

Pac-12 Conference Football Media Day

Friday, July 29, 2022
Hollywood, California, USA

Oregon State Beavers Coach Jonathan Smith Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We welcome Coach Smith to the stage. He'll give his opening statement, then we'll open it up for Q&A.

Coach.

JONATHAN SMITH: It's great to see everybody. It's always an exciting time of year to finally get to this point where you're staring down the season, getting ready for training camp.

A lot to talk about in college football. Been talking about it all day. But I do think about the reason I got into coaching is really for this starting Wednesday. We got training camp starting. Got a roster that we're really excited about. Practices, preparing for a season is going to be competitive. Non-conference schedule will be challenging. Definitely looking forward to it.

I do want to make mention, we have two players here, Alex Austin, Luke Musgrave, have a lot of respect for in our program, proud of those guys representing us today. Luke from the state of Oregon, Bend, done big things at tight end.

Alex coming back here, Long Beach Poly grad. A three-year starter for us at corner. Both those guys, couldn't be more thankful for to be in the program.

I will tell you at Oregon State we're proud of the progress we've made. We're not a finished product by any stretch. But over the four years being here as the head coach, really proud of the development we've had, competitiveness, winning more games than we lost last year.

I think that momentum carries into our belief from a program, our boosters and supporters as we continue to finish off a stadium. It will be a little bit different for us in a stadium that is half built. Construction is going as planned. Playing a season in about half a stadium filled. But we're

really looking forward to, when that finishes, completing Reser Stadium, to be in one of the best football facilities and stadiums in the country. It's an exciting time to be around.

I feel good about this roster that we've come coming back. We have a lot of returning players on both sides of the ball. Actually return all our specialists as well, long snapper, punter and kicker. We feel like we have a veteran group that has learned now what it takes to win. We've got a lot of those guys back. I'm looking forward to seeing what we can do this year, understanding how competitive, especially this league is. Week in and week out, you got to play well and earn the chance to win a game on Saturday.

But we got this program in a spot that we're confident that we can play well on a Saturday, we can win week in and week out. Nothing going to be given to you, but you got to go earn it.

Again, I just want to end with saying exciting times to get started with another college football season. Looking forward to it.

With that I will take some questions.

Q. What was the conversation with the team after the loss to Utah State?

JONATHAN SMITH: Just make sure I hear you. After the loss to Utah State?

Q. The L.A. Bowl.

JONATHAN SMITH: It was a disappointing way to end the year in a bowl game because you obviously try to finish well and win a game like that.

At the same time, right after the game you're talking about a complete season that just finished. There was a lot to be proud of. But hopefully we've learned from that.

Yeah, we got ourselves to a bowl game and wanted to finish better. Now hopefully get ourselves to another one this next year, learn from that experience, to finish better.



Q. Utah State finished 5-0 against the Pac-12 last year. When you see teams like that regionally, with USC and UCLA leaving, how much urgency does that put on you to get the program headed in the right direction?

JONATHAN SMITH: Well, we said it before playing the bowl game. You look at, in general, the Mountain West Conference, how competitive they were, winning games. Got a bunch of respect for those coaches and players in that league. We play two Mountain West teams to start our non-conference.

Boise State, I coached there for two years. Those guys are a really good program for over a decade, a decade of time. Then we go down to Fresno and play a team, Jeff Tedford, got a bunch of respect, know him really well. Those guys have won a bunch of games the last couple years.

Jake Haener I know intimately, really good player, won some really big games. I remember watching him play UCLA this last year early in the season. I recruited Jake when I was at the University of Washington. There's good players, good coaches in that league.

I'll even stretch it all the way to the Big Sky Conference as well because I coached there for a couple years. There's good players and good coaches there.

We got a bunch of respect for anyone on our schedule or anyone in the region.

Q. Oregon State has a lineage for running backs. How important is that lineage to you, especially as far as being able to run the ball, establish the run, but also keeping up with the spread in the Pac-12?

JONATHAN SMITH: Yeah, we do pride ourselves being able to run the football. Since I've been back as the head coach here, we've had some really good running backs, going back to Jermar Jefferson, BJ Baylor. Now we're counting on another guy or two stepping up into that role this year. I think we've got some guys that can do it. Deshaun Fenwick carried the ball for us quite a bit last year, had a good year. Trey Lowe is back as well. Both those guys have an opportunity to kind of be the mainstay at running back for us.

We have a young freshman, Damien Martinez, who's here for the spring, had a good spring ball. He'll be a true freshman this fall.

I'm just a believer in being able to win games but finish games running the football. That's been a mainstay for us

here at Oregon State.

At the same time we got to be better and complement it with some explosive passes. We've got receivers on the outside I think we can make some plays for us that way.

Q. What did COVID teach the younger players on the team? What impact did it have on the seniors leaving the program?

JONATHAN SMITH: Just make sure I heard that. COVID?

Q. Yeah, when COVID shut everything down. How did the young players handle that, and what did that do to the seniors?

JONATHAN SMITH: I think for all of us, COVID, going through that season of isolation, no fans, it added to our appreciation of this game and the pageantry of having the fans back around, fully being able to engage in practice, meetings, and missing that. It added to our appreciation how beautiful this thing is.

Saturday college game days are great. Fans, pageantry, awesome. Even the day to day was affected during COVID. Missing out on some of that added to our, like I say, appreciation for all that's entailed in playing college football.

Q. Chance Nolan really took a step forward for you last year. I think he's one of the more underrated quarterbacks within the conference. What does he mean to this team behind the scenes, the leadership? How did he elevate you back to competing for a bowl game last year?

JONATHAN SMITH: Yeah, what I love about Chance is how competitive he is. I think he displays that in his style of play. Being competitive in the pocket but also extending the play, getting some extra yards, gaining first downs.

He did have a lot of good games for us. I thought he improved from his first year to this last year. Now he's headed into year three. We're counting on him taking the next step into being a three-year starting quarterback. He has a skill set of throwing the ball, athletic, competitive.

I do feel like we've got a couple guys in the quarterback room that are going to push him to make him even better. Competitively, anytime someone is pushing you, I think that helps.

Tristan Gebbia is a guy that he was playing his best football before he took a serious injury the previous year.

Chance ran with things this last year. Tristan is back and healthy now. Anxious to see those two go after it.

Let's face it, you need a quarterback in this league, you need good quarterback play to win. I do think we got a couple of guys that can help us do that.

Q. One of the previous questions alluded to filling the shoes of BJ Baylor. Deshaun Fenwick, big-time back. What do you think he brings to the table that is different?

JONATHAN SMITH: I think Deshaun is pretty physical in his brand of play. I think he's really smart schematically, he understands not just in our run game but protection, running routes. He's got a deep desire for football. He loves it.

He's got an opportunity. We're going to give him that opportunity to be a future back in this league.

I will say majority of the time we are trying to have multiple backs carry the ball just from game 1 to game 12, the wear and tear that takes place. Deshaun has everything you need to be a big-time back in this league. We're hoping to see it this fall.

Q. Utah has a quarterback and offensive coordinator that will now be together for four years. What does it do for maturation of a quarterback when you have that level of continuity with your OF COURSE?

JONATHAN SMITH: I think it's really beneficial. I think it's not just the quarterback position. I look at our place at Oregon State, we've had great continuity on staff. We're headed into year five with seven of the ten full-time assistants going into year five.

The ability for coaches to be around their players a longer period of time to really know them, get to know them, strengths, weaknesses, what pushes their buttons, how they learn.

In regards to the quarterback, opportunity to play and experience and learn from that, then the coach being the same and consistent working through that, they can draw on those experiences: Remember two, three years ago, we went through this or that. There's huge value in that continuity.

I know Utah has it going. We got it going at our place. Hopefully reap some benefits this fall.

Q. You played Utah a handful of times now. You were able to beat them last year. What makes them so

tough to deal with? Why are they worthy of being the pick to win the league this year?

JONATHAN SMITH: Well, they've always played a brand of physical football, been physical on defense. They challenge you consistently. They can run the ball. You mentioned Cam already, adding him into the mix. Now in a pass game that's really, really effective, his ability to extend the play, not just throw it. I know their roster got a lot of returning players after a big-time season. I can see why they were picked to win the thing.

They're highly respected. Kyle has done this thing at a high level for a long time. So they got a lot of good things for them. They're going to be really challenging.

Q. I want to talk about your former linebacker Avery Roberts who was the heart and soul of the Beavers' defense. How are you planning to replace his experience, leadership and production? Are there any defenders on your radar that you expect to fill his shoes?

JONATHAN SMITH: Avery was a really good player for us. Really productive. Shoot, I think he was close to if not leading the league in tackles last year. It's not just that production that we're trying to replace. His leadership. He'd been around the game a long time. His work ethic. He'll be missed.

I do think we have some up-and-comers that have played the inside linebacker position for us, one of them being Omar Speights, who is really right next to him. He'll be a three-year starter this fall. Had close to a hundred tackles this last season. We're counting on Omar taking a huge step in that role.

Then we have some depth. Jack Colletto, Easton Mascarenas, John Miller, Kyrei Fisher started in our bowl game and did some good things.

We have some depth we feel like that can step into that role. That's what I love about college football, too, is that everybody's roster got some seniors that are on their way out, you're counting on the young guys developing. We take some pride around our place in developing players. We're going to need it this fall to step not only in the inside backer position but a few others as well.

Q. I know it's been a process building your alma mater back up to respectability. Last season you won five of your first seven games, team went to a bowl game. Is it safe to say that the Beaver's program has arrived and ain't going nowhere no time soon?

JONATHAN SMITH: We're definitely trying to make it that way. We're continuing to rise, we're not going anywhere. You're right, we won five of the first seven. Learning experience, we didn't finish the way we wanted to finish. This year is an opportunity to improve on that.

Again, I go back to this idea that each year is new in college football. Just mentioned with players leaving, players needing to develop and get better. So there's nothing guaranteed just because we did such and such last year, it affects the next year. It's really the same mantra I had from year one to year two: What we did last year wasn't very good; doesn't say anything about the following year.

Each year you got to come in and grow, develop, compete. I feel like we got a mature roster that's all about doing that. Now we got to go prove it and show it each Saturday.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you very much for your time.

JONATHAN SMITH: Okay, thanks, guys.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports