

Chargers 2024 NFL Draft Media Availability, Day 1

Thursday, April 25, 2024 ⚡ Hoag Performance Center ⚡ Costa Mesa, Calif.

Opening statements:

GENERAL MANAGER JOE HORTIZ: "Obviously, you guys saw that we selected [T] Joe Alt. Very excited to make the pick. I feel like we got a guy that is going to come in and really improve our team. He's big. He's physical. He's tough, smart, durable. An outstanding player in college who is just scratching the surface. We're really excited to add him and look forward to getting him here tomorrow.

HEAD COACH JIM HARBAUGH: "I'll just echo what Joe [Hortiz] said. I also want to just give a shoutout to Joe and all of our scouts, everybody in personnel, the Spanos Family. The amount of work, dedication from everyone sitting in that room, just everybody giving their best for the Los Angeles Chargers. Joe [Hortiz] was a masterclass of leadership and bringing the best out of all of us. There were many working tirelessly.

On where Alt 'fits' along the offensive front:

HORTIZ: "He began, actually, as a right tackle in college. Then, obviously, played left [tackle] the last two-and-a-half years. But, he started out as a right tackle."

HARBAUGH: "We don't know yet. Those things are to-be-determined. You can count on us playing our best five offensive linemen. What position each guy plays, within the offense and within the offensive line, is to-be-determined."

On if Alt 'is going to be a tackle':

HARBAUGH: "He's a tackle."

HORTIZ: "Yeah, he's a tackle."

On 'why offensive tackle' when 'there were good wide receivers available':

HORTIZ: "Yeah, there were. I think I've said it from the beginning, when we started talking about the draft, that we're going to take the best player available for the Chargers, and that's what we did today. That's what we're going to do at 37 [overall] and every other pick that we have. Obviously, he helps our team and he helps us get better. That's what we want to do. We want to get better with every pick. That's what we feel like we did."

On Alt's 'play-style':

HORTIZ: "You watch him come off the ball, in the run game. Obviously, we're going to run the ball here. He just drives off of the line of scrimmage. You watch him move players over three gaps on his down blocks. He's very athletic, excellent range, high-level competitor, and, certainly, an athlete as a pass-protector. The ability for a guy his size to bend — and you see it on film, you see him recover — but then when you watch him at the Combine, watch him at his Pro Day, it's exceptional. Really excited to add that. It's just an elite-level athlete for the man his size, who can do a lot of things. He's just scratching the surface, he's 21 years old. He just turned 21 in February, so you're talking about a guy who's still growing and maturing. The upside with him is tremendous."

On 'how easy of a decision it was' to select Alt:

HARBAUGH: "It was a unanimous decision. Like I alluded to earlier, all of the work that went in, he was the player at the top of our board. Nobody rated higher than Joe Alt when it came to our selection that we picked. I know the questions are going to come up and you're going to say, 'Well, what about a weapon?' Offensive linemen, we look at as weapons. That group, when we talk about attacking on offense, offensive line is the tip of the spear."

On how Alt 'gets the Chargers closer to the team that they envision':

HARBAUGH: "Our team, and there are going to be more guys added, competitors welcomed. Any country in the world, any state in our country, any team: competitors welcomed."

On if Harbaugh 'crossed paths' with Alt's father, former Chiefs tackle John Alt:

HARBAUGH: "I think that we did play against each other. I remember that his dad was a great player. It was interesting, when you're watching the two the draft, I remember John Alt being like a six-foot-eight man, and when they stood up together, our Joe Alt, he's a legitimate six-foot-eight. And, it's not just big, it's not just power, there's extreme athleticism. The bend that he has in the ankles, the knees, the hips. A tremendous competitor. Good job, [Hortiz]."

On if 'calls from other teams came in' regarding potentially trading the No. 5-overall selection:

HORTIZ: "We had a few calls leading up to the draft. We did have one call when we were on the clock. We talked through it and, ultimately, didn't feel like it was worth trading back and passing on Joe [Alt]."

On 'a report' regarding the Chargers 'receiving calls about potentially trading QB Justin Herbert':

HORTIZ: "At the Combine, I had some people ask me if we would consider it, and they were quickly shot down. No, that is never an option."

On Alt's competitiveness:

HARBAUGH: "Playing every game — every game his junior year, every game his sophomore year. I'm pretty sure that he played every game, started eight-of-11, his freshman year. He's there every day. He's there every game. That tells me that he's a competitor. Really good from [Defensive Line Coach] Mike Elston, our defensive line coach, who was coaching at Notre Dame during Joe's freshman year, and also [Safeties Coach] Chris O'Leary, who was just at Notre Dame, coaching there. We had the kind of intel that is best to have, people that were right inside the building, who were there with him every single day. Not just the competitive part, but, I mean, the athleticism, might I say the word, 'freaky,' was thrown out. For somebody that size, that is rare. We don't plan on picking at five again, so I think the way that Joe [Hortiz] and our scouts and our personnel department and our owners viewed it, OK, we're there now, let's get a player that is of that caliber."

On T Rashawn Slater and if the offensive line is set:

HARBAUGH: "Like I said, it's to-be-determined. All of that is to-be-determined, what our best five is. [T] Rashawn Slater is the left tackle. We love [Trey] Pipkins [III] as a player. All of the guys. When you start talking tackle, as I expressed in a lot of the meetings, I would play with five tackles, if we could [*laughter*]. Big, long, athletic, strong guys. Don't rule anything out. Who is going to play where? We're going to play the best five that we have on the team."

On their assessment of Alt's 'anchor in pass protection':

HORTIZ: "I think that it's good. When you're six-foot-eight, sometimes you give a little bit of ground, and when you're six-foot-four, you give some ground. When you watch Joe [Alt], sometimes, as an offensive lineman, you don't get caught in great position, right? When you watch him get caught in a bad position, his ability to recover and get back down and anchor and front-up late, that's what he can do. Everyone is going to get knocked back some, on occasion. He doesn't get knocked back very often. When it does happen, he has that freakish athleticism to recover and get his knees bent and flex those ankles and get back down. I think he does an outstanding job."

On Alt's 'freakish athleticism' and 'the value of speed in an offensive lineman':

HORTIZ: "There are some offensive linemen, in the past, that have run 4.7s [40-yard-dash], right? And they haven't been very good on film. I think you see his game speed translate to the film. When you watch him get up to the second level, when you watch him get out on screens or short-side pulls and run downfield, he controls his body. Speed is important, quickness off the ball is very important, but body control and ability to adjust and get to your blocking space is what he offers."

HARBAUGH: "And as Joe [Hortiz] said earlier, 21 years old. There's a ton of upside. This is not a finished product. You can tell from the Pro Day, [Assistant General Manager] Chad Alexander came back raving about the Pro Day that Joe [Alt] had. He was even working on his [pass] set and improving his set, and changing some of his set from the season to his Pro Day. He was right. Watch the Pro Day workout, it was legit. To be that good, with where he is that, this is a high high high ceiling, and a really high floor, player. Just exactly what you pray for, what you wish for. This is a great piece. It starts up front, tip of the spear, of our attack with our offensive line. He's going to be a tremendous piece."

On Pipkins' role:

HARBAUGH: "I think that he is one of our five best right now, and that is not going to change — and that includes Joe Alt on our football team. Extremely impressed with Trey [Pipkins III]. He also has that freaky athleticism, and also building the strength and power to match that athleticism. I would predict that there's a spot in the starting five for Trey Pipkins."

On 'wanting a physical team and running the ball':

HARBAUGH: "It's not just the running game with the offensive line. They protect, that's why they get paid so much money, the offensive linemen and the tackles in this league, because the quarterback, in the passing game, has got to be able to finish a throwing motion. That comes that comes from [Hall of Fame Head Coach] Bill Walsh — I'm stealing that one, I didn't invent that one [*laughter*]. Six-foot-eight, long arms. I don't think that he's ever been hurt, that I know of. This is a great piece to add into the attack. When I say the attack, that's passing game and running game."

On where Alt was on the board when selected:

HORTIZ: "He was the best player available."

On what separated Alt from other players on the board:

HARBAUGH: "There was nobody higher than Joe."

HORTIZ: "We just felt like he was the best player available on the board. So we have the board and then we stack them 1 through 200. We stack it based on who we believe is the best player. What separates him? He's a tackle versus a receiver, certainly, but there are other great players on the board, too. We felt like he was the best of the great players."

On the decision to select Alt:

HORTIZ: "We try to have all of the debates on all of the players before the draft. I think I mentioned that in some previous conversations with you guys. We get up there, the board is set. The board is set. The order is set. All of the conversations are had beforehand."

On the conversation surrounding Alt when ranking him on the board:

HARBAUGH: "There would be so many conversations to take you through there [*laughter*]. You can't believe the amount of hours that go into it. Joe [Hortiz] is in there more than anybody. We're all in there a lot. [President of Football Operations] John Spanos is in every meeting. The last two days leading up to the draft, we had practice, then a five-and-a-half hour session. Then, another five-and-a-half hour session, straight. He set a record. There was only one pee break."

HORTIZ: "In two days [*laughter*]."

HARBAUGH: "Taken in those two days [*laughter*]. I mean, to go through every conversation, that would be impossible."

HORTIZ: "Just quickly, you talk about the value of each position. The value of the players and who you see higher. The whys and hows, but it's a normal process for us. We talk about it and then we stack them."

On if Alt was brought in for a visit:

HORTIZ: "We had a chance to visit with him at the combine. [Offensive Line Coach] Mike Devlin and [Assistant General Manager] Chad [Alexander] were out there and [Area Scout] Pat Ryan, I believe, were at the Pro Day. We met with him there. We had a great feel for him from talking to him in Indianapolis. You don't have to talk to him long to feel good about him, I know that. Then, obviously, with two coaches on the staff [that were at Notre Dame], we felt like we knew him really well. No reason to bring him in."

On the conversation with Alt when he was called:

HORTIZ: "He was excited. I asked him if his dad could wear Powder Blue. He didn't think it would be a problem, so we felt like we could take him at that point."

On if the team 'needs to address' the wide receiver position:

HARBAUGH: "We're going to be addressing all positions."

HORTIZ: "We're going to address more than just the receivers, too, absolutely. I've said this before — you look at it and there are certainly more needs at different spots, but there are needs at every position. That's why we're living by the best player philosophy. Again, you're never one player away and you're never one position away. You have to improve every single position on your team at every opportunity you get. We're going to still be working on a few of the positions. We're not done with offensive line, either. We're just going to try and make the team better."

On the offensive line:

HORTIZ: "Well, I think to play center, you have to be able to snap. That definitely gives those guys that are used to snapping an advantage. I'll let Coach [Harbaugh] answer the rest of it."

HARBAUGH: "[T] Rashawn Slater. He's locked in as the left tackle. No debate was needed for that. We love him. Just, the way your questions are going, let's not bet against [WR] Quentin Johnston, [WR Joshua] Josh Palmer, [WR Derius] D.D. [Davis] and [WR] Simi [Fehoko]. There will be more."

On speaking with Alt at the combine:

HORTIZ: "The way we have it set up, the majority of our interview is film [review] and board [work] because we want to get a feel for the player's intelligence. Football intelligence and acumen. The goal is to get him up, get him talking, on the board. If you guys had a chance to watch Coach work in that room, now, he pulls out the best of every player. He pulls out their personality and their competitiveness, gets them going. You get a great feel for everything, really, with the player. His energy, his passion for the game. Then, we get him on that board and start talking ball. The way [Offensive Line Coach] Mike [Devlin] and all of our coaches did it, he gets props to the scouts watching these guys in film sessions. His coaches, they put on a clinic, now. It was impressive with all of our position coaches. Being up there, drawing out what the player knows. Talking ball with them. We had our 45 interviews at the combine and we felt like we had a good feel for the players that we spoke to."

On the mindset moving through the draft:

HORTIZ: "To me, it's over when it's over. We're not even close to being over. This is, certainly, a big pick for us, sitting up here. The next eight picks are huge. I think the excitement will continue through. Anxiety, I don't know if there was ever really anxiety other than, you know, making sure I don't screw up the [phone] number or anything like that. Like I said, the stack was set. The rankings were set. Let the guys go off the board and pick our pick."

HARBAUGH: "I'll just add, I had no anxiety whatsoever. That process really came from all the hard work that everybody did and just how they were all giving it their best for the Chargers. Mainly, we got a guy. We got a guy in Joe Hortiz. There's no question about it. He knows every guy. He's watched tape on every single player. He's the one that was bringing out our best in these meetings. He never missed a name, never missed a beat. Even when he was taking a bite of the Chick-Fil-A sandwich [*laughter*]. It just rolled. I had no anxiety whatsoever. My brother [Ravens Head Coach John Harbaugh] texted me after the pick. He said, 'That's who I would have taken,' if he was at that pick. That's the great debate. That's part of the cool thing. There's great players. Some of them are rated right there together. You sit and judge guys as we go, whether it was the right decision or not. I just say, from my perspective, and watching Joe [Hortiz] work this draft and our personnel department, all of our scouts, and our coaches, as Joe said, I have total confidence and trust that we got it right. You have to go make it right. I believe that we have a great partner in doing that, in Joe Alt."

On Harbaugh's response to his brother's text message:

HARBAUGH: "Let's see [*laughter*]. Oh, I haven't texted him back yet [*laughter*]. What would be an appropriate response [*laughter*]? Thumbs up! I'll just go with the pound, I gave him the pound emoji [*laughter*]."

On if the team could trade back into the first round:

HORTIZ: "I'd say all options are open, definitely."

On Michigan QB J.J. McCarthy being selected by Minnesota:

HARBAUGH: "I watched it. I stayed to watch it. I'm thrilled. I've been having conversations with J.J. That's where he wanted to go. That's where he had his heart set. I'm just so happy for him. I love him like a son. I was praying and pulling for it to work out the way he wanted it to work out. The stars aligned. Congratulations to Minnesota. They got themselves a great player."