

Big Ten Football Media Days

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Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Northwestern Wildcats

Interim Head Coach David

Braun

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: A two-time FCS National Champion coordinator from North Dakota State, please welcome to the stage the interim head coach of Northwestern, David Braun.

DAVID BRAUN: Good morning. I'd like to open by first off thanking my family back home: my wife, Kristin; our 8-year-old son, Lucas; 6-year-old son, Andrew.

Interesting timing. My wife is due with our third, a little girl, any day now. So a lot of things going on at the Braun house right now. But they have been an absolute rock over the course of the last couple weeks and certainly want to acknowledge everything that she has going on at home.

Secondly, I want to thank our players, our staff, and all their families. They have responded in this time with exceptional work ethic, resolve, perseverance, through an incredibly difficult time. In all my one-on-one meetings, time with our players during workouts, it has been absolutely inspiring.

It is an honor to be here representing Northwestern University, our football program, and most importantly, our players back in Evanston preparing to have a successful season this fall.

I never could have imagined, nor did I desire, to become a head coach under these types of circumstances. That said, I'm honored to lead this group moving forward. With a dad from Ohio, born in the north suburbs of Chicago, and moving to Wisconsin in elementary school, my childhood was filled with Big Ten football. Watching Northwestern games with dad, many Saturdays in Camp Randall, rooting on the Badgers, it was part of my life. It was part of my memories with my dad.

We won't acknowledge who my dad roots for. We've had a very clear understanding that he'll be rooting for the Cats moving forward.



There was a great deal of appreciation built up for what Big Ten football is, the ultimate student-athlete experience: top-notch academics and high-end football on Saturdays. Prioritizing the student-athlete experience.

I dreamt of playing in the Big Ten. That never became a reality, but an opportunity to work in the Big Ten, coach in the Big Ten, and coach and mentor these young men is something that I don't take lightly.

I vividly remember in 1995 watching Northwestern beat 9th ranked Notre Dame, incredible. It still sticks with me to this day. The following year, I'm sitting in the stands with a childhood friend watching Northwestern take on Wisconsin, and improbable circumstances, Ron Dayne fumbles with under a minute left to go, a few plays later to find Steve Schnur connect with D'Wayne Bates on a double move in one of the most improbable Northwestern wins in Northwestern history. Again, this opportunity is a dream come true, to be a part of Big Ten football.

I say all this to say that, when Coach Fitz offered our family the opportunity to come to Northwestern back in January, and I started work on January 16th of this year, my wife and I had to pinch ourselves. An opportunity to coordinate in the Big Ten, to work for a man like Coach Fitz, to be close to my family in Wisconsin, to be a part of the Big Ten, and the opportunity to mentor young men that value what Northwestern stands for -- a world-class education competing on the biggest stage in college football.

This obviously has been a very difficult time for our team, our staff, our current and former players impacted, our alumni, the university, and the broader Northwestern community.

I am grateful to the Northwestern leadership and Dr. Gragg for entrusting me with leading this program moving forward.

The circumstances surrounding our family's opportunity in being elevated to interim head coach were not dream-like scenarios, but they have done one thing. They have crystallized our family's purpose. As a family, our mission, Kristin and I truly believe that football is the ultimate vehicle



to have a positive impact on young men.

Our number one priority moving forward will be ensuring that the student-athlete experience for the young men that we coach and mentor is just that, the ultimate student-athlete experience.

With the evolving landscape of college football and there being more emphasis put into talent acquisition, transactional relationships, we have an opportunity. We have an opportunity to firmly commit to the values of Northwestern University, to firmly commit to what this program has been built off of, and that is the holistic development of the young men that we mentor and coach.

I told our players a couple weeks ago moving forward it is my ultimate purpose to make sure the four people back home are taken care of, and beyond that, I'm here to support and serve them moving forward. Through one-on-one meetings with a majority of our team, I have found a team that has come together, that truly loves one another, and has an incredible resolve to attack the 2023 season and write their own story about overcoming adversity.

Let me be clear. This football team will be ready to go. I look forward to coming together as a team, a staff, an athletic administration, a university, an alumni base, a fan base, to fully support these student-athletes as they go make us all proud moving forward.

Now to talk some football. I'm very excited about what we have coming back on the offensive side of the ball. There's a great deal of depth at all positions. The loss of Peter Skoronski on the O-line will certainly be a big hit, but truly believe under our offensive staff our O-line has a chance to show that depth, play with depth, and find ways to establish the run in the Big Ten.

The tight end group is one of the deeper tight end groups I've been around, and that's saying a lot after coming from North Dakota State. Excited about our running back room and the return of Cam Porter, and Armon Binns, our wide receiver coach, has done a tremendous job getting this wide receiver group to a point where we feel like we can really lean on the depth in that room to utilize the passing game.

The quarterback battle will be something that will be fun to see as the fall moves forward, but then the addition of Ben Bryant, the return of Brendan Sullivan, and a young man from the South Side of Chicago, Jack Lausch, will provide a great deal of competition in fall camp.

Defensively, we look forward to a D-line room that Coach

Smith has done a great job of building through some transfers and the development of a young group with a great deal of talent, a veteran linebacker room, a ton of depth in the safety room, and an athletic core room that's inexperienced but has a great leader in Garnett Hollis as we move forward. Special teams will continue to play a critical role in finding ways to win on Saturdays for Northwestern.

At the end of the day and one of the first things that we did as a staff in the last couple days was having an opportunity to sit down and have an honest conversation about how we're going to win football games at Northwestern this year. And it's not just going to be our defense, it won't just be our offense. It's going to require complementary football that puts us in situations to win in the fourth quarter.

Again, let me be clear. Through all these one-on-one meetings, seeing our team the last two weeks, I firmly believe that this group has a demeanor, has a brotherhood, and has a resolve that there's reasons to be very excited about the story they will write this fall.

With that said, I'll open it up to questions.

Q. Kind of what were the last few weeks for you, finding out you're the head coach of Northwestern, and what does it mean having the support of your players having only been here for six months?

DAVID BRAUN: It's all been very emotional, highs and lows, but to know that our family has the full support of our players means everything to Kristin and I and our staff. It's a special group of young men.

Q. The most recent lawsuit filed by a former Northwestern player said that associate head coach Matt MacPherson witnessed the naked pull-ups. It also said two assistant coaches were ran. It also said strength and conditioning coaches organized the belly-flop contest where the punishment was to get ran. It detailed an incident with Jay Hooten and MacPherson, another incident with him. These guys are on your staff. Are you looking into any of the involvement that coaches on your staff may have had in the hazing allegations?

DAVID BRAUN: I won't speak to current allegations. Fully trust that our university is going through a process and will make decisions based on the facts.

What I can speak to is how proud I am of the way that our team has come together with all this stuff swirling around our football team. There's absolute resolve and confidence



from our leadership within our team of how we're going to move forward.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

Q. First off, congratulations on taking over the head coaching job. Your game against Ohio State was heavily influenced by the wind last year, or Northwestern's, I should say. That's something you guys are no stranger to, playing so close to the water as you always do. How do you teach players to put aside the weather and just focus on the game of football when those instances happen?

DAVID BRAUN: Honestly, the best thing you can do is make sure that you are providing practice opportunities that expose them to those types of conditions to the best of your ability. I think one thing I learned at North Dakota State, us playing in a dome, that was an incredible home-field advantage, and crowd noise could actually be a detriment to us on defense in terms of communication.

We had to expose our players to that noise in practice to make sure we were able to lean into our nonverbal communication. It's no different with the elements. We need to find ways, every way possible, that, even if it happens to be a practice in fall camp where there's wind, there's elements, we're going to have to tough it out, get out on the field, and make sure we expose our guys to those conditions before we get to game day.

Q. Can you talk about a couple of conversations, the last one you've had from Pat Fitzgerald, what he told you, expectations, the conversation, the first time you met as a team with the head coach, what you told them about the challenge ahead and the scrutiny they'd be under.

DAVID BRAUN: I'll start with the second question, the first thing I told them was my responsibility moving forward to give them clarity and direction. My intent was to be there to support and serve them moving forward.

I challenged the group. A lot of people have been impacted by decisions made, by the decisions that have been made over the course of the last couple weeks, and our guys right now in that facility are going through a lot.

We have an opportunity to either run from that or an opportunity to truly stare that adversity in the face, stare it down, and go attack this opportunity to make this fall an incredible story that truly embodies what this team is all about.

I've challenged them with that, and I can say that they have responded to that challenge in an absolutely inspiring fashion.

