

Big 12 Conference Football Media Days

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Arlington, Texas, USA

Texas Longhorns Steve Sarkisian

Press Conference

STEVE SARKISIAN: Well, thank you. I think first and foremost I want to thank all of y'all for coming. This is a great time of year for college football. I think anytime it's media days, it kind of signifies that college football is right around the corner. That's an exciting time. I think it's a great time for the Big 12. It's a tremendous opportunity.

I really love our football team. I love their mindset. I love where they're at. I know there's been so much talk about the SEC and what's happening in 2024, but I think one thing that I love about this team that we have this year is their focus on 2023 and this opportunity we have here in the Big 12. It's going to be a heck of a season, great competition.

I've got to give a shout-out to Longhorn Nation. Season ticket sales being sold out in June, over 68,000 season ticket sales. I know there's a lot of excitement in the air. I know we're excited as a team, our coaching staff, our players, and I want to commend our players, like I said, for their commitment.

They've bought into this thing, and more than they've bought into it, they've elevated it. There's high expectations within our organization, and we're looking forward to September and putting it all on the field.

Q. Steve, talking about that SEC talk, do you expect this season at all to be awkward, just kind of going through it with the SEC talk and your exit?

STEVE SARKISIAN: It won't be awkward for us. I can't speak for anybody else. It won't be awkward for us.

We've got a roster full of players who quite frankly came to the University of Texas to try to win a Big 12 Championship, and we've got one more opportunity to do that, and I think our guys are focused on that.

And so it won't be awkward from our end, but like I said, I can't speak for everybody else.



Q. Your last regular season game in the Big 12 is against Texas Tech. Does that game hold any extra weight given it's a rivalry and how that game went last season?

STEVE SARKISIAN: I hope it carries extra weight because hopefully we're competing to get into the championship game.

But the reality of it is, hey, we've had some longstanding games with a lot of teams in the Big 12, and we're going to embrace every opportunity we get this year.

I think it's pretty clear and easy to say, hey, we're going to get everybody's best shot every Saturday. The key to the drill is that we make sure they get our best shot every Saturday, and that final game on Friday after Thanksgiving will be no different.

Q. Two-parter. I understand that Kalani Sitake helped host you on your recruiting visit to BYU back in 1995. If you could speak about your relationship over the years with Kalani, and even though you've coached against BYU before, will it be special to do it with both of you in P5 situations?

STEVE SARKISIAN: Yeah, I think Kalani and I have a great relationship. I'm really proud of him. He's always been a great coach, a guy that he's had a chance to compete against in his days when he was a coordinator before becoming a head coach.

He's earned a great opportunity. He's done a great job leading BYU to this point, and we do stay connected and stay close that way.

You know, people have asked me before about BYU now being in the Big 12 and how that'll be. To me, BYU has been a national brand for decades, and going back to Coach Edwards and what he was able to do and some of the great teams and great programs and now to be in a Power Five situation in the Big 12, I'm happy for them. I'm happy for BYU. I'm happy for their alumni and those players. I think it's a great opportunity.



Then we get a chance to play them. I'm glad we don't have to go to Provo. We get them in Austin. So that'll be fun.

Q. Steve, obviously you're heading into year three now; got a couple of your own recruiting classes in. How does this team compare philosophically with your coaching style compared to year one, and how have you seen that manifest in the locker room and practices?

STEVE SARKISIAN: Yeah, something that in my opinion we've got now going into year three is I think we've got really quality competitive depth on our roster across the board. That our players know when they go to practice every day, the guy in the same line as them, whether he's behind them or in front of them, is probably as equally talented as him, if not better.

So now how do I continue to work to strive to be motivated to continue to get better, because I think when you're surrounded by like-minded people, that's what pushes you to become even better.

Then ultimately when you go to practice, that the guy lining up across from you is a quality player and a quality opponent, and so again, that's pushing you to be the best that you can be but that you do it out of respect.

I was talking to the team earlier today about how proud I am of the culture they've developed. It's one thing for me to come in and have an idea of a culture and what I want it to look like and for them to buy into it. It's another to not just buy into it but to elevate it. I think that's what they've done.

This team is different. They have a different look in their eye. They look different on the hoof. They interact with one another differently.

I've used the adage, I feel like this team is on a mission because that's the approach they have every day that they show up in the facility.

Q. You're talking a lot about -- I've seen a lot in the past that you've been talking about this team looking and feeling and sounding like your team. What are your expectations overall for this season? Do you expect to go home with the championship?

STEVE SARKISIAN: I expect our team to play aggressive, tough, fast, physical, and smart football every Saturday. If we do that every Saturday, we'll put ourselves in position to be competing for a championship.

But that's the challenge that we have week in and week out, is to put ourselves in the best position to go do those things. There's a style of play that we believe in, and there's a level of toughness that's involved. There's a level of physicality that's involved. There's a level of aggression that's involved. There's a speed element involved. There's a football intellect that's involved in all of that, that we have to recreate starting every Sunday night, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday to get ready for our upcoming opponent.

I do think this team has the maturity to do that week in and week out, because I think they hold each other accountable, and when a guy is not doing that, they're willing to step in and they're not relying on the coaches to do that as much anymore.

You know, ultimately, we all -- if you ask any one of our players, they want to be here December 2 competing for a Big 12 Championship. That's simple. But we have to do the necessary things day in and day out to try to make that happen.

Q. Quinn went out of his way to tell us in the spring that he was not happy with how he played overall last season. What did that say about his leadership, and how is he handling all the expectations? He's projected already as a first-round pick next spring.

STEVE SARKISIAN: Well, I think a couple things about Quinn that stood out to me from last year as you go back and kind of assess last season. He came back for the OU game coming off the injury and had a really good football game.

You go read about the quotes that he had after that game, all he did was praise his teammates for how well they played. Then we don't play great against Oklahoma State and we suffer a loss, and he took all the blame.

So I think right then, you found out the type of leader that he is. What he did coming into this off-season is continued just to pour into what does he need to do to be the best quarterback for the University of Texas.

The result of that is we've seen his body composition change. We've seen a level of maturity change. We've seen him really dialing in and understanding schematically what we're trying to do offensively change. We've seen him from a morale standpoint speaking up in team meetings, speaking up on the field, from a work ethic standpoint. I think he's earned the respect of his teammates throughout this time and throughout this process.

What I do know is he's extremely talented. There's not a throw he can't make. He's got a very high football IQ.

If things go the way we think they can go, the pundits are probably right, he is a first-round draft pick quarterback.

Q. Last week did it surprise you that Texas was picked atop the preseason media poll to win it, and do you feel that's going to be more added pressure on you to deliver in year three in the program's final year in the Big 12?

STEVE SARKISIAN: I don't know what surprises me. I don't know what you guys do at night, man, so you guys are the one that decide who gets picked where, quite frankly, and not to take anything away from you. It doesn't really matter, right? It's how we play and what we do.

What I do know is I chose to be the head coach of the University of Texas, and our players chose to come to the University of Texas. With that comes the responsibility and the expectations that come with that.

We don't shy away from that. We accept it. We have to acknowledge it. Then we push it to the side, and then we get back to the daily grind of what we need to do.

I think we've got a mature enough team to respect what you guys think of us, but at the end of the day, now we have to go back to work. Expectations are just that. What will ultimately define us is how we play on Saturdays, and that's what we've got to focus on.

Q. You've talked about the success of Quinn, but it all boils down to the offensive line. Have you gotten into a two-depth situation, and offensively are they in the same -- what pattern?

STEVE SARKISIAN: I love what we bring back on the offensive line. Last year we started two true freshmen on the offensive line. Kelvin Banks was a freshman All-American at left tackle; had a great year. Cole Hutson at right guard.

But we're bringing back all starting five offensive linemen. We've recruited the position well over the last two years, and it's a highly competitive room. We have guys vying for starting spots right now that didn't start a year ago, and that's exactly what we want. We've got healthy competition.

They have to go against a really good defensive front. When you talk about Byron Murphy, T'Vondre Sweat, Alfred Collins, the addition of Trill Carter from Minnesota,

Barryn Sorrell. We've got a really good defensive front that our offensive line has to block every day in practice.

But I'm with you, man. You win football games up front, and you've got to recruit big humans to make that happen, and that's something that we've committed ourselves to doing over the last two years, and we'll continue to commit ourselves to.

Q. It was mentioned of course you guys were selected first in the preseason poll. It's the first time since 2009 that that's happened. What do you feel like is different about this team, especially when you compare it to your first two years?

STEVE SARKISIAN: Well, like I said, I think we have competitive depth at every position. I think we've got great leadership. As much as there's a lot of focus on a lot of the new players that have come into our program, there should be a lot of focus on the players that are in year three with me now. When I think about Jaylan Ford, Jahdae Barron, Xavier Worthy, Christian Jones, T'Vondre Sweat, Alfred Collins, Vernon Broughton. I'm just naming a few. These are all guys I inherited when I got here.

I know a lot is made of the players that we've brought in, but we've got a lot of veteran players that came to the University of Texas to win a championship. They bought into a new coach, a new coaching staff, a new style of play, a new culture, and inevitably they're leaders on our team now, and they get a chance going into some of them their final season to compete for a Big 12 Championship.

I think that's their focus, and that in turn permeates throughout our locker room and we've got a locker room full of guys that that's the goal. There's not personal initiatives involved. It's about the team and the team trying to go win a championship, and that's what our focus is.

Q. Now that Bijan and Roschon are gone, how have the other running backs responded and adapted to filling that key area of the team?

STEVE SARKISIAN: Yeah, it's a great one. We lost two really good players. We lost two really good leaders. We lost two really good people in our program that are going on to future endeavors in the NFL, and much deserves. But they were also great role models for some other players in that room.

When you start thinking about Keilan Robinson, start thinking about Jonathan Brooks, you start thinking about Jaydon Blue, those three guys spent a year or two with those guys in that room and know what it looks like and know what it takes from a day-to-day basis in season, out

of season, how they conduct themselves off the field.

Then with the addition of Cedric Baxter and Trey Wisner, two really good young players for us, there's no shortage of talent in our running back room.

It's making sure that they're prepared for the grind of a 12-game regular season and then ultimately hopefully games to come after that.

We feel good about the depth in the room. There's a lot of maturity. I think Coach Choice does a great job coaching those guys, and I think we'll be in good hands at the running back position.

Q. Alabama has lost once at home since 2016. What is the key for this roster? They only travel out of the state twice this year. What is the key for this roster to go in and win at Alabama?

STEVE SARKISIAN: Well, like every game, I think we know this. I said this earlier. Everywhere we go, we have to recognize we're the University of Texas. We're going to get everybody's best shot. Alabama is no different. Coach Saban is going to have that team ready to play.

We have to make sure they get our best shot. We have to prepare really well. We have to embrace the moment and understand what that moment is, and we've got to play good football.

We thought we played them well a year ago. We didn't play well enough. So the key to the drill when we go there, we have to play better than we did last year.

I think we can. I think we'll have the mental fortitude to go do it, the mental toughness to go do it, and the physical toughness to go do it because it's going to be a physical football game. They're a big, physical football team that will be really well-coached, and we have to make sure they get our best shot because we're going to get theirs for sure, too.

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