

Carolina Panthers Media Conference

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Dan Morgan

Dave Canales

Draft Day Press Conference



we've been here, but yeah, there's definitely the potential for that.

Q. Do you think it's likely?

DAN MORGAN: Yeah, I do, yeah.

Q. Particularly on day 3 there seemed to be a couple guys who fell to you guys, particularly Zakee Wheatley and Sam Hecht. Are those two guys, when you had the opportunity to draft them, were you surprised that they were still available when you got the chance to take them?

DAN MORGAN: Yeah, a little bit. I think you saw us kind of maneuver around the board a little bit, just looking at our board, we had a handful of players that we had up there, so we're like, hey, we like these guys. They're all guys we feel like can help us. We're like let's trade back. Let's gain more picks, gain more value, and we did that. And it worked out in our favor at the end.

Q. Specifically about Zakee, how do you see him fitting into this defense?

DAN MORGAN: Just a big, long, physical guy. He fits the DNA that we want, the type of competitor we want. He can play in the post. He can play up in the box. He can do a lot of things for our defense that we're excited about.

Q. You had a couple of guys today that made it through college or at least the last couple years without a single penalty. Is that just kind of a coincidence, or is that something that you all value and look at?

DAN MORGAN: Obviously we don't want penalties. I think it's more a coincidence than anything, but honestly I didn't even really know that. That's kind of cool, though.

Q. Yeah, I think it was Wheatley and Hecht made it through without a penalty in college or at least the last couple of years. On Will Lee specifically, he comes off the tape like really just kind of tenacious. How important is that in a safety back there?

DAN MORGAN: Good to see everybody. Brain's a little fried right now. First off, just kind of want to thank the staff, the scouting staff, the coaches, football operations, everybody involved for what we feel is a successful draft.

We felt like we definitely got better. We challenged the roster in a lot of spots, gained a lot of depth in a lot of areas. Yeah, we feel good about what we accomplished during the draft and excited about things moving forward. We're obviously headed in the right direction.

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

Q. I heard you talk about challenging the roster and building depth. Did you draft anyone this weekend you think will start from day one?

DAN MORGAN: I think everybody that we drafted, I think they'll all have the opportunity to compete, and that's what we're all about here, myself and Coach and the rest of the staff. We want to bring guys in to challenge the roster and have them compete. We bought in a bunch of competitors during this draft. They're going to have a chance to compete and show us what they can do, and they'll be fun to watch.

Q. Which of these guys do you think has the chance to make the biggest, earliest impact?

DAN MORGAN: I think it's up to them. I'm excited about all the guys we drafted. Otherwise, we wouldn't have drafted them. They're all going to have the opportunity to come in and compete, and we're excited to see what they can do.

Q. Are you thinking of bringing in another undrafted quarterback?

DAN MORGAN: Potentially we'll do that and have four quarterbacks, which we really haven't had I think since



DAN MORGAN: Yeah, corner, safety, that's what we want. That's our identity. We want to be physical. We want to be tough. We want to be competitive. We're drafting those type of guys in our culture.

I think every one of those guys we drafted, from the first round all the way down to the seventh, they embody that.

Q. Specifically to Hecht at center, what did you guys see in him that you like, and how do you see him competing right out of the gate?

DAN MORGAN: He's going to have a chance to compete. I think first and foremost you see his initial quickness. He's really good with angles. He can reach guys. He's good with his hands, getting his hands inside, controlling blockers, and staying sticky on blocks, I would say is the biggest thing with him. Staying on his feet, keeping his balance. He's another guy that can work at a second level. He can get out in space as a polar. There's a lot of things we like with him.

Q. Was it a priority for you this weekend to make that room not only deeper but younger as you look at the makeup of the offensive line as a whole?

DAN MORGAN: Yeah, I definitely think we need to add some depth there on the interior and outside at tackle. I feel like we accomplished that. We'll do some things in undrafted free agency as well that will, again, add to the competition and the depth out there.

Q. I'm setting myself up to be made fun of because of how I pronounce the guy's name. Jackson, the guy you just added from Miami of Ohio, do you see him as a special teams cog? What's your outlook on him? He doesn't have a lot of playing time prior to last year.

DAN MORGAN: Good player. Good instincts. He can run, can play fast. He sees it really well. A guy that we're obviously excited about. I think he's definitely going to be able to contribute on special teams, and again, like every area, he's going to have a chance to compete and show us what he can do.

Q. Then with Will Lee, do you see him primarily working outside boundary-wise? I know he brought up how much he likes doing press man, but obviously that's not something you guys do a ton. Do you guys see him as a long-term outside cornerback?

DAN MORGAN: I think obviously I'll leave that up to the coaches for what they want to do with him. At Texas A&M he played on the outside, and he's really good at press. I

think he's a guy that, as he continues to grow and mature in the game, he'll be able to figure out off coverage and some of the things that we do schematically.

I think he's just a really good fit for us by the way he plays, the temperament he plays with, the swag he plays with out there. Just a guy that we really loved.

Q. Dan or Dave can address this or both of you. Kind of following up on the last question, was this a draft where you guys wanted to kind of look long term more so maybe than short term?

DAVE CANALES: I'll answer that. For me it's always about right now. This season and what we're doing and trying to make sure that we can get the most out of our guys that we currently have. We always start with our roster but then try to find guys that fit the traits and characteristics, personality of who the Panthers are.

That's what we were looking for, just get more of that. It's going to be the same thing every year. How can we make the 2026 Panthers the best possible unit that we can make it? If we have guys that bring a certain skill set at any position, to give them a chance to compete and be out there. We feel like it elevates the whole group.

Q. Back to Dan. Every year, really since you took over, people -- and you have drafted tight ends, but there's this feeling, I think, that you guys need to go get a No. 1 tight end. Is that shared in the building? I don't know, you addressed it a little bit last week.

DAN MORGAN: We have a lot of confidence in the guys that are on our roster, and I said that before with Tommy and with Mitch and with Ja'Tavion and James Mitchell. We have some guys that we're excited about.

Again, we'll always look for avenues to make the roster better if we feel like we need to figure out tight end and bring a different skill set in, then we'll do that, but right now we feel good about it.

Q. Dan, any positions where you feel like you're still maybe a little light, whether it's inside linebacker, even corner?

DAN MORGAN: I think, again, we're always going to find ways, we're never going to be content. We're never just going to sit there. We're just going to try to add as much depth and competition to the roster as possible. We'll keep doing that moving forward.

Q. Just a question about Lee and Wheatley. What specifically did you see in those two players that made

them a fit for corner and safety rooms that you guys have right now?

DAN MORGAN: Lee and Wheatley? You want to go?

DAVE CANALES: I'll take it. We look for play style, first and foremost, trying to project the athletic ability to contribute is obviously a big part of it. Then once we kind of know and identify guys that we feel like can impact us and can play in the NFL from an athletic standpoint, then we go to play style.

Will Lee, Dan kind of talked about it a little bit, the length, the aggressiveness, his ability to play physical at the attack point, whether it's on bubble screens or getting involved in the run game. We ask our corners to tackle and be a part of the fit in our system with our crack or place rules and things like that.

We felt like he really fit that mold.

As far as Zakee Wheatley, he's just a really instinctive player, physical player, shows up downhill, takes really good angles, runs downhill. He's all over the field. Just that kind of activity on the back half, it's really crucial for how we play football and guys being able to see the formation, anticipate concepts, and then show up physically and play with that type of attitude that we're looking for.

We had a great time meeting with Zakee at the Combine and just kind of picking his brain about what he knew, what he was looking for, and where he came from and how he's become the player that he's become. We just loved all the background and everything, and it really shows on film. He was one of my favorite guys just through the process to see him and the play style he brought.

Q. This running back class was not particularly deep, at least on the outside looking in and the selections that were made. You've had Jonathon in the program for about a week. Obviously you're not doing any contact. You drafted Etienne last year. I know we're talking about the moves that you did make, but the fact that you guys didn't push for a running back with how much you publicly talk about wanting to run the ball, what does that say about those two guys and your guys' outlook on them?

DAN MORGAN: It goes beyond that too. A.J. Dillon is here. Tyus is a guy we're really excited to see coming up in camp and the preseason games, and Montrell is another guy who played at a really high level in college and is finding his way in the pros, but we were able to bring those guys in. We're excited to see what they can do.

When we start with this process, as we're looking at players in the Draft, we kind of look at them compared to our roster, compared to the guys we have, who is this guy competing with in this room? Where do we see them trying to be able to affect it? We have a bunch of guys we're really excited about.

Of course you talked about Jonathon and Trevor, and in that conversation as well, and we have high hopes for Jonathon. He looks great right now. Can't wait to, in the smartest way possible, get him out there and expose him at the right time and get him accustomed to the things that we're doing.

Yeah, I love that group and love what Bernie Parmalee is doing with them and how they attack it. We kind of tell them, you set the tone for the offense. So we love the way those guys are built.

Q. We haven't been able to talk to you about it yet, but Trevin and J.T., are they both participating in the program as well?

DAVE CANALES: Yeah, Trevin came out. He's doing really great in terms of getting back out there. J.T. has been cleared. He's doing more and more. Right now, as you know, it's weight room and meetings right now. So until we get on the field and move them around, we've still got to be smart about all that stuff.

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