

Big 12 Conference Football Media Days

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Arlington, Texas, USA

West Virginia Mountaineers

Neal Brown

Press Conference

NEAL BROWN: First of all, thank you to Michael, who's the best mascot in college football, and to Alex and Haley for helping him there. Appreciate them being here.

Good afternoon. It is afternoon on the East Coast, and we've got a couple of East Coast members now, so appreciate that.

Glad to be here, and I'll say this at the front. Appreciate what you all do as far as covering college football and making it one of the top really sports that's out there. So I appreciate that.

I'll start with this because I'm sure I'm going to get asked about it. Upset about the media poll. Definitely do not agree with that.

The good thing, the positive is that the media has not been, as far as predicting the Big 12 has not been successful in recent years, so I think that bodes well for us.

But I'll say this on a more serious note. I was sitting on the beach last week, whenever Mike Montoro, who's the best in the business who's our sports information director for football, he sent me a text and I made the mistake of looking at it. From that point on, my vacation was over.

I went into football mode.

This is why I disagree, and this is why, first of all, it starts with belief in our staff and belief in our players, and then how we finish will be the next thing. We beat Oklahoma, beat Oklahoma State on the road, winning two of our last three games.

Offensively this is going to be our best group. And then we have 132 starts returning on the offensive line, 132. If that's not the most in the country, it's got to be close.

Within that group we've got four former freshman All-Americans. We've got three for sure all-conference



type players. Two of them are here with us today. Zach Frazier who's a two-time All-American, and then Doug Nester. We have a budding superstar at running back in CJ Donaldson, and defensively we're going to be one of the most improved units in the Big 12, if not in the country.

We have all-league type players at each level, and those guys are here today. Sean Martin at defensive end, Lee Kpogba who will be one of the leading tacklers in the conference this year at Mike linebacker, and then Aubrey Burks at safety. All three guys here talented experience and secondary through the transfer portal.

And then returning on special teams we've got our punter and our long snapper who are both two of the better ones in our league.

Looking forward to proving everybody wrong on that front. We won't finish there.

With that, I'll open it up for questions.

Q. Chad Scott's been promoted to offensive coordinator. Last year 50th in pace and tempo with Garrett Greene, CJ Donaldson. Is there going to be a slower tempo and more running this season?

NEAL BROWN: Well, I think running the football is going to be the strength of our offensive team, but one emphasis on that is we've got to be more explosive in our pass game, and I think that's where we got to show some growth offensively, is we ran the football at times very successfully last year.

What we didn't do as good a job of is taking advantage of that run game with some explosive pass plays.

As far as tempo, we want to be able to present ourselves playing fast all the time; then let the game dictate the tempo. But we practice at a really fast pace. We're going to have the ability to go as fast as anybody in the country, but also the game and the style of game we need to play that day will dictate how fast we play.

Q. I know you just learned a lesson about reading text



messages on the beach, but what has been the reaction from your players to the poll, and does this become a rallying cry for you guys or do you try to ignore it?

NEAL BROWN: No. I think we're past in this day and age with media information being able to ignore anything. I think your best opportunity is just to confront it. We had a team meeting on Tuesday where we talked about it in detail, and probably a more colorful terms than I just did here, but a lot of the same things that I said to our team, I just repeated here in front of you all.

I have a strong belief, and what we spend a lot of time on is just talking about being we are. We have a clear vision of what we have to improve on. I think if you talk about offensively, we've got to get better efficiency-wise, especially on first down and in the red zone.

We've got to be more explosive and eliminate errors. Defensively is what we've got to do better is we've got to limit the explosive plays.

You're not going to -- you're going to give up some, especially in the league that we play in, but we have to limit those explosive plays, and then we've got to be able to create takeaways. That was our -- the explosive plays and the lack of takeaways last year were the biggest negative effect on us defensively.

We've been focused on ourselves, getting ourselves better. This is something that's going to increase the size of the chip. The chip was already there on the shoulder; it just increases the size.

Q. In 2021, Baylor won the league with several experienced starters in the secondary and multiple NFL Draft picks. Last year, Kansas State, same story. Do you believe that that's a necessary prerequisite for winning the league now? How do you feel about West Virginia's secondary coming into the season?

NEAL BROWN: Well, I think each year is different, right. I think being fortunate enough to be in this league, this is going to be my ninth season either as a coordinator or as a head coach in this league, and to see the evolution.

One of those is this used to be you just outscore everybody and you win. Well, I think it's changed. The defense -- the level of defensive coaching, the level of defensive players, the emphasis on special teams has definitely changed, and as that has changed, the style of football has changed.

You've got to be able to defend the pass. If you go back and look at us, we played really good defense for three

years. In 2020 we played great defense, but we played really good defense, and what we did a good job of is we gave up some completions but we kept the ball in front of us. We were able to tackle, and we didn't give up the home run shots.

So I think when you look back to whether it was Baylor or Kansas State, what they did a really good job of is eliminating those deep pass plays, and their secondaries both tackled at a high level.

One of the things after you reflect back is we knew we needed to get some veterans, so we went out and added Montre Miller from Kent State who started double-digit games at corner, was an All-MAC player; we added Anthony Wilson who's started over 30 games, was a three-time All-Sun Belt player at Georgia Southern; we added Beanie Bishop who played at two previous institutions with double-digit starts.

The question you're asking is do you have to play at a high level in the secondary to win this league. Yes. Do you have to have multiple draft picks? I'm not sure.

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