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Chargers 2024 NFL Draft Media Availability, Day 3

Saturday, April 27, 2024 ⚡ Hoag Performance Center ⚡ Costa Mesa, Calif.

Opening statements:

GENERAL MANAGER JOE HORTIZ: "That was a fun three days. I think that it was a really good opportunity to build our team and add to it. First, I want to thank all of the scouts, our whole personnel department, for the work that they put in before we were here, and, certainly, once we got here. It was probably a different process, a little different process, with me and [Assistant General Manager] Chad [Alexander] coming in, but they didn't miss a beat. They were ready. They had the information, had the work in. Really proud of the effort that they put in. The coaches, I mentioned, their effort, the commitment to the draft while camps are going on — veteran minicamps and football school, just a lot of stuff going on. They were focused, they didn't lose their focus on what the important task was, in terms of the draft, and I really appreciate their efforts. [Senior Vice President, Communications and External Affairs] Josh [Rupprecht] and his crew, our entire medical staff. [Director of Player Health, Wellness and Performance] Marco [Zucconi], [Head Athletic Trainer] Sal [Lopez], their help with all of the medicals and information. They were there at my side a lot during the draft, and then also leading up to it, just on top of all the information. [Director of Video Operations Brian] Duddy and the video crew, everything that we needed, we were ready to go. They had it prepared ahead of time. If we needed something, they had it ready. Smitty [Director, Equipment Operations Chris Smith] and the equipment guys, Wieds [Director of Football Operations John Wiedmeier] and operations. There are so many people and departments that go into this game, this season, but they also go into the draft. I really appreciate everyone's efforts, energy and enthusiasm. It was a great, cohesive, collaborative effort from all of us. A fun day today. We were busy. Had a chance to add six players. You guys can ask me about them individually, I don't want to run through them all [*laughter*]. But, one thing that I will say about all of them, they're multi-year starters. They're great character guys. They're highly competitive players. In case anyone asks, if anyone is curious, they were the best players on our board when we picked them."

ASSISTANT GENERAL MANAGER CHAD ALEXANDER: "Really excited for this whole process and all of the guys that we brought in, all nine of them. Like Joe [Hortiz] said, ultra competitors. They bring toughness and edge, guys that are really going to help us moving forward. Extremely, extremely happy about the results."

On if the players selected today 'were along the same identity' as players:

HORTIZ: "Yeah, I think so. There are players that fit the Charger profile. We really believe all nine of these guys do. You want high character players, you want highly competitive players, passionate players, intelligent, durable, tough — just guys that care about each other. I can really say that about every one of these. We have the Blue Star that we brought with us here — it used to be the Red Star, it's the Blue Star now — we drafted three of them. We don't have a bunch of them. Each scout gets one and they put it on a guy. We were able to take three of them. Frankly, all nine of these players could be Blue Star-type players, but we're limited in the numbers we can give out, so you pick one and you put it on them. That's a real positive thing for us."

On 'if the Black Dot came, too':

HORTIZ: "The Black Dot came, too. We did not take a Black Dot [*laughter*]."

On DB Tarheeb Still and if he has 'flexibility inside-out':

HORTIZ: "Certainly. If you've seen the highlights, he plays inside and out there. He's played with really good corners throughout his career. He had a first rounder playing with him last year. I can't remember when the other one went — when was it, the third round? But, he started with them. He played inside and outside with them, and he belonged on the same field with them. You couldn't tell them apart at times. You had to find them because you're like, 'Gosh, which one is that?' Sometimes, we were grading Tarheeb [Still] last year thinking that you were grading someone else. He moves around, has that versatility, has that toughness, burst, explosiveness."

On 'philosophically, how important is having flexibility' when evaluating a defensive back:

HORTIZ: "I think, when you look at a corner, nickel flexibility is a bonus. That's a plus. If they're just an outside guy, that's great. If they're an excellent nickel, that's a great. But, the guy that can do both like him, that's something that you really value."

On DB Cam Hart and if they were 'surprised that he was still there':

HORTIZ: "The traits are outstanding. He's highly competitive. He can challenge all throws when he is in position. Length to recover, speed to recover. In terms of being surprised when they're there, you're surprised when everyone's there if you like them [*laughter*]. If they're the highest guy on your board, it's like, 'Alright, he made it.' Someone's going to be there. Some guys fall, some guys get drafted higher than the pundits say. But, when the right guys follow you, that's where they belong. The draft is the draft. Guys fall, guys rise, guys get picked where that team wants to pick them."

On 'if something' on Hart's 'film led to him falling':

HORTIZ: "I can't speak for other teams, I just know that we liked him."

On the 'advantage' of having members of the coaching staff recently coach in college for aiding in prospect evaluation:

HORTIZ: "I think it's going to be an advantage for a couple years for us, for sure. Incoming freshmen, they've recruited and they've gotten to know their families. Then, the ones that have been there, they've played against them and coached them. They know the ins and outs of the players that they've coached, certainly, but they also have familiarity with the players they haven't coached that they've competed against. That is a definite bonus, definitely."

On if the Voluntary Veteran Minicamp prior to the draft 'reinforced' his 'approach to the draft':

HORTIZ: "It reinforced that we're looking for the right types of players because I'll tell you right now, being out there at those three days, and seeing the guys that are already out on the field, I'm excited to add these nine players, plus the players that we are working on signing in post-draft free agency. I'm excited to add them to the group of guys that are already out there."

On if he 'feels better or comfortable with the wide receiver group' after the draft:

HORTIZ: "We drafted three [wide receivers], so I definitely feel like we got a lot deeper there. I've talked about depth for our team from the beginning. That's one of the goals. I feel like we got deeper there, yeah."

On if the wide receiver group is 'missing anything':

HORTIZ: "I think that the group that exists is going to go out and compete and challenge each other and try to win for the Chargers. If we feel like we can add a player to any group on this team that helps us do those things, we're going to add them — it doesn't matter the position."

On 'how emotional of a call' he delivered to WR Brenden Rice:

HORTIZ: "It was a tough one, knowing what he, his family and his friends are going through. Certainly felt the emotion through the phone. I felt the emotion, myself, having to make that call. I know that he was very excited, while having to deal with the emotions he was facing. When we were talking, he was like, 'I've wanted to play for [Head] Coach [Jim] Harbaugh. I'm so excited to play for Coach Harbaugh. I can't wait.' He was so happy to be a Charger. To feel that and hear that, it was a pretty cool moment for me, myself."

On the skillsets of Rice and WR Cornelius Johnson:

ALEXANDER: "We really like both of those guys. We love them as players. First of all, they both have NFL bodies, they look like NFL receivers. They're extremely productive guys that are tough, they have the right mindset. Brenden [Rice] has a lot of explosive plays down the field, long touchdown production — Arizona State, UCLA, Stanford, these games. He can really stretch the field vertically. He does a lot of things that you really, really like. He blocks and does a really good job. Then, Cornelius [Johnson], same thing. Really productive, tough-minded individual. He might be the best blocking receiver in the draft, or certainly one of them. He gets after it. It's great to bring those two guys in and have them compete with the rest of the group."

On RB Kimani Vidal:

HORTIZ: "One, he can carry the rock. He's done it very well during his career there. He has great vision, burst, excellent contact balance, strength. He's not a tall back, but he's not a small back. He's 215 points, I think, and just runs through arm tackles, can make guys miss, take a hit, stay on his feet, great balance, strong. DBs are closing in on him, he'll punch them with a stiff arm and just keep going. He just competes. He also offers something in the passing game, as well. When you watch him block, it's impressive. He will throw it up in there against a blitzing linebacker."

On DL Justin Eboigbe:

HORTIZ: "He's a guy who, myself and a number of our scouts, really liked. I think everyone who did him basically had third-round grades on him. Maybe even a few second-round grades sprinkled in there. When you watch his film, he does everything right. He play the defensive line position how we want it done. It's hat in hands, extending, two-gapping, reading, he's instinctive. He has a high motor. He's athletic. He's a sneaky pass rusher. He's great at picking. He's great on twists. Kind of relentless motor. He's earned the right wherever he came from, the riser. You watch the film. The scouts went in there in October. He didn't rise from October to now. They threw it on him then. He just got realized by the media. He's a good football player."

On Eboigbe's ability to play multiple positions:

HORTIZ: "At different parts of the game in different situations. Interior, he can line up over the center and maybe in a third-down situation. I think his base position is a five-technique as a defensive end. But you've seen him at Alabama, he plays the six, the seven-technique. Then, he moves down to the three. Like you said, even those and some passing situations. Again, with our defense, you talk about corners being nickel or outside. Defensive linemen, they can play all across the board, which is pretty good value."

ALEXANDER: "He's extremely intelligent. A really impressive combine interview and in his interviews with the coaches and stuff like that. He gets it. He understands football at a high level. It's not going to be a problem for him to align at different positions along the defensive line."

On the importance of Day 3 of the draft for building a team:

HORTIZ: "I think it's very important. When you can find players that, one, can create an impact for you, that can create depth for you, that can become the starter. You can find all different types of players on Day 3. You know that going into it. There are certainly different values that they bring. That's where the scouts and the coaches really do their work. Everyone has their mock drafts on the first and second rounds, the third rounds. Honestly, you could probably 36, 37 players on Day 1 and you'll get 32 of them right. Pretty much everyone knows who's going because there is so much information out there. Day 3 is the day where the information is not as readily available. That's when you trust your scouts. Our guys did a great job just knowing the players and really identifying the ones that could help us."

On Eboigbe's recovery:

HORTIZ: "That's where we trust our medical team, [Director of Player Health, Wellness & Performance] Marco [Zucconi], [Head Athletic Trainer Salvador] Sal [Lopez] and Dr. G [David Gazzaniga]. You evaluate it. You see the images and you assess it. We felt good about it."

On if Eboigbe was brought in for a pre-draft visit:

HORTIZ: "We got the combine medicals. They were good. He aced the interview, like Chad [Alexander] said. He was awesome out there. We felt good about it. We didn't say anything about him from that moment on. That's why he was a riser, I guess [*laughter*]."

On Hortiz completing his first draft as a general manager:

HORTIZ: "Thankful for the opportunity from [President of Football Operations] John [Spanos] and [Owner and Chairman of the Board] Dean [A. Spanos] for giving me this chance. Thankfulness to Chad [Alexander] and all the scouts, the coaching staff, my family. I miss them dearly. That's probably the feeling that I have. We made the first pick and someone said, 'How does it feel?' When we took [T] Joe [Alt]. It felt the same to me, it really did because I've been part of it so many times. Probably at the end today, I said, 'Wow, we did it.' There's an excitement to it. It's what I was hired to do. I just did what I was taught to do by [Ravens Executive Vice President] Ozzie [Newsome], [Ravens Executive Vice President & General Manager] Eric [DeCosta] and the guys that I worked with in Baltimore, [Ravens Owner Stephen] Steve [J. Bisciotti]. I just brought what they taught me to do and did it my way, I guess a little bit. I guess that's my answer."

On the draft helping build the roster:

HORTIZ: "I mean, I'll tell you what, I'm really excited the way it went. Especially, if you look at our first pick and we take [T] Joe [Alt]. I don't know how many tackles went in the first two days of the draft, but we feel like we got the one, our best player on the board. Certainly the best tackle on the board. It worked out great from that way. Then, the opportunity to take the players that we took. Each time, we were just excited to take every one of the players. I really believe that we made our team better. Looking forward to seeing them here and getting them with the rest of the group."

On how much Hortiz took from his mentors through this process:

HORTIZ: "Chad [Alexander] can attest to this — we worked together for 20 years. [Ravens Executive Vice President] Ozzie [Newsome] led us until the 2018 draft. [Ravens Executive Vice President & General Manager] Eric [DeCosta] was right there as his right-hand man. We were down the line right next to them. You learn so much from each other. We do bring a lot of it. Me personally, I sat in there and go through the process. I know the process. I've never done it from that chair, but after doing it, after meetings and after everything, you learn a lot more than you even realized just by sitting there and watching them. It probably took a little bit from each of them. Some philosophical stuff that Ozzie taught us way back when that came into play in my mind many times and, certainly, the mechanics and the strategy that Eric has employed since he was the director of college scouting and director of player personnel in Baltimore. I watched him do it for so long. A lot of that rubbed off on me and I tried to apply a lot of what I learned from both of those guys."

On Hortiz's draft process:

ALEXANDER: "It was so fun just watching him and seeing him grow in this role and his natural leadership come through. Really, just get the best out of everybody. Just the process itself. We did learn a lot from [Ravens Executive Vice President] Ozzie [Newsome]. He set the blueprint. We've learned from [Ravens Executive Vice President & General Manager] Eric [DeCosta] and really borrowed from everybody that we've worked with. Joe [Hortiz] did an outstanding job of just bringing everyone together, stayed true to the process. We spent just as much time on our top guy on our board as our last guy on our board. He just had a way of bringing everyone in and having everyone feel part of it. It was outstanding. You could tell by how happy everyone was at the end, leaving from over there just a few minutes ago. Everyone is high-fiving. Everyone is just really pumped up and excited about the result. The process was challenging. We really challenged ourselves. We challenged the scouts. We challenged the coaches. They answered the bell. They did an outstanding job. Joe and Jim [Harbaugh] are our leaders. They led the way. They really did."

HORTIZ: "Just so we are clear with the bathroom break ... [*laughter*] ... people can get up and leave and go to the bathroom, alright? [*laughter*] I just don't get up, right? That's a learned thing. I know you cap your coffee intake. One cup of coffee. Use the restroom before you start the meetings and then you just roll, but anyone is welcome to get up. I'm not like, just keeping everyone in there, bladders exploding [*laughter*]. People do leave. People do leave. All it takes is one. One person gets up and goes, then, okay, it's okay. You get on a roll and I don't drink a lot of water during meetings. I just try to limit my fluid intake."