

Big Ten Football Media Days

Thursday, July 25, 2024

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Maryland Terrapins

Coach Michael Locksley

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Coach Locksley, we'll begin with your opening statement.

MICHAEL LOCKSLEY: First of all, appreciate you guys hanging in there. As we like to say, head butt the finish the last day. I also want to thank our SEC guys and some of the other guys that showed up without a tie. Going last in there at the end, it gave me the ability to come in and have an open collar, which I enjoy having.

It's funny because as I walked to fly here, Jordan Phillips said, Coach, look at you. You're looking sweet.

I said, You know what? I'm comfortable, and I'm confident.

That's funny because that kind of defines the 2024 iteration of the Maryland football family, a comfortable and confident team. Not comfortable as in we think we've arrived, but comfortable in knowing who we are. I'm in year six here at Maryland, and to know who you are and to understand what it takes to get to where we can compete for championships, our players have embraced that.

I also come to you humbly because it's funny, this is an election year, and I was just the newly elected mayor of Terpsville. So I'm excited to serve Terpsville this season. When you think of Maryland and what we've navigated since I took over in 2019, we've navigated some enormous change in the college landscape. We dealt with the pandemic. We dealt with the NIL, transfer portal stuff. Then we dealt with conference realignment.

I can tell you, when you have big changes like we faced in college athletics the last few years, it creates angst, it creates anxiety, it can be frustrating. But for us at Maryland, we see it as a great opportunity. When you look at how we've been able to navigate it, it starts with the three pillars that we kind of use from a vision standpoint. In our alignment, it starts with our president, Darryll Pines, who came in the same year I did, Damon Evans, my athletic director. That alignment we have, we've all had to navigate a changing world to get to the respective rooms that we're in.

I think that starts with the first pillar for us is we operate out of an expanded room now. When you expand the room, you open up the doors for new ways of thinking, new ways of doing things. When I think of the Big Ten now and then with the addition of the four new teams, we've expanded the room there as well. It's not just a diversity thing. It's about bringing in different ideas, different ways, different regions, and with the addition of those four teams and the way we set ourselves up at Maryland, we've been able to navigate these things at a really high level to the point where we have consistently become a team that people know has an opportunity to win.

We embrace this opportunity with expanding that room. When it brings these new ideas, it also gives us an opportunity with the second pillar is for us is giving to the community. Over the last season in itself, our players have done over 700 hours of community service, and we feel like, when you're being of service to your team and to your community, it makes it a lot easier to develop a winning culture because you understand, as a Maryland football player, that nothing is going to be given to us. We're going to have to earn or take everything that we get.

We're here now -- because of this, we're here to challenge status quo. When you look at the lack of divisions in the Big Ten, it's an opportunity for places like Maryland to break down that status quo that the top of our league has to be the same three or four teams.

There was a time as a coach when I was scared to dream big, and I want my players to hear me talk about this. It's something to stand up here in front of you guys and tell you that we want to compete for a Big Ten Championship. By doing so, that allows you to hopefully compete for a National Championship.

Then you'll be ridiculed. They'll say, you only win eight games. You don't win big games. For a long time, I used to be worried about that. As I like to say, my give a crap gauge is on E. I want my players to understand, I want them to dream big. I want my players to embrace that we are here to compete for Big Ten Championships, and we do it by being of service, not just to ourselves, which



today's society kind of leads us to, but to do it by being of service to our teammates and to the community that we want to support.

The third pillar for these visions is being player led. I've oftentimes said that, when it's a coach-led team, you're a good team. But when you're player led, it gives you a chance to activate leadership from within. You have accountability. You have buy in. It means a little bit more when your friend tells you that you're not living up to the standard than when your coach tells you.

I can tell you that our team has embraced those three things.

I know a lot of you guys are saying, what are you going to do without Lia, man? I'm still trying to figure it out myself, which is why I lost my weight and got my comfortable and confident clothes on.

Lia left a tremendous legacy in that quarterback room, and a little known fact, he and I met every day from the start of the season until our last game at 10:00 at night until 12:00, 1:00 in the morning. The work ethic and the way he approached playing quarterback, he left a legacy in that quarterback room.

Now as we transition to becoming what I feel is a defensive-led team, where we have the seven returning starters that are coming back and a handful of other guys that have played some really significant minutes, I can tell you that Lia Tagovailoa played a huge role in the foundation that we're building on to compete for championships.

I would be remiss if I didn't talk about a guy that still is impacting my life. Coach Saban is retiring obviously from football but now working on TV. He still has a significant role and still plays a significant role as a board member for the National Coalition of Minority Football Coaches, an organization I started after the pandemic, and Coach plays a huge role and continues to help guide and shape as we navigate preparing, promoting, and producing the next level of coaches.

So I wouldn't be here now as the head coach at Maryland if it wasn't for the three years I spent under Coach's tutelage. I know my family and I wish him well in his retirement.

Last but not least, our team. I brought three guys here today that you guys will really enjoy talking to, and they embody what this new iteration of the Maryland football family looks like. When you talk about a guy like Ruben Hyppolite, Ruben came back for an extra year that was granted. Here's a guy that took the vision that he saw, that

I showed him a vision, and he jumped on board before he became a fruition. He's part of building us to a team that's won two straight bowl games, part of players that have been drafted the last two years. You see Ruben, who had a strong relief factor.

You look at Jordan, who had a tremendous work ethic. There's not a guy in the country that I think will outwork Jordan Phillips. You'll see the passion he has for the game.

Last but not least, Tai Felton, a guy who shows tremendous resiliency as a player. Tai is one of those guys who has waited his turn, and now I expect him to be paired and partnered with Kaden Prather to become a receiving corps that you guys will come to know as you move forward.

Lastly I want to thank our supporters and all the people who have supported Maryland through the years for giving us this opportunity in this new college landscape to make an everlasting impact on the game of college football.

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

Q. Coach, you talked about community. In regards to what you founded and the fact that the Big Ten has the most African American coaches, over almost half than any other conference in the country, what does that do for you? Especially you have James Franklin, one of the longest-tenured coaches. And in regards to the community in the DMV area, how have you managed to kind of lock down the top recruits in that area and keep them home at Maryland?

MICHAEL LOCKSLEY: Yeah, a two-part question. I think first the one is about the Big Ten and the diversity here. And I mentioned this in my opening statement that any time you expand the room, that's a good thing. Just imagine if everything operated like a football locker room. We would not have some of the issues that we have today. By expanding the room with the diversity we have in coaching, we're giving new ways of looking at things, new ways of doing things, a different kind of voice or perspective.

That's what Maryland has been, and that's one of the values we've added when I talk about the alignment we have on our campus. When you start talking about the DMV and the recruiting factor there, I can tell you it's one of the most fruitful areas in the country. We've built our foundation on local players.

When you see a guy like a Deonte Banks, who was a low three-star recruit get drafted in the first round, you see the



D.J. Moores get drafted in the first round, it shows that we do kind of have an idea of what it should look like. And now, because of the development of those types of players in our program, it's opened the door for us to start reaping the benefits of some of the top players, not just in the DMV, but in the country with the way we've expanded the room in the Big Ten to compete.

Q. I was so pleased to hear about those 700 hours that your team put in. I'm curious, which players and staff are leading the charge in community impact at your school?

MICHAEL LOCKSLEY: The good thing is part of the fabric of our program is that we pay our players to go do these community service things. They're all making an impact. I can tell you that Dante Trader I know is on the Allstate's Good Works list for this season. We've had players each year be a part of it. I was a recipient of it as a coach of that team a year ago.

Again, we're big on knowing that, if you're of service to your community, understanding that great things happen for you when you pay things forward. That's what I'm doing with the coalition that I started. That's what I'm encouraging my players to do in our community while they are then able to also take advantage of the opportunities that the NIL stuff has opened up for them.

Q. You talked about the quarterback room, but on defense you guys return seven starters, added Jalen Huskey. What are your thoughts on the defense kind of going into the season with Brian Williams stepping into his third year as DC?

MICHAEL LOCKSLEY: I'm really excited. If you study my background, my first half of my career, the first eight, nine years, I coached on defense. I played defense in college. So now as we transition to a defensive-led team, I'm going to put my defensive hat on, and you guys can say I'm a defensive guy too.

No, B-Dub and the defensive staff, Lance Thompson, James Thomas, Zac Spavital, they all have done a tremendous job -- Coach Aazaar is back -- putting together and putting our players in the best position to have success. And to me, that's what great coaches do, they put their players in the best possible position. And Brian Williams has done that each year when you look at how our defense has improved. Brian is one of those guys that I know people are going to come knocking doors down to hire, as he should be on anybody's list that's looking for a head coach.

But I'm expecting our defense to now lead us. We've been

an offensive-led team for the last few years. We've played great defense. That's not to take away from that, and that's not to say we won't score points on offense because we've got weapons. Once we identify the starting quarterback, I think you'll see the offense grow into a role where they complement each other.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

