

# Big 12 Conference Football Media Days

Wednesday, July 12, 2023

Arlington, Texas, USA

**BYU Cougars**

**Kalani Sitake**

Press Conference



**KALANI SITAKE:** I just want to take this time in my statement to express my gratitude and appreciation for being here at media days. This is a lot of fun.

Being an independent, I wasn't able to experience this as a head coach, so this is my first time. I was actually getting some pointers and some trips from Kedon Slovis. He's been through more media days than I have.

But looking forward to this opportunity to be here to speak in front of you. Want to express our gratitude from our program to the Big 12 conference and Commissioner Yormark. I've been really impressed with his leadership and I'm excited to follow his leadership and I love the innovative and creative ways of approaching college football, and looking forward to following him as a leader.

I've been able to meet and associate myself and get connected with so many coaches in the Big 12 meetings and the Big 12 Conference and meet the administrators from all the different institutions, as well, and I can tell you I've been impressed with all of them and how kind they've been to myself and to our staff.

So I want to express my gratitude and appreciation to all of them helping us through this transition as we get into the Big 12.

Finally, I want to express gratitude to the BYU administration, to our president, and recognize him, our new president, Shane Reese that's here with us, and our athletic director Tom Holmo that's here. I also want to recognize our former president that's put so much energy and service into what we've done here. He's been amazing and a great mentor to myself is Kevin Worthen.

I also want to show my appreciation to our team and our players. They're so excited. When the schedule came out, they were really excited about the schedule. I didn't have to do much as a leader to motivate them after seeing that. Just wanted to let them know how much I appreciate being

their coach.

Finally, I want to just express my appreciation and love for all the BYU fans, Cougar Nation. They're amazing. I grew up a BYU fan and I lived the dream as a BYU fan. Then I got to live another dream playing for LaVell Edwards, a legend, and now I'm the head coach. So you can imagine how I feel.

This has been a great dream for me, so please don't wake me up. I'm enjoying it. We're in the Big 12 now, and I am excited for everyone to get to meet our fan base and see how they've been a strength for us and our program and definitely a strength for me as a head coach.

Finally just thank you media members for being here. Looking forward to getting to know you guys as we go to different places, and that's national media that covers their schools. Looking forward to knowing you and getting to know you better and visiting your places and doing interviews with you.

With that being said, the time is yours, and look forward to answering your questions.

**Q. You mentioned you got a little bit of advice from Kedon when it comes to being in press conferences. For you now joining a Power Five conference, having a quarterback that's already been playing against Power Five conferences and players and also going through the schedule, what does that do for your persona, the identity of the program, and also just to be able to lay the groundwork in year one?**

**KALANI SITAKE:** Yeah, I think the high level of experience that that quarterback position -- I know a lot goes to what he's done on the football field, but the things that I've been impressed with Kedon is the stuff he does off the field, the connection he has to his teammates, to his coaches, to our fans. I've been impressed with that.

I think that's going to help take him to another level of playing. I want to make sure we give him a comfortable pocket, but I know if it's not too comfortable he can find ways to extend the plays and hopefully find success.

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There's a lot of things that he brings to the table with his leadership and with the experience that we're going to lean on heavily.

**Q. In terms of you guys building towards the Big 12, does it feel like a fulfillment of 50 years of football success paying off when you guys take the field in a couple of weeks?**

KALANI SITAKE: I mean, this is something that we've been dreaming of for a while, speaking as a fan. Now that we've been given this platform I'm excited for the opportunities that we have.

I'm also looking at the partners that are in this conference and watching the film, and there's great football here. Highly skilled athletes that are coached really well. And I've met all the administrators from all the different schools and been really impressed with them.

This isn't going to be easy, and we know that. That's why independents, I told Tom, find as many as you can that people don't want to play; I want to play them all, with the thought that possibly this could be the goal.

Now that we're here, there's a high sense of urgency for us to get ready to go, and I feel really good about the progress that we've made as a team in the last couple years, and there's some really cool lessons that we've been able to learn about our skills but also the deficiencies that we probably have meeting some of those P5 teams that we've played in the past five years.

**Q. Coach Holgorson talked earlier about the newcomers won't be full TV members, revenue members until year three. What about being competitive on the field? Is it fair to expect the four newcomers, yourself included, to compete for the conference titles those first couple seasons, or will it take a few years?**

KALANI SITAKE: Well, I mean, I'm looking at the last six teams I played for championships here in the last three years, and there's a lot of parity there. I'm hoping that our team can add to that.

Everyone wants to win, and my goal is to get us to perform at our best 12 times. If we do it the way that I hope, I think that will earn us more opportunities to play on the field again.

**Q. What do you think the biggest adjustment to playing in a Power Five conference is going to be for your team?**

KALANI SITAKE: I mean, I've been through this before, and so have our offensive coordinator and our defensive coordinator when we were at Utah. So we went through that transition from Mountain West Conference team to the Pac-12, and I've also seen other teams that have made the transition. Like you look at TCU and what they've done.

There's information and things that you can see that are out there that people that have done it before, and what you try to do is you try to do what they did well and then lean on the experiences. I know we're at BYU so it's a little bit different and unique, but I need to find ways to turn that uniqueness into a strength for us and make sure it's a competitive advantage when we get on the field.

**Q. Can you talk about the hiring of Jay Hill coming in from Weber, one of the best FCS defensive schools? What is it we should expect from the BYU defense after everything that happened last year?**

KALANI SITAKE: Yeah, I've known Jay Hill forever. We coached a decade together at Utah. So myself and -- we speak the same language when it comes to defensive-minded football. I've really followed -- he's my friend, so I've watched him in his career. He's taken Weber State to become an FCS powerhouse, and he's done it in a lot of different ways, developing his players and coaching them hard but also loving them.

Everything that he's about fits right in with what we're trying to get done and the culture of BYU.

I say that with a lot of appreciation for the staff that was there before, as well. But I think he's going to be the guy that -- to be able to take our defense to where -- I think we do it. It's not easy to make changes, and my responsibility is to the players first and also to our fans.

Anytime we need to make adjustments I'm going to do that, especially if it's going to benefit our players. And I think our players are really excited about it and the change, and I'm excited to have Jay Hill there with me.

He's also been a head coach before, so he knows some of the things that we go through as head coaches. He's been a great resource for me to go to for advice and guidance, and he happens to be on my staff. I'm lucky to coach with these guys.

**Q. This one pertains to recruiting. Do you think that joining a Power Five conference, specifically the Big 12, just opens up new doors for you maybe in the south that wasn't there before? I know Texas is a huge place to recruit. Do you think that gives you a leg up**



**now in getting some players from places like Texas?**

KALANI SITAKE: Yeah, I mean, it's already been that way since the announcement of us joining the conference. We've seen an uptick in recruiting.

I think it increases, maybe gets a little bit of curiosity for people that never thought about BYU as a destination to play. What they do is look into it and find out what they're aligned with what I'm aligned with and the mission -- we're a faith-based institution so we're affiliated with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, and a lot of people don't know much about the church or about our mission, but our football program is right in alignment with the mission of our church, and that's proclaiming our belief in Jesus Christ as our savior.

There's a lot of people that fall in line with that, whether they're members of the church or not. It's just opened the doors as far as widened our net a little bit in recruiting, and all it takes is a couple a year that you can get into. We've seen that already happen in the transfer portal, but we've also seen it with the recruits that we've brought in that we've been able to talk to.

Anytime that you can increase your net and get into more households and just be talked about, that'll work out.

I think for us, it's make sure that the product on the field matches what kids want to play in and the culture that I ran in our program matches what they want to be a part of, and then away we go.

**Q. You guys play in a beautiful environment, beautiful stadium. I just wanted to get your thoughts, why is Provo so difficult to play in, and how excited are you to bring that environment to the Big 12?**

KALANI SITAKE: Well, I'm going to go back to the BYU fans. They're amazing. I am one, so the energy and the excitement that they bring to the games, I think it's a good experience for visiting teams, as well.

They give you ice cream before the fourth quarter, guys. I think everybody should do that. But should probably extend it to the fans -- not to the fans, but also to the coaches on the sideline. That would be really cool. That could be innovative where I'm eating ice cream going into the fourth quarter.

But it's a different experience, and the beauty matches the -- the beauty from the fans matches what you're seeing in the landscape, the mountains and everything.

I love that our stadium is named after LaVell Edwards.

That's my guy. He's a great leader, and a lot of what I do in our program is from him. And I know Sark can say the same thing. Kyle Whittingham can say the same thing. There's a lot of people that he's been able to influence as a coach, and so many different ways in college football, and we're seeing it right now.

**Q. From the standpoint of opposing coaches and teams that have never played in Provo, how big of a home field advantage do you feel like you have and what's the challenge to opposing teams?**

KALANI SITAKE: I think it's the same everywhere else, that when you have a fan base that loves their team -- and the noise always becomes a factor, but we're going to experience it, too. We're going to go to venues that we've never been to, as well, and I'm excited for it.

I'm excited to interact with other fans and other teams, and I've been able to meet a bunch of the players here that I've seen on film, and man, such impressive people. We played against Baylor a couple years ago in Waco. That was a cool experience.

The interaction with the fans and our fans that were there had a great experience, as well, and I'm hoping that people can see that Provo is a great destination.

I hope it becomes an advantage for us and continues to be an advantage, but when you have fans that love their teams, it's going to be difficult to go into those stadiums and come out with a victory.

That's why college football is so exciting. We get to experience it and have the advantage at home, but then go on the road and feel a different type of environment.

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