

# Pac-12 Conference Football Media Day

Friday, July 29, 2022  
Hollywood, California, USA

## Washington Huskies Coach Kalen DeBoer Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We welcome Kalen DeBoer to the stage.

Coach, go ahead.

KALEN DeBOER: Thank you. Good morning. It's great to see all of you here. First of all, just want to thank you for spreading the message of Husky football as well as the Pac-12. I know we're excited for this season. Our staff has worked tirelessly since coming in mid December to January, building our team. We've had a great off-season from winter workouts to spring football, now summer workouts.

I think we're certainly a team that is a lot stronger, faster, leaner. Those are things that in the development of our current roster were important. We brought in a few players that I think will be difference makers. Looking forward to really bringing it together here this fall.

I think every day we continue to grow and to have a mindset we're gaining or confidence and belief in what we're accomplishing, doing, who we can be down the road.

Great leadership from President Cauce to our athletic director, Jen Cohen. Appreciate all the support. It's really made the transition very seamless. It's been awesome getting to meet the people there in Seattle. Really looking forward to a great fall.

Any questions?

**Q. A question about the '23 schedule. The reason why I ask is because USC is presently on your schedule, but the conference hasn't decided what the schedule will be. My question to you is, given that it will be one of their last years in the league, are you intent on keeping the USC game on the 2023 schedule for Washington?**

KALEN DeBOER: Yeah, I mean, that is a question I hadn't

even thought of. Hadn't looked ahead at. I mean, we're just really honestly focused on this year, trying to just get our feet underneath of us as a new staff and growing this program.

So there's parts of the 2022 schedule I haven't even really thought of. We're worried about week one. I think next year, we're going to play that Pac-12 schedule, whatever it be.

Haven't really looked forward to the 2023 season that much.

**Q. What have you seen from your quarterbacks, all three of them, this summer?**

KALEN DeBOER: Yeah, no, that's obviously a big part of any football program. In our offense, the quarterback position is the driver.

Michael Penix comes to us from Indiana where I coached with him for one year. Systematically he understands what we do. That was an easy transition for him during spring ball. You see him being able to coach guys up and being a little more confident in that. In those workouts that we had, those 15 practices.

As far as the other two that obviously were already on the roster, Dylan, again, I have only got the 15 practices to go off of and the film. But he's taken a lot of snaps in a Husky uniform.

It's cool hearing the guys that are on the team and hearing them talk about how much they see Dylan's improvement from last year already to where we're at now. That's only going to continue to happen and develop.

Then you got the up-and-comer. You got Sam Huard. Took a few snaps last year or last year. His ceiling, he's probably the furthest away from his ceiling because he's younger, hasn't taken as many snaps that the other two have. Every day his growth is the one that probably will continue to be the most extreme each and every day.

It's fun seeing those guys. They're great high-character

**ASAP** . . . when all is said, we're done.®  
sports

guys. They understand it's a battle amongst all three of them. But first and foremost our team comes first. They all want to be the leader and the guy that takes the first snap on September 3rd. They're doing a great job of doing it in a united way.

**Q. What do you think you guys are doing, been able to churn out some top-notch defensive backs the last few years? As far as coaching, what are you doing to maximize your talent in the defensive back field?**

KALEN DeBOER: Being a new staff, I can't sit here in front of you all and take credit for that. That's something I think that just is -- the DBU mantra has been something that's been strong. The coaching staffs that have come before me have done a great job, first of all, recruiting that talent and developing that talent.

We are going to continue to feed off of that. Fortunately the players we have returning that we need to fill in, a Kyler Gordon, a Trent McDuffie position, they saw what it looked like. They work every day to be those same players. Not that those are easy shoes to fill, but our staff is excited about who we have. I'm excited that those guys have had the experience to see those great players. We got to continue to make it DBU in the future.

**Q. I realize it's been a dead period over the last month till earlier this week. What has the fallout been on the recruiting trail of the L.A. schools leaving the conference? What have you been hearing from either your commits or the players you're recruiting? A recruit from Washington earlier this week said he was committing to USC in part because of joining the Big Ten.**

KALEN DeBOER: For us it really hasn't had an impact at all. It really hasn't. I've maybe had one conversation, and it was not something where it was really a player or a prospect having strong questions or concerns. It was just a discussion, talking, asking, kind of just like everyone else does, what they see the future being.

At this point that's something I am not in control of. Really hasn't affected us at all.

**Q. I realize this is going to sound like a silly question, but I promise it's serious. If an opponent withheld the heights and weights of their players, how would you view that as a coach? Game week against this opponent, you look at the roster, it's just names and numbers, how would you feel about that?**

KALEN DeBOER: I mean, I think it's helpful, additional information we use to understand what we're going to be

up against.

I mean, nowadays you can find the information you probably want somehow, somehow. It's probably just a little more digging that we'd have to put in finding that information out so...

**Q. Coming into a situation like Washington, now you've had a spring camp, I'm sure you had a list of things you prioritized in fixing or changing. Some were easier than others. What has been the most difficult thing to change or implement so far through camp?**

KALEN DeBOER: It's a good question because I don't know if there's been something that's really difficult.

I have a number of staff members that have been with me, so that continuity makes the transition easy so you know what's being said in the meeting rooms, how the summer workouts are going. Our strength staff, a few of them, I have worked with, our head strength coach, Ron McKeefery, who not just is important to the strength piece but also the culture piece in the off-season. I know what's being said pretty much daily because we're on the same page and we've known each other for so many years.

In the installation of things, it's really gone seamless. I think the evolving of college rules have allowed us to have a little more hands on with guys, be able to install things quicker than you could have maybe seven, eight, nine years ago.

That's lent us to feeling confident that when we step on the field next Thursday for our first practice, there's going to be a depth of understanding of not just what that play is but the details how we're going to run it and how we're going to execute it.

**Q. When we talk to high school kids, they say the biggest adjustment from high school to college football is the size and the speed of the game. Going from South Dakota, you spent time at Wisconsin, now coming from Fresno State, how big of an adjustment is it for what you want to do with the size and speed of the game?**

KALEN DeBOER: You're asking the size and the speed...

**Q. You adjusting what you want to do with different types of athletes you've had in the past, playing opponents with a different type of athlete in the past.**

KALEN DeBOER: I've been around. I think what you always find is that there's great talent at all levels. Just at

the higher level there's more of 'em. There's not the weak-link position that you're going to attack like maybe you did at the smaller college level. Everyone across the board at all positions is strong.

As far as our schemes, I think they've been tried and true. Been a number of different places, I'm not worried. I guess I'm not really worried about that at all. It's not really something that crosses my mind.

We've played on the West Coast the last four to five years, have a pretty good understanding of what that looks like, the diversity that comes with each program at different levels. Been out in the Midwest, played pretty much from coast-to-coast at the different levels.

I'm excited to see what we are able to accomplish this fall. I'm very confident that we'll continue to build a brand of Washington football, whether it be offense, defense or special teams that will be fun to watch.

**Q. This was a team that two years ago was set to play in the Pac-12 championship game. Last year obviously a lot of turnover off the field. When you look at your roster right now, do you feel this is a team that's closer to what it was two years ago or last year?**

KALEN DeBOER: Yeah, no, that's a good question.

I think the biggest thing, maybe this goes back to one of the previous questions a little bit, the biggest difficulty has happened, is you got guys that have been through a lot, right? I'm the third head coach since really 2019. It's turned over.

You got some guys that have had multiple position coaches. If there's anything that's been hard, it's just really understanding that these guys have been through a lot.

Looking back to answer your question, what is really something that is comforting is, for example, the two guys I'm bringing with me today, Alex Cook and Jaxson Kirkland, guys on each side of the ball that were part of a 2018 conference championship, guys that are coming back for their sixth year, they know what it looks like.

We have more players that are in that position, as well, that saw what it took. They know what this program stands for, what the expectations are. They know what it takes to get there.

I feel it's probably somewhere in between, right? A championship kind of mindset, but really the doing part and the action part is the hard part because that's the day-to-day process that we're in the middle of right now.

Simplifying it down, just trying to focus on winning that day is what we are trying to do, worry about the things we can control and make a name for the 2022 team.

**Q. You've had so much success with quarterbacks. What do you look for in a quarterback? How do you develop them to the place where they need to be?**

KALEN DeBOER: Yeah, well, the quarterback drives our offense. You put position players and you recruit receivers and these skill spots for a reason, right? It's to be able to distribute the ball. That quarterback has to be able to throw. Anything they can do with their feet is just an added bonus.

We obviously would love to have that, but we don't have to.

Play-making ability can come in a lot of different forms. To me distributing the ball is the first form. Anything they can do extending plays and things like that. Doesn't mean they're running for yards, but maybe they're keeping the play alive, eyes downfield. I think in the past couple years some of our biggest plays have been when the initial play broke down.

That play-making ability is critical.

But the arm talent that comes along with being a great passer is key. Then someone who is going to lead the charge, right? You need that toughness as a football team. I think the toughness your quarterback brings is where it all starts. Your offensive line, your defensive line, your defense as a whole. Yes, very important.

The quarterback gets a lot of attention, we all know that. His resolve and his resiliency, his toughness is critical to our success for sure.

**Q. When do you look at your other head coaching stops, where do you feel over this off-season your team is on a progress curve maybe vice versa some of the places you've been before?**

KALEN DeBOER: I would say they're all different, right? My first job was a small college, a place I had been for five years. That was an easy transition. I knew all the guys. The systems were all in both sides of the ball, special teams.

More recently I think I felt good about being at Fresno State, then COVID hits. Now everything, especially with putting in a defensive install that was going to be new, that was changed.

I feel like this is certainly the farthest we've been in really getting the culture piece together because we've been able to be around our guys all spring, winter, spring and summer since 2020, that allows you to build that relationship with each other, as a team, but also install the schemes that we want to.

Again, when we hit the ground running on Thursday for practice, there's going to be a lot of reps that have been run by the players during the spring and also their summer workouts.

**Q. What was your reaction when the USC and UCLA news came out? Having just gotten to the conference, thrust into some flux, how have you dealt with that?**

KALEN DeBOER: Yeah, I think in today's world of college athletics, college football in particular, you expect the unexpected. I think probably everyone has a little bit surprised, right? But you also know and expect that things are going to change and they're going to continue to change.

You take it in stride and you make the most of the situation we're in. I feel like we're in a great spot at U-Dub, part of a conference that has a lot of things still going for it.

Those again are decisions that are kind of out of my control at this point. I'm just worried about 2022 football season.

**Q. Pretty big last month recruiting-wise. What has been the process of establishing your staff on the recruiting trail and the response you've seen so far?**

KALEN DeBOER: Just really proud of our staff having the vision, going back to when we first got together, the first weeks in January. We had to put together first of all your 2022 roster, filling in the holes, but then we really put our heads together and really did a great job of being thorough and understanding what we needed for 2023 and how we were going to do it.

We've had a lot of success. I think it's obviously come down to the relationships that you build with these gentlemen, finding the right fit that you want in your program. Of course, they got to want to be a part of it.

We've studied what's been successful over the years at University of Washington, and when the great teams have happened, where a lot of those players come from. Just the tradition of where the prospects come from geographically as well.

I think we've honed in on some really high-character quality guys. Again, probably why there's not really been a lot of

concern or questions from our commitments as to what is going on in the world of realignment.

We're in a good spot. Proud of our staff for having the vision, the work ethic, to build those relationships.

**Q. You hit on a little bit your experience at Sioux Falls. How different is life as an NAIA coach compared to an FBS level?**

KALEN DeBOER: Yeah, it's not even comparable, to be honest with you (smiling).

Going through those times are what give me the most confidence to be able to, I guess. You wear so many hats. You have so many different things that you do. I mean, I'm building lockers, right, my first year as a coordinator there for your players, you're doing equipment and things like that. You're the one from making copies to printing playbooks to doing it all.

Those times you really understand the details. You understand and appreciate what everyone a part of the organization is doing, how much work they're putting into their job.

I wouldn't trade my past for the world. I've got a chance to see a lot of great coaches being an assistant over the last 15 years. That's led to being at Fresno for a couple where I got a chance to, again, reshape who I am and what our teams are going to look like. Now I get a chance to do that at U-Dub.

**Q. In these first few months at Washington, do you realize there are differences from one school to another? Do you have different requirements, time management, that you're getting used to?**

KALEN DeBOER: Yeah, no question. I think there's greater involvement with the people. There's a higher level of intensity with the recruiting. There's a lot more other things other than football that you're involved with because there's more people involved.

I enjoy that. I enjoy being around the people. Again, hiring a staff that can take care of those things, the day-to-day, trusting that that progress is still being made, not having to micromanage them every single minute, is again part of my path and getting to know those people, having the trust in those people that I've hired.

**Q. As someone who came up through the ranks of smaller colleges, what do you make of the direction the sport is headed now with super conferences, NIL, unlimited transfers?**

KALEN DeBOER: Well, I guess if you're talking about the philosophy, the philosophy is to make this one of the greatest experiences of their life.

I think those experiences, giving these guys resources, again, NIL is providing resources to these guys. Continue to do it and right the way, embracing it is something I guess that has been important to me because this is a positive for them and it helps their experience.

Being able to transfer in the portal, as much as I understand the issues with a few of the things that have happened, it's also, again, helping them, in their limited years to play this sport, to get their education. It's giving them a chance, if that decision wasn't the right one or things changed since they've been at their university, doing it the right way and it hopefully going down in an above-board fashion. It gives them an opportunity to go make the most of their educational experience and their football time.

**Q. How big was it for you to get Jaxson back and also keep the secondary together?**

KALEN DeBOER: Yeah, it's huge. Not because he is huge, okay, it's huge because Jaxson is a guy that bleeds purple. His dad was a great, great football player at U-Dub. It's an important place for him.

The conversations go back to January, early January, when this first all started happening. It took a long time to evolve to where we knew he was going to be able to wear a Husky uniform again.

During that time it's been really special seeing how important this place is to him and how great of a teammate he is, even during the waiting period of finding out what he could do, what was going to happen.

Just seeing him have the, again, resiliency, the patience while he continued to just focus on doing what he could do to help himself be ready if he was able to step on Husky Stadium again and play ball for us.

The DB position, guys like Alex Cook and Asa Turner, Mish Powell, their return is really important. Obviously it's a new system, but they've really picked up on it. They're very intelligent players. I'm excited to see them along with what our havoc is that we're going to cause up front and what we are going to do defensively.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

