

Big 12 Conference Football Media Days

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Kansas State Wildcats

Chris Klieman

Press Conference

CHRIS KLIEMAN: Thank you, and appreciate everybody having here and coming out to AT&T Stadium. First thing I'd like to do is thank Commissioner Yormark for his vision, for his leadership. He's done an absolutely phenomenal job bringing energy to the Big 12 and being there for us as coaches, with a lot of messages back and forth, and without his leadership we wouldn't be in the place that we are right now.

Thank you so much, Commissioner Yormark, and your staff for doing a phenomenal job keeping the Big 12 right where it needs to be, and that's at the top of the Power Five leagues. So thank you for that.

We're excited to be back. It's going into year five for me, and it's crazy to think how quickly this time has gone. And we have four student-athletes here with us, Cooper Beebe, Will Howard, Kobe Savage, and Daniel Green that kind of epitomize what our four- and five-year journey has been here at Kansas State.

We're big believers in development and developing players, and I think you look at Cooper Beebe and you look at Will Howard, and that personifies what Kansas State football is, and that's a developmental program. We're excited to be back at AT&T. We finished our season at the end of the regular season in the Big 12 Championship game here with a big win that probably gave us a little bit of cache as far as what we're doing is the right way, and our kids believe that what we are doing is the right way, and we're a playing led team, and our players are the reason why we got to AT&T and had success last year.

But it's a new year, and we've been talking about that since we got back in mid-January, that you need to stay humble. You need to eat crumbs. You need to stay hungry.

What you did yesterday is great, but it pales in comparison to what you can do today. I'm excited about the challenge that we have this year, but I know that our guys are going to learn from the experiences they had last year and



continue to fight through the adversity that we know we're going to have.

We've got a tremendous league. We're adding four schools. We get two of those schools on our docket this year, and then we lose two schools in OU and Texas at the end of the year. But our league is as strong as it's ever been, and I'm excited to get the competition started.

Q. Coach, you mentioned the newcomers in this conference. You get one of them to open the league in UCF. What are your thoughts on the Knights, head coach Gus Malzahn, and having them in the conference?

CHRIS KLIEMAN: Excited. I've gotten to know Gus a little bit. Have a tremendous amount of respect for him and what he's done in our profession.

I talked to him a little bit at our Big 12 days down in Arizona, and they're going to be a really good football team coming into Manhattan. We're glad we have them in Manhattan and not down in Orlando.

It's a great program that has traditionally been a really good program, and I'm excited about Gus and UCF joining our league.

Q. Winning the Big 12 Championship game last year and then seeing TCU win their playoff game, how would you describe the parity that's in the Big 12 as well as college football?

CHRIS KLIEMAN: Well, there's tremendous parity in the Big 12. You saw that last year with the amount of teams that either won one-score games or knocked people off, and every week you had to have your A game or you were going to get beat.

I think that's what college football is starting to become, as well. Recruiting is never ending. The transfer portal is never ending. So there's so many players switching teams, so you're always going to have increased parity.

Some of the guys that maybe weren't playing as much for



you are on another team. Sometimes even in the same league. That always is going to increase competition.

College football is really healthy, and I'm excited about the direction it's going, especially once we get to the 12-team playoff.

Q. I sort of made a fool out of myself yesterday when I placed Deuce Vaughn at TCU. I misspoke. I actually meant Kendre Miller. You guys are losing production of Deuce Vaughn. Can you talk a little bit about how you replace a talent like that?

CHRIS KLIEMAN: Well, you don't replace Deuce Vaughn, and if you want to come here on Sundays, he's going to be playing here every Sunday, and he's going to be having a heck of an NFL career and I love the kid because of his passion for football.

Him allowing me to be in his life, what a great, great young man, a great football player but a better person, a better family. We probably aren't going to be able to do that with one guy.

We're excited about our running back room. Coach Brian Anderson does a great job with those guys. DJ Giddens I think is a rising star. He played sparingly behind Deuce because you didn't want to take Deuce off the field very often, but when he did he was very productive and had a couple of good games for us.

We went out and got Treshaun Ward who was really productive at Florida State. And we didn't get to see a bunch of Treshaun during spring ball because he was recovering from an injury. He's full go now. I'm excited to see what a number of those guys can do, but those are two guys, DJ Giddens and Treshaun Ward, that we were believe can split some of the load, carry some of the load that Deuce has.

And those guys just need to be themselves. All of our running backs in that room just need to be themselves. They don't need to be Deuce. There's only one of those guys, and everybody saw that in college football the last three years.

Q. Can you talk about Will Howard this year compared to where he was this time last year heading in?

CHRIS KLIEMAN: Confidence, belief. Those are the two things I think of when I think of Will Howard. He's had an incredible journey at Kansas State, and he's had some ups and downs. But he's always weathered the storm. He's always bet on himself and believed in himself.

Most importantly, I would tell you as we come into fall camp, the whole football team believes in Will Howard. The whole football team knows that you can win a Big 12 Championship with Will Howard at quarterback.

I've just marveled at how he attacks his craft. He's always watching film. He's always breaking things down, he's always being a servant leader, which is very unselfish. He is meeting with tight ends, meeting with running backs, and just sharing his knowledge of football.

And then he continues to work on his physical traits. He's leaner this year. He's stronger. I know that he's worked on some mechanical things.

I think this is the best we're going to see -- we're going to see Will Howard's best year this year without question, and I thought the last half of the season last year he was probably the most improved player in all of college football, at least in the Big 12.

Q. State of Iowa athletes are on a roll right now, your home state, with Ashley Joens winning the award yesterday, with Max winning the award yesterday, with Caitlin Clark doing what she's doing, and with yourself winning the championship last year. What is it about your upbringing and your grass-roots upbringing that paved the way for some of the success that you guys are having?

CHRIS KLIEMAN: I appreciate that. I'm very close to the state of Iowa. My folks still live in Waterloo. My brother lives in Cedar Falls. I look at my parents' upbringing: Hard work, perseverance, never making excuses. I see that. I followed Iowa women's basketball. Caitlin Clark was a blast to watch. Some of my best friends are at Dowling. We've tried to do a good job in the state of Iowa.

Two of our best football players are from the state of Iowa, Brendan Mott who's why Iowa City, and Ben Senate who's from Waterloo. We have to continue to recruit all the Midwest for sure.

We've got to win in the state of Kansas, but we've branched out into Iowa, Nebraska, Missouri, Colorado, so on, so forth, Oklahoma. But just something about those hardworking kids that have great parental support and great backgrounds of being multi-sport athletes that we're always looking for.

Q. How important was it for you to sign that contract extension back in May, and what does that say about the future of wildcat football?

CHRIS KLIEMAN: Well, I'm indebted to Gene Taylor for

giving me an opportunity at North Dakota State to be a head coach, and then - not trying to win the press conference - but believing in what people can do, and he hired me at Kansas State, and he hired all of us at Kansas State.

I really enjoy Manhattan. I think it's a great community. I think it's a great college town for sure. I see the excitement that is going on in Manhattan right now, and I'm just telling you, who you work for is really, really important to me. It's really important to me, and I've got a great job, but I'm surrounded by really good assistants.

I'm surrounded by a great support staff. I've got a locker room full of guys that believe in each other, believe in us as coaches, and then I've got an athletic director that has our back.

That made that really simple for me to sign and say this is where I want to be.

Q. You're obviously the defending Big 12 champion, so Kansas State is going to be a game that is circled on everyone's schedule. You're going to get everyone's best shot. How do you and your team approach going from being the hunters to the hunted?

CHRIS KLIEMAN: I'm kind of excited actually, but in this league, I think everybody circles every game. I just don't -- I've never bought into one game is more important than another, because if you do, what are you going to tell your players the next week, that this one is not quite as important?

But yeah, to be the hunted, the fact that we're the defending Big 12 champs means nothing when you go into that game. I mean, still, you've got to perform.

Fortunately we've had past experiences from my previous school that we had to win a championship and then come back and follow it up with another championship.

It's always staying hungry, always staying humble, and making sure that the guys focus on the task at hand, and each week in this league, you're going to get beat every week if you don't have your A game and if you don't have great focus and you don't have great preparation because the coaching is so good in this league, the teams are so good in this league. 1 through 14, anybody can beat anybody, and I really believe that.

Q. This year you guys went 66th in the transfer portal, just rankings of players coming in. Is that an effect of how great the roster is and building from within, or is it that there just weren't many needs to go out and get?

CHRIS KLIEMAN: Well, the transfer portal has benefitted K-State, and once again, if somebody has a better opportunity or wants to move back closer to home, I'm all for it. I think kids need the opportunity. You only get home years to play this great game, so I'm fine with how the transfer portal is.

That being said, whether it's Kade Warner, whether it's Julius Brents, whether it's Josh Hayes, whether it's Adrian Martinez, we've had really good success in the transfer portal.

In the same respect, we haven't lost that many marquee guys. We've lost some depth, which is never great, but that's why you recruit freshmen to play, because freshmen now have to play because of the transfer portal.

It's just something about the culture of us wanting to make sure we find the right fit, and we're always going to be a developmental school, and I'm a big believer in the more third-, fourth-, fifth-year guys you have, the better chance you're going to have to be successful, and this year we have got, I think, nine sixth-year guys, and I'm losing track to the math, do we still have one or two more years of the COVID year. I lose track of it.

But we've got nine six-year guys that a lot of times those six-year guys say, I'm going to go see what else it out there. I'm going to go try this because I've done everything I can at school X, I'm going to go to school Y. But some of our guys, some of them were offensive linemen, said no.

We love what we're doing here. We love the team we have, the players, the staff, that they wanted to stay right at Kansas State.

We just haven't had the huge influx of numbers, and I hope that continues.

Q. Brett Yormark mentioned the idea of playing more games on Thursday and Friday. We know how much you guys like to get recruits at a game in Bill Snyder Family Stadium. Is that a concern they could be playing on the same night as you guys?

CHRIS KLIEMAN: It is, but if Brett says that's the best thing for us to do, we're going to do it, because he's our leader and there's a reason why we're doing it that way. We have one on Friday night this year at Oklahoma State, which I'm going to be excited about. There's always going to be something going on.

There's so many things anymore that for people to do, whether it's a Thursday, a Friday or a Saturday that if you

put a really good product out there, people are going to come watch you play.

But no, I think the more people and more audiences we can touch, and if that's a Thursday, if that's a Friday, whenever that is, I know that we're all willing to do it to help out the conference.

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