



QUOTES

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GENERAL MANAGER TOM TELESCO PRE-DRAFT PRESS CONFERENCE

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LOS ANGELES CHARGERS GENERAL MANAGER TOM TELESCO

Opening statement:

"First off, I think a lot of you probably know [former Chargers Director of Public Relations] Bill Johnston. Last week, I was at Ramona Johnston's memorial service. She passed away recently. It was an unbelievable service. It was really emotional and pretty powerful. It was really a celebration of life. Bill spoke, his daughter, Hayley, spoke. Some of Ramona's friends spoke. It was really well done and there were hundreds of people there to pay their respects to Bill and to Ramona.

I was walking out of the service and I see the legendary [San Diego Union-Tribune Senior Sports Columnist] Nick Canepa. A lot of the San Diego media were there to pay their respects to Bill and to Ramona. Of course, he says to me, 'When is your press conference when you lie to all of the media?' I'm like, 'Nick, first of all, I don't do that. I'm not going to lie to the media.' I said, 'We're not in this to deceive anybody.' Obviously, there are questions that I probably can't answer. I'll just say that I won't be able to answer — but there's no lying at all. Nick being Nick says, 'You're lying to me right now.' I said, 'No, I'm not lying at all right now. It's just the way it is.' That's the way these press conferences are draft week.

A lot of you probably don't want to be here for this because you know I'm not going to say anything. I really don't want to be here for this because I know I can't say anything. We're both here and don't really want to be here, but let's at least try to get through this and have some fun. It's tough. We do all of this work all year and you guys have a lot of questions about it. There's just not a whole lot that you can really say right now. Nick being Nick and being a good columnist, he had a lot of critiques of what we're doing and what I'm doing, so that was nice to see. I'll answer as many of your questions as I can. A lot may be just very general about the draft, but that's just kind of the way it is. Once we pick the players, we'll be up here and talk about these guys all day long. I'll open it up to questions."

On having the 28th selection:

"If you're in the top 10, I think obviously [team] need is considered. It would be hard not to. Your pool of players that are maybe going to be top players or difference-makers is probably a little bit wider up in the top 10. Where we are in the late 20s, if you do consider need — which obviously, all of us, you do consider it a little bit. It's not the end-all be-all, but at 28 it's a little bit different. More than likely, there isn't going to be four, five or six players there that are potential difference-makers where we can choose maybe who is the best fit for us or fill a need. More than likely, that player is going to be a player that we really like. It could be a position where we don't have an immediate need. It may be more of a secondary-type of thing, but if he's the best player, that's probably the guy we're going to go with."

On selecting a player that doesn't fill an immediate need:

"It's just the way that it's structured. You always have more than one need. There's not just one. Our needs change a lot. I don't know what our needs will be in 2020 and beyond, so it's hard to take players right now with only thinking of how they pencil in on opening day in 2019. It's hard to draft that way. You set your board the best you can. You set your board without taking any needs into consideration and then you just kind of draft off of that. You try and really stay as true as you can to how you have them ranked. The biggest thing when you stack your board is to make sure you're not stacking it with any need biased. That's part of my job, making sure that we stay as objective as possible."

On the team's willingness to trade out of the first round:

"It would be the same with every draft: We're always receptive to it. We go through a lot of different scenarios as far as trading back, trading up and staying put. There's never been a year where I'd ever say that we would definitely not trade up or definitely not trade back. We'd certainly be receptive to it."

On the importance to how high a second-round pick would be in return for trading out of the first:

"I guess, if you did trade out of the first round, ideally you wouldn't want to go too far back into the second round. A lot of that is dictated by what your board looks like at that point. A lot of those trades are going to happen on the clock, so we would know who's available, who's left. If we move back, how far could we go and try to make an estimation if we go back to a certain point, could we still get a player that we really like. It's great to pick up extra picks, but also I want to make sure whoever we take with that first pick — whether it's a first-round pick or we trade back into the second — it's a player that we really, really love, not just a guy that we like but we got an extra draft pick to go along with it. I want a player that we really like, we're all invested in — scouts, coaches, everybody in the building."

On the days leading up to the draft:

"Hopefully not a whole lot. At this point for the scouts, it's 12 months of work. It's a lot of preparation — scouts, coaches, doctors, trainers, the security people — it's amazing the amount of people and the amount of work that goes into this. At this point, if the Commissioner [Roger Goodell] says that we're drafting tonight, we're ready to go. I don't want to do too much today, tomorrow or Wednesday because at this point, you start to talk yourself out of things. I've already done that this morning on a couple of things. I look back at my notes of what we have talked about — so this is the time that you try not to over-analyze."

On the work that goes into a draft:

"We just don't grade our draft classes. We don't do a lot of assessment. It really comes down to wins and losses. Can you make the playoffs? How many playoff wins can you have? Can you win a championship? That's really how we're all looked at. Not so much by what your draft classes are. Now, I don't want to discount the work that our scouting staff does. They are so well-prepared in what they do, so detailed — the work ethic, turning over every rock they can so we have all of the information to make the decisions we have to make. The bulk of that work is their work that they start — shoot, they've started on next year's draft already. We say it's 13 months of work on these players. They do all of the leg-work, all of the evaluation of the players, all the background. They talk to sources. They're still talking to sources now. All that work and then the work with the coaches and coaches knowing how to use the players the right way — with what their strengths and what their weaknesses are, how they fit into scheme and developing players."

Our coaching staff is a great group of teachers as far as developing players. You have to have both of those — a scouting staff that really works that has an eye for talent and has an eye for people skills as far as evaluating their character, and a coaching staff that can really teach and develop. We've been able to get that together here. Now, it doesn't mean you're going to hit on every pick. It just doesn't happen like that. You're only as good as your next draft class, to be honest with you.

What I love is that everybody works together really, really well. Everybody does it a little bit differently. I keep things pretty separate and bring everything together at the end. Our scouts, our coaches, our doctors, security people, our psychologists — everyone that kind of has a piece of this works well together, respects each other. It's an opinion-based business. You're not always right, you're not always wrong, but we can all discuss things out, try to get in the right spot and make the best decision possible."

On being prepared for different scenarios:

"I think [the 2018 NFL Draft] was a good teaching point probably to a lot of our younger scouts that are new in the business as far as being prepared with what could happen. We had gone through a lot of different scenarios with what could happen with our pick last year at No. 17. Most of them didn't involve [S] Derwin James [Jr.] being there with that pick, but that didn't mean that we weren't prepared that, if he was as opposed to some other players, what would we do? We had already walked through that scenario and were prepared if something like that had happened. You just can never take anything for granted in this business — and you shouldn't. I mean, we have 12 or 13 months that we work on this. There's really no excuse to not be prepared to do something on draft day. Our guys were prepared for it and we got lucky in the end."

On the possibility to selecting an interior defensive lineman:

"It's a good group [of prospects]. It's probably as deep as we've seen in a while. I can't really compare it to other years. I'm so focused on this year. I say the whole defensive line group between defensive ends, defensive tackles is very strong."

On scouting certain characteristics affecting the team camaraderie:

"There's no secret. Everybody does a lot of the same work [on player's personalities]. If you're a scout on the road, you have to look at tape of the player, you have to get a feel for him as a player — just his playing ability by watching him play football live and watch him play on tape. So much of the scouts' work is talking to people that have known that player for one year, two years, three years, four years — maybe a coach that recruited the player knows the family — and try to get a feel for that player as a person because we're not just drafting a football player, we're drafting a person to come into this organization, come into this community. We're selective here. We want the best of the best. Some of that involves the character part of it.

Look, no one's perfect. We've all made mistakes. A lot of these kids are young, college kids. They've made mistakes, but you look for the right kids that have the character who can overcome adversity, who have drive, determination, are accountable and are good teammates. It's all part of that makeup of looking to draft a player. You can have all of those intangibles and all of that makeup, but if you don't have the talent part of it, you probably won't be here. I can find a lot of people that work real hard — I mean, I used to work really hard at it. A lot of players did, but if you're not good and if you can't play, you can't play. We need both ends of that spectrum. We also know that these guys aren't perfect at all. None of us are.

We do have a good thing going in our locker room right now. I love the camaraderie, I love how the guys play with each other and play for each other. They're great teammates with each other. They're tough on each other. I mean, they want to win. They hold each other accountable, but in the right way. I think we have a good group of leaders. We need players that can come in and kind of fit in that culture. You try and get a feel for these players, but it's hard. A human judging another human is very difficult to do. The background work that they scouts do, our psychologists, coaches and everybody that makes these phone calls and talks to the right sources, that's really important work to do."

On the coaching staff working with the scouting staff:

"A lot of it is just communication. A lot of that takes place in training camp. It's also a process that takes years and years and years to perfect. We're going into year three right now with this coaching staff. It's just the communication between the scouts and the coaches, the front office and the coaches. I'm talking with the assistant coaches all of the time trying to learn about them, the fit and the right players into what they're looking for. The coaches and scouts work wonderfully together. It's not always like that. It's not been like that on every team I've been on, but we have that going here and it's a big part of it."

On the importance of veteran coordinators on staff:

"I think what's really beneficial is having an offensive coordinator and a defensive coordinator that have been head coaches, so they know what this whole process is about. They've been in that head coach's chair, they've been in the draft room. Each person — whether an assistant coach, a coordinator, a head coach, a general manager, an area scout — we all have a little different perspective from what seat we're in. The higher you go up on the chain, you have to be much more big picture than small picture. Someone that has head coaching experience, has been there and done that, has been in the head coach's seat — having [Offensive Coordinator Ken] Whiz [Whisenhunt] and [Defensive Coordinator] Gus [Bradley] is very beneficial, plus they obviously have years and years of experience. They have their systems and schemes that they run. They can communicate that very well to their assistant coaches and communicate it very well to myself and the scouts as far as what they're looking for. In the end, we're all working together on this to find the right player that fits us. That player may not fit another team, another scheme, but he may fit us. That's why everyone's draft board is going to be a little bit different based on what you do and what you're looking for."

On if a player selected at No. 28 can make an impact as a rookie:

"Well, considering who we took last year and the impact that he made, that's a pretty high bar. It just is. I don't think anybody would ever have 28 players rated as first-round players. I know we don't. It's a little more difficult. It's just different. We're picking 28th rather than in the top 15 or top 17. I don't know what the expectations will be in year one. It may not be to come in and play like Derwin James quite did — which was pretty amazing, what he did. A player that we think can make a contribution right now, get better as we move forward and be a solid player for us. Like I said, even with the contribution right now, it may be a player that we don't have a specific role or need for, but we may in the future. That could be it, too. It just kind of depends on who it is and what position it is."

On the team's quarterbacks:

"We're pretty good at quarterback. I'm pretty happy with our quarterback room."

On looking at quarterback for the future:

"Yes, you have to. I love where we are right now with Philip [Rivers], Tyrod Taylor and even with Cardale Jones — but yes, you always have to be looking toward the future. That's just natural with where our quarterbacks are right now and where Philip is, but Philip had a career year last year. He's really showing no signs of descending. We're very happy with Tyrod. To have him here, we feel like we have two starting-level NFL quarterbacks, which I think is important for us right now. We have a good football team, so now we have two quarterbacks that we feel like we can win with. We also have Cardale, who we still think has some developmental qualities that we like a lot. It's a good room right now."

On the depth of the quarterback prospects this year:

"I will say the last four or five years, there have been a lot of college quarterbacks that have come out, played early and played well. That wasn't always the case 10 to 15 years ago. I think there are quarterbacks in this draft that are going to come in — they may not play immediately, but I think they can be starters in this league. Is it top-heavy where you have three or four quarterbacks going in the top five? Probably not this year. I thought the group was pretty good. I really did."

On how many players have a first-round grade:

"I knew someone was going to ask that. I'm not going to say. For us, the average has been about 15 to 18 players we have graded as first-round players. That's been about the average year after year. Very rarely do you have more than 20."

On how the signing of QB Tyrod Taylor affects the team's approach to quarterbacks in the draft:

"You're always thinking about it because part of my job is that I have to look down the road a lot more than the head coach does. The head coach is a little bit more of a short-team focus. I have to be short-term focused, but a long-ranged plan as well. I certainly feel better about our football team right now, but still, it's always in your head. It's a very important position. You want a long-range plan. It's always something that's going through my head along with a lot of other things right now."

On if the team will extend the contract of QB Philip Rivers:

"I think he's playing at a really high level right now. My expectation is that he's going to be here a while. I haven't seen any difference."

On how long Rivers can play:

"I'm grateful for each year. I really am. I'm grateful for every year that he's playing, but that doesn't mean that we can't be looking long-term to see what the solution is down the road. I'm grateful for every year. He played at — I don't know if it was a career year last year, but it was certainly close. We're very happy with him."

On the possibility of extending RB Melvin Gordon III:

"It's certainly something that we'll talk about. He's a special player. Right now, it's all draft. We'll get onto the other stuff on the list after the draft."

On expectations given for any potential quarterback drafted given Rivers' play:

"You have to wait. It is what it is. It's a draft, they can't go anywhere else. If you take a player — at any position — he has to come in and win a job, No. 1, then win a starting role. If you don't win a starting role, then you have to wait, but you had better be working while you're waiting. There's no scholarship here. You have to earn your spot and work. That's part of it."

On projections from college systems:

"There is a lot of projection that goes into it. The college game is a little bit different. It's a little more spread out than it used to be, but all of the same things that we scout and look for in a player as far as the traits and the different categories that we look for hasn't changed since 1995 when I started. A wide receiver, for instance, the critical factors that we look for, the position specifics are exactly the same now as they were in 1995."

On if the team's upcoming schedule has an effect on the way a team drafts:

"No. I barely even look at the schedule when it comes out. I just look to see when our bye week is and see if we have any long East Coast road trips that are back-to-back that we could stay out there. I look at our division as far as what's in our division and look at the matchups that we have and what we have to play against, what they have to play against with us. I think that comes into it. We have to play our division teams twice. We have to win our division, so those are really important games. That plays a little bit into it when you're looking at players, but as far as the whole schedule, probably not as much."

On the process of contacting players to sign as undrafted free agents:

"You have to be careful because all of these kids think they're going to be drafted and would like to be drafted. If you call a kid and say, 'Look, we're not going to draft you, but we'd love to sign you,' that's not a great look. Right? A lot of these players, we'll start talking to players in December as far players we think are — probably more day three type of draft picks or potential players after the draft. We'll start that work pretty early and try to build some relationships with them. Part of building relationships with them is not just recruiting for us, but it's a chance for us to get to know them better and see if they fit. [RB] Austin Ekeler was one of those guys. Our guys do a lot of work on that part of it, trying to identify the right guys that have the right traits because they're not going to have everything or else they would have been drafted higher. You have to try and mine through it and see who fits us. That starts pretty early. As far as actually calling players, that's probably already started as far as checking in with different guys."

On how the team's track record with undrafted free agents affects the ability to sign players following the draft:

"I hate to say it, but most college players — college seniors and college juniors — they don't know who's come through here. They really don't. Probably, most of them think that Antonio Gates was a first-round draft pick. I mean, some of these kids just don't know. You can preach it to them. I think a lot of teams have pretty good track records in it, but you do try to bring up some recent names of players that they may recognize and try to go through their path. 'This is how this player made it to the League, this is how you may have to make it to the League.' Most of it is really trying to sell, 'Hey look, this is your opportunity. This is how our roster looks, this is where our depth chart is, this is where your reps may come, this is how we think we can develop you, this is where your strengths and weaknesses are, this is what we think we can work on.' We really try to sell guys on their particular ability to make the team at this position — this is what we have and this is what you're competing against."

On players from the Alliance of American Football:

"We signed one a couple of weeks ago. A long snapper, Cole Mazza, from Birmingham. There was another player that we were going to sign, but he went a different direction. We did a good amount of work on that AAF. There were some players that we liked. We may still do some things after the draft. There were a handful of guys that we liked."

On underclassmen entering the draft affecting the undrafted free agents:

"Those numbers have really increased. I think it was over 100 this year. I wouldn't say [we pay more attention to those guys]. Once everyone declares for the draft as a junior — for us, whether you're a junior or a senior it doesn't matter, it's all the same work on those guys. There's no extra work on a junior. I just don't like to see those numbers like that. I hate to see a player declare for the draft thinking he's going to be drafted very high and then he goes undrafted. Obviously, the money is a lot different when you go undrafted. To give up a year of eligibility of playing college football and maybe finishing your degree, you just wish the kid would stay in — but every kid's situation is different and unique, and their family atmosphere is different and unique. It's hard to be judgmental on that. I would like kinds to stay in school as long as they can just to get as much of their degree done as they can because it's something that they're going to need when they're done playing football — whatever that is. Whether they play two years or 12 years, you're going to use your degree at some point. The numbers have increased a lot. It's probably put more stress and pressure on our scouts to do more work in the fall on players that may declare than there used to be. The numbers used to be much smaller, but it's just the nature of today's game."

On the importance to versatility among offensive linemen:

"Versatility is great. On game day, you usually dress seven. I know you guys had the [G] Forrest Lamp question all the time [during the season]. Why isn't Forrest dressing? This wouldn't be a press conference without a Forrest Lamp, right? Forrest, for us, just because his time on the field was really a guard for us. He didn't have a lot of position flexibility to play tackle or center yet. He didn't dress in as many games. Since you only dress seven, those two guys that don't start need to play either guard and center, guard and tackle or tackle and center. Versatility is really important for a young player. It helped [C/G] Scott Quessenberry dress for a lot of games because Scott could play both guard and center. It's really helpful. You usually have eight on your 53, but you dress seven on game day. It's hard to have a one-position guy. Every now and then, you'll have a center who is just a center. Having guards that can play both side and play some [center] is a huge plus for us."

On versatility in the secondary:

"Yes, since we play all of our DBs as linebackers right? The great thing about Gus [Bradley] is that he's pretty flexible with that, too. There are a lot of corners that fit as a safety in our defense. Maybe even some free safeties that fit as a corner or a nickel corner. Versatility in today's game — I guess it's probably always been like that — but certainly on defense in that secondary with so many nickel defenses and dime defenses that can play different spots is helpful. Plus, defensive backs that can tackle. When you take linebackers off the field, you're taking off guys that are usually pretty good tacklers, so you have to have defensive backs that are willing to tackle kind of like the way [CB] Desmond King [II] does and some other guys."