

Chargers General Manager Tom Telesco Day 1 Draft Availability Thursday, April 28, 2022 ⚡ SoFi Stadium ⚡ Inglewood, Calif.

Opening statement:

“Just real quick because I wish I would’ve mentioned this at the pre-draft press conference and I kind of thought about it today. I do want to recognize, some of you guys may know about him, but John Clayton. I know John was part of the media, but he was kind of a big part of our football community in the NFL and I know he loved the draft. I thought about this week, we used to talk to each other, for probably nine years, the week before the draft and kind of go through all the teams and what they may do. I’d get feedback from him and I’d give him a little bit. I always looked forward to it. He used to always help me kind of prepare for the draft. I know how much he loved the draft, so I just wanted to recognize him. Even though he was [a member of the media], he was a big part of our NFL community. That being said, let’s segway over to Zion and you can ask whatever you want.”

On selecting G Zion Johnson:

“Guards are people too, right? I know it’s not the sexiest pick in the world, but he’s tough, he’s durable, he’s smart. We have some excellent skill players, both at receiver, tight end, also at running back and with [QB] Justin Herbert, obviously, these guys cannot do their jobs without a rock-solid offensive line. So, as much as this pick is to protect our quarterback, which is a big part of it, this is also to facilitate everybody else. It’s pass-protection, it’s run game. We’re in the second half of the game and we have a lead and we’ve got to run the ball, they know we’re going to run the ball, he’s going to help there. So, if he does what we think he can do, he’s going to play 900 to 1,000 snaps for us in his rookie year, but he’s a really well-rounded football player, so we’re excited to get him in here.”

On how the scenario played out:

“As I did all of my work, I was pretty confident he should be there when we pick. I know we love to say, “We never thought he’d be there.” I thought he’d be there, so that was a target of ours, felt good. There wasn’t a whole lot of action when we were picking, as far as moving down, I knew we weren’t going to move up, so we’re really thrilled to get him.”

On recognizing Johnson’s difference from his junior year to senior year:

“He’s played a lot of spots. His story is incredible. What’s great is he’s earned everything he’s had to get to this level. We’re talking about a kid, two years of high school football, so a late bloomer, he goes to a non-scholarship Davidson, plays really well there, but it’s non-scholarship competition, obviously, and he’s paying his own way to college. You guys can all ask these questions to him when he comes in tomorrow. College gets expensive, so he put his name in a transfer portal and one of his coaches who had gone to Boston College, they liked him obviously, they brought him and he just really took off at Boston College. He played multiple positions there. He’s really, really strong, like powerfully strong lower body, so he can anchor on big people inside in pass protection, but he’s also a very good athlete and he’s really smart. Those are the qualities you really need in an offensive lineman. He’s versatile. We see him as a guard, he could be a center down the road, I don’t think tackle, but really solid interior offensive lineman with some versatility down the road.”

On his resiliency playing into the decision making:

“It does. I mean, you like to see prospects that have had to handle tough situations. He wasn’t a big recruit out of high school. One year starter in high school, so a late bloomer, so he had to try and find somewhere to play football. Davidson recruited him, but that’s not particularly high level, no offense to Davidson, but it is not Boston College. Then he goes to Boston College and you’ve got to earn it all over again against better people and he did it there. Then he went to the Senior Bowl and he had to earn it all over there again and he did it there. He will have to come to this level and same thing, he’s going to have to earn it all over again. I mean, the competition and the players get better and better and better. They get bigger and faster and more powerful, so we think he has all of the makeup you need for that position along with the ability.”

On Johnson setting himself apart compared to other prospects:

“Everything I just kind of mentioned, he’s just a really well-rounded player — run-game, pass-game. We will see in training camp, but I don’t think it should be a big learning curve for him, but I guess we’ll see. Just really well-rounded in both phases of the game.”

On where Johnson fits on the offensive line:

“We see Zion as a right guard right now. Nothing has changed with [G] Matt Feiler. It’s always an option, it’s just not something we’re pursuing right now.”

On how the Senior Bowl helped Johnson’s value:

“It certainly didn’t hurt it. He already had a really great season this past year at Boston College. We wanted to make sure to see something similar to the Senior Bowl, in which he showed that against good people. There were some pretty good defensive linemen there, so it was a big help.”

On the comparison from left guard to right guard and Johnson’s transition:

“I mean I don’t want to make it sound like it’s easy. He’ll have to make a little transition there, but I’m not worried about it.”

On if Johnson was one of the guys that he talked to at the Senior Bowl and at the Combine:

“Yes, I talked to a lot of guys, but yes, Senior Bowl, Combine, probably even Pro Day.”

On Johnson’s personality fit with the organization:

“Yeah, I mean all of the work we did on Zion, he’s a great teammate and that’s a big part of playing here. He walks in here and he was a great college player — one of the best players on his college team. He walks through our locker room and he is the youngest player here and he has got to earn his role again, but we think he got some great ability to be a good teammate, to learn from the guys that are older than him, do what he is supposed to do and gradually, he will kind of grow into that leadership role some time way down the road, like they all do. We think he is going to fit in really well with the group and the offensive line and that’s a tight-knit group, those five-plus, three or four backup offensive linemen. It’s a really tight-knit group and fitting in and being a part of that is a big part of it.”

On T Storm Norton or T Trey Pipkins III at right tackle:

“If we are playing tomorrow, yeah, we’re okay with it.”

On if he was surprised with the number of trades that took place before their pick:

“Yes, it was really quiet to start off. I think it was five defensive players who went first and then kind of picked up from there and it sounds like it’s going nuts right now in there. I lost track of who’s going where.”

On how different the preparation was for this draft with the 17th overall pick in comparison to in 2018 when they had the 17th overall pick:

“It’s the same preparation in this draft, just thought there was a lower chance that he would make it to our pick. So, if we wanted [S Derwin James Jr.], we’d have to trade up. This one seemed, process and preparation, I just felt there was a much better chance that he could be there to pick.”

On if he felt like he could still have a chance to draft Johnson if he traded down:

“Yeah, depending where. You make educated decisions on where a guy could go. In the end, no, I don’t really know, but I try to make educated decisions on that, but it was pretty quiet.”

On if he has ever been involved in a draft with about eight trades in the first round:

“I’d have to look. I don’t know if that’s a lot or not. It just seems like since we picked, every time we looked up, someone was making a trade, which, obviously, it takes two teams. Some teams are coming up because they’re being aggressive because they want to get a player and other teams feel like that we can move back and we’ve got plenty of guys to choose from. That’s what makes the draft great. We all look at it a little bit differently. We all have different lists of players. There are 32 teams and we don’t all rank [the players] the same way. Just like when you look at all of the mock drafts that are done, they’re not all the same, right? Because we all look at players differently. It’s just opinions. So, everybody values players a little bit differently.”

On the Houston Texans taking a guard as the 15th overall pick:

“I had it on their list. I didn’t know it was going to be that high.”

On if the phone rang in the draft room:

“Pretty quiet. If you prepare the right way and have a good plan, there really shouldn’t be any fumbling in the draft room. So, it was pretty smooth.”

On if any teams called:

“It was relatively quiet.”

On if they had a lot of first-round graded players available when the team went on the clock:

“No. A small handful, which is normal. We’re picking at 17, so it’s not like we’re going to have 28 first-round players up there.”

On how he measures success:

“It’s just wins and losses. That’s what it comes down to and that’s what you get judged on.”