

March 2, 2022

General Manager Martin Mayhew

On the difference between the process being at the combine in person versus virtual last year:

“It's great to be back here. You know, it's great to be in person. You watch tape of a lot of these guys and it's great to be able to sit down and actually talk to them personally one on one or with the rest of our group. So yeah, it's been good to be back, you know, I'm really enjoying it. And our staff has done a great job, getting everything lined up for us. We're having our 45 interviews now. And just working with these guys, working with [Executive VP of Football/Player Personnel] Marty [Hurney] and [Director of College Personnel Tim] Gribble, [Director of Pro Personnel] Chris [Polian] and [Senior Director of Player Personnel] Eric [Stokes], it's been right. So, we got really good staff and we have a really good synergy together right now. So I'm really enjoying it.”

On how great it is to be able to meet the prospects in person this year:

“It's awesome. I mean we preach a lot about character, about work ethic, about culture, so we want to add guys that fit our culture and that fit our team and our organization. And you can only find that out really by interacting with those guys and talking to them and seeing what motivates them, seeing how much they love playing football. So it's really important to us as far as putting our team together to be able to make sure we're bringing the right kind of guys in.”

On what he looks to get out of the interviews:

“Well, the good thing is now, all-star games, going back to those. I was at the Hula bowl, went to NFLPA, left went to East-West Bowl and went to the Senior Bowl. So I did all of them. We got a ton of guys interviewed during that process so we can find out more about their personal characters. They had questions that came up and we got to kind of talk about those things. In the room here, we kind focus more on football. So, we have video up, we have them talk about exactly kind of what their roles are, what their responsibilities are, and having time to just kind of describe what's happening on the tape. So you get a sense for that part of it too. There's a lot to be a lot to be gleaned from spending time with guys and asking 'em questions about themselves, about football, about why they love to play the game. And we learned a lot here.”

On if the trip is beneficial for free agency:

“We've had several meetings with some of our, some of our guys, obviously a lot of them, we like to have back with our football team. Those discussions are really ongoing. This is the first one of the first steps in the process we've been in contact since the season ended. And now we have the opportunity to sit down and talk with the agents face to face. A lot of it depends on how things shape out other positions and where we spend money other places. So there are a lot of moving pieces to it, but it's great to get a sense of where those guys are, what their mindset is. And most of them want to be back with us and that's great to hear.”

On how hard it is to project where the salary cap will be allocated when looking for a QB:

“So obviously we're looking at all opportunities there in terms of quarterback. First what I want to say how much I appreciate [QB] Taylor Heineke. He had a battlefield promotion. Our starter played 16 snaps last season. He was our backup player at the entire season for us. He did yeoman's work. One of the hardest working guys

that I've been around one of the toughest competitors. So I just thank the world of Taylor and really appreciate him. But we are looking to upgrade that position and we're looking at every angle that's possible. We're looking at trade possibilities, draft possibilities, free agents. We're looking at everybody. That is a big piece of the puzzle, as you said, what we spend there, obviously we can't spend somewhere else. So, that we're waiting, we're trying to get that to come together, working on that. But we're also working on our own guys and trying to see what commitments that we can make. And that's all part of the, I said, moving pieces. That's what that all is."

On RB Antonio Gibson's health and the teams plan to add to the running back group through the draft:

"Yeah, Antonio's getting better. You know, he dealt with that throughout the entire season, actually one of the toughest guys on our team as well. For a running back, dealing with and lower body injuries and some of the Wednesdays, I wasn't sure he could make it through practice. But he played, I think he might have missed one game. But yeah, he played great for last year, did a great job, rushed for over a thousand yards. And he's very important moving forward. And as far as addressing that position, we're looking at everything, we want to get better everywhere. Our number one need right now is good football players, you know, so that's where we're focused."

On how the discussions about the QB position materialize:

"We certainly look at all those things and we know the guys that we expect will be available next year. I think this is a quality quarterback class this year. There's no consensus number one, I don't think right. As of right now, I think there may be some separation here at the combine. We may see some of that happening. But we're aware of what our options are as far as next year too. We are looking to address it now, if possible. And that's where our focus is."

On what he thinks of guys who workout at the Combine versus guys who opt to workout at their Pro Days:

"That's a very personal choice. Obviously, we're all here. All the GMs are here. Most of them are, most coaches are here as well. We would like to see everybody go out and compete and compare apples to apples. But the combine is just one piece of the puzzle. It started way back last summer with the blesto meetings. When we started talking about the guys who were going to be available this year, who we thought might be coming out as seniors. That was back last May. And then our area guys hit the road. They were on the road in August throughout the entire fall scouting guys. Marty was on the road quite a bit. I went out some too as well. I did a lot of film work this year. We did a lot of evaluations during the fall. Now we're here at the combine. We were at the all-star games and now we're here at the combine. The next thing will be the pro days. So it all goes together. It's a complete evaluation, the combine's not the only thing. And if a guy chooses not to that's his prerogative. We would hope that they all would all work. I think what's been interesting is as they've opened up the combine now, and it's on television and we've got fans in the stands, you guys might not remember, but like eight to ten years ago, we had a bunch of guys who wouldn't work out who decided to wait until the pro. We're seeing a lot more guys because the competitive juices flowing and they want to be on television, running a 40 and, and doing drills. We've seen a lot more guys participate. That's a good thing."

On if his own personal knowledge on a QB could potentially sway the decision:

"I mean it's not my individual decision, obviously. There are a lot of people involved in that process. I don't think that's gonna have much of a much of a bearing on who we choose but certainly I have a voice in it."

On if the team plans to bring back RB J.D. McKissic:

"He is we would love to have J.D. back. We plan to meet with his agent while we're down here. We met with [WR] Cam Sims' agent yesterday, plan to meet with [S] Bobby McCain's agent here as well. We'd love to have all three of those guys back. They're all sort of in the same group where they were really important to what we

did last year. We love to have 'em for this year. The important thing is gonna be, can we come up with the number that makes sense for everybody involved and how does that fit into the puzzle of putting our football team together? We'd love to have J.D. back. He's explosive and he made some big plays for us last year, and he's an important part of what we have going."

On negotiations with WR Terry McLaurin:

"Yeah, we plan to meet with Terry's agent as well. His agent is based here so we're gonna meet with him here. We feel good about our group of wideouts right now. We think [WR] Dyami Brown's gonna be better this year. We're trying to get Cam Sims back, expect big things from [WR] Dax Milne, Terry and [WR] Curtis Samuel didn't have a great year last year because of the injury. We expect a bounce back year from Curtis. We've got some quality guys we can always try to get better and that's what our plan is pretty much across the board. We're always looking to get better at pretty much every position."

On if he gets a good feel for the QB's in the individual meetings:

"Oh yeah. Yeah. And we met with these guys, some of these guys at the Senior Bowl as well at the East-West game. We met with several quarterbacks a couple nights ago. It's every step in the process is really important. What they did on tape last year, what they showed us in the All-Star games and how those interviews went in the All-Star games. These interviews here we'll have 30 visits, I presume we'll have quarterbacks involved in those vis as well. It's an entire process and there's not one piece of it that's more important than any other piece of it."

On what he thinks of the Georgia players:

"There are a lot of good players at Georgia that's for sure. I wish I had done a school visit there but had an opportunity to see quite a few of those guys play in the playoffs. We're gonna spend some time with some of those guys as well. I don't see one particular common trait in those guys. They really had a really good defensive front and a lot ton of good players from there."

On if he looks for speed in LB's:

"Yeah. We need athletes across the board on defense where you're talking defensive line, linebackers, secondary. With the way offenses now are spreading everybody out you gotta be able to play in space. So athleticism is really important. Obviously, we have some guys that have that and can always add more to that group. Linebackers have to be able to cover. There's very few guys now that are two-down run-stopping linebackers. I played with those guys back in the 90's when I was playing and those guys are disappearing. Now you gotta be able to be an athlete and make plays in space. We're looking for players who can do that"

On how negotiations will affect bringing a player back:

"Yeah. We want to get a sense for where they are contractually. We want to explain to them that we aren't ready to make an offer right now, but we do want them back and they have the opportunity, uh, to, to go out. And when the negotiation period begins in a week or so, they'll have the opportunity to go out and talk to other teams and we want them to keep us informed as to where they are contractually and what kind of offers they're looking at. That's what our purpose here is, to express that we want those guys back, there's no offers going back and forth, but they know of our interests and know how important those guys are to us, who one express that to their agents personally."