

Big Ten Football Media Days

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Chicago, Illinois, USA

Michigan Wolverines

Coach Kyle Whittingham

Press Conference



KYLE WHITTINGHAM: Thank you. Great to be here. Media Day has always been one of my favorite days of the year. This year's no different. Means football season is right around the corner.

Excited to be at Michigan. What a place. University that really has it all. You talk about resources, academics, tradition, history, the whole nine yards. Feel very blessed and very fortunate to be able to lead the Wolverine program.

It been seven months now. Starting to feel like we're settling in. We've had some real good things going on with our players. Winter conditioning, which was back January, February, went exceptionally well. Transitioned into spring ball. Got a lot done there. Finishing up the summer conditioning right now. Then preparing for fall camp, which will start next week. Then September 5th we'll kick off the season against Western Michigan. Looking forward to that.

Look at it like Christmas where you get a Christmas present, unwrap it and see what you got. Really don't know what to expect when you're working with each other for all those months.

I can tell you right now it's been a very good transition for me and my family. Of course, my good friend Mack Brown said the best part of the job is the day you get hired till the first game. That's the period where you can do no wrong. That's been all positive (smiling).

I think we got a good football team. I can't predict how good we can be or where we'll end up. I can say if we're playing meaningful games in November, that's probably for us a successful season, a chance to have something to build on.

I think we got a great staff. Got two exceptional coordinators, offense and defense, in Jason Beck and Jay Hill. Kerry Coombs does a great job with the special teams. I think we have a staff that is really top-notch. Players have really bought into the staff, bought into the

strength program.

That's one thing about the players at Michigan right now, they're hungry and ready to get back in a season, get some football. They've been through a lot in the last four or five years. Hopefully we can put the drama to bed and just get back to being student-athletes and having a great college experience.

So questions...

Q. I wanted to ask about you Bryce Underwood and some of the strengths that you see in him, some things where you feel like he can work on.

KYLE WHITTINGHAM: Okay, Bryce Underwood. First of all, I think the expectations might have been a little high for him last year. He just turned 18 years old, true freshman, thrust into the starting role of the Michigan Wolverines.

I don't know what people did expect, but he was able to win nine ballgames and put up some decent numbers. He knows, we know those numbers have to improve. Given the circumstances, I thought he did some good things.

What we've seen since we've been there, since we've analyzed the film, first of all physically he's got everything you want: 6'4", 230 pounds, runs about a 4.6 40. Has a cannon for an arm, throws well on the move. He has a very high ceiling. It think he's going to turn out to be a very successful quarterback at Michigan.

His work ethic second to none. He wants to be great as badly as any player I've ever been around. He's still got some things to work on. The spring game wasn't really indicative of the progress that he made during the spring practices. That was a game where we divided the team up exactly in half. We didn't have the first O-line working together or the first offense working together. It was a little bit of a hodgepodge situation finding enough guys to get through the game.

We as coaches, and in particular Coach Jason Beck, our coordinator, feel very good about where he is. He has some more things we got to work on, but he's cleaned up



some of the footwork in the pocket. His re-progressions, pocket presence.

One thing about Bryce, he does a really good job of throwing accurate balls on the move. We've got to make sure we as coaches structure that in, change the launch point for him. Also involve him in the run game. He's a very capable runner.

A lot of what he we did with Devon Dampier last year at Utah is what you're going to see Bryce doing this year.

Q. Michigan has had some issues in the past two to three years with coaches and scandals. Do you believe that you are under a limelight?

KYLE WHITTINGHAM: Good question. I mean, it's reality. There has been a lot of drama, as I mentioned before. We hope that we've come to the end of that and we're ready to proceed just with the business of playing football and winning football games and graduating players and putting the emphasis on things that should have the emphasis.

There were some unfortunate things that happened. It's not my place to really speak out on it. I wasn't there, I was not involved.

I can tell you now we have a very hungry and willing group of players that have worked their tail off for the last seven months and are eager to get the season started. Very good leadership as well.

I'm just excited to make the first thing first, which is graduating and winning football games.

Q. What have you learned about the Ohio State-Michigan rivalry in your first seven months on the job? How do you approach that game?

KYLE WHITTINGHAM: I haven't learned really much more than I already knew. It's a national game. Everybody knows about it. It's 'the game' as we call it. It's a great importance to both sides obviously. But I'm an old-school coach. We got 11 games that we play before that, so we're not going to get ahead of ourselves.

Make no mistake, I understand the implications that it has. Friend of mine, Urban Meyer, he was at the other place for a few years. We talked about the game over the course of that time span.

Very well-versed in what it means, the intensity of it, the national allure that it has. Our players are the same. I mean, everybody knows that that game's looming out there. I think the best-case scenario, it comes down to that

12th game. That's for all the marbles in the Big Ten. I think that would be ideal. Hopefully that happens.

Q. Lane Kiffin at SEC media days last week indicated he suggested a salary cap for incoming freshmen, only so much. I'd like your feeling on that. Overall, should there be a salary cap of NIL for power schools? Ryan Day indicated yesterday pretty much the sky's the limit for him.

KYLE WHITTINGHAM: Well, the sky's not the limit for everybody.

But I believe, Lane Kiffin, I think that's a good concept. I believe we have to have a salary cap. I believe in an NFL minor league model for college football is in its best interest. Maybe not exactly item for item, but conceptually.

I can tell you right now with NIL, rising 20, 30, 40 percent a year, it's not sustainable to stay on the path we're on right now. We can't, except for maybe Ohio. I guess they're the ones that can.

It's something that there's no guardrails, no parameters. I believe there's got to be a seismic change in college football. I believe there will be in the next two, three, four years. Part of that will be getting a handle on the NIL and the salary cap.

Q. You mentioned the extenuating circumstances of Bryce's development last year, everything that your players have been through. That being said, still won nine games. What can a little stability do for that program?

KYLE WHITTINGHAM: Well, we'll find out. Distractions are something you want to minimize. Hopefully we can put all that stuff in the rearview mirror, like I said, get back to the basics the playing football and being a student-athlete.

These players, to their credit, as you mentioned, winning nine games under the circumstances really speaks to who they are as young men, their character, their ability to focus and handle adversity.

It will be refreshing, I believe, for the program to hopefully be in a situation where it's all about football and recruiting and academics, and none of the extracurricular stuff.

Q. Talking about limiting distractions, you just mentioned Bryce may have had too much thrust on him last year. About a month ago at a youth football camp, he declared himself the best football player to come out of Michigan. When you heard that as his coach, do you like him having that confidence or



would you like more or restraint going into the season?

KYLE WHITTINGHAM: I think you want your quarterback to be confident. If that's his belief and feel, that's great. I have no problem with that. May be in his best interest maybe to not put that pressure on himself in that way.

Bryce is a very confident young man. Obviously very successful in high school. I'm not sure if he was meaning the best player from the state of Michigan or for the university. I didn't really talk in detail about it. I just know that the players respect him, they voted him team captain by a landslide. Wasn't even close. He's got their respect, a lot of confidence in himself.

I really can't say that that was a big deal to me.

Q. You've seen many defenses in different conferences. Have you reviewed the Big Ten? What type of defense do you think can be successful in this league?

KYLE WHITTINGHAM: Well, yeah, I haven't had a chance to do a deep dive into everyone in the Big Ten. From when I got on board, it was recruiting, taking care of our own program.

But I know defensively in the Big Ten you better be able to stop the run. To me that is universal in football. The key to playing great defense is turn a team one-dimensional by taking away the run, getting them in third-and-long, and when they're in third-and-long, get after the quarterback. It's a pretty simple equation. That will be no different here at Michigan.

Conversely, we have to be able to run the football. Last year at the place I was, University of Utah, we were second in the nation running the football. If you run the football and defend the run, your chances of success go way up, so I think that's going to be a key.

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