

Pac-12 Conference Football Media Day

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Hollywood, California, USA

Stanford Cardinal Coach David Shaw Press Conference



DAVID SHAW: Real excited to be here. Very excited to get going with our guys. Many of you know we had a difficult time through COVID, as we all did, but in particular in the Bay Area with the restrictions and the understandable approach, conservative approach, to COVID, really hampered our football team. It's just so nice to have an off-season now, started in full winter conditioning, full spring football, full summer conditioning. Our team is bigger, faster, stronger than it's been in many years.

Real excited about getting back to not just survival football but attacking football. Very excited about the strengths of our football team right now, which many of you will talk about. Starting with Tanner McKee, who had some really bright spots last year, never had all three of his starting receivers at the same time the entire time last year. Missed some time with injury. Had a lot of ups and downs. But you saw a lot of bright spots in there. Really excited about him taking the next step along with our receiving core. We think we've got one of the best groups of guys in the nation. Excited for those guys to get going.

I think we've got a guy who is going to come on the scene in E.J. Smith as a complete running back, both can run it and catch it, make some explosive plays there.

We have age and maturity on the offensive line. Excited about that group as well. So excited Kyu Kelly came back. Going to be one of the top corners this year. Led the conference in pass breakups last year. Anticipate that happening again this year.

We have an aged secondary and experienced secondary, a group that will play together, a group that has been a good leadership group for us on our football team, not just on the defense.

Our linebacker core, last year anytime you watched us, you saw three out of our four inside linebackers playing with, as I call it, a Q-tip on one hand or the other. The injuries were

really difficult last year. A lot of them were bone injuries, broken hands, wrists, things we couldn't avoid.

Our linebacker core is aged and experienced. Our edge rushers we're really excited about, including David Bailey, an incoming freshman, that came to us this spring. Put some good film out there for us to watch. We're young and inexperienced on the defensive line, but we're also very athletic and physical on the defensive line.

As a football team, I think we're much better than we were a year ago. Definitely much better. Excited to get going.

As far as all the college football stuff going on, hey, realignment is realignment. It's been happening for a couple years now. Surprised about the news in our conference. But my hope is, as I've been saying all year, our relationship with USC and UCLA doesn't change, that we continue to play each other even if they're out-of-conference games. These are long-standing rivalries that I hope that we maintain. I'm still a firm believer that over time these things will self-correct, whether that's 10, 15, 20 years down the road, whether it is at some point completely reforming the conferences by region or becoming super conferences, whatever, who knows.

But for right now we love being in the Pac-12, and we hope to maintain those Pac-12 relationships with the other 10 institutions and continue to play high-level football. Still an incredibly deep conference with a lot of good coaches and players that we're really excited about.

Just touch briefly on NIL and transfer portal. From my perspective, there are positives with both and negatives with both. As far as Stanford goes, we've taken the positives out of both. We've had very few guys leave us. We've had very few guys join us as transfers. Our academic bar is set very high. It's not going to change.

The people that get into Stanford typically stay at Stanford. We want to play high-level football, we want to compete for championships, as we've done, and at the same time we want high-level degrees. We want our people going to the NFL, and also we want our people going to law school,

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business school, starting their own companies.

For us, just coming and going, jumping on and off of rosters at different places doesn't really fit who we recruit.

As far as NIL goes, our guys are taking advantage of their NIL opportunities the way that they're supposed to. NIL is not supposed to be used as an enticement, although that's happened around the country, both for transfers and people coming out of high school. Once again, that hasn't affected us.

The people that we recruit, the people that want to be at Stanford are long-term thinkers. They don't think about short-term money; they think about long-term money. The money that exchanges hands for people to make decisions hasn't really affected us. We want our people leaving Stanford and talking about doing great things and big things.

I'll take the comparison between cash in hand right now and a Stanford degree 20 years later, and I know which one is going to be more valuable. The people we recruit understand that.

So we really haven't been affected by -- NIL has been good for us, but this other thing that people are calling NIL, which is not the NIL, hasn't really affected us. And it won't go forward because we're going to continue to recruit the right people the right way. The last couple years will tell you that we're going to get the young people that we want to get.

The only year that we haven't been a top 25 or had a top 25 recruiting class is the year of COVID where people couldn't visit Stanford. Visiting our campus is a deal breaker. The campus at Stanford, it's hard for us to explain Stanford over the phone. Many of you have been at our campus, and it's a special place.

We're going to continue to recruit at a high level, play at a high level. One of our missions at Stanford has always been for us to be an example of how it's supposed to be done in college athletics, and we're going to continue that.

I'll take some questions.

Q. You touched on how the sport has changed and continues to change. How does that hit you as someone who has been a steward and spokesman for college football?

DAVID SHAW: There have always been changes associated with college athletics. These are just more drastic changes, and a lot of them are happening at the

same time, which has been the biggest difference.

Bottom line for me, some people take this as a negative, and I will stand up against that, I want college athletics to be college athletics. I don't want it to be professional athletics. I don't want it to be professional.

Now, I want our young people to take advantage of their opportunities through NIL and through other opportunities. I think there are a lot of different things that we can continue to do to help our student-athletes through health and safety, through, yes, other monetary avenues which I think would be outstanding to help our young people.

At the same time, I don't want to hire and fire college athletes. I want to bring them in, I want them to be students. They're 18, 19 years old, 20 years old. I want to them to enjoy college. I don't want them to be professionals. I don't want that to change, that experience to change. I want them to be on our campus, be college kids, stay up playing video games at 2:00 in the morning in the dorms. I want them to have those experiences and then leave us and become professionals in whatever their chosen profession.

That's the biggest thing for me, handling these changes and making the adjustments we need to make in order to continue to have college athletics and the other opportunities for the other sports. These monetary things have put so much focus on football and men's basketball. But college athletics can't just focus on those two sports. We need to do what's right for all the other sports, too.

That's my answer to that question, is to maintain college athletics the way that they are not just for those two sports but for everyone.

Q. They say great quarterbacks make others around them better. You brought your quarterback Tanner McKee. Can you briefly discuss his maturation process, how he impacts the offense.

DAVID SHAW: Yeah, Tanner, you probably hear him talking over there, he's an outstanding person, just a great human being. All the way back from recruiting, he's one of those people that when you talk to him, he makes you feel good about humanity. He's just a really good person.

And now over the years that really good person has a really good fire, right? That's a great combination that you want. You want a quarterback that the guys like, but the guys also respond to him. When he says, Get your butt going, he means it, and our guys respond to him. He brings his own fire, his own energy, his own juice.

What I love is we got a great leadership council. I'm so proud of these guys for what they've been able to instill in our team this off-season and for that great leadership council to also point to Tanner and say, Of our leadership council, this guy is the leader of our leaders.

That says a lot about him as a person, him as a football player. I'm really excited for this year of football for him because I think he's really going to show the ceiling that we saw from him many years ago.

Q. When you look back on the legacy you carved out at Stanford, you look around the college football landscape, particularly DI, you're one of the few Black coaches at this level, how much pride does that instill in you knowing everything you've managed to accomplish?

DAVID SHAW: I appreciate the question.

I try not to look back too much, think too much about legacy. But I think about the mentality of playing great football and graduating. That's been the focus. I stick to those. You look back over the years, over 90% graduation rate, a lot of guys have played great football, a lot of guys have gone on to the NFL. I tell people all the time, I lead the nation in writing recommendations for business school, for law school, for people going to these other high-level jobs. That's what I should do from my position, the people that I coach.

I'm coaching leaders. For us to focus on playing great football and graduating our guys, that's been what we've done. That's what I'm really proud of.

Q. How do you overcome the bias against West Coast teams when you look at the Associated polls when it comes down to a 10-win Pac-12 school vice versa an SEC team that maybe has eight wins? You guys dealt with it when Christian McCaffrey was here with the Heisman voting. Some people would say he should have won. But then you look at Alabama, they get the rub.

DAVID SHAW: I'm one of those people.

Q. Yeah. How do you overcome that rub of the West Coast bias no matter what your record is at Stanford?

DAVID SHAW: The biggest thing is we got to win, you know. That's the thing. We got to win. You got to play great football, really show what kind of program that you have.

That's where we as a conference have fallen short here

and there. Now, I will say built into that, this conference has been really deep, and it's really hard to run the table in this conference. Maybe other conferences it's easier playing eight conference games, maybe the conference is not quite as deep. You have three games to get up for every year.

Our conference, if you slip up, you're going to get beat. Doesn't matter who it is, where it is. You have to play your best football and play nine conference games and a difficult out-of-conference schedule is something that maybe the entire country doesn't understand. Maybe other places are giving a little bit of a leeway when they don't play the difficult schedule. They play a couple tough games, play well in those.

I've looked at many things over the years. There's years where we had great teams in our conference, but they play seven conference games in a row, and the sixth game in a row, whether that's at the Palouse or at Stanford, Oregon, wherever, you have that one slipup, you fall out of that trying to get into the Playoff because of that one game, whereas other conferences you don't see them play more than three conference games in a row. Some of them you rarely see them play more than back-to-back conference games because there's a bye or non-conference opponent.

For us to play six, seven, sometimes eight conference games in a row, sometimes without a bye, that's a tough, tough, difficult thing to do. So for us, we have to find a way to win, win those big games, win the out-of-conference games, win the bowl games to truly have a balance.

Some people's opinion you're not going to change, I'm fine with that. We need to be able to have something to say here is how we compare to those other schools around the country.

Q. With the loss of UCLA, USC, does that bother you as far as Stanford's strength of schedule, or are you looking towards more tougher out-of-conference opponents just in case?

DAVID SHAW: First of all, that's two years from now. That's 14 years, regular people years, two college football seasons (smiling).

For us, I don't think about strength of schedule. You compare our strength of schedule to anybody in America, we'll be in the top 10 in my opinion over the last decade. We play out-of-conference opponents, Notre Dame, BYU this year, Division I opponents. I'm not worried about strength of schedule.

I'm sad to a certain degree about not being in the same



conference in a few years with USC and UCLA because those have been a big part of the Pac-10, Pac-8, Pac-12 story. Selfishly being a Stanford alum, a lot of great games between Stanford and UCLA and USC. As I said earlier, my hope is we continue to play those two programs even if they are out-of-conference games.

Q. You mentioned Tanner McKee. What are your expectations this year about the larger passing game? Is this a top two, top three passing offense in the conference waiting to break out?

DAVID SHAW: First of all, expectations are for balance, right? I don't want to come out and throw the ball 60 times a game. That's never been what I wanted to do. It's never proven that that wins. What wins is being balanced, being able to run the football as well as throw it.

As far as the passing game goes, it's the combination of being efficient and explosive. As you said, we never had a game with all three of those guys at the same time with Tanner. We never had a game with all three of those guys and Ben Yurosek, who we believe is going to be one of the top tight ends in America, starting last year. You can make a case the last month of the season, there was nobody better in America. So now you throw Ben Yurosek into that with Tanner, with the three receivers, not to mention John Humphreys, who also came in and made some big plays for us, Bryce Farrell, another Southern California guy. For us to look at it and say we want to be one of the most dangerous teams in America, run and pass, I believe we have the talent to do it.

Q. This morning it felt rather symbolic that it was the Stanford athletic director with the Pac-12 commissioner speaking to the state of the conference. You mentioned the word 'example'. I don't think it's breaking news to say Stanford is arguably the greatest university on earth, most NCAA team championships. Now with the departure of USC and UCLA, does it feel like Stanford is taking on an even greater role as flag bearer of this conference and the West Coast?

DAVID SHAW: That's a tough question to answer. I believe it's up to all the remaining universities to be at their absolute best and really band together to show what this conference is about.

Stanford always thinks that way anyway regardless of what we're doing, it's to be the best at what we do, right, winning championships in multiple sports, but also being a top five university in the world, not just in the United States, to have outstanding young people that come to our place to flower and do special things.

That's how we think anyway. We talk about Stanford being a launching pad for leaders. We want our people to be leaders. We want them to be leaders. They have to think like leaders.

For us, without taking the mantle for the conference, really for us being the best we can be and pushing our young people to be the best they can be, that's our main goal.

As far as the conference goes, really working with the other nine schools left in this conference to make this conference the best it can be.

Q. You have a ton of returning experience on the offensive line. Can you speak to the importance of continuity within that group and what your expectations are?

DAVID SHAW: Yeah, really excited about where we are on the offensive line. I've said this many times, that there's a reason why they call it growing pains, because sometimes it hurts. We had some growing pains last year.

But I think what that taught us really is what we do well, what we don't do well. Really looking at this group, and having the off-season to really put some things together, both for them physically, but then also schematically, technique that we want to see on the field.

Terry Heffernan has done a great job this off-season, had a really good spring with our offensive line. These guys have put the work in. They are bigger, more explosive, more physical than they were a year ago. They've got a little chip on their shoulders, right?

We did not play our brand of football last year to any degree. So now for these guys to come back, for me to continually say how our team goes depends on the offensive line. I mean it. Those guys are going to set the table for us, for Tanner to do what he needs to do, E.J. Smith, those guys need to play at a high level. They're taking that very seriously.

I look at our group right now, we are where we were before. I think we've got probably seven guys that could start. We may play up to eight depending on how well these guys come through training camp, have that big, physical group up front that can also be great pass protectors. They're going to determine how much success we have this year.

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

DAVID SHAW: A couple things. One, I'm looking forward to playing them since we didn't play them last year. There was a game that was played, we didn't show up and play it (smiling).

Kyle has done an outstanding job, not just recruiting, right? So much gets talked about that. It's recruiting and developing and having an identity. I point to for our team multiple times, you watch, what I love about their year last year, they didn't start off like gangbusters. It started off difficult. That's when you see the character after football team. They didn't fold. They got better, came together. They threw Cameron in there. Cameron takes the next step, has an outstanding year. They're very deserving because when you're on top, somebody is going to knock you off.

They have enough guys coming back. They're physical, they're athletic, they're explosive. They've got marquee guys on both sides of the ball. They've got a staff that knows who they are, and they play to their strengths. They're a tough team to beat.

They absolutely deserve that bull's-eye that the other 11 teams now have on them (smiling). At the same time they play a style of football that we appreciate, that we try to embody as well. There have been many years where Utah and Stanford were the two most physical teams in the conference. Utah is the most physical team in the conference, and we're trying to get back there.

Q. Rising will have the same offensive coordinator for his entire career. What does it do for maturation of a quarterback when you can have the same OF COURSE for all four years?

DAVID SHAW: Yeah, that's the difficult part with all -- we talk a lot about all the transfers that have happened, but at the same time there's a lot of coaching changes here and there. It's a different day and age where it used to be that coaching staffs stayed together for a while, staffs got three, five, six, seven years to get things going. It's just not that way anymore.

But it helps a quarterback's development when he hears the same voice, when things stay consistent. I think you'll see that with Tanner as well, coming back really on year three. Year two was a big learning year, year two kind of got out there. Now year three we've been fine-tuning things for him to play. I think Cameron's going to experience that also, that there's now another level that you can reach when everything else has stayed consistent, you're not learning anymore, now as I say for those guys, now those guys become graduates. Right now they're working on the graduate level, they're not the

undergraduate level, they're working on graduate level of their offense.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, coach.

DAVID SHAW: Thank you all. Good to see you.

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