

# Pac-12 Conference Football Media Day

Friday, July 29, 2022  
Hollywood, California, USA

## USC Trojans Coach Lincoln Riley Press Conference



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

Coach.

LINCOLN RILEY: Thank you.

Welcome, everybody. It's great to be here at my first Pac-12 Media Days, my first of two I guess. It's been a great day. It really has. Appreciate everybody coming out.

Yeah, been a very interesting last seven or eight months. Been a lot of fun. I've really, really appreciated the support that we've had from so many as we kind of got started here on this journey at USC.

From building a staff, building a roster in a very unique way, to a tremendous spring, a great off-season, now time to put some of the talk and all the hype and all the other things going on behind us and go play ball, it's a great feeling, something we're very much looking forward to.

Obviously I've been asked once or twice today about the conference realignment. Obviously we're aware of it. It's certainly an impact mostly in recruiting right now. But certainly would like to keep the focus as much as we possibly can on the Pac-12 Conference, our team this year, all the great players, potentially great teams in this conference. I think there's a ton of excitement, and rightfully so.

Very much looking forward to being a part of this. There's a lot of schools in this league that I very much respect, a lot of coaches I very much respect and look forward to competing against.

With that we will take some questions.

**Q. Caleb comes to USC with the lineage of the Oklahoma quarterbacks you were able to develop**

**there. What kind of offensive skill set have you seen from him that's similar, and how is he different as well?**

LINCOLN RILEY: Caleb has a great skill set. He does. That was pretty apparent the first time that I saw him. You get a lot of guys that are really athletic quarterbacks but maybe leave something to be desired with accuracy or arm talent, or vice versa.

Caleb is one of the rare young guys that has elite ability with both. Then I think for those of you that maybe got a chance to be around him a little bit, he's got a very magnetic personality. He's a guy that can get in any scenario, any room, feel comfortable, get along with people, be very present, has a great way with people. I think you got the makings of a potentially great leader and a really great player.

I think it's important for everybody to remember, he's still young in his career. I mean, Caleb has played half of a college football season. He played it in a major university under a lot of scrutiny, played in some big games and big moments. That's going to certainly help him. There's no question he's ready for this moment and ready for this challenge.

There's still a lot of work to be done. I think he's very aware of that. You ask for a comparison. They were all talented, too. I think the reason, one of the reasons, they kept improving was they stayed hungry and they realized the areas they had to get better, the work it was going to take to make that improvement. It's something we've been able to talk about. He's responded well. I think he's a much better player right now than at any point last season, as we would expect him to be.

**Q. On the defensive side of the ball, all the talk this off-season was about the transfers coming in. You did get a big defensive transfer in Shane Lee. How has the defense come along in the springtime?**

LINCOLN RILEY: I think our defense has done extremely well. I have a lot of confidence in Alex Grinch. I got to sit there firsthand and watch the changes that he made when



he came to Oklahoma in 2019. There were just immediate, drastic improvements. He obviously did that in this conference when he went to Washington State for his first defensive coordinator job.

I have a lot of confidence in the players we have there, the coaches that we have there, the scheme. I think all the makings to have an outstanding defense.

Frankly, that's our expectation. You think about the great history of this place. Of course, the highlights of Reggie Bush are going to run forever, all the quarterbacks, all that. You can't forget all the great defensive players that have run through here. When this team has been a national championship-caliber team, it's been riding a tremendous defense.

That's where we expect to be. We expect to have a national championship-caliber defense here at USC. I believe we have the people to do that.

**Q. Obviously it's been guns blazing right out of the gate in terms of talent acquisition. It seems like SC is getting their pick of the litter from a skill position perspective. How are you seeing talent acquisition in the trenches, offensive line and defensive line? How do you feel about those two units this year?**

LINCOLN RILEY: Yeah, no, absolutely great question. Another thing that's certainly going to be a focus of ours going forward. It doesn't matter what level of football you're talking about, what league, when you're great up front, you're going to have a chance.

I think the first key for us in the trenches was making sure we hired the right guys to coach them. Getting Josh Henson on the offensive line from Texas A&M, bringing in Shaun Nua from Michigan, Roy Manning from Oklahoma, that was important to us. Yes, recruiting them, the talent acquisition is obviously important, but you got to develop 'em. How many great players do you see across the country, a great, talented kid that goes into a program, you never hear about them, don't make the improvements everybody expects.

We wanted to bring guys in that could develop first. I like the offensive line talent that was left over. We did a little bit less work there. We brought in one transfer, two, but one grad transfer, Bobby Haskins from Virginia. Really like where we're headed there.

Obviously continuing to build that line for the future will be a priority for us.

The defensive line we were a little bit more aggressive,

added a couple of big inside guys. We brought in Romello Height on the edge, Solomon Byrd on the edge. We were a little bit more aggressive there immediately in the portal to try to beef that up, to try to add a little bit more quality depth.

No, I think we have the makings of very good offensive lines and defensive lines this year. It's important. It's obviously going to continue to be important for us.

Another thing I would say, too, there's been a little bit of a notion of there's not a lot of big, offensive line or defensive line talent in the West. I tell you, my seven or eight months there, I think that's completely false. I think a lot of tremendous talent. There's a lot of guys that we're recruiting on both sides of the ball in the West in the next several years that we would be recruiting no matter what university we were at in the country.

We've got to do a great job developing them, bringing the right ones in. I think if we do that, we'll be in good shape.

**Q. Realignment aside, what's one thing that surprised you in the first seven months?**

LINCOLN RILEY: I haven't been asked that one today. You did well (smiling).

I would say how involved and how passionate our former players are. I mean, we had former greats at every single spring practice. Guys want to be involved. They take so much pride in this program, rightfully so. They were part of the greatest runs that this game has ever seen at any university. To see how open they've been for us, how involved they want to be has been a great thing.

I guess when you haven't been somewhere, you hope it will be like that. But it was just day after day after day after day. We're talking some of the absolute giants in our game. There's been a lot of great things here, but that one definitely stands out for me.

**Q. The buzz this off-season has been overwhelming, the expectations through the roof. Almost CFP or bust for this team this year. Do you embrace those expectations? Are they fair?**

LINCOLN RILEY: Not my place to say whether they're fair or not. Like I said in my opening press conference, before even one of these players had come in, I mean, you don't come to USC and you don't come to Los Angeles to do things small. You got to set your sights big.

I don't think it's too much. I don't. I believe in what we're doing. I believe in what we're teaching. I believe in the

people that we have in there. Obviously it's going to continue to evolve through years. I didn't come here for one season. I didn't come here to do this in a short-term.

In some respects you keep the long game in mind. The people we brought in here, the staff we brought in here, we didn't come here to play for second. We are not wired that way. We came here competitively to win championships, win them now and to win them for a long time. That will always be our expectation.

**Q. What is your expectation for this year?**

LINCOLN RILEY: To win the championship.

**Q. Any undue pressure on all your young players because of this atmosphere, over the high expectations? Are you concerned about the pressure on your team?**

LINCOLN RILEY: No, because I think you either owe - I got asked that a lot when I became a head coach at a prominent university when I was 33 years old. The reality is if there's no pressure, then you probably don't have the same opportunities as others do.

You've got to see the opportunity in it. The opportunity is, if you do it well, anything is possible. This is one of those places. This is one of those programs. Frankly, this is one of those cities that if you do it well here, the sky's the absolute limit. I believe it's there for our football team.

We'll choose to focus on the opportunities and take advantage of anything we can do.

**Q. It seems like you're not going to get a honeymoon. Do you feel like you've already had your honeymoon, the pressure is on you to win right away, nobody will cut you any slack?**

LINCOLN RILEY: As a head coach, I don't know what a honeymoon looks like (smiling). I didn't get one at the first place. I don't expect to have one here. My expectations are extremely high. I mean, again, this is a go-for-it kind of place. I would reiterate again, we didn't come here to play for second.

**Q. There were allegations levied back in May that USC had tampered with receiver Jordan Addison. Your reaction to those allegations? Could you clarify in general how you went about securing the commitment from Jordan?**

LINCOLN RILEY: Yeah, I mean, we've worked hard through our careers as coaches, my career as a coach, to

do things with integrity. I think we've largely done that throughout my career.

I think if you ask people that have been around us, been in the inner workings with us, they know how we go about our business.

When someone challenges that with no facts and just only emotion, yeah, I mean, I think you take it personally. Absolutely you do.

I understand this is an emotional time, it's an emotional game with a lot of emotional people. We recruited Jordan just like we did every other transfer. Jordan got in the transfer portal. Jordan came on a visit to USC.

Despite all the negative things that were put out magically by somebody, he's a kid that's all about ball. All he wanted to do in his entire official visit was talk ball. We literally missed like several of the meals, entertainment we had scheduled so we could watch more film and talk more ball. That's all he's about.

I think he's really been misrepresented throughout this whole thing. Hopefully as this year goes on people get to see the quality of young man that he is.

He's done a great job for us so far. He's been a great member of this team. Seems extremely happy to be in L.A. and playing for USC.

**Q. There is a report about phone calls between you and Pat Narduzzi. Did you have contact with him about those allegations?**

LINCOLN RILEY: Yeah, I would never talk about a call between me and another coach, whether it did or didn't happen. That's not ever something I would discuss.

**Q. With Jordan, what does he bring to this offense, what does he add?**

LINCOLN RILEY: He's a proven play-maker. He's a guy that's proven that he wants to step out and continue to improve himself as a player. That's what you're looking for, explosiveness, a guy that wants to win, wants to be a part of this place.

That combination is a great combination. It obviously gives our quarterbacks another weapon, I think somebody that's going to be very difficult to cover one on one. We've had a pretty good history within the scheme of taking talented receivers and developing them and using them in creative ways that have given some people problems.

So he's a tremendous addition to this team, to the program. Very, very thrilled to have him with us.

**Q. During the spring you were pretty candid about the fact that you felt NIL did not have a place in recruiting in terms of recruiting high school players. Over the past few months, have you seen it directly impact recruitments that you've been involved in? You can't name names. Wins or losses, has it been a factor that you feared or thought it would be?**

LINCOLN RILEY: Absolutely it has been. I think we all predicted it pretty quickly, as soon as they instituted NIL with not much legislation around it.

There's a lot of factors right now. Number one, when I took this job, NIL obviously had already started. Everyone knew it was going to be a part of college football going forward, building rosters going forward. It's going to be a factor.

I certainly recognized the opportunities that existed in L.A. and specifically with USC and felt like there was no school more positioned to capitalize off NIL than us. Now that I'm boots on the ground, I believe that even more. It's probably even more substantial than what I thought it could be.

As it's evolved, I think what we've seen is, as a lot of coaches have said, we have rules that are not being enforced. One of two things is going to happen: we're either going to start enforcing the rules that are there or we're going to create new rules. I don't know which one is going to happen. I can't predict that. One of the two will happen and needs to happen.

When it does, the thing I like about our position is if collectives and donor-based funding and all that becomes part of the future and the norm, I'm very confident in the people that we have, the resources that we have, that USC will be in prime position.

If it doesn't and it becomes more traditional marketing and endorsement deals, would you rather be anywhere than sitting right here in the middle of southern California, in Los Angeles?

Whichever way it evolves, we're going to be ready. We feel like we're going to be positioned very well.

I hope that it does evolve soon, whichever direction it's going to go, so we can set our sites forward and everybody can move on.

**Q. You mentioned the impact you felt from the Big Ten move on recruiting. What have conversations been**

**like with recruits about that news?**

LINCOLN RILEY: Yeah, they're exciting because I think there's some obvious benefits right off the top. Playing in some of the major, biggest, most influential media markets not only in the country but in the world.

One thing that I don't feel like has been discussed that much is forever and ever one of the most watched, impactful games in college football has been the Rose Bowl. You think about some of the epic matchups that have happened in the Rose Bowl. Now you're going to have several of those happening each year, albeit in different venues. I think it's going to create some cool and intriguing matchups that will grab attention all over the country.

The financial impact is significant. The ability to take that and put it back into facilities, to put it back into services for your players, to mental health, to development, to anything that's going to benefit the program, it's a big deal, there's no question. The TV slots are a big deal.

USC has always been a national brand, but it opens up with a recruiting base that's maybe different than ever before in the school's history.

There's a lot exciting about it. So the conversations have been fun. It's certainly been impactful. I'm glad that our people have been on the forefront.

**Q. With college football you're not only trying to build next year's roster but the roster after at the same time. Does this news change the type of players you're looking for?**

LINCOLN RILEY: Sure. It absolutely does. Especially as you start thinking towards the future. You look at it from two perspectives. Number one is what do we believe the best version of USC football is, what are our ideal players that best fit our schemes and systems. Also you look at it relative to the competition and the people that you're going to play year in and year out.

Those are conversations that we've started having immediately. I don't know that I want to lay out exactly our thoughts on it. Will it change? 100%.

**Q. One of your former players. I'm curious what you can tell us about Kyler Murray's work ethic and whether that would ever be a concern.**

LINCOLN RILEY: Yeah, it was a concern. It was a big concern. I was really concerned when I had him at OU that he was going to burn himself out. I don't know as a coach



you worry about a guy working too hard. But he pushes the limits of it.

I spent a lot of time with the guy. We're very close. We talk a lot. We talk all the time still to this day. Kyler Murray loves football. Kyler Murray loves to compete. He loves to win. Every professional athlete wants to win. Not many like him.

For him to do what he's done in his career, and to think he hasn't prepared... I thought he said it well when he talked to the press the other day. That's not him, that's not normally his MO to talk about himself or do that. I thought he hit the nail right on the head and I'm glad he did that.

I don't know why the clause was in there. Again, I'm not in there in the inner workings. Having had three years with him every single day for three years, I never worried about him and the amount of preparation he was putting into getting ready to play.

In fact, I never worried about him when he was the backup quarterback. I never worried about him when he was playing another sport. The guy, he's phenomenal.

So, no, his work ethic, that's one thing I will never question.

**Q. The statement surprised me. How did you respond? Did he talk to you before he did that? Were you surprised to see it? What were your reactions?**

LINCOLN RILEY: Say it one more time.

**Q. The statement, he's a taciturn dude. He says what he has to say, gets out of there. Did it surprise you to see him go there?**

LINCOLN RILEY: It didn't. In some ways yes, some ways no. It didn't surprise me because I know how personal he takes winning. I mean, he's the guy as a leader you have to almost pull him off of the other guys sometimes. He's a fierce leader and a fierce competitor. He puts so much into the game.

It did surprise me because, like you said, it's not his MO. He's not a 'me' guy. I called him the morning, I was driving, I FaceTimed him the day he signed his contract. He didn't even want to talk about it. All he wants to talk about is the team next year, how they're going to win. He's all ball. Really he has a singular focus.

For him to go do that, it was something that really bothered him. But I'm glad he did it. I thought it showed guts, I thought it showed maturity. I'm glad he fired back. He had every right to do so.

**Q. Hollywood Brown is there now, too. First thing he talked about was how he and Kyler played together on the scout team, how much pride they took in busting up the first teamers. Can you tell me some stories from those days?**

LINCOLN RILEY: Pretty good scout team. They ruined our defense's psyche. Those guys were pretty good. They both love ball. They did, whether it's playing in the NFL on the same team or playing on a scout team, just getting somebody else ready to play when they both weren't eligible.

No, they both love ball. I can't wait to see them play again together. The one year they got on the field together, I mean, they were so in sync. I know there's a ton of confidence that's already laid there.

**Q. Is there anyone on the offensive side of the ball that gets you excited in the morning, that opens up the playbook?**

LINCOLN RILEY: I hope a bunch of 'em get me excited in the morning, evening, afternoon, all (smiling).

Yeah, I think we have some really intriguing skill sets. I'm really excited about our backs, both Travis Dye and Austin Jones are proven guys at this level that are both really pros in the way they go about their business. They both have great experience. So really excited about those two.

The receiving core obviously we've made a lot of additions and changes, too. I mean, so many of those guys, obviously Jordan and Mario have been talked about quite a bit and deservedly so. Excited about Terrell Bynum, Brenden Rice, Tahj Washington, Gary Bryant. I think that's a really intriguing group. We have some neat skill positions, have some guys that can stretch the field, make a lot of plays, give us some versatility.

I think there will be a lot of competitions within our own locker room. It will be really interesting to see how we evolve as an offense. But proud of some of the additions we've made.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, coach.

LINCOLN RILEY: Thanks, everybody.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports