

Pac-12 Conference Football Media Day

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Hollywood, California, USA

California Golden Bears Coach Justin Wilcox

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We welcome Justin Wilcox to the stage. He'll give an opening statement, then we'll open it up for your questions.

Coach.

JUSTIN WILCOX: Well, it's great to be back. Going on year six at Cal. We will be kicking off training camp this Thursday. Actually bringing back about 150 to 200 alumni to send us into camp, which will be really exciting. Looking forward to a very, very competitive fall from our team.

Joining me today we got a couple of our players back here, Matt Cindric, who is a senior offensive lineman, and Daniel Scott, who is a six-year safety for us. Both excellent players. Great representatives of the program.

With that, love to open it up for questions.

Q. I wanted to touch on, how do you approach the season with only 18 returning players from the previous season?

JUSTIN WILCOX: There's going to be a lot of new faces playing for us. There's going to be times you're going to be inexperienced at certain positions or units. However, we feel really strongly about the talent on the team. We have some inexperienced guys, but we have some really talented guys.

They've had a really good off-season. Now it's about putting it all together, creating some rhythm and getting into the season where we will be tested each and every Saturday.

Q. In regards to COVID and everything that happened with the program, what were some of the good things that came from the team, how they kind of soldiered through that?

JUSTIN WILCOX: That's a good question.

Obviously there were some things that were out of our control that we had to work through. But I thought the players on the team and the staff did a really nice job of sticking together through some difficult moments, finding a way to keep improving, keep competing.

We started the season last year not well at all and finished the season much stronger. Really it's attributed to the chemistry and the way that the guys stayed together and kept competing.

That bodes well for the future.

Q. For the senior class, guys that were either lost during that season, nobody had a chance to hear their story, what are some of the faces and moments during that time that really still stick with you?

JUSTIN WILCOX: I think the group as a whole had a unique experience. There was some adversity along the way. That's just how football goes, that's how life goes. I think, even though it's not always fun at the time, it does teach them and us a lot of lessons along the way.

Really proud of how those guys, as I mentioned before, stayed together. They were great teammates. They care about each other. Ultimately that will serve them well.

Q. With USC, UCLA on the verge of leaving, where do you feel that puts your program? Cal would be the other major UC school. Do you feel recruiting-wise that's a bonus for you?

JUSTIN WILCOX: Yeah, I mean, I think anymore not much surprises me. Was it big news? Yeah, it was. But I'm very bullish on our program, our institution, what we can offer a young man who wants to come get a great education, get coached well, get treated really well.

We will continue to recruit California very hard. That won't change one bit. But I understand that especially for the traditionalists in all of us, when things like that happen, it feels a bit uneasy.



There's just change in college athletics right now. There's change in college football. We've got to adapt and adjust with it.

Q. What is a lofty goal that this senior class or a goal that you've pressed to the team?

JUSTIN WILCOX: The goal is to win the Pac-12 championship. That's been our goal. We work every day towards that. We know that's a lofty goal.

With the guys on the team, the people in our building, that's what the goal is, where it's been set. We have conviction that if we take care of the things we can control, we give ourselves an opportunity to attain it.

Q. What gives you confidence that the offense can take a step forward this year?

JUSTIN WILCOX: We are inexperienced on offense at a number of positions, but we feel the talent is probably greater than what we've had. The skill positions, we feel like we're going to have some more guys create explosive plays. We as coaches have to put them in position to do that.

We'll have a new quarterback. We feel strongly about the two guys that top the board there in Jack Plummer and Kai Millner. We have a stable of running backs that we feel good about. Tight ends. The offensive line has a few returners, then some new players. We also took a couple transfers to help us at that spot.

We would expect us to take a step forward. Getting more specific, it's really scoring touchdowns in the red zone and creating explosive plays. Those are the two areas where we have to make the biggest jump. If they do that, we'll give ourselves a chance to win.

Q. Is there a specific benchmark you want to hit?

JUSTIN WILCOX: Statistically?

Q. Yes.

JUSTIN WILCOX: Score more than the other team, that's our benchmark (smiling).

Q. With Jack, obviously you scouted him before you took him in. But going through spring, seeing him in person, how did he compare to the player you thought you were bringing in?

JUSTIN WILCOX: Who are you talking about?

Q. Jack Plummer.

JUSTIN WILCOX: He's probably a bit better than we thought. A very heady guy. He's played college football at a high level. He can throw the ball. Jack is a passer. It's very natural for him to deliver it.

We're excited about where he's going. There still needs to be some chemistry and rhythm built. It doesn't happen overnight. But he's put in a lot of time, as has Kai, with the group of receivers and tight ends. Again, feel strongly about what those guys can do.

Q. What was the separation between Jack and Kai in spring?

JUSTIN WILCOX: Probably experience. Jack has some experience, and he did a really good job picking things up maybe quicker than myself or Bill would have expected, Bill Musgrave. He's doing a really nice job.

Kai is going to continue to push and grow as a player. He's a little bit younger. If we were playing tomorrow, Jack would be the guy. But I expect him to continue to improve because I know Kai is as well.

Q. We heard from David Shaw earlier. He said he would like to see Stanford continue to play UCLA and USC as non-conference games. Do you have any thoughts on continuing those rivalries?

JUSTIN WILCOX: Yeah, I mean, those are conversations that are going to happen at an administrative level and maybe even above that.

I'm all for playing whoever's on the schedule, to be honest with you. I don't know if they're going to ask me. If they do, I'll give them my opinion. So, yeah. Sure, put them on there. Let's play. Two great programs. Love to play 'em.

Q. You talk about bringing in a lot of alumni. How important is that to this program?

JUSTIN WILCOX: It's really important. Unfortunately last couple years we weren't able to be in person as much as we all would have liked to. But we've kind of scheduled a couple standing events to get a bunch of our ex-players back. The first one is check-in day, which will be Thursday. We're going to have a good barbecue, there might be up to 200 football alumni there. Saw a couple of them today. We're really excited for them to meet our players, share some of their experiences, make a connection, probably talk about the old days as well.

Q. You mentioned not being surprised by anything.



Back to the UCLA, USC move, do you recall where you were when that news broke? Was there some initial apprehension about what that meant for the conference, where Cal fits in?

JUSTIN WILCOX: I'm having a hard time hearing you.

Q. Do you recall where you were when that news broke? Was there any initial apprehension about what that meant for the conference and Cal?

JUSTIN WILCOX: No. I mean, I believe I was traveling. I got off a flight, and I had a couple messages. Then you get 1,500 links to articles and this article and that report (smiling).

I can't say that I was overly surprised. I don't know that anytime it's not going to give you a little bit -- you weren't expecting it maybe on that day, but I don't know that I was overly surprised.

Apprehension? No. I still, again, have conviction about where we're going as an institution and the schools in our conference. We've got some really good programs, excellent schools, great coaches. Like I said, I'm confident and bullish on the future.

Q. How much have you been looped into the internal conversations about all the stuff the last month?

JUSTIN WILCOX: Internal conversations?

Q. Yes.

JUSTIN WILCOX: Not many. Yeah, very few. Very few.

Q. I'd imagine this is your first normal off-season that you've had in the last three years. How much of a difference could that make for this fall?

JUSTIN WILCOX: It has felt more traditional, off-season, in terms of our preparation, spring practice, weight room, all that.

Yeah, it matters, but ultimately we got to go out and perform on Saturdays. That's where we will be judged. I'm confident in the players on the team, the work they've put in. I know we're going to go out and compete really hard. But we need to go out and play well.

We had a number of games last year where we could have done a few things differently and found ourselves on the other side and won those games, and we didn't get that done.

Ultimately it's about the Saturdays. But having this more traditional off-season certainly doesn't hurt.

Q. As long as you've been running the show in Berkeley, defense has been what this program has been able to hang its hat on. How do you stack up this defensive unit against some of the others you've had? How big of a role is Daniel Scott going to play?

JUSTIN WILCOX: I think we have a chance to be pretty good. The interior of the defense, the defensive line, the inside linebacker positions, we feel very strongly about. We also have some younger players that we feel like have an opportunity to step up on the edge and in the secondary.

But ultimately time will tell. It's hard for me to judge one defense against another when one of them that we're judging hasn't played yet. So we will see.

Go Bears. Thanks.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach.

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