

March 1, 2023

General Manager Martin Mayhew

Opening Statement:

“All right guys. Glad to see you all at this combine and really a very important part of the process for us as a team. I just want to start by just saying what a great job and shout out to [President of National Football Scouting] Jeff Foster and his staff. They do an incredible job in terms of setting this whole thing up and running it. There's been talk a few years ago about the player experience and Jeff went back re-evaluated everything that they were doing here. And we've made a lot of changes that are to the benefit of the players in terms of changing the schedule up, changing the medical process, but not being pulled on by four and five doctors. Now we've got that process streamlined and created a recovery room for the guys. I know it's up for bid in 2025, but I'm very hopeful and a lot of my colleagues are hopeful that it stays here in Indianapolis. So with that, I will open it up to questions.”

On how the NFL Combine changes help the evaluation process:

“What was talked about a couple years ago was the amount of stress that was put on these guys and how long their days were. And what it really allows them to do, I think, is be their best self in the interview process, as well as on the field process that they're not tired. Last year a lot was made of the fact that we had the bench on the same day as the [40-yard dash]. So a lot of guys did not do the bench last year for that reason. So now they changed it so the bench is the day after the on field workout. So those kinds of things allow the players to perform at their absolute best, which is what we want and what the players and their agents want as well.”

On how much he values traditional evaluation with the modernization of tracking data:

“We value all that. It's all pieces of the puzzle. You can't just put it on one thing like a 40 time or height, weight, speed. There are so many variables involved. The tracking data is obviously very helpful but the 40 times we look at that because it's uniform, everybody's running on the same surface, on the same day. All the DB groups the same day, all linebackers, same day, same surface. So, it's not like the different pro days where you have different types of surfaces, different conditions. Some guys are outside, some guys are on grass and some guys are inside on turf or different types of turf. So, it just gives us one standard and we can see who ran faster on that particular day, which is helpful to us in terms of gathering accurate information.”

On the benefits of QB Sam Howell being able to watch a veteran QB:

“I think that it's a tremendous value. I don't think it's any coincidence that [Green Bay Packers QB] Aaron Rodgers and [Kansas City Chiefs QB] Pat Mahomes are two of the best quarterbacks in the league, and they had the benefit of being able to sit behind a quality quarterback, sit and learn for some period of time. I'm obviously not saying that Sam is those guys right now, but I'm saying that I think that there's a lot of benefit to coming in without that immediate pressure every single week to learn a different game plan, to play against a different team, to play a longer season than you ever played in your whole life with grown men and different schemes that you're seeing you haven't seen before. I think that's one of the things as a league where we really have failed is in developing quarterbacks. And the reason for that, I believe, is because the bad teams get to pick first. They pick a very talented quarterback. Sometimes their team is not that talented then they have that immediate pressure to put that player on the field and so many guys have failed for that reason. So, I think it's going to help Sam a lot.”

On the growing number of versatile position players:

“Well I think you see it a lot more multiple defensive schemes. So, you see schemes that run three-four defenses than they morph into a four-three. We have what we call our cinco package, which is five down linemen. So you're seeing people are able to put different pieces in different spots to make the most of what their skillset is. So I think that benefits some of these guys that are declared as tweeners. Are they defensive tackles or defensive ends? Are they outside linebackers or edge players or pass rushers. I think it benefits those guys. We have so many schemes that have multiple and we find multiple uses of guys to be able to maximize their skillset.”

On how measurables influence a player's stock:

“I think that's something you got to think about, but you know one of the biggest mistakes I've made in my career was assuming that [Los Angeles Rams DT] Aaron Donald was too small. And a lot of people thought that 12 other teams thought the same thing because he went 13th. But obviously you got to take into consideration what measurables that you want and desire, but you also have to look at what a guy can do, what they're capable of doing. And clearly you can't make a decision based off that, I don't think. You got to watch the tape, evaluate who that guy is, get to know that player as a person and make an ultimate decision of what he can contribute to your team despite what his measurables are.”

On how much time he devotes to looking at prospects versus potential deals:

“Yeah, honestly, this year we have not done a lot of deal talking at this point we have several agent meetings that we're doing, meeting with some of the agents from some of our players but it varies from year to year. If you have somebody who you're trying to move or if you have somebody who you've targeted on a different team that you're trying to get, you'll spend a lot of time on that. This year so far, I haven't spent much time on that.”

On his experience at the NFL Combine as a former player:

“That was 1988. That was a long time ago, so I don’t remember a whole heck of a lot about it. I remember I ran pretty good. I remember I got seven reps on the bench. I was pretty embarrassed about that. But yeah, it’s changed a lot since then and for the better, I think. I think the interview process has changed a lot, which has been really beneficial as far as getting to know these guys and having the opportunity to do that. A lot of the other data that we collect now, we didn’t collect back then. A lot of psychological testing that we’re able to do now, we didn’t do back then. It’s gotten a lot better, a lot more sophisticated, obviously a lot more people here. Now you have fans there and obviously a lot more of you guys here as well. Before I think the goal was initially to get medical information and then do a little on field workout and get to know these guys a little bit. It hasn’t changed dramatically in terms of the goals, but the method to get to those answers has changed a lot and it’s a lot more efficient.”

On how he utilizes the Senior Bowl:

“The Senior Bowl has been outstanding. [Executive Director of Reese’s Senior Bowl] Jim Nay has done an incredible job getting that revamped and resituated. Their interview process has been incredible. We get to talk to every single guy that’s there, which is really helpful for us. And every year I go to the Senior Bowl since I’ve been going for the last 20 years or whatever, there’s always a guy or two that catches your eye that you haven’t seen before I don’t know what’s much about. Thinking back, I think it was 2014 or 15, the year we drafted [G] Laken Tomlinson. There was a corner/safety there that I didn’t know hardly anything about. I knew his name and that was pretty much it. But he had an incredible week of practice. We ended up taking that guy in the sixth round, [S] Quandre Diggs who ended up being an all -pro. And he caught my eye at the Senior Bowl. So, I think there’s a lot of benefit for players to go there and we certainly derive a lot of benefit from it.”

On how Offensive Coordinator Eric Bieniemy’s system will influence prospecting:

“We’re still working through that process with Eric. He’s only been there for a couple days. I’ve seen him in the office, I think two days and I just saw him at the hotel a while back. So we’re still evolving with that process with him and trying to figure out exactly what he’s going to be looking for at different positions. We have some thoughts obviously, but we’re going to blend all that and we’ll get into free agency and get into the draft and start getting input from him and we’ll make some of those decisions down the road.”

On how much he will lean on Offensive Coordinator Eric Bieniemy for input on the upcoming draft:

“We lean on our coaching staff. Our coaches do a great job evaluating players. That’s one thing I think that [Head] Coach [Ron] Rivera’s done a really good job of putting the staff together of guys that know what they’re looking at. So we lean on those guys a lot. Eric will be very involved in the process. We definitely lean on him and [Defensive Coordinator] Jack [Del Rio] as coordinators to know what they want as far as skillset set and what they look for in certain players. So, Eric will be

very involved in that.”

On what he thinks about teams not sending any representatives to the combine:

“I think what's going on is I think some of the coaches are not coming. All the general managers are here. As far as I know, all the personnel departments are here. This is really an event, an opportunity for us to see these guys live. A lot of guys that you haven't seen and sit down and talk with these guys one-on-one. I don't know the whole background of each coaching staff or each team made that decision. Frequently that decision is made by a GM or an owner that says there's not enough value for you to go. Our coaches are all here, all participating, they're all involved in the interview process. We think there's value in that for them being able to sit down and talk to these guys face to face. We had a great interview with [RB] Brian Robinson last year, but we left that interview with some questions we wanted to ask Brian further. And we brought him into our building for a 30 visit and we got answers to all those questions, and it worked out very well for us. So we think there's a lot of value in having the coaches involved in this process, especially the interview process.”

On if they talked to Georgia DL Jalen Carter:

“Yeah, I haven't spoken to Jalen Carter. I read the news and I know as much as you do about that.”

On how teams evaluate players background off the field:

“Well, it's gonna be pretty heavily investigated by the media and by you guys. We'll track that, obviously. We have a company that we work with on background investigations and we'll work with that company. We have a very thorough analysis of these guys' backgrounds, especially any criminal activity or criminal behavior, things like that. I don't know what happened with him. Not saying he did anything that was wrong because I don't know but we'll know. We'll find out.”

On if they do background checks for all draft prospects:

“We'll do it for everyone. Everybody. Yeah, so we do a very thorough background check on everybody.”

On how you assess the older players in the draft:

“Yeah, I think it's something you've gotta look at more extensively or look deeper into it and just what a player's numerical age is. How much football did he play? Did he play a ton of football? If he is a running back, did he get 600, 700 carries? Those are the things that will concern you more than what his numerical age is. We'll look at that. I think the NIL's and the transfer portal have changed college football as we know it. A lot of people think that's not good. I don't know if it's good or bad. I do know one thing that's positive that came from it though is that we don't see as many guys who are gonna be seventh round picks or free agents declaring for the draft now because they can go to their school. If their family doesn't have any money, they can earn some money at the school. If they're not happy with how they're being used or with their coaching staff, they can transfer to a different school. So, we're seeing a smaller number of guys that are coming out early, I think for that reason. I think there is some benefit to those college players having opportunities, other

options besides coming into the draft when they're not really ready for it.”

On if they have had conversations with WR Curtis Samuel about restructuring his contract:

“I won't get into any of the contracts talks that we have with our guys.”

On the tight end group:

“Yeah, we evaluate that pretty thoroughly. It is really good tight end class, I believe. I think we have a really good group of tight ends. I think Logan Thomas has been a very good player for us in the past. As you know, Cole Turner had one of the best off seasons that I've seen a young tight end have and then he got injured in training camp and suffered some soft tissue injuries during the season. We didn't see fully what Cole is capable of doing. And then Armani [Rogers] also as an undrafted free agent, a guy who moved to tight end last year really showed some very intriguing flashes. Obviously, John Bates is a very complete guy as a blocker and as a receiver. Then we've got Curtis Hodges who was on the injured reserve last year. We didn't activate him, but he is very, very talented. We've got a nice group of young pups out there that look pretty good.”

On the progression of HBCU exposure:

“Well, I want to give some credit to my old teammate, Deion Sanders for shining light on black colleges and HBCUs. I think it was pretty incredible what he did down at Jackson State in Jackson, Mississippi and he is the guy that did it the right way. He was a high school coach. He went and became a college coach. He dominated at that level and now he's moved on to Colorado and I think he really shined a light on HBCUs because I'm from Tallahassee, Florida, so Florida A&M was a school I was very familiar with. I went to all their games when I was in high school. They offered me a scholarship. I ended up going to Florida State. My mom went to Florida A&M as a matter of fact. So, I really appreciated what he's been able to do for HBCUs and I think we're gonna see more kids that are willing to go to HBCUs to play because that light's been shined on those schools. Now they're getting more games on television. They're much more visible than what they were four or five years ago.”

On the quarterback position and QB Sam Howell:

“Yeah, there is a lot of discussion about that. We're working through our roster right now. One of the important things about the combines an opportunity to see all of the young quarterbacks that are coming out too and we're have an opportunity to look at those as well as what's out there in free agency. Sam will have every opportunity to win that starting job. Was very impressed with the way that he played and practiced last year. Obviously very small sample, he only played in one game, but we got to see him the whole off season. We gotta see him all through training camp, every week in practice. He has the skills that it takes to be a starter in this league, in my opinion.”

On Offensive Coordinator Eric Bieniemy:

“Eric and I go way back. We've got probably a hundred thousand or so friends in common. He's, a fraternity brother of mine, Omega Psi Phi. So, when I interviewed him, I was just trying not to piss him off, you know but we're so glad to have him. It is a guy that's been in three of the last four Super Bowls. Had the number one offense in the league last year in terms of scoring. Just as an offense coordinator has accomplished a lot and our guys are really excited about it too. Our team is

excited about it. The whole building is excited to have him join us. His press conference, I mean, Terry McClaurin was there, Jahan Dotson was there, Logan Thomas. A lot of our players showed up. They're excited about what he brings to the table and what he's gonna be able to do for us offensively. Honestly, I'm just glad that we have him. I'm glad that he's a part of our football team. Couldn't be happier to have him. Certainly, appreciate Scott Turner and the things he was able to do for us. He did some really good things for us but we're really happy to have Eric.”

On his philosophy on players that made mistakes early in college:

“I mean, I think you gotta take into consideration that probably most of you guys, I know I did make some mistakes in college so you gotta take that. But what kind of mistake was it and is it something that has been addressed? Is it something that the player has addressed or is it something that we're still concerned about? That's the big question for me. I think football character is really, really important. As long as well as personal character in terms of our draft and adding guys to our football team. I've been to two Super Bowls. One is a player and one is an executive, and both of those teams had outstanding character, the 1991 Redskins and 2019 49ers where we lost to Eric Bienenmy unfortunately. But I think the character is really important, but I think you have to go to with the understanding these are typically teenage kids. If they made a mistake as a teenager, and if we condemn every single guy that did that, that's, that's on us. So, you gotta weigh everything and evaluate everything in the whole person and that's the way I look at it.”

On how challenging it may be when a player is going through a situation outside of football:

“Well, I don't know all the details of it. It certainly is a challenge for him. It's something that needs to be explained, thoroughly explained. Something needs to be investigated in terms of this the first time this ever happened or is has happened before and is it something that can be controlled.”

On if there is anything he can take from his time with the San Francisco 49ers in terms of late round draft picks:

“The one thing that I felt that they did a really good job of was just knowing to play a profile of what they were looking for and we're trying to do the same thing here for different positions. What things are important? What attributes are really important for those positions to be successful? You may find somebody like a George Kittle in the fifth round who has some of the attributes that you're looking for in a tight end and maybe there's some things that kept him out of the first round. But if you know that he's gonna fit for what you're doing offensively, he fits your scheme, he's gonna fit into what you're doing and fit into your locker room, then you take that shot on a player like George. So, I think they do a really good job of identifying guys that fit them and that's what we're trying to do here.”