

Pac-12 Conference Football Media Day

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Hollywood, California, USA

Colorado Buffaloes Coach Karl Dorrell Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Karl Dorrell. Go ahead, Coach.

KARL DORRELL: Welcome to the Media Day. Karl Dorrell here, the head football coach for Colorado.

Excited about a new season, excited about a new opportunity that's in front of us, to build off of the process that we're building in Colorado.

Challenging season a year ago for us. We played with a lot of young players. I believe we had 68 freshmen and sophomores on our football team that were playing primarily. I think we've made a lot of progress even though it lacked in terms of the number of wins, but we did gain a lot of experience through the process of training and developing young players for them to have a chance to compete at that level and to use that experience to develop going into this season in 2022.

Like I said earlier, we're very disappointed in the results of our season. The way that I operate as a coach, in my 34 years of coaching, is when things aren't right, you have to make things right. I don't ever try to celebrate a lack of successful season, so we had to make some changes.

I made changes primarily on the offensive side, four new coaches there that are here. They've done a great job of reinvigorating and reinventing our offense. Along with that, the developing of the quarterback position I think was very critical, too, for us to have more competition and more suitors for that position.

If you remember, I had two scholarship quarterbacks for the last two years, my first year in '20 and last year in '21. Now that room has six scholarship quarterbacks. So it's good to have more numbers there, more competition in that room, which is going to push the envelope for that position to play better as well. Big change on the offensive side.

We did change our offense completely from scratch. It's a new system. We're excited about that process of how the players have taken that information, the offensive players I'm talking about, and digested it and performed it, continue to do that during a time in the off-season, spring, now finishing up the summer. It was a really good summer for them to kind of continue to develop and mature in terms of being in that system.

We do have a couple new additions on the defensive side as well. New corners coach. We have a new defensive line coach. The other two, three coaches are still here.

We feel like there were some things that were needed to be done in the off-season for us to make the incremental steps of success moving forward.

The season a year ago was disappointing. Obviously that changed a lot of dynamics within our program. Obviously the portal is part of everybody's process, what they deal with year in and year out. It's going to be kind of a natural process of I would say attrition that's going to happen year in and year out. It's been affecting all of us. It affected us as well.

But the positive of that is we're able to build our team with some guys that are like minded, with players that are on the same page with a staff that has been very invested in these young people.

We've come where it's come full circle with our effort, attitude, work ethic, determination, everything you want to think of is all moving in the right direction. I feel like from the process of the off-season and spring and then a great summer that we just finished up today, we're ready to go for 2022.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. Your quarterback Brendon Lewis, can you describe his maturation process? He struggled a little bit with throwing the ball last season. Can you explain some of his improvements?

KARL DORRELL: Absolutely. Brendon Lewis was our

starter a year ago, started 12 games, played healthy for 12 solid games last year.

The best part of that is he played for 12 games for us last year. He can use that as a year of being the starter, gaining so much experience about playing in the Pac-12, particularly some of the non-conference games we had.

I would say this in answering your question. The first thing that came to me after the season is he went back and watched all of the games just by himself and made notes and critiques about what he could have done better, what he did well, what he needs to improve on. So he went through that process for himself at the end of the season.

To his credit, he's invested a lot of time and blood, I would say sweat equity, this last season to develop into being a better quarterback than where he was last fall. There's no question in my mind and his mind he's not even the same player.

It's like anything: you gain from that experience. Whether it's good or bad, you learn from that experience. That's what Brendon was able to do. He had a great spring where his efficiency and his numbers, his accuracy in throwing looked much, much better. Continued that into this summer.

I'm excited to watch him when we go into training camp next week.

Q. Your other quarterback, J.T. Shrout, can you describe his recovery process from the injury. Do you expect him to make a big push in competition?

KARL DORRELL: Yes, we're hoping that he's healthy and ready to go, which he is. He was somewhat healthy this spring, but we held him back. We didn't want him to do any competitive scrimmage-like scenarios for him in the springtime. But he did the seven-on-sevens. He was still working on some conditioning and some movement drills.

So I stand corrected, he might have been maybe 90, 95%. He's completely 100% right now. He does everything that everybody does in terms of their summer training. So he's ready to go.

I would say with J.T., his challenge is J.T. I would say that just because he hasn't played the game in a year. It's him getting antsy, understanding the competition of it all, stuff like that. He just needs to come out here and perform and really do the things that are comfortable for him to do, kind of get back into the rhythm of being sore and being beat up, stuff like that, that he's been missing for the last year and a half. Those are things that he's going to have to kind

of take it day by day.

But we are excited that he's healthy, ready to go. He should push the envelope a little bit. I'm excited about the competition. It's going to help us be a better offense.

Q. Can you briefly discuss the competition in your running back room?

KARL DORRELL: We got two returning guys that were key players from a year ago: Deion Smith played later in the year last year, but Alex Fontenot, who was kind of a stable player for us, even when I first got here my first year in 2020, he had a great 2019 season. That 2020 season he had an injury that took the rest -- he didn't get a chance to play in the 2020 season with the injury of that year.

Last year he did get a chance to get some playing time, but he did have some soft tissue injuries that kind of delayed his production a little bit throughout the season.

Those are the top two between Alex and Deion. Both of them had great off-seasons. Both of them are over 200 pounds, which is kind of one of those mandates that I wanted them to get a little bit more muscle, girth, depth in terms of those things. They look better physically. They've digested the offense. They understand both of them are kind of leaders of being the 1-2 punch for us offensively. We do have some good younger players, though, that are fighting to get some playing time.

It's going to be led by those two. It's a hungry group. It's a hungry group. They understand with Jarek Broussard moving on, graduating and moving on, it's their chance to rise and shine. They're excited about that opportunity.

Q. I wanted to ask you a question as a UCLA alum and former player. How did you feel about their move?

KARL DORRELL: I knew that was coming up (smiling).

It was probably shocking was my first impression, was shocking. Being in this conference for over a hundred years, I would say that was the first initial impression, was that.

But you got to also recognize that when I came back to Colorado in 2020, COVID hit three weeks later. I mean, it was a lot of things that have been challenging and changing for me every year. It was like one more thing. What's one more thing? Guys leaving the conference.

I think it's that time, things are evolving in college athletics. Some things that have been grandfathered in, so to speak, you would think, everything has susceptibility to change.

There's certain things that happen. This is a situation that this has happened.

But as humans, as we all evolve throughout the years, we'll evolve and adapt and move forward. But it was shocking, I would say.

Q. In the last month or so, the conversations you might have had with your former teammates, guys of your era, has it come up? What might those conversations have been like?

KARL DORRELL: There's question marks. It's like there's a question mark above my head about what does that mean, what does that look like moving forward.

We all don't know. We don't know what that's going to look like moving forwards. But I wish them the very best. Obviously that's a school that has made me into who I am today as a coach.

I don't wish them any ill will or anything. We want them to be successful. Obviously that's something that's part of my background. But right now there's an unknown feeling about what is it going to look like, all those things, that will come together in time.

Q. As you enter year three of your tenure, what are some of the things you've learned about yourself as a head coach strategically, culturally, recruiting-wise, that maybe you could take from your first go-around in the conference?

KARL DORRELL: It's actually tremendously different than that go-around just because with social media, which wasn't prevalent at that time, that's the major draw that's going on now. NIL is kind of a bigger thing. That wasn't around. There's been a number of things that have changed in terms of the dynamics in recruiting and coaching and things like that.

The other part, too, is that I've learned in a great deal of time since my UCLA experience, a great deal of information about coaching. I've had some people in my background that have helped me become better at what I do as a communicator, as a guy that teaches, and obviously in terms of the organization of things.

I would say going into year three for me right now, and I mentioned that statement that I don't rest on mediocrity, I don't rest on things that aren't successful, you have to make changes. I think those are the things that I was able to do. I was fortunate enough to do it with my athletic director being on the same page with me.

We need to challenge ourselves year in and year out about being successful and trying to put your best effort forward year in and year out. That's what our players are expecting us as coaches to be, and that's kind of how we are charged as a program, is to be in the competitive marketplace in this sport. We haven't done that yet.

We're still pushing ourselves to get into that marketplace. We think this year is going to be a good testament going into year three of really showing some of that progress that has been made over these last couple of years.

Q. Nate Landman has been the anchor of your defense the past few years. I wanted to hear your thoughts on what goes into replacing a guy of that caliber?

KARL DORRELL: That's challenging, as you know. You have a great player in any position, and Nate has been a great player for us. Prior to even me being here, he's been a great, great player. He's going to be a great player at the next level.

It's like most things, you try to utilize some of his thoughts and mindsets of using some of that experience when he was a teammate last year of giving some of that information to our guys that are still here in the program.

It's hard to replicate that other than what Nate can do. Nate has done a great job of being back home when he's here in the off-season. As a matter of fact, he was here about a month ago in June and spent two weeks training, being around our guys, telling them about his experience with the Falcons, telling them about what he should have done better here at Colorado that he was pointing to the players to pick up where he left off.

I think he's done the best thing that any former player can do, is to help set the stage for the next group. So we feel we're in great shape. We feel that the depth at the linebacker position is the best it's been since I've been here. We think that the quality of talent at that position is much, much better, too.

There's some guys that are just no names for us, but we did add a couple guys. You're going to have a guy that I brought here talk to you later in Robert Barnes, he's one of those linebackers. We added another one from the transfer portal with Josh Chandler, who is also here. He's not here, but he's in our program.

We've added a couple veteran pieces. But collectively that position is actually a lot stronger than it's been since I've been here.

Q. You've had a group of athletes nominated as



Pre-Season All-Conference players, one of them being Quinn Perry. Can you talk about your expectations for Quinn.

KARL DORRELL: Absolutely. Quinn has had a really good off-season. He's trying to change his body. He's trying to look more athletic, look like a prototypical linebacker.

I think the best thing for Quinn, and this is something that's a testament to Nate, Nate has taken Quinn under his arm last year when Nate got hurt, because Quinn had to finish the season at his position, and really help his progress as the season unfolded towards the end there.

Hopefully he'll carry some of that information that Nate was able to express with him and be coached and continue to physically develop and have a tremendous year this year. It's good to get a little recognition early on for him from his efforts from a year ago.

He's doing everything that he should be doing for him to have a successful year. So everything now is just in front of him, him staying healthy and doing what he's capable of becoming.

Q. In regards to the senior class, how important have they been for you since COVID happened, right now, even people transferring, how important is that senior class?

KARL DORRELL: That's a great question, probably a unique question, because they did come in. Look, let's reverse the lens here. When I came here in 2020, I was probably their third coach or fourth, who knows. They survived a COVID season with a lot of change that we all talked about and know about. They go into last year with some expectations that we didn't get a chance to meet.

But I think they understood where we were heading from a cultural standpoint. They're a big mouthpiece for us now. I'm very indebted to these seniors because they had to buy into my message at this point in time for them to have the type of goals and aspirations set for themselves this season.

They've done a tremendous job, they really have. But I don't take that lightly just because what I said on the onset of the answer for that question is I'm their third coach. It's hard to build that trust in such a short period of time. Who do you trust? This is the third guy.

I think I have to give them credit for giving me the opportunity to build this program and them spreading that message in the way that they're doing it. It's helping us

become the team we're capable of becoming this year.

Q. When you look at teams that you've coached in the past that have maybe exceeded expectations, or even historically like your UCLA team that went on to beat Oklahoma, had all that great success, what do you see from this team that compares to past teams that you've coached?

KARL DORRELL: That's a great reference, what you just mentioned there. That was like year three at UCLA for me, that year you're talking about when we beat Oklahoma.

I'm expecting that jump for us this year. We have a great foundation. The foundation is there. Now we're building the talent, building the room, building the roster. I believe you're going to see a quality team this year, a team that's going to be very competitive, a team that's going to win more games than they won a year ago.

That's contrary to the feeling that's in the room, but that's the expectations that we have. We think we have a chance to be a very successful team. But we have to start with week one, we got to take care of business, do the things we're capable of becoming.

I think the maturity in this program, particularly from the leadership, the older players, are much stronger than they were a year ago. So we have a chance to meet the goals and expectations we set for ourselves.

Q. What makes Utah so tough to play, and why are they worthy of being the pick to win the league?

KARL DORRELL: I think Kyle is an outstanding coach. I've known Kyle since my UCLA days, we played against Utah. I think we split those games. We lost in Utah, and we beat 'em in our place.

But he's an experienced, accomplished coach that knows what it takes to win. He's been doing it for a number of years. That's why he's still there. So I have a lot of respect for what they've done in this conference.

Now being members of this conference, being in the position they are, they've done a tremendous job. I would say it's because there's continuity. There's obviously a guy at the helm that I have a tremendous amount of respect for. He's got a great staff, and they recruit. They do things right.

I would give him, those are part of the reasons why they are who they are.

Q. With the continuity, what does it do for a



quarterback when he has the same offensive coordinator for his entire career like Cam Rising has now with Andy Ludwig?

KARL DORRELL: Continuity means if you can keep continuity, it's like in the stock market over time. That's probably a bad reference, but probably over time historically you come out on the better end. That's what people say. Am I saying that right, you people that are involved in the stock market (laughter)?

The point of the matter is continuity, there's a better chance correlation-wise that's going to be a consistent factor for success.

Q. What do you foresee, given the massive changes in college football in the last two years, as the biggest challenge as a coaching staff in terms of recruiting and retention of top players?

KARL DORRELL: Yeah, obviously the retention of players is challenging because of the ability that's allotted for these guys to transfer.

I think it's a positive thing, though. I'm not saying that's a bad thing. But it's something that makes it a challenging proposition when you're managing a program.

I would say the other part, too, is them having a chance with NIL to continue to build on their brand. Both of those realms of the portal and NIL is going to make the leader of every program feel like they have to balance their roster each and every year. That's going to be challenging.

Thank goodness the NCAA has given us the latitude of just taking away the initials in terms of scholarships each year because they're allowing you now to replace what you've lost. Sometimes those numbers are more than what the initials were. Now that that's thrown away, allowing us to balance our 85 scholarships, that gives us a chance to be full force by the start of every season.

There's challenges. There's absolutely challenges. But it's just like the thing with the conference realignment, I think we kind of move on and adapt, find a way to do it correctly, and things will be fine.

It's just getting comfortable with the changes that are in front of us.

Q. How is your program helping your student-athletes navigate the NIL?

KARL DORRELL: How is the program... Say that again.

Q. How is your program helping student-athletes navigate NIL?

KARL DORRELL: We're doing it in the best fashion as we can. It's one of those things we do have we call it influencer exchanges and programs that are within our department that are setting the table for NIL for our student-athletes. So we're doing some very proactive work with getting them established through the process.

Now, the challenging part of it is we can't actually make deals for them. Can't be the broker between this guy and this player. We can't do those things. But we can give them all the information they need to put them in position to have that type of exchange, if that makes sense.

It's making progress, I would tell you. I would say that's probably the right way to say it. Because it's new for everybody, we are making progress in that area. But we need to continue to move forward in that area as we keep going through this thing.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach. Appreciate your time.

KARL DORRELL: Thank you.

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