

# Big 12 Conference Football Media Days

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## Houston Cougars Dana Holgorsen Press Conference

DANA HOLGORSON: Well, it's exciting to be the new guy again. You can tell that I'm one of the new guys when I've got to follow up the national Coach of the Year here with TCU and the run that they made last year.

But we're personally excited to be back. This is a special deal. Been a part of the Big 12 Conference for 17 years and been a part of this for seven years.

The last four years have been a little different for me, being in the American Conference, and it really makes you appreciate a conference like the Big 12 by now being back. This thing goes so many different directions. The University of Houston has been looking forward to this day for a long, long time.

We all know the history about 28 years ago when the Big 12, this great conference, was formed, and Houston not being a part of that. So I'm just proud to be at a university with great leadership from Dr. Renu Khator to Tillman Fertitta to all the great people that drive this university. Chris Pezman our athletic director is here today, as well.

This has been a dream come true for a lot of Cougars for a long time, and we're excited about being in the Big 12 and what's going to come, not only this year but for years to come.

**Q. Could you just give us your first impressions on Donovan Smith and what kind of impact you expect him to have this season?**

DANA HOLGORSON: I've been very impressed with Donovan. He's played a lot of ball. He's played in 21 games.

I think that's important.

We lost a very seasoned quarterback in Clayton Tune. He's been our guy for four years and has been a model of consistency and just a model program player. Wish him all



the luck in the NFL.

But that opens it up to who's next. I was talking with Andre Ware up there about this a minute ago. The University of Houston has had really good quarterback play over the years, from Andre back in the day to David Klingler to Kevin Kolb to Case Keenum, who I coached for two years in '08, '09, and then Tune is a part of that conversation, as well.

The expectations are high for Donovan. But I felt like it was important to bring a guy in with experience, with Big 12 experience. We did that at a number of other positions, as well.

But Donovan has impressed me. I think his best days are ahead of him. He's only been playing quarterback for a couple years.

He's got the upper hand right now based on 21 games of experience, but Lucas Coley has been battling and is really competing hard, and he's got a lot of good football ahead of him, as well.

We brought in a junior college kid from California, Ui Ale who's got loads of potential, so we've got some guys to choose from.

But to answer your question, I've been impressed with Donovan. He's 6'5", 240, and has game experience in the Big 12.

**Q. Everyone knows the Houston area is a big recruiting hotbed. You've got teams like LSU coming from the SEC that's always invading the area for prospects. With Houston now being in the Big 12, do you think that gives you a recruiting advantage moving forward?**

DANA HOLGORSON: Well, it certainly can't hurt. You mentioned one school. There's approximately 64 other schools that are in Power Five football, as well. It's coast to coast, man.

The one advantage that you have at Houston is it's the

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most centrally located city, one of them, in the United States. The good news is we have 6 million people that we have to choose from.

The bad news is every other school in the country is coming to Houston, as well. There's a lot of good places out there.

We have 13 other schools in the Big 12 that are awesome institutions and have great advantages in each of their own way, but there's four other Power Five conferences out there that all come to Houston.

Our deal is three of the four young men that I have here with me today are Houston based. They're three kids that grew up in Houston, could have went other places and chose to stay at the University of Houston.

I think that's going to happen more when it comes to being able to talk Power Five and talk Big 12. It's certainly going to help. By no means is it going to be a slam dunk just because we're now in the Big 12.

**Q. Last year in non-conference play you played Texas Tech and Kansas in back to back games. Do you use that two-game stretch as a barometer to see how prepared you are to face a Big 12 schedule on a week-to-week basis in this conference?**

DANA HOLGORSON: Well, every year is different. 42 spots on our roster this year are new, so every year is different, every team is different.

I was very careful with talking too much Big 12 prior to January. I think we probably made a little bit too big of a deal playing Kansas after losing to Texas Tech, the way we lost to Texas Tech was just a hard way to lose, and we had another opportunity to play a Big 12 quality school in the University of Kansas who was playing lights out at the time, as good as anybody in the country I would argue when we played them.

I think we pressed too much a little bit, just based on this is what it's going to be like. But I tried not to make that big of a deal about it.

Since January, yeah, I've talked about it because that's the way it's going to be. It's going to be like that every week. But every team is different.

This team is different than last year's team. It's my job to kind of figure out how it's different and what we've got to do to be successful.

**Q. Back to the quarterback question, do you have a**

**timeline on when you'd like to get that settled in camp? And being back in the league, is there anything that you learned from the first time around that applies this time, or is the league completely different where there's not a lot of things to sort of pick up from?**

DANA HOLGORSON: Yeah, it's funny, I was talking with Case Keenum the other day, and I asked him about competition. Back when we were here in 2008, Blake Joseph and Case Keenum were battling back and forth. I asked him the importance of when you name a starter, and he goes, I wouldn't. Just let them compete, because if they compete, it makes them better, and then it should take care of itself.

I'm not concerned with it right now. They've been 50/50, and we knew they were going to be 50/50, and they're going to continue to be 50/50 until one just makes it clear.

So I think that's going to naturally take care of itself.

I'm a big proponent of letting kids compete. Let's compete for the next two weeks when we do some stuff, compete when we get into camp, compete, and the more competition we have at every single position, which I do feel like we have more competition at every single now position than we did last year, let them compete for playing time because that's what makes them better.

Second part, I think with the experience that I've had in the Big 12 and doing this transition in the past, I think it's been helpful over the last 18 months. A lot of closed door meetings with PES and administrators and fundraising and scheduling, staffing, budgets, all that stuff, I think it's been very beneficial.

It kind of stops now, right. Everybody that comes up here to talk has Big 12 experience, and they run their own programs. This is the deepest conference in the country.

By adding the four schools that we added, I think it adds to the deepest conference in the country.

Better get ready to line up and prepare your best each and every week to put your best foot forward, and I think we will do that, and I think we'll be competitive.

**Q. Now that we have the official renderings of the football-only specific building, what is the next step? Seeing as how you've done this transition before, what's the next step in getting us to a Big 12 level?**

DANA HOLGORSON: It's just got -- time. That's the only thing is time. That building is going to happen. It's going to start in December. We'll all get excited about it once we



see dirt moving. But it's still time.

There's a lot of Big 12 schools that are full share right now. The only way we're going to be full share is time. It's going to be three years before we're on equal playing field. That doesn't give you any excuses to not be successful and not be competitive. That's just going to take time.

But it's going to happen. You can mark your calendar three years from now that we're going to have what we need. But in the meantime we expect to line up, be competitive, recruit at a high level, compete at a high level, and that's what we're going to do.

**Q. Texas Tech and Houston go far back to the Southwest Conference, and you even spent quite a bit of time at Jones AT&T Stadium on the home side. What's that game going to be like? Is there a new rivalry growing between Texas Tech and Houston?**

DANA HOLGORSON: Well, it would have been better if we had won last year. Double overtime loss kind of hurt a little bit.

Obviously have a lot of familiarity with that program, spending eight great years there. I hear that the late great Mike Leach and Kliff Kingsbury are getting inducted into the Hall of Fame, and I don't think it's irony that they chose the Houston game for that, so that will be neat to witness.

But yeah, I think those rivals are going to naturally take care of themselves. It's kind of the opposite of what I did back in 2011 when West Virginia came into the Big 12. It was a big day for West Virginia, but there was no prior relationships with anybody. Everybody that West Virginia was playing was new.

Now the University of Houston is coming into the Big 12, and we've got history with BYU. We've got history with Cincinnati, Central Florida recently, okay, and then obviously my familiarity with West Virginia. But then you go back to the old Southwest Conference back in 1990, the late '80s and early '90s where it was Texas and TCU and Texas Tech and Baylor and Oklahoma State, and so those will get rekindled.

So I think it'll happen actually a little bit quicker. That's great for college football. That's great for the Big 12. Certainly that's great for the University of Houston and our fan base.

**Q. You guys lost a lot of production at the skill positions from last year. How do you plan on replacing that in the midst of entering a new conference?**

DANA HOLGORSON: That's the one thing I'm pretty comfortable with. You know, Tank Dell was pretty special, third-round draft pick, dynamic player. He kind of took the ball from other people a lot. I don't know if we're going to have like the one guy with 1,500 yards.

But we've got three starters returning with Matt Golden, who's a special player; Joseph Manjack, who was a contributor in five games last year; Sam Brown made some big plays; a couple of transfers coming in that have Power Five experience, and then we recruited very well at that spot.

There's a lot of competition and a lot of very talented players that quite frankly we wouldn't have got if it wasn't for the Big 12.

I'm excited about coaching those guys. That's the least of my worries with receivers. I'll spend most of my time with other things other than that.

**Q. Can we talk about the hiring of Eman Naghavi your new OC. He was Tulane's offensive line coach, amazing, vicious attack that they had. How does that add to Donovan Smith and Houston's ground attack?**

DANA HOLGORSON: So Eman Naghavi, it's an interesting story. He's about as O-line as O-line gets. Katy High School, McNeese State, small college, Louisiana Monroe, Georgia State. I don't know how many people witnessed what Tulane did against Southern California right here on this field in January, but it was pretty spectacular. So I saw it up close.

His one year at Tulane sold me. He's been on my list for a while. But the one year at Tulane really sold me. He's exceptional with getting offensive line to play together and is one of the better ones that I've been around in the short period of time that I've been with him.

^ JR he's been a great fit. He's as Houston as Houston gets. Grew up there, loves the city.

Gary Joseph is a pretty big-time high school coach in this state. Eman was smart enough to marry his daughter. We're excited to have Eman, and he's bringing something different to the table when it comes to a more well-rounded in offensive line group.

**Q. When you look at the Big 12 in general, you mentioned that this is the deepest conference. Last year TCU was the seventh best odds to win the Big 12. The year before, Baylor was the sixth best odds to win the Big 12. Would you also consider this the most**



**open conference where there's always an opportunity for a team that isn't ranked inside the Top 5 to sneak into the conversation to make it to Arlington?**

DANA HOLGORSON: Well, probably, but every year is different. I think Sark and the University of Texas would disagree with that assessment right now because they're picked to win it. They'll be pretty good.

It's just a deep conference. There's never been more parity than there is right now in college football. This conference is crazy. Being a part of it for 17 years and then being on the outside looking in for the last four years, I watched every game and I followed it.

There's just so much parity in this league. Without getting too much into it, there used to be a few lay-ups back in the day. There aren't any lay-ups. There's just the parity is good, the coaching is unbelievable, the facilities are spectacular, the support is unbelievable.

I'm so excited to be back in the league, and the University of Houston is excited to be a part of it.

Just couldn't be more thrilled with the situation that we're in currently. A lot of work to be done. A lot of work ahead of us. We understand that. We're excited about it.

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