



CLEVELAND BROWNS TRANSCRIPT

Special Teams Coordinator Mike Priefer 2-7-19

Special teams coordinator Mike Priefer:

Opening statement:

“My name is Mike Priefer. I am the new special teams coordinator of the Cleveland Browns. It sounds really cool to say that because being from this area, I grew up a big Browns fan, Indians and Cavaliers. Really excited to be here. Huge opportunity. Great time to be Brown with the team that we have. I want to thank the Haslam family, (General Manager) John Dorsey and (Head Coach) Freddie Kitchens for bringing me in and making me a part of this organization. We have passionate fans here. It is funny, I was in the Navy and I would be overseas and be in the Mediterranean somewhere, and I would run into somebody wearing an Indians hat or a Browns t-shirt so I know there are fans all over the world that are passionate about their Browns. I am really excited to be here, and I am proud and happy to be a part of it.”

On how much time he spent in Cleveland during his childhood, given he moved a lot:

“I still have family around here – aunts, uncles and cousins. It is funny you mention that because every time we would play the Browns when I was with different teams, they would say, ‘Hey, Uncle Mike. Good luck. I hope the Browns win.’ They were still cheering for their Browns – I know any other family members; my immediate family, they always cheer for whatever team I am coaching for. I spent my first about 10 years of my life here, five in Middleburg Heights and five in Brunswick. My dad was the head football coach at Padua Franciscan High School so I kind of grew up around Padua and St. Anthony. In fact, he lived on 6850 State Road right up on the hill there across the street from St. Anthony. I actually went to church there a couple of weekends ago, and that was the first time I had been back since my grandmother’s funeral 26-27 years ago. I have come back to this area when we have played the Browns or I have come up here for an Indians game in the summer or something like that. I do have family still around.”

On his contract ending with the Vikings at the end of last year:

“Yes. I kind of bet on myself. I let my contract run out. Minnesota is a great organization, and we had a good run there. We had eight really good years there, and I just felt like it was time to explore other opportunities. When this one came up, I had several interviews and some other interviews set up, and when I came here and met with John, met with Freddie and was around the organization, I said that the excitement and the buzz in the building right now, this is where I really want to be. Being from here helped, but it is really where I wanted to be. I believe that they wanted me to be back. They offered me a contract, and I just felt like this was the best spot for me and my family.”

On the Browns special teams units not performing well in recent years:

“I am not sure how bad they were last year. I know that they had their moments that they were pretty good and in other moments they were not as good. When I first got to Minnesota, they were OK, and we were pretty good right off the bat. I think what it boils down to is you need to have good players. You need to have players that love the game of football. I am going to tell these young guys when they get into the building here in April that you can’t be a good special teams player unless you are passionate about the game of football. If you are just out there for a paycheck, you are out there just to get by or you are out there, ‘Hey, I only want to play linebacker or running back,’ then first of all, you are not going to help our team win and you are certainly not going to help us on special teams. If you have a passion about football and if you love the game, then I think you have a chance if you are good enough. I tell guys, ‘Use the fundamentals and techniques that we give you and then let God take over. Let the God-given talent that you have been given to help you play at high level.’ How quickly can we turn around our special teams? I think that is going to depend on our players and depend on how much they buy into what we are doing here. The culture that we had in Minnesota was outstanding. I am leaving a really good group of guys, and I have



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heard from a bunch of them and other people in the organization. It was tough to leave, but I am going to reiterate how excited I am to be here and to have this opportunity to help our football team win and win a lot of games.”

On minimizing penalties on special teams:

“There is a fine line there. You can over-coach it where guys are passive and they are not playing as fast and as hard as they can, but what we have had the last two years in Minnesota is we were the least penalized special teams unit in the league two years in a row. That is the mentality that I would like to bring here. I think that we are going to get that. We just hired an assistant, Doug Colman, who is going to work with me on special teams. He came from Dallas. He had been in Houston, and he has the same mentality that I do. We are going to play penalty-free football. We are going to play fast. We are going to play physical. We are going to play disciplined. We are going to play with enthusiasm and passion. We are going to help our football team win games. I do not want to go into a situation where I think, ‘Hey, we are going to go out and win every game for the Cleveland Browns.’ That is not our role on special teams. Our role is to go out there and be a weapon in all six phases, including field goal and field goal block. Be a weapon, play great complementary football and at the end of the day, let’s hope we win the game. That is where our mentality is going to be as we train these young men.”

On his experience in the Navy:

“Being a coach’s son, I learned that coaching is teaching, and then my experience in the Navy helped me become a better leader. I was a helicopter pilot. I was an aircraft commander at the age of 25. I was in charge of this helicopter, and I have a co-pilot with me and I have some air crewmen in the back. I had some incredible experiences in the Navy doing that. Being a division officer, I was, like I said, 24, 25, 26-year old young guy that was in charge of 50 enlisted men. I had a chief petty officer that worked with me, and we had a bunch of young guys. I loved it. What that trained me for has helped me become a better leader. I made mistakes, like we all do at that age, but I earned a lot about myself as a leader. I learned about how to help young men reach their goals and reach their full potential. At the end of the day, it was a great learning experience for me as a leader, and it helped me in my coaching career thus far.”

On lessons from the suspension with the Vikings:

“A situation occurred in Minnesota where I made a comment that I should not have made, and I apologized for that comment. I learned a lot from it, and what I learned is that you can’t say hurtful things about people, period – no matter where you are, no matter who you are talking to.”

On if he had a direct connection with Dorsey or through his father prior to joining the Browns:

“I have known John for a long time. He actually played in Green Bay when I was a ball boy there with my dad. I moved from Chapel Hill, North Carolina to Green Bay, Wisconsin, if you can imagine, my senior year in high school. I went from a co-ed public school to an all-boys Catholic school, and I am looking around like, ‘What am I doing here?’ It was really cold and a lot of snow. Being from Cleveland, you are used to the snow, but the cold was unbelievable, kind of like it is in Minneapolis. My dad has been a huge influence on me as a person, as a man and as a football coach. He was actually so much of an influence that he was the best man in my wedding. He has always been there for me. He has always been a great sounding board for me. He has been a great example for me. One of the reasons I got into coaching after my Naval career is because I saw the impact that my father had on young people’s lives. I have always had a passion for football. I have always loved the game of football, but I saw what he brought to the table not just in coaching – like he says, coaching is teaching – but the impact that he had on people’s lives. It was an easy decision for me when I got out of the Navy. It was tough to leave because I loved flying, I loved being a division officer and I loved being around that atmosphere, but the decision to go into coaching was a quite easy one because of the influence that he had on me.”

On if he ultimately knew he would become a football coach when entering the Naval Academy:



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“No, I did not. When I was a young guy, I was a big Civil War buff. I loved studying about the Civil War, and I guess the romantic idea of that part of it. I told my father, and it was probably my 9th or 10th grade year, I said, ‘When I graduate high school, I want to join the Army.’ He said, ‘Well, you have pretty good grades. Why don’t you see if you can get into one of the academies?’ I said, ‘What are you talking about?’ He said, ‘Army-Navy football.’ I said, ‘Oh, OK. That is what you are talking about. Before my junior year, we took a trip up to West Point and took a trip up to Annapolis, and I said, ‘This is where I want to be.’ I was fortunate enough to get into Annapolis and graduate in 1989 and went to flight school and loved flying. We would go on deployment, and guys would bring books or whatever they wanted to read, and I would bring a playbook. My dad was coaching at Georgia Tech at that time, and here I am flipping through the defensive playbook of Georgia Tech for enjoyment, rather than reading a book or whatever. I kind of knew in the back of my mind that was going to be something that I have always wanted to do.”

On if he has had aspirations of being a head coach or if he solely wants to specialize in special teams:

“I have always had the passion to be a head coach, but what I have come to realize is that I may not have that opportunity in the NFL. You know what? That is OK. My job right now is to be the best special teams coordinator that the Cleveland Browns can have. I want to be the best special teams coordinator that they have ever had. I want to lead these young men in the area of special teams to help us win a championship. I absolutely love coaching special teams. I would not want to coach anything else. Maybe someday be a head coach, that is fine, but that is not for me right now. What is for me right now is to be the best special teams coordinator that the Cleveland Browns need me to be to help us win a bunch of games.”

On K Greg Joseph’s performance last season, given some inconsistencies:

“First of all, special teams is six phases. I understand where you are coming from, I understand that completely, and I have been there before. It is glaring when a guy misses a kick. I have lived it. We could be great on special teams and miss a field goal at the end of the game, and you lost the game on special teams. I do not believe that. Going back to your question about Greg, I really like Greg coming out of college last year, a strong-legged kid. He needs some technique work. I still think he needs some technique work, but there is something there. He has a really big leg, and I think the to kick in Cleveland, to go to Baltimore, to go to Pittsburgh or go to Cincinnati, all of these outdoor venues that I have not been used to these past eight years, you are going to need a strong-legged young man. I like Greg. I like what he brings to the table. I think he has a chance to be a really good kicker. Will we bring in competition for him? I am not sure yet. We have not had those discussions. At the end of the day, I think he has a chance to be pretty good, and I did like him coming out.”

On if he seriously considered a career in the Navy:

“I did. About 1997, I had been a GA at the Naval Academy. I went back to the Naval Academy for my shore duty, which was not the best career move. I was told that is not the best career move, but I wanted to give coaching a chance. I kind of back-doored my way into coaching and probably made my Navy superiors upset that I did that instead of focusing on the Navy. I thought real seriously about doing. In 1997 when I got out of the Navy, I just got a job with Coach (Jim) Tressel at Youngstown State, which was a phenomenal experience for me. We won the 1997 National Championship. It was a really, really cool deal. There was part of me that wanted to stay in, there was a part of me that wanted to go fly helicopters in the FBI and there was part of me that wanted to go coach. To be honest with you, I am glad the coaching won out. I am really excited to be here and excited about the future of the Cleveland Browns.”

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