of the game in terms of having sacks on there, but he's disruptive, play in and play out. He's not only a good pass rusher, but he's also really good against the run, and he's a guy that can make an impact just chasing the ball and running ball carriers down.

He brings a lot more than just pass rush to the defense. He brings a guy with a high motor. His effort is outstanding, and he's physical at the point of attack. He can do a lot of things other than rush the passer. Looking forward to him just keep improving and getting better, and I know he's committed to that. We're definitely excited about him.

Q. How did last season's free agency affect your aggressiveness going into this off-season?

DAN MORGAN: I wouldn't say that it really impacted it. I mean, we try to be aggressive in every aspect, not just free agency, but just on like a day-to-day standpoint. If a guy that we like hits the waiver wire, then we'll be aggressive to claim him. We're going to be aggressive in every avenue to make this team better, whether through free agency or just the day-to-day waiver wire, trades, et cetera.

We just have that aggressive mindset.

Q. You had mentioned earlier that you guys hit the positions you wanted to hit, but during your planning, when you were formulating your plan, was there a position in free agency that you thought was kind of difficult to attack during the free agency period and that you would have to rely on maybe re-signings or the draft as you looked at the landscape so that you could focus in on inside and outside linebacker?

DAN MORGAN: I don't think we really looked at it like that. We had our plan in place, which was to sign who we thought was the best players. Fortunately we got that done and feel really good about getting that done and what they're going to bring to our team. So yeah, I feel good about filling the outside linebacker, filling inside linebacker,

and again, giving us flexibility in the draft moving forward.

Q. Will Ja'Tavion Sanders be ready in time for OTAs and the off-season program?

DAN MORGAN: Yeah, he's making a lot of progress. I think he should be ready. I see him in there every day working with the trainers and definitely have gotten good reports on him. He's looking great physically. He's working his butt off.

I suspect that he'll be ready.

Q. After you guys had that initial wave on the first day, it became a series of one-year deals, many of them at numbers that were lower than projected. How important was it to kind of do that and kind of get some -- if you will, some value signings achieved after you had made the commitment to Jaelan and Devin?

DAN MORGAN: Yeah, I think it's really important, just to fill out your roster and add that depth and that competition that I talked about before. So yeah, one-year deals, guys that we think can help our team immediately, guys that are going to compete and just add depth and competition to different position groups.

Q. You had said a minute ago or a couple minutes ago that you're on to the draft. Might you still do a few or a couple things late in free agency, or do you think you're done?

DAN MORGAN: There might be a few moves here and there, you know, guys that we think we might be able to get.

But yeah, we're always going to be looking. We're always going to be aggressive. There's always going to be guys out there that aren't signed that you think should be signed that may be an opportunity for us to get better, and if we feel like they'll make us better, then we'll definitely explore it.

Q. Were there any anxious moments on that first day, or kind of tell me what they were, and what was the emotion, because you guys got Jaelan pretty quick. Did you have pretty good confidence going in that you were going to get him that quickly?

DAN MORGAN: No, that's the part about free agency that you hate. You just never know.

Obviously there's always going to be anxious moments. There's 31 other teams that you're competing against, and you don't know what's true. You don't know what to

believe. Yeah, there's definitely anxious moments.

But we felt good about what we're building here and attracting players here. We felt like players wanted to be here as opposed to when I first took over, it was maybe a little harder.

You definitely feel that shift in guys really wanting to be here and be a part of what we're building here.

Q. What were they telling you to make you feel they wanted to be there versus what you felt back a few years ago?

DAN MORGAN: Yeah, I think once you get the deals done and you talk to the guys, you could just feel their excitement about being here. They all felt like our team was an up and coming team that was trending in the right direction. They all heard really good things about Coach Canales, the staff, and just the culture around here. That definitely made me believe that things are trending upwards here.

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