

Pac-12 Conference Football Media Day

Friday, July 29, 2022
Hollywood, California, USA

Arizona Wildcats Coach Jedd Fisch Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We'd like to welcome Jedd Fisch to the stage. He'll give opening remarks and then we'll open it up to Q&A.

Coach.

JEDD FISCH: Thank you. Good morning. It's great to be back here in Los Angeles for our Media Day. Lived here for three years. Got to be a part of a winning program with the Los Angeles Rams and want to congratulate them, first and foremost, Coach McVay, Les Snead, Kevin Demoff, on being Super Bowl champions. When you have a chance to be in a championship town, it feels good.

We're excited here at University of Arizona to be back here and to be here in Southern California.

This is a huge part for our recruiting. We are a California-based recruiting program. We have committed as much time and energy as possible to recruit Southern California. That is our goal moving forward.

We have done a really great job with our coaching staff in recruiting the state of Arizona, California and Hawaii. We will continue to do that and make Southern California a pipeline for the University of Arizona.

I've heard a lot of coaches tell our recruits that we're an off-season team. I would say this: we have had a great off-season, and I appreciate them recognizing that.

I also believe that we're going to be a really good in-season team. As we're building our program, it was really important for all of us to make sure that on November 26th of last year, when our season ended, we needed to get better, we needed to get better in every way.

It was our first opportunity to recruit. It was our first signing class. According to Rivals, I think we finished No. 1 in the Pac-12; according to 247, I think in the top three. We're very proud of that. We signed the highest-ranked player in

the history of University of Arizona football in Tetairoa McMillan, right here out of Southern California. Really excited about what he brings, what Keyan Burnett brings, Noah Fifita brings, what Jacob Manu brings, all four guys from Servite, along with the guys we signed, from Rayshon "Speedy" Luke down there in Bosco, a couple players from Mater Dei and from Oaks, as well.

Excited about how we committed to making our off-season pretty special in recruiting, also how we made our off-season pretty special with our facilities. In the last 15 months, we spent \$15 million. Every part of that was to rebrand, enhance and make our facility top in the conference.

We're excited about having a brand-new indoor facility that is just two years old, then everything else in our facility has been redone since I've arrived.

Our athletic director, Dave Heeke, has done an amazing job of allowing us to do that, and because of that we were also able to win in the transfer portal.

1980 to 2000, University of Arizona football won 63% of its games. They were third in the Pac-12, tied with USC, during that time. From 2001 to 2021, we did not do that. We're sitting in a situation where we were winning about 45% of our games.

We need to change that, and that is our goal, that is what we'll do. We believe that this year is the first year of the rebuild, and we're really excited about how that's going.

We talk to our players all the time about being the 33rd NFL team based on our experiences in the league. We have 150 years of NFL experience on our staff. What we've done is we've tried to commit to allowing our players to see it from the inside-out, to see what the NFL looks like, to see what it looks like to be a pro, to see what it looks like to build champions.

We brought Bill Belichick into Tucson, Sean McVay to Tucson, Steve Spurrier to Tucson, to talk to our players. Our players have heard from Zach Taylor, from Jim Nagy at the Senior Bowl, from LeCharles Bentley at the NFLPA,



Mike Tannenbaum and Mike Lombardi over the last seven weeks. We believe our guys need to know and hear what it's like to be a pro, what the program should look like.

Additionally, in the off-season, we've committed to having an incredible NIL program. As of yesterday, our NIL program and our collective is a 501(c)(3). We're the second team in the country, from what I understand, that our donors and our boosters are able to commit funds in a charitable way to our NIL collective, the Friends of Wilbur & Wilma. We are very proud of that.

We're also proud of the fact that our university has come out publicly and said we're going to support Alston and the Alston case with the 5980 Fund. We're going to allow our players to benefit from their academic successes.

Again, we're excited about all these things that have occurred between November 26th and today. When we get started on Wednesday in training camp, it's now time to build off of those successes.

We have a bunch of new players and new coaches that have come in through both the coach transfer portal and the player transfer portal. We're also looking for fans in the transfer portal and boosters. So any of those guys that want to transfer in, we'll take them as well.

But when it comes down to our coaches, we brought in Johnny Nansen and Jason Kaufusi, who have done a tremendous job with our program and our defense.

Then we brought in players like Jayden de Laura, who is coming in here as one of the best players in the conference last season, the Freshman Pac-12 Player of the Year, at quarterback; Jacob Cowing, who is here today, at wide receiver; Hunter Echols, defensive end from L.A.; DJ Warnell, a nickel safety from this area; Tia Savea; and many others.

Finally, I would say the players that have been here and have been a part of our program have bought in tremendously to the changes that we're trying to do this year. We brought Christian Young to this event. He has done an amazing job of leading our defense as a safety. Guys like Christian Roland-Wallace and Kyon Barrs and Jaxen Turner have been game changers for us in that locker room. We're excited to watch them go.

So I believe that everything is in front of us. Champions have to behave like champions before they become champions. We've asked our players to behave like 'em, and now it's our job and it's our goal to be better this season than we were last and continue to build off of our off-season.

So thank you very much. Any questions you have...

Q. You mentioned it, but when you're coming off a 1-11 season, what is the pitch like when you're bringing in transfers? A lot of guys felt like this was the right place for them.

JEDD FISCH: I think they saw that where we were is not where we're headed. What they have the opportunity to do is be part of the change, to be a part of a program that I believe offers everything you can possibly want in an incredible environment, in a beautiful community, an opportunity to play and play early.

Guys want to come and be a part of it. We told those guys we can help you get to the next level if that's what you aspire to do. We know what it looks like in a draft room. We know what it looks like when it comes to successes.

Additionally, we felt as if we needed to get some of those pieces in place, and they felt like they could immediately impact the results.

Q. You mentioned you feel like this is really the first year of the rebuild. What do you think you learned most from what you experienced in 2021?

JEDD FISCH: How important it is to be able to compete for all four quarters. For us, our players never stopped playing and never stopped competing. Sometimes our depth beat us. It was really important for us moving forward that we built our program based on being able to play for all four quarters and 60 minutes.

We had a lot of games that we were close, then it got away from us. We need to find a way to make sure from 2021 to 2022 that our process is enabling us to be successful by having depth at a lot of positions.

Q. Do you feel your NFL background, when you are recruiting, is a differentiator versus some of the other places that historically have competed more in college football?

JEDD FISCH: Yeah, I hope so. I think a lot of people talk about that they can get you to the next level or they know what the next level looks like, but you actually have to be there to know it.

I feel like it gives us an opportunity based on the relationships we have with coaches at the next level to be able to talk with them and kind of see what they're looking, see how the trends of the NFL have changed.

As we share our message with our recruits, our players, we're going to do everything we can to get you a chance to be at the next level, then it's up to you after that.

Q. You mentioned right off the top how you are a Southern California or California-based recruiting operation. With USC and UCLA leaving the conference, does that change anything in regard to your approach?

JEDD FISCH: I hope what it does when parents are making decisions on wanting to watch their children play, they don't have to get on a plane and fly to Newark, fly to Iowa, fly to Ann Arbor. They get to get in a car, drive five and a half hours, and next thing you know they're at Arizona. They can be able to watch their sons play right here on the West Coast, right in prime time television. We're hopeful that that's going to be a huge benefit for us moving forward.

Q. How do you feel about the roster today compared to how you felt about it a year ago?

JEDD FISCH: We're better. We're a better football team. The players that were on our roster last year that are on our roster this year have improved. They've committed to being better in the weight room. They've committed to being better in film study. They've committed to being better fundamentally.

The players that we've been able to bring in, we brought in some good football players. What it looks like come Saturday, September 3rd, is very different than how I feel right now. We'll have to see. We'll have to see if our team can come together in this training camp and how well we can play as a team.

If we can do that, then I think we'll be a better football team as well.

Q. Both Kyon Barrs and Jamarye Joiner had foot surgeries at the start of spring practice. Update on their health status?

JEDD FISCH: Yes, I believe both of them will be starting August 3rd in practice. I think they're both cleared to go. I look forward to watching both of them be able to participate. They've all done a great job with rehab. We came out here to L.A. for surgery. We used the Rams' physician. Did a fantastic job in getting both those kids back healthy.

Q. I just wanted to ask, you had the two transfers come in, Jayden de Laura and Jacob Cowing. Two very talented players that are just starting to learn how

to play with each other. What was the spring practice like with those two guys?

JEDD FISCH: Better than the spring practice the year before, I can tell you that (smiling).

We were able to hit on a lot of passes. We were able to be explosive. We were able to make plays out there on the field. It was fun to watch 'em. It was fun to watch what they did. They connected pretty well together.

Then along with that we had T Mac, who was here this spring, and Dorian Singer. The receiving core, while young, two freshmen and a transfer, gives us some hope to be able to be a little more explosive and score a few more touchdowns in the red area.

Q. You referenced Bill Belichick and Sean McVay speaking to your team. What did you and the team learn with those two coaching legends?

JEDD FISCH: Yeah, both of them are so unique and special in their own ways. I think our players learned the importance of competition in everything you do and the importance of communication in everything you do.

You listen to both those guys speak, and they could speak in their own way and say their own words, but their messaging is the same: it's about how do you compete every day, how do you communicate every day, how much better in fundamentals can you get every day.

If you can follow those three things, that was the message from both of them. How they said it, what they said was different, but in the end our staff, myself, and our team all learned that from those guys.

Q. What do you expect Stevie Rocker's role to be this season?

JEDD FISCH: I'd expect him to do one of two things: be one of the best special teams players on our football team, I've challenged him to do that, and then to be able to find a role and get the ball as a running back.

You got one guy back there as a running back traditionally. We've got a pretty deep running back room. We just received a transfer from Florida State a few weeks ago who will be arriving on campus today. We've got Michael Wiley returning, Drake Anderson, Stevie Rocker, Jalen John, then Rayshon Luke and Jonah Coleman arriving. It's going to be a great competition this summer. But every one of them should be committed to being great on special teams if they're not carrying the ball.

Q. When do you expect to name a starting quarterback?

JEDD FISCH: Jayden will take all the reps with the ones.

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

JEDD FISCH: Well, first, they're the champions last year. It's pre-season. I think they should be picked ahead of time. They have a returning quarterback, which is always a huge part of your successes.

I would also say Coach Whittingham is the standard. He's the standard. He's 18 years at Utah as the head coach. He does it the right way. His teams play hard, they play tough. I have not been shy in talking about how I admire Utah's football program.

You could see why they are who they are. We had a very good football game against them a year ago. I just admire the way they play all four quarters.

Q. When a quarterback has the continuity with the offensive coordinator, what does that do for maturation of a quarterback?

JEDD FISCH: Yeah, I think it's without a doubt the key to success, is continuity. The biggest issue that so many programs that have failed have had a lack of continuity. They've had a lack of consistency, whether it be at head coach or coordinators, or at quarterback.

If you're able to have consistency and continuity, you have a chance to be pretty successful.

What was exciting for the University of Arizona is that when you could bring in the Freshman Player of the Year, then you feel like you've got some continuity moving forward.

I call the plays on offense, so I feel confident that the coordinator will be there. So, therefore, that relationship between he and I is critical to our success as we move forward.

Q. In regards to the recruiting class that you brought in that's so talented, how many of them have stepped up and become leaders before someone their age would normally become one? How much is that young talent rising to the challenge for you?

JEDD FISCH: I would say without a question that you become a leader in a lot of different ways. Sometimes it's performance-based, sometimes it's talk, sometimes it's

actions, sometimes it's just kind of presence.

We wanted to bring in players that have won games. I think that was a huge part of it. So if you look at our recruiting class, you look at their high school records, they know how to win.

You're respected in a locker room if you're coming from a winning program. Those guys are going to have to immediately impact our program in a lot of ways, and their ability to be a winner, their ability to understand what it takes to be a winner, the process that it goes into becoming a winner, and showing that they're willing to do that, will give them the best chance to become leaders quickly.

But we have some good veteran leadership of guys that have been in this program over the last few years who have embraced our program, and those young guys will need to learn from them as well.

Q. Servite, those schools in California, a huge recruiting base for you. How has that relationship grown in your time? How easy is it for high school players to trust you in the regard to know you can get them to the NFL?

JEDD FISCH: I think it comes down to tell the truth, tell the truth as a coach, tell the truth. If you commit to something, show them that you're going to do it. If you're going to tell them you're going to be around NFL players and coaches, then make sure there's NFL players and coaches in your building. If you're going to tell them they're going to have accessibility to some of the greatest in the profession or some of the greatest that have played at Arizona, make sure they're there.

If you can actually hit on those targets, you can actually -- those commitments that you made, make them happen, then you'll earn their trust.

When we tell our guys you're going to hear from people like Bill Belichick, Sean McVay, then they walk into your building, they know what you're telling them in recruiting is not just a sales pitch but it's actual reality.

I think that's what has been critical for our staff. That's where I respect our coaching staff so much.

Q. How big is it to beat regional schools? Like San Diego State, Mountain West schools, how important is it to get those wins to strengthen the program?

JEDD FISCH: I mean, without a doubt we all understand the importance of winning football games in the

conference, out of the conference, whatever games you schedule.

We're playing a 12-2 San Diego State team that's opening up their new stadium. That's going to be a great challenge.

We're looking forward to that challenge. We're playing an SEC team coached by Mike Leach coming back into the Pac-12 Conference to play a game. We recognize that challenge. We're playing the national champions, North Dakota State. We recognize that challenge.

We're excited about it, but we don't look at it in terms of one win is more important than the other. We're just going to go out there and play our best football and see what happens.

Q. With Tetairoa specifically, what gives you confidence he'll be able to jump in and make a huge impact as a freshman?

JEDD FISCH: Tetairoa?

Q. Yes.

JEDD FISCH: Well, he's a really good player and a great kid. When you have that marriage of a great person with extremely high character, with physical talent, it gives you your best chance to be good.

Now, he's going to be a freshman and he's going to take some lumps. We understand that and recognize that. But what you know is if he's going to be a hard worker, if he's going to be committed, and if he's got the raw talent, it gives you some hope, really a great feel moving forward that he's going to be able to impact our team not just September 3rd but every week after, then for the next few years.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach.

JEDD FISCH: Thank you. Have a great day.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports