

Jason McCourty:

Let you guys all get settled in. How are you guys all doing out there today? Appreciate you guys all coming this morning, this afternoon. This is our Annual Super Bowl Press Conference here with the NFLPA. My name is Jason McCourty. I'm a former NFLPA executive committee member, so I'm honored to be here and be able to represent the union here and be able to be a conduit for you guys to them and answer questions and just give you guys a state of where we are as a union. But before we get into all of that, each and every year here at the NFLPA, we give out the highest award or honor that we can and that's the Alan Page Community Award. And that's given to somebody that not only does his job on the field, but makes an exceptional impact off the field in his community.

And this award was created by players and for the players, and that's something that is extremely big for us and it's named after Justice Alan Page, who was a Hall of Famer, a union leader, but also was a humanitarian and a civil rights advocate. He represented everything we want our players to be today. His dedication to service and leadership continues to help and guide and inspire all the guys that are currently playing. Throughout the season, you guys saw some of it, 18 players are named as community MVPs for the outstanding work that they do in the community. And these guys don't do it for their recognition. They do it every single day to be examples in their locker rooms, but to uplift the communities that they're playing in. We were able to narrow it all the way down to five finalists, and that was Cam Bynum of the Minnesota Vikings, Demario Davis of the New Orleans Saints, Derrick Henry of the Baltimore Ravens, Ryan Kelly of the Indianapolis Colts, who's here today, and Darius Slayton from the New York Giants, who's also here.

All these finalists did a great job and this is voted on by their peers to be able to see who's going to be the guy. And our 2025 honoree made a huge impact with his Left-Hand Right-Hand Foundation, which supports underserved communities. And this past December, he hosted a holiday party for 24 families collaborating with the NYPD-led Far Rockaway, Harlem and Bronx Giants program. In his six-year NFL career, he's already donated \$150,000 to support 150 young boys, and that's to help them with school and beyond. He also organizes free football camps in his hometown of Atlanta, provides meals and essentials for families in Georgia, Texas, New Jersey and New York. He hosts an annual car show in New York City to introduce kids to career opportunities outside of football. After a league-wide vote, it's my honor to announce the winner of the 2025 Alan Page Community Award. The recipient will receive \$100,000 charitable donation from the NFLPA and this year's winner is Darius Slayton. Come on up.

We're going to have Darius come to the stage. I'm also going to ask Jalen Reeves-Maybin to stand up, our Executive Director, Lloyd Howell, and then Jamia Washington from our partner at Big Brothers and Big Sisters of America. Get the check in there. Once again, congratulations to Darius. Appreciate all the hard work that you've done. Continue to do it. We'll be watching for you, man.

Now that we've done that, I also want to bring up the President of the NFLPA, that's Jalen Reeves-Maybin, want to have him come up and address and talk. You want that? Oh, I'm sorry. Darius, come on up. We want you to say a few words. It wasn't going to be that easy. You did the work, now you got to earn the check. Go ahead and talk.

Darius Slayton:

It's the hard part. First, I just want to say I'm grateful to receive this award. Growing up, my parents always would take us to go visit the elderly or do things in the community and they always just reinforced me and my sister to always give back to anybody that you can help and that's something that I've tried to... Now that I've made it to this point in my life, I've tried to reach back and help people as much as I can. And to me, this just reflects not me, but my community, reflects my parents. I thank God. I thank my family for all the support because I wouldn't be able to get all these events done and do all of

these things without their support. So for me, the Allen Page Community Award represents not just myself but my whole community and I'm just grateful to have the support system that I have. So again, I'm grateful to receive this award and thank you to all you all and the NFLPA and God bless.

Jason McCourty:

Jalen Reeves-Maybin.

Jalen Reeves-Maybin:

Appreciate everyone being here today. I want to start off by saying thank you to the City of New Orleans for hosting us. Also want to acknowledge that our hearts are with the people, families and victims of those affected by some of the events that happened here New Year's. I also want to congratulate the Chiefs and the Eagles for making it to the biggest stage in sports. Once again, those two teams have been here multiple times over the last seven or eight years, and it's really a testament to the work that those teams have put in from top to bottom organizationally and to the players.

This is about 11 months since I became the President of the NFLPA and I am very grateful for the chance to represent our membership. I don't take this role lightly and I'm not here to really push a personal agenda or anything. I just think that it's important to have someone who's willing to speak up for the players, willing to take direction from the players and really try to put the players in the front of this whole ride. I think a lot of times, things get misconstrued with who's controlling the players or who's running the union, and we really try to reinforce that this is player-led, player-driven, player-centric with everything that we do. At its heart, the PA is here to push the agenda of the players. It's not me, it's not Lloyd, it's not any of these EC members. It's the membership as a whole. So when an issue comes up or a topic comes up, we're not speaking from our own personal. We've done the work over the years to really get the ideas from the players, whether that's doing surveys, which is the thing that we've implemented over the last couple of years, to get more data-driven, to really figure out what are the issues that players care about and not letting anyone from the outside dictate the direction we should go. So we don't want that coming from the media. We don't want that coming from the fans. We don't want that coming from the ownership. It's really about what we see fit, what we see best and how we want to move in the right direction.

From a PA organizational standpoint, I won't steal all of Lloyd's thunder, but there have been some changes being made, just from the structure of the PA, and it's really been driven... I keep using the same word, but it's really been driven to be focused towards the players. So with every decision we're making, with every action that we're going, it's driven for what do the players want? What do the players needs? And we're really taking a new look at how to approach the entire structure of the PA. Sorry about this. Just to continue with that, a lot of the strides we're making, I can't take all the credit. It's been a lot of Lloyd's impact and we went through a big search to find out who our next Executive Director was going to be and we spent months, many of these guys up here spent months sourcing people, finding out, throwing stuff at the wall, seeing what sticks, seeing what didn't. A lot of us went into that situation thinking we wanted one thing and figuring out, "Hey, actually, that's not what we want. We don't think that's what's best for the players." And I think we've landed in a great spot and I know there's been some headlines out there about some of the turnover that's going on at the union now and some people leaving and some changes were being made. And I just want to give everyone the confidence to have the trust in us to make those decisions and to not think that it's ego-driven, it's all just to put us in a better situation to serve the players. A big part of that is communication.

With our membership being so big, the communication is always the issue. Guys are in season, guys are super busy and it's hard to get everyone on the same page. So we've really done a lot to try to look at

those processes and see what needs to be done different so the players feel like they're engaged at all times and they're the ones leading the charge. With that being said, I just want to turn it over to Lloyd and wanted to say, appreciate everyone for being here and yep, your turn. Appreciate it.

Lloyd Howell:

You got it. Thank you, Jalen. Good morning everyone, and thank you for being here. For me, it's been 18 months, so I think I'm past the initiation. Before we get started, I'd like to take a moment to extend my deepest condolences on behalf of the entire NFLPA to the City of New Orleans and to individuals and families who were victims in the horrific terrorist attack. I'd also like to thank the city officials who have welcomed us this week and the first responders and law enforcement agencies who keep us safe. We're also keeping a close eye on Los Angeles where many of our players and families have been displaced or affected by the wildfires, and we applaud both the Rams and the Chargers who made their city proud in the playoffs despite these challenges. Tragedies like these put football in perspective, but they can also show the unifying healing power of the game we love.

As we get ready for Super Bowl 59, it's clear that football has never been more exciting, more popular, and more successful. And because of that, it has never been more opportunities for growth. Many people deserve credit for the league's success, but none more than the players. So many fans tune in each week to cheer them on and marvel at their talent. That was evidenced in 2024 Super Bowl. We had over 123,000,000 viewers and ended this NFL games accounting for...

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Lloyd Howell:

...million viewers, and ended this NFL Games accounting for 80 of the top 100 most TV programs in the US despite a presidential election, and the Olympics. The players are at the heart, and soul of this sport, and this business. They need to be at the center of every decision that is made about the league's future. That's why when I was elected by the player leadership 18 months ago, I made it my mission to build a truly player centric, data-driven advocacy organization with two primary goals to help protect the health, and safety of the players, and helps secure their financial future. These priorities are not just fair, and reasonable. They benefit the league, and its fans. Because if we protect, and provide for the players, we also protect, and provide for the long-term sustainable growth of the game. I'm happy to report the NFLPA has made tremendous progress since I spoke with you last year.

We're bringing in new skills, and capabilities that will be needed to more effectively advocate for the players. Not only are we employing cutting edge data-driven approaches to identify what matters most to our players, and their families. We're meeting regularly to discuss those issues. I had in-person meetings like last year with all 32 teams. It allowed me a chance to meet with a room of about 90% of our members. I also met with dozens of agents, front office leadership, and everyone in between. As a result, I can say with confidence that our members are much better informed, and far more engaged than before, and we're becoming more unified behind our priorities. We certainly have room to go, but we're off to a great start. I won't go through all the players' priorities today, but I do want to talk a bit about health, and safety as well as revenue, and compensation.

I'll start with health, and safety as these need to be the starting point of everything we do. We're asking players to leave everything on the field every week, and that means risking an injury. Everyone wins when we have as many healthy players as possible suiting up each week, and enjoying long careers. I come from a finance background, so I always turn to the numbers, and when it comes to safety, everyone should be investing in taking a data, and science backed approach. I heard the commissioner

remark recently that the league has made enough progress on health, and safety to expand the regular season. Frankly, we're not sure how he's reaching that conclusion based on the data we've been given access to. We believe there's much more to be done taking schedule, and travel, for example, this season, several teams played two games within a hundred-hour span, or three games in 10 days. The Packers flew from Green Bay to Brazil, and back in 48 hours. Players are feeling the physical toll. We want to look at the data like data on how travel impacts sleep, and recovery, or how recovery time impacts injury risk so that we can build a schedule that prioritizes the player's health, and performance over viewership metrics. This is common sense, and we had 17 years of international games to try to figure this out. We all need to be sharing relevant data so that we can work together to set up players for success. Players also want to play on the safest possible field surfaces. I talked about this last year's Super Bowl, but we continue to see players suffer potentially preventable injuries on turf fields, or poorly maintained grass surfaces. The fact is there's very little consistency across surfaces in the league, and the variability gets worse when you factor in soccer fields we're playing on internationally. Our data shows that properly maintained grass fields reduces risk of non-contact injury, and we know the league has field specific data on soft tissue injuries for each team, but they've historically been unwilling to share that data. I want us all to have an honest, transparent conversation about surfaces grounded in that data. We shouldn't be making decisions on whether something feels safe enough. The sport is driven by metrics, and so let's be sure that let's be sure that the data is the basis of our decisions. The other pillar I'd like to talk about is revenue, and compensation. The NFL League is a league of its own when it comes to revenue generation, and the new era of professional football has created major new value creation channels. Because of this growth, and the advent of private equity taking minority ownership stakes teams have never been worth more, and the league has never been more valuable. It starts with TV where the deals are getting bigger, and there are many more of them, as streamers compete with broadcasters, and cable companies for rights. Owners are building massive real estate projects around stadiums, which would certainly not drive the same level of traffic without the stadium, or training facility as an anchor, we can't forget sports betting, where advertising revenue is only expected to grow, and then there are the revenue opportunities that come with international expansion such as marketing sponsorship, and international broadcast rates. It is important to recognize that none of these growth drivers would exist if the players weren't providing such a remarkable game they experienced for fans. They deserve the benefit, or two benefit from all of this even after they retire. Most American workers have decades to build financial security through their jobs, and about 10 years of peak earnings on average.

An NFL player's earning period is only about three to four years, and the average NFL career ends at 26 years old. Players are the engine that drives the league's growth, so let's let them share more in the value they help to create. Coming from the corporate world the new role of private equity in the league has made me think about how every other industry incentivized their top talent by giving them equity, so that when the organization becomes more valuable, the employees share in it. We look forward to working with our members to determine how we can explore compensation structures that provide the right performance incentives while also providing them income security they deserve, including benefiting more from the value they create. In fact, I'll be going over to our pitch day, so please join me if you want to hear more on this topic. I want to close by saying the NFLPA exists to amplify players' voices, to protect their rights, fight for their health, and safety, and secure their financial future.

More than ever, we are taking a data-based approach to bring fairness, transparency, and the player perspective to every aspect of the game. We'll continue to challenge the status quo for our members, and I want to say undeniably that the NFLPA, and its members are engaged, and more unified than ever. A player centric future is a future we should all hope for. It will allow us to enjoy a stronger, and more sustainable game that thrills current fans, and creates new lifelong fans. This is our vision. It is

exhilarating, it is building in momentum, and over the coming year we will work tirelessly to make this vision a reality. Thank you. Some of our EC members are here today. We have Case Keenum, Austin Ekeler, Jalen, who you heard from, as well as Jason all to help answer questions depending on what you would like to know more about. So, with that, thank you, and now we can get to Q&A.

Jason McCourty:

Thank you, Lloyd. Thank you, Jalen. For you guys, we'll have a microphone going around, ask your questions. The light is very bright up here, so if you can just say your name before you answer your question, that way the guys will be able to see, and know who they're talking to.

Darren Smith, KLKC radio:

Thank you. My name is Darren Smith, KLKC Radio out of Kansas City. You talk about the 18 game season, and so I'm someone who covers the Chiefs on a day-to-day basis, and speaking with the players, including Chris Jones, they were one of the teams that played three games within 11 days. What is the union willing to fight for because it seems as though Goodell is intent on having an eighteen-game season before the end of the collective bargaining agreement. What are you all willing to fight for, and not cave to the league, whether it's lifetime health benefits, or guarantee contracts that you all will not just cave to the league, and give them 18 games just to give more money?

Lloyd Howell:

Sure. Thank you for the question. Let's start with a couple of facts. The length of the season is a CBA negotiated matter, and if anyone has ever looked at the CBA, it's about a two-inch, three-inch legal document that covers a variety of aspects of this sport, so any commentary outside of a formal negotiation is just commentary, and it's a player's decision as to what they will agree to do, or not. Right now, when I have talked to the players over the last two seasons, no one wants to play an 18th game, no one. The 17 games is already for many of the guys too long. 17 games is also so lengthy that you're still dealing with injuries going into the next season. So, there are a variety of issues that hang off of the length of season before any form of negotiation. So, what are those? Some of which I spoke to in my opening comments, you've got health, and safety issues, recovery, what does that mean in terms of number of bi-weeks?

What does that mean in terms of the off-season? What does that mean in terms of the complexion of the 18 today? We've agreed in the last CBA up to 10 games overseas, and then if anything beyond that, you have to come to the PA to kind of get agreement. So, when you talk about 18 games, what does the international composition look like, and where? There's evidence that we're going to go as far away as Australia, or they would like to go as far away as Australia, the Middle East, India, you name it, they truly want to look at the international expansion of the game, so how does that fit into 18? Work rules. We were already in discussions about different types of tackles, different types of blocking that needs to be a continued sort of topic, benefits. You mentioned healthcare, so what does that look like in terms of what's guaranteed if you're playing a longer season, if your off-season is impacted by that, what does that look like? And what does it look like in terms of what we were able to do incentive packages for guys who make the 53 person roster, and oh, yeah, maybe that needs to be addressed, the roster size, the practice squad, then we get to the economics. So, if I'm asking my workforce to work more, it's not as simple as I'm going to fall back on the all-revenue split that currently exists. As you heard in my opening comments, what are the international opportunities? What are the guarantees? Be it health, or playing, or whatever the case may be.

So, there are so many dimensions that hang off of the length of the season, and so none of the players, as I say, just to sum up, and probably want to hear from the guys, no one wants to play 18 games, some guys don't even want to play 17, just given the toll it has on their body, and the lack of time to recover. So, should we get to a point where we actually engage in negotiations, and we open up the CBA, that'll be the time to get into all these other parameters above, and beyond what's the length of the season.

Mark Maske, WaPo:

It's Mark Maske from the Washington Post. Just to follow up on that, Lloyd, what is the current state of the conversations you've had with the league on that topic on the 18th game, and logistically, and time-wise, how do you see those conversations proceeding from here?

Lloyd Howell:

Yeah, I mean they've been informal. I think the first time I heard Roger mention 18, I think it was Draft weekend, and he did an interview on the Pat McAfee show, and so the first conversation we had, did I hear you right, did you just say 18? And E&D owned the fact that he had said 18. Since that time mark, we haven't had any discussions about it. Their side hasn't raised it. We certainly haven't raised it. So, if anything, we've talked about international more so than the length of the season. As I mentioned in my previous response. When we get to that point, we'll get to that point, but we're not at that point now.

Jason McCourty:

Before we move on, just with the 18 games, one of the guys, you guys are in the locker room every day. Is that a topic that's being discussed, and if so, what are guys saying when it comes to the 18 games?

Jalen Reeves-Maybin:

Yeah, I think the topic's been discussed, but it's more so been from just a headline out there, and honestly guys saying, "No way. No way we're doing that", but it's not been like a negotiation, or a thing that we've put, this is happening. We got to figure out what we want this fast. As Lloyd said, that's a CBA issue, and there's tons of aspects, and components to opening up a CBA to change the length of the season. So, I think that everyone sees 18th game, and we get a little bit scared, but as Lloyd said, there haven't been any negotiations, or any...

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Jalen Reeves-Maybin:

... a little bit scared, but as Lloyd said, there haven't been any negotiations or any formal discussions about an extension of the season.

Speaker 3:

Okay.

Case Keenum:

I'd like to add something to that too. I think all of us here and all of our teammates back home, we all love playing football. Do we all wish our season would've been longer for other reasons? Yes. This time of year though, the training room is pretty full. All of us are struggling to get our bodies back right. I know most of my teammates, we don't feel really normal until July comes around in time for another

season. So this is probably not the right time to talk about adding another game that's a regular season for us. So it's just, as far as the health and safety goes, that's a big issue for us.

Speaker 3:

Okay.

Scott Morgan, So FL Tribune:

My name is Scott Morgan on South Florida Tribune. I would appreciate if everybody would kindly answer this question. Let's talk about Guardian Caps and Guardian helmets. What are your thoughts about the early results on them and do you think you're going to encourage your membership to go ahead and wear them, whether full-time as you get more and more accustomed to the technology? As I understand, it's helped a little bit, but obviously we're far from the finished product. Thank you.

Jalen Reeves-Maybin:

Yeah, I think with the new data coming out showing that, I think this year was the lowest concussion rate in the last 10 years, and I think you would have to say the Guardian Cap might be a part of that. The kickoff rule changes might be a part of that and as well as just been an effort over the last whatever years to reduce those type of hits that result in concussions. I think the data on the Guardian Cap is still young, so I think there will be guys who take advantage of that and you might see more guys in it next year than the previous year, but I don't think it'll come to a point where we need to mandate the Guardian Cap for everyone.

Austin Ekeler:

Yeah, I would say it's encouraging to see just the efforts from both sides to try to figure out this issue, because this is one of the major pain points for us when it comes to health and safety, this topic. And so for us to see, hey, there's some changes. Hey, let's try this new Guardian Cap, maybe try some other technology. You see, the neck collar things that people wear is definitely encouraging and as Jalen said, is still young and so we'll still continue to see the numbers. Did the Guardian Cap help? Was it the other things?

And for me personally, just wearing the Guardian Cap, it feels heavy on my head. As a running back, just my balance and things like that. I use a lot of just different movements and so just making it more efficient for people. And I love that right now it's an option, you can use it if you'd like. I actually had two concussions this last year and I still feel like the equipment that I was wearing was still sufficient enough. I think it was just the hits that I took unfortunately, but at the end of the day it's just again, really encouraging to see the efforts being made and we'll continue to go and try to make it as best as possible.

Randall Williams, Bloomberg:

Randall Williams, Bloomberg News. Lloyd, you mentioned the opportunity for players to have equity in teams. A couple years ago, Aaron Rogers attempted to do something similar with the Jets, and the reason I asked that question is because when you mentioned Private Equity, one of the things that's happened is owners have been given a longer measuring stake to figure out how much these stakes will sell for, whether they want to go to limited partner, Private Equity and things like that. I would imagine this would be a limited partner. Have you given any thought to what structure would look like for a player or players to get ownership in a team?

Lloyd Howell:

Partially. In my first year in the role, as I was making the rounds talking to owners and would mention Private Equity, I got a polite, "Hell no. Not my team. Made sacrifices." The list went on and on as to why they were not in favor. And then less than a year, they voted on for teams who elect to participate up to 10%, non-voting, non-controlling, essentially a limited partnership. So what changed?

All right, you heard in my opening comments the value of this league is growing very well and it's arguably the most popular sport on the planet. To grow, you need capital and so to the extent that you can get capital and not give up control, that's a pretty good deal. And then you get into the specifics that I just don't know. What's the lockup? Who can participate? Is there a clearing house? All things that I think in my discussions with the league, they're still working through. So they have some very reputable firms in the mix, which is encouraging, but it still gets to today's professional football player athlete thinks about their sport, their job, differently than in the past.

They're thinking about wealth creation, they're thinking about legacy, they're thinking about their families. They're thinking about what entrepreneurial platforms can I get into? And so life after football is not as important, but is as important as what they're doing at a very young age. So there's questions that certainly I have. I am an operating executive at Carlisle Group. I do understand enough to be dangerous when it comes to Private Equity. It is intriguing, but it is intriguing that today's professional football player has more of an equity mindset. They want to put their money to work, right?

And so in order to do that, here is a platform, why can't they participate? And it could be for conflict of interest reasons, it could be all sorts of reasons, but in my experience you can work through that. You can set up the right safeguards. So those are the right questions. Hopefully a little bit later today, we're going to get into some of that. We actually have players who have their own Private Equity firms and who are invested in NBA franchises and other professional leagues. And so it'll be an opportunity for football, the players, to get smarter, but also to share some knowledge as to how it has worked in other professional sports.

Sam Holt, Women of Fantasy Football:

Sam Holt with Women of Fantasy Football right here up front.

Lloyd Howell:

I'm blind, I can't see anything.

Sam Holt, Women of Fantasy Football:

Sorry. Excited to hear that the concussions are down 17% thanks to the Guardian Cap and other measures that the team has taken. Is there any goal in adding technology to the pads or other parts that the players are wearing of their uniforms that wouldn't be cumbersome for them to wear, but we could also gain data in terms of speed and force so we can learn how these lower body injuries are happening on different turf versus grass? Is there any goals in adding that so we can gain some of that data?

Lloyd Howell:

Yeah, I'll start and the guys should probably weigh in here. The guys already wear our sensors pretty much throughout the season, and it tracks all sorts of health information. We have been in discussions with the league as to sharing it, protecting PHI, as to what is it telling us and so on and so forth. The sensitivity is many of the franchise see it as competitive advantage. So if they're doing something unique and it's translating to wins, why do I want to share all that stuff? We're picking it up on really a health

and safety. So if we can sanitize the data, maybe redact names and it's like for just linebackers is what it's telling us.

And then to your direct question, get into sleep and recovery and nutrition. And right now, 32 teams are kind of doing it differently so it's hard to draw from that and say, "What are the best practices?" So on and so forth. So technology is increasingly at the forefront of what both the league and the players are doing. We've got to get comfortable with sharing the data, as I said, in a transparent, open way in order to make progress. So if we're talking about field, why is a soccer pitch less attractive to the guys than what they might play domestically? What's the right type of grass?

It gets really agricultural and it gets really scientific really fast. And that's not to say both sides haven't been talking, but come on, it's 2025. We can talk a little faster. We kind of maybe make some decisions and figure out what the next step. But the guys do wear sensors today. I'd say basically all the teams are fairly scientific about what the data shares with them and then the treatments and whatnot that they should probably speak on.

Jalen Reeves-Maybin:

I think just from my eight years in the league, the data and the science and the tracking has improved greatly. This past year is probably the most I was really involved with tracking average speeds in a practice day. So your average Wednesday practice, you usually hit whatever miles per hour and if you come back two weeks later and you've been increasing for two weeks now, you try to figure out, okay, what did I do in my schedule this week that's kind of adjusted those speeds or how does that affect if I was slow in the week in practice, was I slow on Sunday at the game?

And I think that's growing. I don't really think we've gotten to the point of really measuring force on contact and things like that, but I think that the data is increasing and players are taking more accountability into that, but still a long way to go.

Jason McCourty:

Guys, have there been thoughts... I heard Lloyd mention when you're tracking sleep and things of that nature for you guys as players, when you go home and you have to wear something where it's tracking your sleep and all of those things have turning that data over to a team from a standpoint of you may go home and go to sleep at 8:00 o'clock the next, I may go to sleep at midnight. Are there concerns when some of that stuff of just some of the information you want to be kept private when it comes to injuries and health and safety and stuff? Austin, I'll let you answer that.

Austin Ekeler:

Yeah, I think that comes back to the club and I think how Lloyd was mentioning it. There is measures that are being taken. For instance, I remember with the Chargers, we had a little app that you'd put in when you woke up, if you're sore, all of this different stuff. And that was specifically for our training room for them to use, them to make decisions. Same thing with kind of the catapult technology that measures the speeds. I had a threshold that I could be in. Hey on Wednesday, like Jalen was saying, on Wednesday, you can hit this. On Thursday, you can hit this. Friday, we want to see you hit your top speed.

And then our coaches and our strength staff would come to us, "Hey, I need to get a top speed from you on one of these reps in this period." And so it comes down just to the club of what they want to gather and how they want to actually use that. But I don't think it's necessarily universal because it's been

different. We don't do the app and the sleeping stuff here with the Commanders. So it just depends on the team and what tech they want to use.

Case Keenum:

It is different from team to team and it's changed obviously over the years. Technology's changed. I actually have a question. Lloyd, if you touch on some cleats stuff. We talked about equipment. I know the equipment room, our equipment room, everyone I've been in has done a great job with helmet selection, a lot of the data there, but are we doing some stuff with cleats and field surface, kind of the interaction of those two?

Lloyd Howell:

We are. And so today all the players have a lot of autonomy about what they would prefer to wear, foot-wise. And it could be sponsorship, it could be for lots of different reasons. That being said, when you look at the field surface and you look at the shoe, there are more optimal situations than not.

So we have been in discussions with the league at a very high level about what's the science again that says these are the preferred shoes given the field surface, given the position, what's available to the guys in terms of optionality. And we're far from getting to that. But Casey's question is spot-on because when you think about the length of the season and your position and the field surface and the conditions that you might be playing in snow, rain, whatever, what are the shoes that are going to help the athlete, protect them from unnecessary injury and then go from there?

So for those of you who study the science around the helmets, there are probably about, what? Half a dozen options for the guys to wear. That being said, they also have preferences maybe from college or maybe when they were in high school. So as we think about Guardian Cap and we think about the helmets, I can see the shoes also going down a similar path in terms of what is right, what's the science indicate, and then how do we evolve to really setting the guys up so that they can not suffer any sort of unnecessary injury.

Amy Tennery, Reuters:

Hi. Amy Tennery from Reuters over here. Another question about head protection beyond the Guardian Cap. Commissioner Goodell said this week that around 370 players this season were wearing what the league considers to be the most advanced model in helmets. I'm wondering what communication you're having with your members to encourage them to make a choice for the best, what the league considers to be the best available models and whether you would consider embracing any rules that would restrict the number of options that players have when it comes to helmets in the future.

Jalen Reeves-Maybin:

Yeah, a lot of that is up to the equipment staff for each team. And there's always been a chart that kind of rates the different helmets. So these are in the green, these are in the yellow, these are on the red, they might still be approved. And then we have a list where it's like, you can't wear these helmets any longer. And that's always case by case.

We want to get everything data driven, but they're still in the aspect of feel for a player who's been playing this game for so long. And change is hard for some guys who've worn the same helmet for six and seven years. I think they've done a good job creating those thresholds and saying, "We're not going to allow this. It's proven to be unsafe and there's better options." So I think as time goes on, we want to get as many guys in those high green-

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Jalen Reeves-Maybin:

... goes on, guys will... We want to get as many guys in those high green, top-of-the-line helmets as possible?

Lloyd Howell:

So let me address the process part of your question. So we're trending in the right direction. I think Roger shared that early in the week, we're at the table looking at the science of a variety of forums during Combine week as well as outside of Combine week. So all to the good, the process of communicating to the guys is going to be picking up. We have an upcoming, what we call our Player Rep Meeting in March. It's typically where we share what's the state of affairs, what's going on? We're also revitalizing our participation in the competition committee, which many of these aspects also get raised. So on a go-forward basis, there'll be more communication than what we've had in the past. But Jalen's exactly right, a lot of what the guys are hearing are coming from their team. They're looking up at a chart, says red, yellow, green. They may have issue given their preference versus what is permissible, and then it gets addressed or adjudicated there. What I would like to do is that the PA becomes more of an ombudsman in terms of we get upstream with these discussions, no matter what it is, policy rule changes, you have it, and then the flow down is more cohesive than what it's been in the past.

Rob Maaddi:

Hey guys. Rob Maaddi Associated Press. I wonder how you feel about the hip drop tackle enforcement? A year into it, seems guys we're getting fined. No penalties. I know, Austin, you were really against it last year.

Austin Ekeler:

Yeah, it's still young as far as getting the data and everything like that. I'd be curious to see what it looks like. And this is again, talk about the competition committee, why we want to make sure that hey, there's an actual equitable portion of what we're doing and what we're saying that's actually considered. We just want to make sure that the rules are clear and concise and that we're on the same page from both a health and safety standpoint, but then to also keeping the game, what the game is. It's still a physical game.

And so, for us, it's in a position where, okay, let's see how it went. You put it out there. We had our voice, we put our narrative out there and where we stood on it, how did it go? And if we're going to make a change, let's make a change. Or if not, let's really enforce, okay, how are you teaching this going forward? If we're going to keep it and stay, let's make sure it's very clear on what it is the rules and how we're actually going to make a movement to make sure that we can actually help the players in not doing this. Because this is a violent game. It's a reaction game. It's not like I'm trying, or anyone's trying to hip, drop, tackle, swivel, whatever they call it. It's more so, hey, I'm trying to get this person on the ground so that I can do my job at a high level.

And I get it. We can control ourselves. We're highly athletic players, but this is, okay, what's the rules? And then also, how do you enforce that because you're changing the game that we played for so long and now putting these minor details in it, which might seem, on the surface level, like, oh, they'll figure it out. But that's changing our techniques. It's changing our fundamentals of the game. And so again, just making sure that that's clear and then also, understanding that, hey, just making it fair as far as if you're

fining guys making that, hey, where's the line? Where's the line of this is a fineable, or this is one that you couldn't actually get away from. So that's what I would say on it.

Mike Jones, The Athletic:

Mike Jones, The Athletic, you said 18 games is too long. That's pretty much the consensus, and a lot of guys feel like 17 is too long. Did you feel like that when there was the talk from going from 16 to 17 or after having played the 17, do you guys feel like, wow, this is way more on our bodies than what we expected?

Lloyd Howell:

Well, the decision predates me. So for the guys-

Mike Jones, The Athletic:

[inaudible 00:45:47] the guys.

Lloyd Howell:

Sorry, go ahead.

Jalen Reeves-Maybin:

Yeah, I don't think anyone was really in favor of going to 17. I definitely think you feel it on your body, you feel the mental toll. Just going through the season realizing... I remember the first year after the last game, I was like, well, damn, we got one more. So that was definitely kind of a wake-up call when you're actually in it. But yeah, I would say that guys were against 17 and I know that guys are against 18.

Austin Ekeler:

Yeah, I would say even just the thought of 18 games makes me cringe. Just personally speaking, for me, my ankles as a running back takes a few months to heal up after the season. It's one of those things where you'll tape up and push through to get there to the end, and then you make playoffs, you get the opportunity to go out there and earn some more time on the field. It definitely extends it. And so I think that's worth it at that point where it's like, hey, chance to go be a world champion.

But if you're out of that run, you're like, "All right, body is feeling it." Even my neck right now, just turning my neck is one of the things that takes a long time to heal as well. And so again, that 18th game, personally speaking, not speaking for the membership, is something that is really outrageous to me. If we're talking about expanding revenue, there's a lot of ways to do that in a safer way. And we're seeing that, international, all these other advertisements and things like that. So I think it's coming back to what's the goal of that? And if it is the revenue, I think there's other ways that we can actually get about that. But yeah, definitely very heavily against 18th game.

Case Keenum:

Yeah, going back to what I said before, I think all of us, we love playing football, there's no doubt about that, but every year, the rookies come in and about week five or six, I'm like, "So you guys ready? You played a full college football season already with preseason and training camp and all that. It's like we got 10 or 11 more games, maybe more than that." It's a long, long season. And like we said, do we love going to work and doing it? Yes. But do we want to protect our bodies and our livelihoods and be able to

play with our kids in the yard when we're done doing this and whatever we can do to promote health and safety. And that's our first and foremost issue, and I think we want to protect.

Ben Fischer, SBJ:

Yeah. Ben Fischer Sports Business Journal. This is mostly for Lloyd, I think, but whoever. Lloyd, my question is about the union's finances. Your last tax document showed a big increase in assets over a billion dollars, but also, we know that you offered a buyout package to a very substantial number of your employees. So I guess what's the bottom line? What is the union's financial position right now? And if it is good, then why the buyouts?

Lloyd Howell:

The position is adequate, not good or great, and I wasn't hired to be adequate. Our membership is expecting better communication, better support, more timely support. And as I mentioned in my opening comments, a level of sophistication that they felt they weren't getting. So, a lot of the changes that have been reported are to be a great organization, is to have cutting edge skill sets, is to apply technology in a different way that the rest of the world's doing, but we're not doing. And driven by what the membership has shared with me in terms of their expectations and what they would like to see, includes better communication. It includes more frequent communication, a lot of the obvious things to maybe the folks in this room, but certainly, we need to pick up the pace.

So the changes that have been reported are really around talent, but it's to make room for these highly demand, in demand capabilities that we don't currently have. Our finances are adequate, but when you think about things like Private Equity, you think about who our financial partners are, and we've made changes in that regard. Things are improving, but we're still not where we need to be. And so that's the connection between our finances as well as the changes that we're making organizationally.

Jason McCourty:

We have time for about two more questions.

Charles Robinson, Yahoo:

Right here. Lloyd, Charles Robinson, Yahoo Sports. Every time you talk about 18 games, you bring up the fact that it's collectively bargained. Roger Goodell knows this, and yet, every time he talks about it publicly, the stance he seems to strike is, this is something that's coming. So I guess what I'd ask you is how do you interpret that from his side? Is this posturing? Is he trying to draw you into negotiation? Is it arrogance? How would you characterize how he speaks about it publicly?

Lloyd Howell:

I don't want to be flippant, but you should ask Roger that. My interpretation is, yeah, he's trying to shape a narrative, for sure, about length of the season, how attractive it could be to the fan base, to preseason. 18 games ends around President weekend. I've heard all this and it's input, but when we open up the CBA and we get into a formal negotiation, a lot of what the guys have shared, what I've shared about recovery science, how will that be taken into account, no matter what the length of the season is? How will you take into account benefits? How will you take into account other dimensions to what it protects, our membership, when you're introducing something that could increase the risk and wear and tear on their bodies? So look, I came from a corporate world where you're constantly trying to

shape a narrative, whether it was on Wall Street or with clients, I don't see it anymore or any less than that.

Armando Salguero, Outkick:

Over here. Hi, Armando Salguero with Outkick.com. I'd like to know from the players, I get that 18 games is a non-starter for you, and I'm sure you understand it's a negotiation. Is there anything that you envision can move you from non-starter, heck no. Not happening. To, okay, well, maybe acceptable. Do any of you have any vision of what that might be?

Jalen Reeves-Maybin:

I wouldn't say it's fair for any of us up here to say what that should be. There's thousands of guys that we speak for who are not here, and frankly, we haven't been deep enough into conversation into figuring out the true points that everyone wants to get to. So for any of us to say up here, double my pay in 18th game, then we can do it, it would just be really be disrespectful to our membership.

Case Keenum:

I'd say in my 13 years of playing, there's only been one season. I've played all 16 games. It was a 16 game season at that point. So just like Jalen said, it's hard to say, to wrap your mind even around that.

Jason McCourty:

Smart guys right there. Don't give out your negotiation tactics to the media. Appreciate all of you guys for coming here and being a part of this, asking the in-depth questions. Thank you guys for coming here and answering. Hope everybody has a wonderful week down at the Super Bowl here in New Orleans. Enjoy your time and be safe. Appreciate it, everyone.

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