



Oakland Raiders Transcript

Raiders Head Coach Jack Del Rio

Opening Statement: "I guess the way the media works nowadays, you probably already got the news but we are going to start Connor [Cook] this weekend. Want him to be himself and go out and do what he can do, and want our team to go out and do what it can do. Be prepared to play a good football game against a division winner, and a team we saw earlier this year in Mexico City. We're excited about the opportunity. We are one of 12 teams that are still playing right now. We take pride in that. We want to earn our right to be one of the final eight next week."

Q: Why go with Connor? Is it simply because Matt McGloin won't be able to play?

Coach Del Rio: "It's really an easy option. He played pretty well when he went in and Matt's hurt. We're hoping to get Matt healthy enough to be in a backup role. Right now, that remains a question."

Q: How will he learn everything? Is he allowed to go home or is he here 24 hours a day?

Coach Del Rio: "We'll do the best we can to prepare him. The great thing about it is he's been here, been in our system, mentally been engaged in what we do and how we do it all year. I'm sure he'll lean on the majority of that. There's only so much you can catch up all at once. At the end of the day, you don't try and have him go around the clock here. He wouldn't be at his best. We'll manage the process of preparing him and giving him what he needs. We'll get ourselves ready to go play."

Q: What was the most impressive thing you saw out of him?

Coach Del Rio: "I would say the most impressive thing was when he went into a very difficult set of circumstances, and I thought he handled himself extremely well. I thought the poise was there. The moment didn't look too big for him. I thought he did a real nice job leading the team down and moving the ball. We're looking forward to playing as a team. What happens is that position gets so much attention, understandably. For us, it's about letting one young man do his job, and the rest of us worry about ours."

Q: A lot of players talked about how calm he was in the huddle. How important will that be?

Coach Del Rio: "It goes a long way, it certainly does. All the reports of how he handled himself, what he did on very little preparation last week was impressive."

Q: The fact that he came out of a school, Michigan State, where he wasn't in a spread and he could change the play at the line of scrimmage, all of that stuff he had done. There are a lot of young guys who haven't. Has that been evident since you got him?

Coach Del Rio: "As far as being under center, being in the huddle, we didn't have to start with learning how to be in a huddle and under center. No question. He played in a big-time conference and won a lot of games, very successful. All of that in the background is very good for him and for us."

Q: Connor said that there were plays that he ran last Sunday that he really hadn't run much in practice. Do you expect him to be embedded in the playbook and have practiced everything?

Coach Del Rio: "As far as game-planning-wise, I'm not going to give you a whole lot. We'll do what we need to do to get ready."

Q: What's Stacy McGee's status?

Coach Del Rio: "I believe he's going to be able to practice and should be able to go. We'll see how the week goes."

Q: How much will he give you to help the line?

Coach Del Rio: "He was playing very well when he went down so it will be great to get him back."



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Q: After the first game against Houston, you were asked about why the running game didn't work out and your answer was, "Jadeveon Clowney." What kind of challenges does he bring?

Coach Del Rio: "Yeah, he was very disruptive, very disruptive, and so was [Vince] Wilfork. I think those two guys were a tough matchup. They'll be tough again. They're good players. There's a reason that they rank on top of the league in gross yardage allowed and that they've been tough to run against because they're not even using an extra man in the box very often. They play with a lighter box and they count on those big guys to be disruptive. They've done a nice job up front, and that's without J.J. [Watt]. That's a pretty strong job by a very good front."

Q: A lot of your road wins were attributed to Derek Carr's ability in the fourth quarter. How much confidence does the rest of the team have as far as going on the road and it not fazing them?

Coach Del Rio: "I think we embraced the process of preparing and we've traveled well and we prepare well and then we go down and compete. I think that's what it's been about all year. That's what it'll be about again this week."

Q: How would you characterize Connor's mentality and his confidence level?

Coach Del Rio: "I think there's a lot of unknown there, right? I think we'll get to watch it play out. Let's see him play. Honestly, we haven't seen him a lot. We saw half a game, or thereabouts, against Denver last week. That was pretty good. That part was pretty good. Small sample, pretty good. We get a chance to just let him go be himself and go do his job. Honestly, I'm more concerned about our team doing what it needs to do as a team. Our defense needs to step up and play at a high level. We've sputtered throughout the year and had our moments, but we have not put together a complete game yet. It would be real nice to get that starting Saturday."

Q: Speaking of your defense, how much does it mean to your secondary to get Karl Joseph back?

Coach Del Rio: "We'd love to have every healthy body we can get. I think Nate [Allen] has played well stepping in for him. I thought [Brynden] Trawick played very well the other night stepping in for Nate. We're not relying on any one guy, but it's certainly good to have all of your players. Stacy [McGee] and Karl are two guys that have been starters for us and have played well for us this year. We'd love to have him back."

Q: Did Connor Cook take any snaps in practice this year other than on the scout team?

Coach Del Rio: "You'd have to ask [quarterbacks coach] Todd Downing to track his... If he wants to give that to you or not, how many snaps he took in practice. I would say he's taken several hundred probably, but I'm not going to sit here and try and tell you the exact number of snaps."

Q: Is this a game where your offensive line really needs to be a stabilizing force up front?

Coach Del Rio: "It's all about team. It's all about team. We talked all year about, really for us, we believe, our philosophy here is that we want to be strong and tough in the trenches on the offensive and defensive lines. To me, that's what the good teams can do. They can run it when they want to run it. They can stop the run when they need to stop it. We've got a great challenge against a really gifted front. Houston is a gifted front and the last time we went against them, their running back ran for 100 yards. So, we've got to make sure that we're on top of our game and that we do what we're capable of doing."

Q: There was a sense last Sunday that the team was still a little bit shocked processing what had happened and what had been lost. Do you think that's out of their system? Do you feel confident that the implications of Derek's injury have been put aside now?

Coach Del Rio: "I don't know if I really completely agree with that assessment. I think what happens is you want to tag or attach a label to whatever you see unfold. There were a lot of factors that added into what ended up being the performance we had that day and I'm not going to sit here and try and explain it. It was not a good day. That's the best way I explain it. We moved on several days ago."



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Raiders Defensive Coordinator Ken Norton, Jr.

Q: What did you see with the tackling issues on Sunday?

Coach Norton, Jr.: “Well, you know, a little disappointing. We work on tackling a lot. It’s been something that we really hang our hat on; tackling, turnovers and things that fundamentally are important for defense. Obviously, that’s over with. It’s a new season and it will certainly be better.”

Q: How do you balance stripping the ball away from making the tackle?

Coach Norton, Jr.: “Well, you work on it. Obviously, turnovers, we’re the league leaders in turnovers. So, there’s two sides to it. You go after the ball, sometimes you’re going to miss the player, but at the same time, there’s certain skill to tackling the ball. There’s a certain skill of putting your shoulder on the ball and same time, second man in getting the ball out. But, you know, we have to tackle. I think they understand what they have to do and that shouldn’t be a problem anymore.”

Q: Do you believe your unit feels the need to take pressure off of Connor Cook?

Coach Norton, Jr.: “Well, our unit has the ability to do a lot of things and our defense is defense. We have to really focus on what we’re doing and they’re a pretty good team and a playoff team. I think that it’s important for us to really focus in on our details and go from there.”

Q: What will Karl Joseph’s return to the defense do for your unit?

Coach Norton, Jr.: “It’s always good to have healthy bodies in there and Karl is a high-round pick, impact player. So, he’ll certainly make a difference for us.”

Q: How big of a deal is it to have players in the locker room with playoff experience and does it help the younger guys?

Coach Norton, Jr.: “Well, we hope so. We hope that experience certainly pays off and we won’t find out until game day. But, they are practicing well, they’re focusing well, they’re all talking about ball, they understand the privilege. They understand that this is a new season, they understand a lot of teams are at home and they have the privilege of still playing and they’ve earned this position to play and they understand that. And, now it’s time to go out and play ball.”

Q: What do you see out of Brock Osweiler as a quarterback?

Coach Norton, Jr.: “Well, he’s a quarterback in this league and if you’re in this league, you must be pretty good. We played him in Mexico and they scored on us. He moved around and we just have to play our ball. Again, focus on our details, execute well, keep down mistakes, eliminating mistakes, eliminating explosives and we just have to really do a lot of focus on ourselves.”

Q: What’s the challenge of going up against a team that does a lot of different things and moves up-tempo?

Coach Norton, Jr.: “A lot of different things. Up-tempo is something that everybody does, that’s always a part of your development, a part of your practice. But at the same time, it comes down to our execution whether it’s fast-tempo, slow-tempo, we have to execute.”

Raiders QB Connor Cook

Q: You’re the first quarterback to make your debut as a starter in the playoffs. What do you expect this game to be like for you?

Cook: “I’m just embracing the opportunity. Going to go out there and have fun, let it all hang out and obviously prepare my butt off, do what I’ve been doing all season long and just go out there and have fun with my teammates.”



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Q: You gave off the impression to teammates that you were quite calm entering the game on Sunday, were you calm on the inside?

Cook: "I felt pretty calm. With hard circumstances just going in there and stuff, I felt like I was confident and I know the offense well. I've been in the system for almost a year now. We're running stuff that I've been familiar with so, it was actually fun to get out there and get some reps."

Q: How much easier will this week be now that you will have had a week of practice?

Cook: "Should be good, just getting as many reps as possible, reps on the side. You know, after [practice], if it's not during team period if we're in the special team's period, getting more and more reps, just practicing stuff, repetition after repetition. So, looking forward to that."

Q: Is there something you can take away from playing in big-time games in college that helps you calm down?

Cook: "No, you just go out there and play, really. You always have the nerves leading up to the game and once you get out there you have a couple snaps and you get hit, get knocked down then all of that stuff kind of goes away and you start to play ball. Obviously, playing at Michigan State, we played in some big-time games there. We were fortunate enough to do that. So, I'm going to try and take whatever I did there, use it, put it to use out there Saturday."

Q: Are there nerves that come with knowing you're going to be the starter?

Cook: "Nope, not really. I was nervous last week just being activated. (*laughter*) Being inactive all season long and finally knowing that I was one play away, I was preparing like I was the guy. So, I was nervous going into the Denver game just like I'll have the nerves going into this game. So, it's all the same."

Q: Did you get much sleep last night?

Cook: "Oh yeah, slept great last night."

Q: Have you received advice from anyone around the league or teammates from Michigan State?

Cook: "I talked to my quarterback coach from Michigan State last night, Brad Salem. And then obviously Derek [Carr], talking to him, trying to encourage me and give me all the confidence that I need heading into this game."

Q: Have the last couple weeks been sort of a whirlwind for you with all of the changes?

Cook: "Yeah, for sure. It's just the name of the game. You see things like this happen a lot. Anything can happen. Anything can change with a drop of the hat. So, you just always have to be ready and whether it's out there on the practice field getting mental reps, putting yourself through it mentally to now actually getting reps, you just have to approach every single day like it's the same."

Q: Do feel like you've always been ready to jump in and be a starter?

Cook: "I think I've always been ready to go in if they needed me. There's still so much to learn, so much for me to improve on. Watching Derek play, watching Matt play, they do a lot of things that I need to get better at. Watching them, if they ever needed me, I think that I would be able to go in and contribute, stuff like that."

Q: Even though you weren't active for the game, does it help to have film from this year against the Texans?

Cook: "Yeah, for sure. That's a point of emphasis for us. We're going to watch that game. A bunch of us have already sat down and watched that game. You just try to pull up things that we can try to exploit in this week's game."



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Q: What do you see from Jadeveon Clowney when you watch film?

Cook: "Very talented edge rusher. A guy who can stop the run, get to the quarterback on the pass rush. Just a guy who makes plays all over the field, a guy who could track down a receiver who's running 40 yards downfield. I think he ran a 4.40, or whatever it was, at the combine. He's a very, very talented football player."

Q: How has your game improved from training camp until now?

Cook: "I think just confidence. When you come in, you're a rookie, you're kind of unsure of the offense, timing with the receivers, all that stuff. So now just having almost a full season under my belt, staying after, getting extra reps after practice. Coming out before in pregame when I was inactive, throwing with other receivers. Just building the timing, the route concepts, all that stuff, the knowledge of the offense. Just learning all of that I think I'm just more confident, more in control."

Q: What's your demeanor?

Cook: "I'm just going to go out there and make plays for my teammates. I've never been the kind of rah-rah kind of guy. I'm going to be vocal inside the huddle. I'm going to communicate to my guys on the sideline and stuff like that, but I would always just go out there and try to make plays and let the play speak for itself."

Q: How much work have you gotten with Michael Crabtree and Amari Cooper throughout the year?

Cook: "A little bit here and there in practice. If it's just routes on air, if we're doing quarterback drills and they're just spot catching, stuff like that. That's really all the chemistry I've had with them or opportunities to work with them in practice in drills like that."

Q: How did you find out you would be starting this weekend?

Cook: "I came in this morning and [quarterbacks] coach Todd Downing told me. So I came in and talked to T.D."

Q: Have you heard from Draymond Green?

Cook: "I have not."

Q: Do you know him?

Cook: "Yes, I do."

Q: Do you have family coming to the game?

Cook: "Yeah, mom, dad, sister, girlfriend."

Q: What was your reaction when Downing told you this morning?

Cook: "Just ready. I'm going to embrace it, this opportunity. Give it everything I got and go out there and have fun."



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Texans Head Coach Bill O'Brien Conference Call

Q: What were your thoughts on Connor Cook throughout the draft process?

Coach O'Brien: "Very good player. Good size, good arm strength. Winner, won a ton of games, Big 10 Championship in college. We held him in high regard."

Q: What did you think of his performance against Denver?

Coach O'Brien: "Look, I think that Denver's defense is very difficult to go against, and I thought he held his own. I think that to go into that situation when you've been the number three guy all year, that's a tough, tough situation. I give him a lot of credit for stepping in there and making some plays and trying to help his team and standing in there. He took some shots, but tried to really help his team win the game."

Q: What stands out about Khalil Mack?

Coach O'Brien: "There's many things that stand out. His athleticism, his toughness, his ability to pressure the quarterback, his ability to move around in the front. They move him around a lot. Just basically, he's the type of player that you have to know where he is on every snap."

Q: What kind of confidence do you have in Brock Osweiler to step in and perform well on Saturday?

Coach O'Brien: "We have confidence in Brock. Brock had a good second half against Tennessee. We didn't win the game, but he was very productive in the game, and he's had a good week of practice for us here. I know he's excited for the challenge. We're all excited for the challenge. We know it's going to be a very challenging game. We hold the Oakland Raiders in very high regard. We know it's a good football team with a heck of a coaching staff. We're all understanding of the challenge that's ahead of us on Saturday."

Q: What does it mean to get Lamar Miller back?

Coach O'Brien: "Anytime you have your number one back, I think it's important. He's a guy that's been so productive for us all year. He's a guy that's done different things. Not just run the ball, he's caught the ball out of the back field. He's been good in protection. So, he's done a number of different things for us and it's good to have him back."

Texans DE Jadeveon Clowney Conference Call

Q: How did you grade yourself after playing the Raiders in Mexico City?

Clowney: "I think I played to the run pretty good. I made a couple of tackles for loss. A couple of key plays in the game to help us keep the game close."

Q: Nothing exceptional from what you expect from yourself in that game?

Clowney: "I expect to play like that every game. I try to. High energy guy getting out after the linemen up front, trying to make plays for my team."

Q: Why do you think you guys were so able to withstand losing J.J. Watt?

Clowney: "Because of the players in the locker room. We believe in ourselves. No matter what anybody said, without him we weren't going to be as good. We just went out there and played football."

Q: How do you think you fit into Romeo Crennel's defense with getting moved around and having different angles?

Clowney: "You said it. He's moving me a lot, so he's really putting me where he wants me and how he wants it done. It's all coming together the way he set it up."



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Q: Is that kind of how you played in college or did you stay in one spot?

Clowney: "No, I played the same way in college. Moving around, finding certain matchups, find a way to get one-on-one's and away from chips and everything. It helps."

Q: Do you feel like you're on your way now that you're healthy?

Clowney: "Yeah, I feel pretty good, man. That was the key thing in the offseason, get my body right. Get it back to the form where I could sustain the long 16-game season. I worked a lot in the offseason on taking care of my body and it's paying off for me now."

Q: What stood out to you about the Raiders the first time you played them in Mexico City?

Clowney: "They're an all-around team, man. Offensive line is good. You have key wide receivers that are Pro Bowl guys. Running backs, they have a great running back and a great quarterback. Defense is playing good. Everything was good about the team. I felt like they were a total team. You know a team either has an offense or a defense, they have both."

Q: You seemed to beat them at the line of scrimmage a lot in that game, but they had a few big plays. Is that what makes them tough to play?

Clowney: "Yeah. They have a lot of sharp guys. A lot of players that can make big plays in big situations. With a quarterback that was then Derek Carr, it was hard to stop the guy. He was a great quarterback in the league."

Q: How do you prepare for Connor Cook?

Clowney: "I think we prepare the same way. Do a little bit of adjustments and then containing him. We're going to try to disguise a lot more because he's a rookie. [We're] going to try to make him find the reads. We'll do a lot of disguising to get after him. That's the key."

Q: Did you meet and talk to Khalil Mack during the draft process?

Clowney: "I talked to him once or twice."

Q: What do you think of his game?

Clowney: "He has the all-around game, total package. He can play the run and the pass. No offensive lineman is going to block him one-on-one. You have to have protection, help on the guy. You have to do it for four quarters. You can't do it for one quarter or just one down. You have to do it every play."

Q: Was it frustrating watching Mack play that first year, seeing the kinds of things you could be doing if you were healthy?

Clowney: "I really didn't pay him no attention. I was watching my team like, 'I should be out there with my team helping them.' That was the most frustrating part in the whole thing because I wasn't out there to help them."