

Big Ten Football Media Days

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Wisconsin Badgers

Coach Luke Fickell

Press Conference



COACH FICKELL: I want to start by saying how thankful and grateful I am to be back into the Big Ten and a part of this, to be representing the University of Wisconsin, our football program, and, most importantly, this football team that we have today.

It's been, I think, eight months now, eight months since I've moved to Madison. And I can tell you that everything involved in what I've done in the last eight months has exceeded my expectations.

And I know I went into it a little bit blind not knowing all things about Madison and all things about Wisconsin, but I'm talking about from the community, the city, the campus, the actual university. All those things, in the eight months I've realized and recognize an incredible amount of amazing things that I had no idea about.

But I think more than anything, over the last eight months, recognizing and seeing and witnessing the culture of young men that we have within our program by far exceeds anything else that I've learned.

For that, I must give a lot of recognition to those that have come before me. To just kind of recognize Coach Alvarez to Coach Bielema to Coach Leonhard and Coach Chryst, the foundation those guys laid and built over time, over the last 20-some years is really evident and deep-rooted. To them I owe a lot for what it is I'm walking into.

So for that first month, for me, it really was about recognizing and seeing all the things that had gone on over the last 20-some years.

It wasn't like coming in in that first month and just blow things up and make a splash. As you know, it was a time of bowl prep. And I think maybe it was a bit unique to go in and say, I want to coach and be part of this bowl preparation and all that's going on.

But it was really, because I knew there were so many amazing things going on before me, that I had to recognize. For that first month I had to take as much time

to figure out in the way they've prepared, the way they've practiced, to the way that they play. All those things for me in that first month was what it was all about.

Moving forward in the last seven months, it's about my ability, our ability to embrace what they've done there and what has been laid there before us to recognize the amazing things and to have a way to enhance them, but then also to implement the things that we know it's going to take to continue to move our program and this football team to the next level.

So to me, that's what the last seven months have been all about. And I can say now we're less than one week away from actually putting that to the test. We will find out in less than a week what that trust, love and respect that we emphasize within our locker room, what it really looks like. How deep-rooted is it really when all of a sudden we begin to do what we came here to do, prepare to play for championships?

And that's what's exciting for me, that's what's exciting, to recognize this opportunity that's in front of us, how close it is, and now to put your culture and things to a test, with all the things that come with camp and the season -- the human elements, the preparation, the playing time, the winning of games. That's when you find out what you've really got.

I'll start off by answering a question I've been asked several times in the last several months and I've already been asked it today, the question that comes down to: Hey, define what success looks like in year one and what are your expectations?

That's the pretty common thing I take away with most questions. We have one objective and that's to play for a championship. I don't think that will ever change, whether it's year one, year two, three, four or five. That's what our objective is.

And then you'd say then I'll tell our guys as we start camp here next week that nobody outside of our team, nobody outside of the walls at which the guys are there every single day, that have everything invested will define what



success looks like for us. We can't allow that.

We can't allow fans. We can't allow students. We can't allow former players. We can't allow the media to define what success looks like within our program.

But I'll tell what I think success looks like. Success looks like, to me, when you play your best ball at the end of the year. When you play your best ball at the end of the year you have an opportunity and we will have an opportunity to play for a championship.

But what is playing your best ball at the end of the year take? It takes an incredible amount of consistency and in year one and with new offenses, new -- there's a lot of things that have to be done.

So the consistency. The ability to grow. To grow as individuals, to grow as players, to grow as a team is really critical in how the development will happen. And our ability to handle adversity, which every one of us knows, whether it's the start of camp or the start of the season, you're going to -- no matter how your season is going -- encounter adversity. That's the beauty of this game.

How we handle that, how we have the ability to grow, how we have the ability to come together the way at which we play in the last month of the season will really help me and our program define what it looks like and what it is as we move forward.

So we've got three great young players with us here today representing our program. It's quite unique we have a fifth-year guy, we've got a third-year guy and a first-year guy. And they epitomize all things that it means to be a Badger. And I say that because even the first-year guy has embraced all the things, just like I have.

So first we have our running back Breyton Allen, who is in his third year. He's from Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. We have Maema Njongmeta, who is a fifth-year graduate linebacker for us, who is from Illinois. And then we have Tanner Mordecai, who is obviously a graduate senior from Waco, Texas, three great individuals that give a depiction of our entire program.

And you'd say, a first-year guy who gives a depiction of your program? Yes, we've got a lot of first-year guys in our program, whether they're players or coaches. I think the uniqueness of those guys and how they've come together really kind of gives a great depiction of our entire program.

Q. Why Wisconsin? You summed it up a little bit there. Why Wisconsin because you had other opportunities, at least reportedly, to go elsewhere.

Number two, what is the imprint you have made to this point? And what is Fickell Ball all about?

COACH FICKELL: We could take the whole time on "why Wisconsin." I've probably said it, but it has a lot to do with being back in the Big Ten. It has to do with the respect I've always had playing against and preparing for Wisconsin.

Understanding and recognizing what the culture, what I assumed the culture was like from afar. Felt like something that would be really, really in my wheelhouse. That's why I said it's exceeded my expectations in just the way I believe I fit and we fit and the things we've been able to do.

But I think there's quite a uniqueness when you put the family involved as well. That's a big part of it. Timing has a lot to do with that. But the ability for my family, our families, the people that have come with us to do what it is they want to do and be able to do it with their own kids as well.

Whatever you want to call Fickell -- it's not about me. Hopefully we all well understand that. It's about the way we can do things together, and I think what the ball will look like from us is it doesn't matter whether it's running or throwing the ball. It doesn't matter whether it's four-wides or packed back in there like the traditional style, whether it's a three down or four down.

What it looks like is the ability for guys to do things together, the ability to feed off one another, the ability to -- ultimately this is a game about toughness. And your ability to be physical up front, your ability to win ball games in the fourth quarter, that has a lot to do with the mentality. That has a lot to do with not just how you play the game but how you train in the game.

I think all those things together was one of the things from afar that I felt like could fit and be a really good natural fit for me walking in the door. And that's what I said, I've been not pleasantly surprised, but I've been really impressed with all things that I didn't know.

Q. We haven't seen it yet, but the quarterback that you grabbed from the portal and the offensive coordinator you hired, it seems like you might be changing what has been, the philosophy at Wisconsin. Why do that?

COACH FICKELL: Why not? I think to the naked eye, to the normal fan, to the kids on campus, to whoever, I mean, I think you're going to see, yes, it's going to look different, there's no doubt, whether it's two tight ends, three tight ends, two backs in there, than maybe the tradition of what Wisconsin has been and been really successful with, to the

ability of being able to spread things out a little bit more.

I don't think it was anything to do with, hey, let's change what it is that they've done and been really good at and let's bring in somebody that's going to do something different. It's more about people.

And obviously I learned that growing up in the Midwest from a great former coach as well. It's about people. When you get the right people together, they understand, regardless of who they're labeled to be, whether they're a ground-and-pound guy, whether they're an air raid guy, what is the core values to the things that you do.

And it might look different, but deep down as you dive into it, it's still going to be about the guys up front, it's still going to be about physicality, it's still going to be about controlling and winning the lines of scrimmage, whether it's offensively or defensively.

The thing I loved about this opportunity in particular was they never asked about that. It wasn't like what are you going to change or aren't you going to change; it's no, we believe in you as a person, we believe in you as a coach, and we believe that you'll do what's best to continue to grow our program and move us forward.

So I give a lot of credit to obviously Chris McIntosh who believed that and the people that are around us that we'll figure out what exactly it will look like as we continue to grow.

But the core values won't change.

Q. You played for John Cooper, Jim Heacock at Ohio State, worked with Jim Heacock, and then obviously Jim Tressel, Urban Meyer. Just how did all these different coaches impact and mold you, and what have you borrowed maybe from each of them to kind of -- you're 20 years into this as a college coach and a few years now as a head coach. What have you borrowed from all the people that were your influences?

COACH FICKELL: Borrowed, stole, became a part of, they're all those things. I think those opportunities, those situations, they've all shaped me. I was very fortunate to be at one place for a very long time, but really be with three Hall of Fame coaches. From Coach Coop, who I played for, to Coach Tressel to Coach Meyer, three Hall of Fame coaches who did it in many different ways.

That's probably the greatest thing I learned, that there are many different ways to do this. There are many different ways to lead. There are many different ways to win and to grow a program. But it's got to be you. It's got to be

authentic and consistent in all those things.

Taking things from each and every one of those guys that I was fortunate enough to spend a lot of time with, whether it was five years, six years, ten years and five years, that's a lot of experience.

But the eight or nine months where I had an opportunity to kind of do things on my own really kind of showed me how important the true leadership behind all that we do is.

And the failures I had, especially in those eight or nine months, probably as much as those other times with those guys have really helped me be who I am.

So I think there is a shape and there's a part of all of it, and it doesn't -- you could come and you could see and you could recognize things from all of them, but I think more than anything it's the ability to be consistent. It's the ability to believe in what it is you're doing and be authentic in everything that you're doing.

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