

Big Ten Football Media Days

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Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Michigan State Spartans

Coach Mel Tucker

Press Conference



KEVIN WARREN: Mel Tucker is very active in the East Lansing community. He's involved with the Greater Lansing Food Bank, Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation, Special Olympics.

One of the biggest things about Coach Tucker, he participated in our recent trip from Montgomery to Selma, and it was a life-changing experience.

He had a great season last year with his victory in the Peach Bowl over Pittsburgh, and I know he's excited about the upcoming season. So we welcome to the podium head football coach at Michigan State University, Mel Tucker.

MEL TUCKER: Good morning. Thank you for being here. Commissioner Warren, thank you again for your continued leadership. You're doing a fantastic job. I'll be very brief.

We have shifted our culture at Michigan State. It's a culture that is rooted in a relentless mindset in everything we do. Culture is how we live and behave every single day, a culture of accountability, attention to detail, sense of urgency, connection, being authentic, being real, and good old-fashioned hard work. You roll your sleeves up and figure out a way to get the job done.

A year ago, last season, 11-2. For us it was just really a step in the right direction. That's really what it was. We did some good things, but nobody cares what you did last year. We certainly don't. We've got a lot of work to do. We have improved tremendously this out of season, on the field and off the field.

We are extremely hungry, and we do have a chip on our shoulder. We've got a lot to prove. We have a very high standard of performance, and we have decided as a program to attack that standard every single day.

There's a lot of work being done in East Lansing right now as we speak. We're actually putting the work in. We're chopping wood every day, and the goal for us is to win every game on our schedule. That's our stated goal. Our goal is to finish first. That's our goal. And we need to bring

a championship to East Lansing. So that's what this is all about.

I feel really good about this upcoming season. We're going to have a great training camp. I can't wait to get started. With that, I'm going to open it up for questions.

Q. Can you get into how you've mixed hitting the transfer portal with recruiting? I know you guys have nine 4 star recruits in your recruiting class right now. I know you can't get into specific names, but can you just get into how you mix hitting the transfer portal with recruiting high school kids?

MEL TUCKER: You know, it's not very complicated. We embrace the portal. We're going to build our team through the high school ranks. It's very similar to what we did while I was in the NFL. You want to build through the draft. You complement or supplement your roster through free agency.

So the high school ranks for us is the draft. The portal is free agency.

Q. You recently went to Alabama with the Big Ten. Why was that trip important, and what were your biggest takeaways?

MEL TUCKER: Thanks for that question. Why did I go? I was presented with an opportunity to get better and to learn. I believe in lifelong learning, and that was certainly an opportunity.

Commissioner Warren came up with the idea a couple summers ago. He made it happen. He invited me, and I jumped at the opportunity.

What did I take out of it? I didn't know as much as I thought that I knew about the civil rights movement and the fight for the right to vote, slavery, reconstruction, Jim Crow, mass incarcerations. Just a tremendous education. For me, it was a life-changing experience.

Q. Thank you for that insight on that. Mel, what have been your initial impressions of transfer running backs



Jalen Berger and Jarek Broussard?

MEL TUCKER: Berger came us to midyear. We got him in January. He's a very talented young man, very talented. He really bought in right away to our culture and what we're all about. He's really started to bond with his teammates, and he's really opened up.

So we've gotten to know him over these past several months, and he is a very versatile guy. He's an excellent runner, and he's excellent in terms of receiving the ball out of the backfield. He's a competitor, and I'm glad we got him.

Jarek Broussard, he played for us at Colorado when I was there. Tremendous, tremendous back. Also excellent ball skills, can catch the ball out of the backfield. Super hypercompetitive. We got him this summer, and he's a guy that can do a lot of things.

Those two guys were obviously portal guys for us that made our team better and made our running back room more competitive.

Q. Coach, they kind of took my question, so I'm going to try a different way to say it. With Kenneth Walker III and everything he did last season, how much have you used what he accomplished to sell maybe those running backs and sell guys on the transfer portal that are looking at Michigan State?

MEL TUCKER: We just tell a story. We just tell a story. He came to us. I'm not sure how many people knew about him nationally. He saw an opportunity to come to Michigan State and get better. His goal was to play in the National Football League and play against great competition.

He came in, and he went to work. He did a great job in the weight room in the winter, and it continued on through spring ball, and he showed up every single day and improved as a football player. Obviously he walked in the door extremely talented, and he raised the level of competition, not just in the running back room, but on the entire football team, and he was extremely productive.

Then he got what he wanted. He was able to help us win a lot of football games. He was a tremendous leader, a great teammate. Now he's moved on to the National Football League, and he's going to have a great career there. It's a great story, and that resonates with players.

Q. Mel, I'm wondering your response to Pat Narduzzi's recent assertion that Pitt would have beaten you apparently badly if Kenny Pickett had played in the Peach Bowl?

MEL TUCKER: I really prefer not to get into hypotheticals, especially games that were played in the past and were decided on the field.

Q. With the new facility in the making, how would this affect the training camp practice this year?

MEL TUCKER: Very little. Our guys are displaced somewhat. Our locker room has moved from the football complex to the stadium, and our equipment room is there. But our meeting rooms are still there at the Skandalaris football building. The coaches' offices haven't been displaced. We're in good shape. Minor inconvenience.

Like Coach Alvarez used to tell us when I played at Wisconsin, nobody cares. Nobody cares.

Q. The Michigan State program is in a very different place than it was 12 months ago. So how are you and your staff continuing to manage those changing expectations, and what are your plans to continue to put your fingerprint on the Spartan program?

MEL TUCKER: We just keep chopping wood every single day. Like I said, we've got something to prove. We took a step in the right direction. We're not where we want to be. The voices inside of our building need to be louder than the voices outside the building. So we're staying focused on the task at hand.

Our culture is all about how we live and behave every day. Those are actions. Those are behaviors. It's a process. What are we doing every single day to get better? Aggregation of marginal gains. Everyone just get a little bit better every single day. We're going to continue to hammer our process, cement our culture, and that's what's going to create the outcomes for us.

There's laser focus, and there's hunger. We've got a chip on our shoulder. All our guys are bought in, the coaches and the players. So it's just a matter of continuing to work our butts off.

Q. What does a wide receiver and playmaker like Jayden Reed do to your offense and special teams unit?

MEL TUCKER: Jay Reed, his nickname was Bird, by the way. He is a tremendous player. First and foremost, he is a great person. He's a great guy. He's a great teammate. He's fun to coach. He's always got a smile on his face, and he can do a lot for us.

You mentioned what he can do on special teams as a



return guy. He's elite. He is outstanding at contested throws. You get the ball, just get it to him, he's going to find a way to come down with it. He's very competitive. He's hypercompetitive, and he practices extremely hard. That's why he's always getting better. He's a great leader for us. He leads by example, but he's also a confront-and-demand guy.

A guy like that, what's he do for your offense? High-level production. I believe you've got to have three to four difference makers on each side of the ball if you want to be really good, and he's a difference maker for us on offense.

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