

Chargers General Manager Tom Telesco Pre-Draft Media Availability

Monday, April 25, 2022 ⚡ Hoag Performance Center ⚡ Costa Mesa, Calif.

On 'how close the roster is to being a complete football team':

"You never really know. You just don't ever really know. We're just trying to use every avenue we can use right now to get there, whether through trades, free agency, the draft, or post-draft. How close are we? I don't know."

On 'if there have been more calls this year' regarding trading draft selections:

"It seems like every year people say the same thing. I don't know. It seems about the same as every other year. There's never really a consensus in the draft. There really shouldn't be; they're just opinions. It's such a subjective process that we go through to rank the players. I don't know. I think the fact that there may not be as many quarterbacks [selected] as usual, maybe that couple play into it. It's just hard to tell. A lot of the trade stuff, you may make a couple of calls this week just to set things up, but it really doesn't get going until when the draft starts, even when you're on the clock sometimes — a player may get a little bit further down than you thought and a team makes a move. It's hard to tell."

On if he 'gets antsy' due to selecting near the middle of the first round:

"You try not to get antsy about it. Sometimes, you just have to sit, wait and be patient. Sometimes. I feel good about where we are. With the amount of players that we have in that area, we should be in pretty good shape."

On if the amount of selections on Day 3 of the draft gives the club 'enough capital' to 'get back' a second- or third-round selection:

"More than likely, probably not. Those seventh-round picks don't carry a lot of capital. We have two sixes. It doesn't get you real far, those picks. It's always a possibility, but I don't know if it's realistic."

On the potential of trading back in the first round to acquire a second-round selection:

"We're always open to it. You'd have to go back pretty far to get a two. But, it's certainly something that you have to look at. We're going into the draft with a first-round pick, and then a big gap until you get to the third [round]. I spend a lot of time going through scenarios and preparations, as far as what could happen, going up or down. Going up this year, without having a second-round pick, I don't know if that's really realistic. I don't think we'll have to, anyways. But, going back, certainly — it's an option every year, and it would certainly be an option this year. A lot of it comes down to who is on the board at that point, how far back do you want to go, how many players do you have left at that spot? There are a lot of benefits of moving down; you can pick up an extra pick, you may pick up an upgrade at the pick. You have to kind of weigh that versus who is there, and kind of remind yourself that we are not infallible, as far as talent evaluators — as many as we get right, we get wrong. Even in the first round, probably less than half of these guys will sign a second contract with their own team. That's not great odds. You have to remember that we put all of this work into these guys, but we're not going to be 100 percent right. Sometimes moving back is helpful; at least you get a little something back for that process, but we'll see. A lot of it plays out during the draft. I don't know exactly who is going where. I put a lot of work into trying to figure that out. I'm like you guys, I don't really know. I don't think anybody really knows. We play it out, do a lot of different scenarios, and let it ride from there."

On if this year's draft 'feels wide open':

"It'd be nice if like four quarterbacks went in the top 15 [picks]. I don't know where those guys fall. I really don't. But the rest of it is about the same to me, it just really is. It doesn't really feel any different than any other year."

On how this year's in-prospect visits compare to conducting visits virtually over the last two years:

"It's nice to have it back, but we've also done more Zoom interviews this year than we did three or four years ago. It's been very efficient. Is it exactly like a face-to-face interview? Obviously not, but we can talk to more people that way. We have brought players in for visits like we used to. Just having the scouts back in the building for meetings, it's kind of important, too. The process is a little bit back to normal. We also learned a lot of things during the pandemic, of how we work, how efficient we can be and how we can make some changes to that, and we've kind of implemented that, as well."

On 'if we're getting back to a little bit more normalcy' with pre-draft visits and preparations:

"There are certainly a lot more numbers this year than last year, and that's really due to the pandemic — players getting an extra year of eligibility to play. Our numbers are really heavy, just the amount of players that the scouts have looked at. Our pool is much bigger. Some players, have like five years of playing, starting experience, which you never used to see. I've never seen so many 24-year-old prospects in the draft in my life. Usually, that's a negative. It may not be so much of a negative now just because there are reasons why they stayed in school. The numbers are high. There's always a lot of tape to watch and players. There are some players that we've seen for five years and have done like three years of work on them, thinking that they were going to come out three years ago, two years ago, then now. But, there should be a pretty strong effort across the league after the draft."

On if there's a 'need' to address the offensive line in the draft:

"We'll just kind of see how it plays out. You never know how it's going to go. A little bit like free agency, you can only bring in what's going to be available — same thing with the draft, you can only draft what's available. We certainly aren't going to force anything. We have different plans in-house, different plans looking forward if it wasn't from in-house. We'll see how it plays out."

On using an offensive line prospect's traits, tape and measurables for a projection of how they will be as an NFL player:

"That's why it's just so subjective, how we do this. There are a lot of opinions involved. You never have anybody with the exact same opinion of players. It's more art than science, when it comes down to it. We use a lot of data to try and cross-check our eyes, but in the end, it's kind of an art as you put this together. You have to weigh that, but even with [T] [Rashawn] [Slater], it wasn't like he was a slam dunk guy. There are no slam dunk players in the draft; there hasn't been. There are certain players that may be, fundamentally, a little farther along than others, but when they get here, we have coaches here that that is what they do. A big part of us getting better for next year is not just adding new players, it's developing what we have. That's coaching. That's coaching in the offseason. Coaches aren't just doing scheme, X's and O's, all day long, it's developing the players we have. If you do see a player that you feel like has all of the traits you need to project at this level, and you feel like he has the work ethic, the mentality, that drive and desire to be great, then you can work with that and you can develop them. We do have to be careful. We want to draft good college players, but those college players have to project to pro players, and sometimes there's a difference there. That's why we have coaches that go out there and work with these guys — put together all of the traits, see if the work ethic is there, then you roll the dice and see if it works."

On projecting if a college left tackle can make the transition to right tackle in the NFL:

“It’s a good question because I know that, as scouts, it’s really easy for me to say, ‘Just flip the left tackle to right tackle,’ or, ‘Hey, he’s a tackle, let’s just put him at guard.’ But, as a coach, there’s some work there. It’s not just a given that a guy can flip from one side to the other. Yes, there are projections involved. I know, for me, the way that we play the game nowadays, both tackles are really left tackles to me, they both have to be really good pass protectors because there are so many good rushers in this league. All of the good teams have multiple rushers — they can line up wherever they want, they can line up inside and line up outside, left or right — and we have to be like protect that. There are discussions about that. If there’s a player that as only played one position in college, can he make that transition that he may play for us? Those are discussions. That’s where it’s really helpful when the coach is getting involved really heavily, if they think that a guy can make that move. Most guys can, but it’s certainly something that we just don’t gloss over and say, ‘We’ll just flip this guy from left to right,’ and let it roll. We do have a lot of discussions on that.”

On working with the scouting staff to develop the draft board from the beginning of the process through the selection:

“For the scouts, it’s a 12-month process. It’s almost 13 months because I know that our guys, in the month of April, are working on next year’s draft, as well. They kind of dual-role it. That draft board, that starts going up in September, and that board is being worked the whole year until we get through February. Then, in this process, we do a lot of draft management to move some guys around. It’s a full-year process with the scouts. We also add in the coaches’ opinions, which is a really big part of the process, as far as how they’ll fit our scheme, whether we’re offense or defense, talking about projections from one position to another. These guys are really good at that, as far as being able to give us information there. Then, you add in all of the medical, the character and the psychological testing that we do. It all rolls into one.”

On what ‘exercising patience’ looks like in the draft room:

“Poker face. You do so much preparation that once draft day comes, really nothing should surprise you. Now, something could surprise us if a player goes before us that we didn’t anticipate, but as far as how it would affect us, it shouldn’t because we should have already talked out not that specific player, but where our numbers would be coming down to our pick. The last two, three weeks, a lot of it’s just draft preparation of what could happen and how you would attack it. So, if you’ve gone through those scenarios — it’s just like a game day, if you’ve practiced and prepared well enough, you shouldn’t have any pressure on game day, just go out and execute it.”

On ‘incorporating positional value’ when vertically aligning the draft board:

“That’s usually on the back end of it. We’ll get the board up from the scouts kind of — I wouldn’t say vanilla, but without any positional value — more our roster is completely empty, we have no players, let’s just put the board up. As we get towards the back end of it, we start moving some guys around based on some of those factors. Then, I always explain to the guys why I’ve moved some of the guys around. That’s kind of part two of the draft board.”

On if the ‘F them picks era’ has caused him to ‘move at all in’ in how he values draft picks:

“I haven’t changed, no. I think what people forget about the Rams — I mean, everyone is focused on those first-round picks — but they’ve drafted and developed players really well, middle and late [rounds]. It kind of gets glossed over. I guess it’s not as sexy, but they’ve done a great job with that, both [Rams General Manager] Les [Snead] and [Rams Head Coach] Sean [McVay]. No, I don’t think so. You can go back to the draft 20 or 30 years, teams have been trading first-round picks for players for a long time. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn’t. If there was only one way to build a Super Bowl team, we would all take that exact same path. Obviously, the Rams did their path and it worked great, they won the Super Bowl. It hasn’t really changed the value of that first-round pick, at least for me. They’re not the first team to do it, they just did it really, really well.”

On if the model of trading early-round picks is sustainable:

“Yeah, it’s hard to tell. I guess we’ll find out over time how things work. Like I said, there’s just so many different ways to build a team. They’re doing it the right way right now.”

On the defensive improvements:

"I would hope [that the improvements make a difference]. I would hope so. All of those guys that we added, plus the players that we had with another year in this system, I'm hoping we take a big jump on that side of the ball this year."

On the running backs:

"It's two-pronged. We have some running backs here that kind of need to take that next step. It's part of player development and coaching. Then, see where the draft takes us, see where after the draft takes us. Just trying to attack it different ways. Running backs have value in this league. You need them and you need good ones. You need guys that can do a lot of different things. It's a difficult position to play, but just the way college football is, there are a lot of running backs that come out every year. As we're seeing, a lot of receivers are coming out every year. They still have value to us, but it's just a matter of where we're going to place them. You only get so many picks to try and attack things through different avenues. Without forgetting the players that we have here and some development and improvement that can be made."

On the team's draft history over the last decade:

"Yeah, I don't really grade drafts. I'll leave that up to you."

On having one player from the 2018 NFL Draft class left on the roster:

"If you take that one year, I'd think it would be [lower than other teams in the league], yeah. I think you hopefully would look at it from a little bit of a more broad base than that, but you're right. I mean, you're right. It just seems like the players that we hit on, we don't really think about. The players we miss on — I'm talking about us — we try and figure out where did we miss? It's a pretty big process that we go through of what went wrong. Sometimes, it's something that we maybe didn't see. Sometimes, it was something uncontrollable. In the end, it's an in-exact science. We try to make the best decision that we can with the information that we have. We try to make it probability-based, just trying to increase our odds of hitting on the player. It doesn't mean that we're going to hit it on every player, we understand that. We'd like to hit on more than that draft class, certainly. It's just the way that it is. It's not easy drafting players. We've been good some years. It's just hard to tell, it really is. I like our process. I like the people that are involved with it. It's a lot of information on a lot of players from a lot of people in this building — not just the scouts. You're talking about it before, it's the medical, the doctors, the psychological testing, the security background checks and all of the sources that we talk to across colleges. You do the best that you can with that."

On if medical, background checks and speaking with sources is able to be done virtually more often now:

"Yeah, it's like picking up the phone. Sometimes you wouldn't need to Zoom, but certainly that's all part of the process."

On the defensive line:

"It's good. We got some guys in there, some big bodies, that play hard, that fit what we want to do. I'm excited about it."

On LB Kenneth Murray Jr.:

"I don't know [his timetable]. I assume he'll probably miss most of OTAs and kind of go from there. He had ankle surgery. It's something that you'd prefer to not have surgery. That's always your first approach if you can. I think, in his case, it just got to the point where it seemed like the best course of action was to go in and have surgery. He's handled it really well."

On if Murray will be ready for the start of training camp:

"I don't really know yet right now."

On the fifth-year option for DL Jerry Tillery:

"No updates there. Jerry had a really nice role for us last year. I expect an even bigger role this year. We'll figure that contract stuff out after the draft."

On if the team could bring in a second punter:

"I've told [P] JK [Scott] that we'll probably have two punters in camp. We're excited about him. Once you guys see him, he's a really big, athletic punter. He gets the ball off quickly. Really good leg. I know he wasn't with a team this past year until the very end, but he kicked well in Green Bay. [Special Teams Coordinator] Ryan Ficken was a real advocate for him. I think you guys will be pleasantly surprised when you see him punt. He has some real NFL talent. We'll probably have another punter in as well and kind of see where it goes."

On if the process focuses more on special teams ability for late-round selections:

"I don't know if we would focus more on it. In my career, I can't remember ever having this many picks in the sixth and seventh rounds. I have no idea how it's going to roll. When you get down toward that seventh round, the way we do our board, there's not a lot of players left down there. We'll kind of see how it shakes out. It's going to be kind of fun, I guess, to have that many picks in the seventh, but we'll see. It wouldn't be a straight focus on just special teams. We'll kind of see where it goes."

On if OLB Chris Rumph II is ready for the third edge rusher role:

"I think so. We'll see once we get to training camp, but he would fit that category of a drafted player from last year and get in a whole offseason program. He's very coachable to take that jump. We signed a linebacker/edge player from the CFL. He was a good player up there, we'll see how he does."

On a potential extension with S Derwin James Jr.:

"Same answer as Jerry [Tillery]."

On a potential extension with QB Justin Herbert:

"I guess [Browns QB Deshaun Watson's contract] could [influence future quarterback contracts], but I'm kind of draft-focused right now. We'll worry about that one down the road. It's a legitimate question, sure."

On if the 2023 NFL Draft can influence how teams approach the 2022 NFL Draft:

"It sounds really good, I just don't think it's realistic. I don't really subscribe to that theory. There have been too many players that we have thought would be real guys the following year and then they don't turn out to be that. I think it's just way too early to try and dictate where next year's draft is, even position-wise. I just wouldn't subscribe to that, but it always sounds pretty good. Maybe people can do that. I'm not good enough to be able to project out that far. I'm not smart enough to do that."

On what this time of year is like for him:

"Most of our work is done. Now, it's just really thinking through different scenarios. Yeah, I have a lot of things that go through my head for the two weeks leading up to the draft. Our scouts, our coaches, they do a great job with preparation. We're really organized. It doesn't mean that we're going to get every pick right, but we're really organized with the information. That really kind of makes you sleep relatively well at night. Again, a lot of the draft, I can't control what's going to happen. I don't know exactly who will go in front of us. I don't know, if we trade back, exactly who will go and who we would miss on. You just make educated decisions and try not to overthink it. At least, that's been my philosophy on that. [The Associated Press'] Joe [Reedy] was trying to make me think really hard about next year's draft already, 2023. I don't have enough brain power for that. We're just trying not to overthink it. We're trying to evaluate football players. We realize it's just not an exact science. We can spend hours trying to rank players, but there's no official ranking of players, there just isn't. That's why when I hear that this player was a reach or this player was a great value, it doesn't make sense to me. That's just your opinion of where you thought that player should be drafted and he was either drafted lower or higher. I don't know, that doesn't make sense. If you go back and look at drafts — take any draft — and look how they were drafted and then look how their pro careers were, it certainly didn't go from one to whatever. It just doesn't. We put a lot of work into this. We kind of get players in groups and different areas. Yeah, we'll talk about ranking them, but I don't get too concerned about an exact ranking because who knows? Who really knows? Now, we do add in a lot of medical and character stuff that kind of affects those rankings, but as far as talent and evaluating the player, it's difficult to have a true ranking. You get things up there and you get prepared. You watch the draft kind of unfold and let it ride from there."

On the draft room moving to SoFi Stadium for the first round of the draft:

“If we hadn’t had the pandemic draft, it would be really, really strange. I would have been, probably, fighting back a little bit on it. Again, I was worried about the pandemic draft and doing it from home. I didn’t think that was going to work and it worked awesome. It worked great. If I can draft from my dining room table, I can draft from anywhere. The stadium, we have a huge locker room, plenty of space. It won’t be an issue at all. Again, if we didn’t have that pandemic draft, I’d probably be worried about it, which isn’t a good thing to have when you’re trying to go and make decisions. That worked just fine, this will work just fine. It will be kind of fun. It’s like a field trip. You go down to the stadium, make our pick and come back home for it. It’s something different to do. The draft is fun. It’s supposed to be fun. I know it’s our job, but for the fans and everybody involved, it’s something fun to do. It will work just fine at SoFi [Stadium].”

On making sure the draft board stays intact:

“I have a really good plan for that right now.”

On if the surfboard will make its way to SoFi Stadium:

“You know, it hasn’t yet. That’s probably something that I may have to work on this week.”

On if he’s excited for DraftFest Special Guest Snoop Dogg:

“Sure. I mean, Snoop is a coach, so we may have to lean on him a little bit and see who he likes in the first round.”