

# Big 12 Conference Football Media Days

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Arlington, Texas, USA

## Texas Longhorns

## Coach Steve Sarkisian

### Press Conference



STEVE SARKISIAN: It's great to be here. I think this is always an exciting time of year when you're thinking about the kickoff of college football. Media Days always seem to be the ones that kind of set that off and set that stage for everybody.

I love this time because I think that I get to be here with four or five of our players and spend some quality time with them and have them the opportunity to share about our program and what we've been doing.

I think, first of all, thank you all for taking the time for being here with us and spending this time with us, because without you we couldn't celebrate college football the way that I think it should. We have an unbelievable game. It's an unbelievable sport.

And I know we love to talk a lot about the things that are wrong with our game right now, but there's a lot of things right about our game. The game of college football, the sport of college football is amazing. I'm extremely fortunate to be the head coach of the University of Texas to be a part of this, and I cherish it every day. I do not take it lightly.

As far as our team goes, year two is exciting. Year two is always exciting when you take over a program because when you come into year one, there's so many things to instill in your program, from philosophies to schemes to discipline to all the things that it goes into, and when you get into year two, now those things really start to come to life.

I had an old mentor of mine talk to me about the first time I became a head coach. He said there's two ways when you take over a program you can approach it. One, to do as many things as you can similar to the last staff, and that will probably be easier on the players, be easier on the staff because it'll be normal to them, it'll be something that they'll feel more comfortable with. But when you do it that way, you'd better be prepared for similar results.

The other way is to go truly implement what you're about, who you are, knowing that that way is probably going to be a little bit more difficult, that the buy-in from the players might take a little longer, the transition for the players and the staff might be a little bit more difficult. There may be more bumps in the road. There may be more rocky waters, which clearly we endured last season. But when you come out on the other side of it, man, now you've got a team that has really bought in to what you want to do and the staff really bought in to what you want to do and a roster that is built the way you want it built to go achieve the success you want to achieve.

I think that's where we're at year two.

Just off-the-cuff, I was having lunch with all the guys that are here today and listening to them talk about what year two feels like in comparison to year one, it's night and day. For a head coach, that's really encouraging because we've got a lot of new faces on our team, but when your leadership of your team believes so strongly in what you're doing, it's a lot easier for the young guys to fall in line.

When I think of young guys, just so everybody is aware, we have 35 new scholarship players on our roster this year, of our 85 total number scholarships. Seven of those of transfers, 28 of them are freshmen, 10 of those freshmen were here in January. So a lot of new faces here this summer.

And then when you look at our total roster of our 85 scholarships, 57 of those young men are freshmen and sophomores. So we're a young football team. But what I love about it, like I said, is the veterans that we do have, there's a tremendous amount of buy-in.

We're excited for the fall. We're excited to get this thing started. I love the work that our guys have put in. I love the chemistry, the bond that our team has forged together, and looking forward to watching our guys compete come September.

**Q. Year two of building the Texas program, but you're in a unique situation. You also have to plan for the**

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**future, going to a different conference. What kind of decisions do you have to make with sort of not just immediately with the program but also knowing that you've got a different landscape coming up in a year or two?**

STEVE SARKISIAN: Yeah, I think for us, having come from the SEC, I had an idea of a style of play that I wanted to play regardless of the conference that we were going to be in. That was a big physical front on both sides of the ball with speed on the perimeter. We had already started to develop our roster and build our roster that way.

So regardless of playing this year in the Big 12 or next year in the Big 12 or whatever this is going to look like, our style of play, our roster that we have in place is one that regardless of who we play is going to be one that fits us and what we want to do, and I think that we're moving in that direction to make that happen.

So it's not as challenging for me because I don't think that we're trying to shift one way and go to another. This is just our belief of who we want to be as a team.

I think we saw it some in recruiting last year. We signed seven offensive linemen, eight defensive linemen, so 15 linemen of the 35 guys that joined our team. There's an idea, yes, that's the direction we want to go in, and then to use one kid as an example, we sign a receiver from Spearman, Texas, Brenen Thompson, who ran a 10.2, 100 meters. There's the speed on the perimeter. Regardless of who we're playing or where we're playing, there's a brand of football we want to adhere to.

**Q. I wanted to ask you about the linemen; how has the summer gone with all of the new offensive and defensive linemen, and has the way the summer workouts structure with the coaches monitoring that, has that gone about as good as you had hoped?**

STEVE SARKISIAN: Yeah, I'm going to answer your second question first. So for the summer workouts, it's been fantastic. The idea that we get to work with our players from skill development and spend time with them, especially from a lineman's perspective, for Coach Flood and Coach Davis, I think that it's been an integral part to the growth of these guys even before training camp.

We signed those seven freshman offensive linemen, but only one of them was an early admit. So the other six didn't show up until after Memorial Day.

For Coach Flood to be able to work with those guys, meet with them, work on techniques, fundamentals, has been tremendous. Those guys, that freshman class I think is

poised to do something special at the University of Texas. They've got the right work ethic. They've got the right mindset. They have the physical traits. Now ultimately we've got to put it all together.

I think them coming on board has created a lot of healthy competition, not only for themselves but for the returners.

So I think twofold, competition should bring the best out of all of us, not only for those young guys but for the older players. We're excited about the addition of them.

I think the summer so far has been good to us, and then we've got to see how far we can take them come fall camp and come when the season rolls around.

**Q. How has Gary Patterson been to work with, and what influence has he had so far?**

STEVE SARKISIAN: Yeah, having Coach Patterson on board has probably been something that has excited me the most out of a lot of things we've done this off-season. I've always been intrigued by Coach Patterson from afar. I've always admired his defensive mind. I've always admired the style of play in which his teams played. I've always admired his ability to recruit and to project players to different positions in the recruiting process.

So to get him on board, which was not easy, I kept kind of swinging on him to get him to come down to Austin, has been fantastic.

The one thing that I've learned more about Coach Patterson than any is the person that he is. He's got great rapport with the other coaches on staff, with the other staff members, with our players. And then the biggest thing for me is him being a sounding board for our defensive staff, him being a sounding board for Coach Kwiatkoski throughout spring ball as we're game planning for our early game opponents of just different ways to play things, adjustments that may need to be made based on if something could occur. He's.

A very forward thinker, and like I said, he's been a joy to have on staff, and looking forward to just being around him for the next six, seven months as the season unfolds.

**Q. I think I know the answer to this, but have you named a starting quarterback? And if not, what's going to go into that decision? I know your first year at USC, Cody Kessler was the guy, but you have some unknown quantities here with Ewers and Card.**

STEVE SARKISIAN: Yeah, one, I think we're in a really good position. The guys, the local guys that cover us on a

daily basis, I think you know the value I place on the quarterback position. My humble opinion, it's the most important position in sports for a lot of reasons.

I think the more quality players you can have in that room for the healthy competition, to push one another, to prepare themselves for their future but also the short-term future of playing a season is vitally important.

We have a unique luxury of having Hudson Card, Quinn Ewers, Maalik Murphy. Those guys are all quality players. The beauty of the summer is we've been around these guys all summer long and been able to be on the field with them with skill development, to see some of the growth that they could make from spring ball into summer. No, we haven't made a decision yet, but I don't think it'll take quite as long as maybe last fall took us.

We'll see. Time will tell. But I've been really impressed with both these guys in Hudson and Quinn and the work that they've done to prepare themselves.

And I think they've earned a lot of respect from their teammates, which is the most important thing, but they've definitely got the respect of myself, Coach Milwee, our entire coaching staff, and I think we're going to be in good hands.

Like any football season goes, very rarely do you just go through one entire season with one quarterback having to make a play to be a championship-caliber team. Somewhere in there that other guy has to show up and make a play for you or win a game for you unexpectedly, and I think that we've got two very capable young men at that position.

**Q. Coach, just kind of curious, what are some things that you may have learned in year one, whether it's as an individual, the team, the conference, your staff that may help you guys be more successful in year two?**

STEVE SARKISIAN: Yeah, I think the biggest thing that has stood out to me that I touched on with the local -- you guys before, but I do think this is important, I didn't think I did a great job a year ago of developing the team and the quality of team and the bond on our team as well as I would have liked.

Granted, we had some difficult circumstances with not having a facility done yet and being kind of in temporary housing, to just not making a great connection, to ultimately not identifying the leadership in a really good way.

So it's been a huge point of emphasis of ours in January all

the way through now of bonding as a team and becoming a team and becoming accountable to one another and relying on one another and being really transparent, open and honest and sharing with one another so you can really get to know your teammates.

I think in this day and age, most of these guys, when they have a free moment, they get on their phone and they text or get on Instagram or Twitter or whatever social media, and they don't talk to one another. We've been trying to foster that type of environment. It's amazing to see what our team is like. We did a team outing yesterday, and I could hear them, and it wasn't a bunch of guys sitting on their phone. When they're on their phone, it's silent. I could hear them laughing, talking, sharing with one another. And ultimately that's what great teams have. That's how you win these tight games in the fourth quarter.

That was probably the biggest thing that I learned that -- I don't think caught me off guard, but I'm like dang it, I wish I could have done something a little bit better, that was it.

I'm proud to say that I think we have. Time will tell what the fall looks like, but I think we have. We've got a tight-knit football team right now.

**Q. With the era of the transfer portal, there's a fear that players may leave if they don't get enough playing time. You have a lot of offensive weapons. How do you plan on distributing the ball?**

STEVE SARKISIAN: Well, I think there's a lot in that question, so I'm going to go with our team first. I've been fortunate throughout my career to have been surrounded by some really good players, and not just really good players, a lot of them on the same teams throughout my time.

There was a time I was coaching Reggie Bush and LenDale White in the same backfield with Matt Leinart at quarterback. All those guys potentially could have won a Heisman Trophy, and two of them did. I was calling plays at Alabama when I had four first-round receivers all on the field at the same time in Jerry Jeudy, Henry Ruggs, DeVonta Smith and Jaylen Waddle, with Tua Tagovailoa at quarterback and Najee Harris at running back.

In the end, when you focus on the team aspect first and knowing that, hey, if the team does well, that means everybody is eating. Everybody is getting their opportunities, and when my opportunity comes, I make my plays.

This era of the transfer portal really is no different. If we want to buy into the selfish idea of society wants to make

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us fall into, which is social media, then we are going to have a problem. But I think we spend a lot of time talking about team and minimizing self and knowing that my job is to the team, and if the team does well, the individual accolades, rewards and things will come as a byproduct of that, and I think our team understands that.

In the end, if we're going to be a successful team, all of these offensive weapons that we have, they'll all be really productive because we're going to need all of them to be as successful a team as we can be.

**Q. You've been recruiting the quarterback position really well, landing Quinn Ewers, who was the No. 1 quarterback in the '21 class, and now a commitment from the top recruit in the '23 class. How have those guys impacted your program, and do you think those guys are helping other recruits come?**

STEVE SARKISIAN: Well, I touched on this earlier. I do believe that the quarterback position is the most important position in sports, and that's not just because of being able to throw post routes and curl routes and slant routes. I think the best quarterbacks, the great quarterbacks are influential people.

In this day and age of the players being able to connect with one another in the recruiting process, they do have an impact on where certain people go, and so you have to be very mindful of the types of kids you recruit at the quarterback position, the things that they liken to, the things that are important to them, because generally, if it's important to them, then it's going to be important to the people that they are connected to.

Generally those are going to be the guys that ultimately join your team.

I do think it matters. I do think recruiting is about momentum. We've hit some momentum streaks here over the last 18 months, and hopefully we can continue to have those momentum streaks throughout my time here. But I think, yeah, there is a lot that goes into the quarterback because not only do they matter on the field when it's game day, I think it matters in recruiting, I think it matters in morale, I think quarterbacks matter in the locker room.

We'll continue to recruit that position at a very high level.

**Q. There's a lot of excitement each and every year about the new football season. What would you say, if you had to talk to the students, the fans, is going to be the most exciting part about next season after your first season just finished?**

STEVE SARKISIAN: Well, I think for me, one of my most memorable moments was the first time I ever got to run out of the tunnel at DKR. To see 100,000 people in there wearing their burnt orange and white, screaming, yelling, it's unbelievable.

I think our student section plays an impact in that. I think they provide a lot of energy into the stadium, the students, the band. The earlier they're there, and more in their seats, the more energy it feels like is in the stadium.

All I would encourage is to get there early, make sure we're not sitting in our seats, that we're standing up and that we create the game day home field advantage at DKR, one that is as intimidating as anywhere in the country, which it can be.

**Q. You play Alabama this year; what did it mean to your career when Nick hired you in 2016, and also what do you take from his program and try to implement in yours?**

STEVE SARKISIAN: Yeah, an unbelievable amount of respect for Coach Saban and that program. Without Nick Saban, I wouldn't be sitting here today in front of y'all. I owe a great deal to him. I owe so much to him, and I will never, ever forget that he and Ms. Terry have been tremendous in my life and my wife's life and what they've done for us on and off the field, I owe them a great deal.

With that being said, I can't wait to play them because I know what he puts into it. I know the work ethic, I know the discipline that he has personally. I know what he instills into his organization, into that team.

I think ultimately that's what you try to take when you leave Alabama, because you can't try to be Nick Saban; there's only one. You have to be a Steve Sarkisian. But the discipline and commitment that he has personally to that program that then he instills into his team and into his own organization is something that you try to emulate.

I cherished my time there with him. I loved my time there with him, and looking forward to playing him in week two.

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