

Big 12 Conference Football Media Days

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TCU Horned Frogs

Sonny Dykes

Press Conference



SONNY DYKES: I'm really excited to be here again. I want to thank the media for being here and for covering the Big 12. I'm really excited about what's going on in our conference right now.

I'm also a little bit sad. Just wanted to touch on the fact that Chuck Carlton is not here with us. Chuck always did a tremendous job covering the Big 12 from the Dallas Morning News, and really sad that he's not here with us. Wish he was, but certainly appreciate what he meant to the league and enjoyed his coverage over the years, and just wanted to say that.

Again, glad to be here. To me it's a signal that football season is right around the corner. It's a very exciting time of the year.

We're blessed to be in the Big 12 and in this tremendous facility. We're blessed to be in a conference that I think has proven to be one of the top conferences in college football.

You go and you look at the parity in the league last year, to me it was unrivaled. I think there's not very many leagues, when any team in the league can beat the best two or three teams, and that certainly is the possibility in the Big 12 week in and week out.

I think it makes this league incredibly unique and incredibly different.

There's obviously some changes happening with Texas and Oklahoma exiting the league, but we welcome some really good, capable members that I think are going to make the league better.

The four teams coming in have had a great history of success. I have tremendous respect for all those coaches at those institutions and the commitment of those institutions to prepare those schools to go and compete in the Big 12, the resources those institutions can provide are

going to allow those teams to be really successful. They all have a great recruiting footprint, and they have the things you have to have to have a strong football program.

Excited about adding those teams. I just want to shout out to Brett Yormark and the leadership in the Big 12. I truly believe we have the best conference commissioner in college athletics. I think his vision is unparalleled.

I love the confidence that he brings to the league. I think he's got a great understanding of how to position the Big 12 to be incredibly successful moving forward.

Couldn't be any more confident in a commissioner that I am with Brett and appreciate what he's done for the league so far and know he's just getting started.

Excited about that, and feel really strong about the future of the Big 12 and our role in it.

Last year was a fun season for TCU football. We came last year and didn't have very high expectations. I think we were picked seventh in the preseason poll, and I probably would have picked us lower, honestly, than I think the media did just based on what was coming back and the coaching change and all the stuff that transpired.

But man, you've got to give our players a ton of credit. We had a good nucleus of players. But what made that group interesting and fun to coach is we were better collectively than we were individually, and that's the sign of a great team, and I think that's what we had last year.

When the season started I felt like we were an average football team, honestly probably slightly below average. We won some games, got a little confidence, hit the second part of our schedule and started to win some games and became probably a slightly above-average football team.

Won some games and figured out how to win, became a probably good football team, and I think at times last year we were a great football team.

It was a fun ride to go on. Those players, man, their level



of commitment and their respect for each other was really just fun to be a part of, and it was a hell of a ride and something I'll never forget.

At the same time, we've got to move forward. What happened last year is certainly not going to have any bearing on what's going to happen this year. A big challenge for us. I think we've got a lot of eyeballs on us moving forward, and that's what you want. You want to have high expectations for your program. You want people to pay attention.

I think everybody has slogans for their program, and I think when you think about TCU football, our deal is we try to be all steak and no sizzle. I think that's kind of what we want.

We want to fly under the radar a little bit, and I think it's a role that we relish. And we want to overperform and underpromise. That's kind of our mentality in our program.

Let me just say this, too. I think a big part of TCU's success before I got here and certainly now under Coach Patterson in the past was our leadership. I think we have tremendous leadership from the top down. Victor Boschini, our chancellor, is outstanding. He provides all the resources that we need.

Again, I feel like I've got the best chancellor in college football, the best athletic director in Jeremiah Donati, and I think we're a great team. I think we share a vision for what we want TCU's program to look like, and they certainly provide the resources that we need to compete at the very highest level.

Blessed and fortunate to be here and excited about this season.

Q. Last year you had one of the most explosive offenses in the nation, about 27 seconds per play. Now Kendall Briles comes in, ran a much faster offense for Arkansas, 23 seconds. Are there any wrinkles we'll see with TCU's offense?

SONNY DYKES: Yeah, we did, we lost some really good football players. You look, Max Duggan finished second in the Heisman Trophy. We had three wide receivers drafted. We had an offensive lineman, Steve Avila, drafted in the second round. So we lost some significant weapons.

The thing I love, though, is the guys that we have coming back. I think it all begins with your offensive line. I'm really excited about both of our tackles that are coming back. To me, that's where it all begins, up front.

Kendall coming in, I think he shares the same vision I do. I

think we come from the same place as far as our football background in a lot of ways. He wants to run the ball. He wants to be a physical offense that runs the football, and I think that's what I want to be, as well.

I think we saw the value in having a tough, physical, hard-nosed run game last year and the success we had up front and the success Kendre Miller had and Max running the ball. All those things were important to us having the success that we had.

Kendall shares that same philosophy. I think that the offense will look pretty similar, but it truly comes from a different place. Garrett was more of a traditional air-raid guy and had pretty air-raid-heavy or air-raid-centric concepts. Kendall has got a lot of the same things but probably a little bit more wrinkles than we had in the past. Like you said, has a history of playing very fast.

Our pace of play will be determined by figuring out ways to win football games, and sometimes going slow and protecting our defense is the way to go to give ourselves the best chance to win. Sometimes you have to make those adjustments. You look at Texas last year, we go into that game, two high-powered offenses, and it's 3-0 at halftime.

So you've got to adapt as you get into those games, and you have to do what it takes to win games. Kendall shares that philosophy just like I do.

Excited about getting him hired. I think he's a tremendous leader. I think he provides a lot of confidence to that group. I think our players really believe in him.

I think they really like the system that we're running, and he certainly has a lot of experience calling it. Excited to see what it looks like.

The big challenge is always to get the pieces to fit together. I really like the pieces that we have. We've got some really high-quality young players that I think have a chance to step up. Also some very high-quality transfers, as well.

Man, that's what makes it fun is seeing that stuff come together. You could see the beginning of it happening in the spring and certainly needs to carry over to the fall. Really optimistic about that group that we have offensively.

Q. Just wanted to ask you, first of all, congratulations on last year. I know it's last year. You talked a little bit about flying under the radar. I know you guys are now kind of the standard bearer. Two parts: Will it be difficult to keep the guys grounded after such a great year, and talk a little bit if you would about -- you

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

talked about Kendall. Talk a little bit if you would about replacing not only Max but replacing a guy like Deuce Vaughn.

SONNY DYKES: Yeah, I think Kendre Miller, but yes.

I think what made the team really good last year was our ability to not focus on stuff that we couldn't control. I think that was what made the group special was as the season rolled along and as you start to stack wins and you get ranked and no one ever said, we're 4-0 and we're ranked or we're 5-0 and we're this or we're leading the Big 12 or we're this in the College Football Playoff. Our players did a remarkable job of just focusing on trying to get better every day.

It's a cliché, and I've coached teams in the past that probably haven't done a very good job of focusing on those things and have focused on the external stuff too much instead of, hey, just going out and getting better and improving.

Man, last year's team was really special that way. I never heard one conversation about the College Football Playoff rankings. Truly we never had one as a coaching staff. Our players never had one that I heard.

Our deal was hey, man, let's control what we can control, let's work hard, let's practice well, let's go out and play hard and be great at situational football.

So the guys really bought into that philosophy. I don't really worry too much about that because I think that they saw how freeing that was. A big part of that was the fact that we were picked seventh. There wasn't a lot of pressure. There wasn't a lot of expectations. We just got to go out and play every Saturday, and the challenge this year will be to not take on that burden and not worry about the expectations of the program moving forward. They were able to do it last year, so I anticipate them being able to do it this year.

Losing Max and Kendre, what made last year's team special was leadership. Max was a tremendous -- in some ways once-in-a-lifetime leader, and Steve Avila was a world-class leader, as well. We just had guys that willed us to victory, and the challenge is going to be to find those guys.

I think they're in our program, but it's like anything else, it's our job to bring that part of them out, and if we can do that, then I anticipate us having a good year.

Q. You mentioned a little bit, but can you take us a little bit through the process of identifying Kendall

Briles as your next offensive coordinator and just identifying him as a coach but also the due diligence maybe that you did beforehand?

SONNY DYKES: Yeah, yeah. A couple of things. You know, you go back and you look at kind of what happened at Baylor. I was a young head coach when those things were happening, and so I followed it. I had worked with Art prior at Texas Tech as an assistant and knew him a long time as a high school coach.

The thing that I always try to do is learn from situations. So when all that happened at Baylor, the thing I tried to do was, okay, let's make sure this never happens in my program, and how can I go about doing that, how can I learn from mistakes that were made.

I think that we all want to do that. I think that colleges across the board, whether it's Title IX, reporting, everything has gotten better because of what occurred there.

I did a lot of homework in that, and I talked to a lot of people that were directly involved in that situation to learn from it, and that was a number of years ago, and then had a chance to see guys move on from there and see how they did, if they had any issues that plagued them moving forward.

Certainly all of those things were things I considered when I hired Kendall. I knew it was going to be an unpopular hire in some ways because of some things that had happened, but at the same time, I was very confident from knowing Kendall from the time he was 13 years old and just talking to people that were directly involved in that situation.

There was a tremendous amount of due diligence. A number of years ago when I was at SMU I did a lot of due diligence, as well, talked to a lot of people that were directly involved at Baylor and saw it and tried to learn from those mistakes, and then obviously as we got down the road hiring him.

I feel really good about the hire.

What was the other part of the question? Yeah, football-wise.

You know, I think as I said earlier, what he does fits what I believe in, and so I think we're really aligned in terms of what we believe allows you to go out and have a chance to win on Saturday.

At the end of the day, I don't care if we're running triple option, I don't care if we're throwing the ball 60 times a game, I don't care if we have to win 55-48 or you win 3-0.



My goal is to try to win football games.

At the end of the day, our job as a coach is to figure out what that looks like, and does that mean going really fast and wearing people down, and if that's the case, then that's what the offense will look like. If that means going really slow and not turning the ball over and giving our defense a chance to win games, then that's what we'll do.

I think that'll be determined, really, just which unit consistently plays well, and there's going to be some times you get into games that are very unexpected, like we talked about with Texas earlier or Michigan. I didn't see the Michigan game maybe being as high scoring as it was. You have to figure it out. You have to be willing to adjust and adapt.

I think people ask me all the time what's different about college football. There's a lot of challenges out there right now whether it's transfer portal, NIL, culture within programs. You look around the profession, four or five years ago, some of the top coaches, most respected coaches in all of college football aren't coaching anymore because of different reasons, scandals in their program.

So what you have to do, you have to be willing to adapt and adjust every day. We had a good year last year, and all we've done is talk about how we're going to change. We're not going to just sit here and say we're going to keep doing things the way we've always done them. We're going to adapt, and we want to try to get ahead of the curve. We want to try to be as innovative and we possibly can.

Any change that occurs in the college football, we want to figure out how to make it work for us and give us an advantage. Those are the things you have to do.

To me, the days of setting up here and going, hey look, we've always done it this way, we're going to continue to do it that way, those things are changing. Every single day we're trying to be innovative and creative and adapt and get ahead of the curve.

Q. You have a lot of new phases on offense but you bring back a lot of experience on defense, almost the whole back seven, Josh, Johnny, et cetera. What are some reasonable expectations from what you want to see on that side of the ball?

SONNY DYKES: Yeah, I think we'll take a big step defensively. I think when you look at Joe Gillespie and his track record, I think his defenses, they get better. They just -- the longer he's there, the better the players understand what they're doing defensively, the better he can do a lot of

the little nuances things that make his defense different and unique and special.

I think our guys have a lot of confidence in the scheme and the technique. We've got a lot of depth.

If you look at last year, we rolled out of spring ball last year and we had five scholarship D-linemen, and typically you don't have a lot of success if that's what you have, and we were able to address that in the transfer portal.

You look at last year, as well, we played really most of the season with only four scholarship linebackers. We just had a lot of injuries and we were hurt, so that took a special way of adapting and adjusting the way we practiced, to preparation, to how we played guys in games, to taking guys off of special teams, everything we could do to keep that unit successful.

Same thing at the corner position. We really were two deep really at corner last year. The great thing about this group this year, we feel like we're seven or eight deep at corner, feel like we're eight or nine deep at linebacker, feel like we're 10 deep on the defensive front.

So those things are all going to allow us to do different things defensively, and take that next step.

If you want to be a great program consistently, it all begins by playing great defense. I think it doesn't matter if it's seventh grade football or the NFL, teams that play great defense and teams that can run the football have had a history of winning football games and doing it over the long haul.

I've been places where maybe our team wasn't built that way and we've had to out-score people, which can be a little bit tedious.

So my hope is this year we take a big step defensively like I think we will. We have a lot of speed. You name some guys that have played a lot of football, and the group can run. The group is physical. I think they're good tacklers. They're good at fundamentals. They communicate well.

All the things that good defenses do, we have the makings of getting there.

My hope is sooner than later, we become a dominant defensive football team, and like I said, it certainly makes my life a lot easier when that happens.

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