

Big 12 Conference Football Media Days

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Oklahoma Sooners

Brent Venables

Press Conference

BRENT VENABLES: Good to see everybody. Appreciate everybody being here today. Just 2023, incredibly excited about this season, about our team. I'd like to recognize our players that are here, Dillon Gabriel, Drake Stoops, Jonah Lauu, and Danny Stutsman, three incredible young men that are about all the right stuff. Thankful to be here with them here today and to be in front of y'all.

Last year in the Big 12 Conference, and having -- most of you know my background. I played at Kansas State as the former Big 8 and had the good fortune to coach in the very first Big 12 game in conference history, Kansas State versus Texas Tech, Zebbie Lethridge and Byron Hanspard and the great Spike Dykes, and what an amazing time it's been in this conference.

All of my opportunities in my life that I have here as a coach have all come from this conference, the Big 8, the Big 12, the coaches, the great mentors that I've had and all the amazing players that have helped me have a career of success.

Incredibly thankful for this conference and what it's meant. And as we all know, this is a conference that takes a backseat to nobody. Incredibly exciting having the new four teams, Central Florida, Cincinnati, BYU and Houston. Great coaches, great teams, great history and tradition that these teams will bring into this program.

I just want to say I appreciate our commissioner for his leadership. The Big 12 is in great hands under his directorship and what he's doing for this conference. There's no doubt that the best is still yet to come for this conference.

We've had tremendous turnover, like a lot of people in this day and age of college football. Like many people, there's been tremendous roster turnover. We desire a roster of stability and consistency. I think that's what lends to success and sustainability.



But it's also losing players is -- to me I look at it as a great opportunity for the new guys.

We've got 123 players on team 129, and out of those 123 players, 97 of them will be in either their first or their second year at the University of Oklahoma. Tremendous turnover, but I couldn't be more excited about the group of guys.

It goes without saying, we went 6-7 last year and fell well below our expectations and our standards at Oklahoma, but man, we learned and grew a lot as a football program. In five of the seven losses, it goes down to the last minute, two minutes of the game in the fourth quarter with a chance to win.

We've looked long and hard in the off-season, since January, of what we need to do to become a more efficient football team, and we've looked at every single part of our program, how we can improve and get better. Nothing ever stays the same.

We spent a lot of the off-season practicing, film review, programatically, coaching, all the things that you go into a season where we can get better, and really excited about the improvements that we've made a year into where we're at right now, and a year into our systems, a year into our strength and conditioning, the PRs, the improvements that we've made in the weight room.

Just had our best academic semester in the history of Oklahoma football. Everything matters in what we do and how we do it, how we can become a more efficient football team. 3rd and 4th down on both sides of the ball, certainly our red zone defense, handling the fourth quarter of games.

Really love the competitive depth that we've both developed with our current players, our returning players, and what we've recruited both out of high school with 40 new scholarship players and 17 transfers.

Really believe that because of the competitive depth we'll have a little bit stronger fourth quarter output on both sides of the ball, a quarter of football where we performed very



poorly last year, which led to five one-score losses for us.

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

Q. You alluded to the difficulty on defense last season, 123rd out of 131. How much is the transfer class going to really be the key to this season turning that around for you?

BRENT VENABLES: Well, again, everything matters. I try to look at everything, evaluate everything. Obviously playing good defense is keeping people out of the end zone, and so improving in the areas where we can improve.

You do that lots of different ways, whether it's scheme, it's players, it's development, it's teaching, it's practicing. Again, it can't ever happen fast enough. We haven't been good on defense for a long time, but everywhere I've been it's been a rebuilding process to some degree.

We've got a lot of work to do, but I've got a lot of faith in both our players, our staff, and certainly how we do what we do and our developmental processes. But there's no area on defense -- we led the Big 12 in interceptions. We led the Big 12 in tackles for loss. Those are building blocks, things you can build from.

Scoring defense, I think we're in the 90s. That's where it starts, keeping people out of the end zone, becoming a better red zone defense, stopping people. We were really poor stopping people in the run game.

I think leading the country last year you've got to be around 2.4 yards a carry we were at 4.4 yards a carry. So how do we shave off a couple of yards. A couple of yards is a lot. I get it. I know what that looks like. But you do it in everything that you're doing for a defensive standpoint.

From again, how you practice to how you teach, all of those things. But I believe we'll be better because of the returning experience. We'll be better fundamentally, we'll be better aggressiveness, we'll be better with our timing and our precision and our physicality as a result of some returning experience, guys like Danny Stutsman or Billy Bowman, Key Lawrence, Woodi Washington, Jonah, Ethan Downs.

And then the addition -- again, we've got nine guys, six guys up front, two All-American linebackers, a hard-hitting safety in Reggie Pearson. I believe we'll be better up the middle of our defense, and I look at where we were at really at every single position, and we didn't have the competitive depth a year ago.

We started the year pretty strong and then we didn't finish the year very well, particularly in, again, those fourth quarters of a bunch of games, we just didn't have any juice left about the middle of the year on.

The competitive depth will lead to better competitive stamina.

Q. You talked about coaching in the first Big 12 game. Your final road trip with Oklahoma will be at BYU. Just want to get your thoughts on the Cougars.

BRENT VENABLES: Yeah, the Cougars, had a little bit of experience both at Kansas State and at Oklahoma. It's going to be a wonderful atmosphere. Late November, it'll probably be about 80 degrees in Provo. No, it's going to be a wonderful atmosphere. Again, incredible fan base. There's not going to be an empty seat in the house.

It'll be a mature football team, like many of the BYU teams are. Coach and his staff have done an amazing job to establish a program of culture and toughness, and you're going to have to go earn victory. They're not going to give you anything.

Hopefully we're playing our best football. The teams I've taken the most pride in, the teams that have been most successful that I've been around are ones that improved as the season goes along. I am hopeful and have an expectation we'll be playing our best football at that time of the year.

Q. Follow-up on that question, your last home game, your last regular season Big 12 home game, black Friday, 11:00 a.m. against TCU. What do you anticipate that atmosphere, what TCU should expect, especially after what happened last year in Fort Worth?

BRENT VENABLES: Yeah, again, last year doesn't mean anything to what happens this year. That's literally how you coach, how you prepare. Coach and his staff did an amazing job. What an incredible season that they had a year ago.

What I expect out of Oklahoma is what I've seen for this will be my 15th year, and you're going to see an incredible very passionate fan base. They're going to show up deep. They're going to show up early. That's been the best winning percentage in college football the last 22 years, and I don't expect anything different than that.

This will be an incredible opportunity. Hopefully we're playing -- hopefully something is on the line in that game, and expectations are something will be. Again, I know

what Sonny and his group are going to bring. A great, great program that is going to come in with a championship mindset.

But for us, man, hopefully, again, we're playing our best football at that time of the year.

Q. I wanted to ask about Danny Stutsman, the guy you brought along here. What have you seen from him in terms of his growth and maturation over the off-season, and what kind of role do you see him playing on the team this season both on and off the field?

BRENT VENABLES: Well, it's like anything. What can you expect from, again, where we are 17 months ago to where we're at going into year two now. I think the greatest calling of coaches, the development of people, developing leaders.

Danny would be the first one to admit that 17 months ago he wasn't capable of leading, and he's in a much different place now. The whole team follows Danny, his emotion, his work, his action. He's a doer and a giver.

I love the maturation that's taking place with him off the field as much as on the field, his seriousness, his commitment to excellence every day. He's put the team and the expectations on his back, and I love that.

A year ago at this time he couldn't run a player-run practice. He couldn't run a player-run walk-through. He wasn't equipped to do that. I think that's a reflection of a lot of guys on our team.

We're in a different place. He certainly is at this point in time to where he was a year ago. He's his own worst critic. He's hard on himself. That's what the best of the best are. They're never satisfied.

I expect great things from Danny. He's long. He's athletic. He plays fast. He closes to the ball. He's got tremendous contact speed. He's got tremendous instincts, got great toughness.

He's worked incredibly hard for the '23 season. Really excited to see Danny and where he's at this year.

Q. I did want to allude to the fact of the statement you've already made is developing your players and you mentioned academics. I thought y'all have always done a tremendous job of that. By the way, I had dinner last night with one of your ex-players, Steven Coleman that played at Dallas Skyline and then again at OU, which I had the great opportunity to coach

Steven at Skyline. But I thank you for that and your staff.

BRENT VENABLES: You bet.

Q. I do want to ask, yesterday I know Coach Gundy kind of blamed OU football for not having the Bedlam game anymore. My question to you is does Oklahoma or would Oklahoma consider playing that in a non-conference game, which I think as media and fans, we would love to see that rivalry continued because rivalries are so big in college football?

BRENT VENABLES: I appreciate the question, and say hey to Steve for me.

Look, I'm not in control of whether or not we play Oklahoma State. I love college football. I love the traditions of the game. I love rivalry games.

Oklahoma and Oklahoma State have played for over 100 years, and Oklahoma has been dang good in those games for a long time.

But whether or not we play them in the future, nobody is asking me what I think. If they do ask me, I'll tell them what I think. I'd love to play the game.

But we're going to play the schedule that they put in front of us.

Q. What is the steepest part of the learning curve in becoming a head coach, and has Bob Stoops reminded you how he did in his second year at OU?

BRENT VENABLES: I've got good revisionist memory. I remember what that year was like.

It's everything. It really is. Looking at overall efficiency I think is probably the biggest thing for me. Willing to listen, sometimes, again, willing to listen to your players, certainly listen to your staff, take it all in. Ultimately you have to make decisions on all of it.

But being a better listener, looking at the efficiency, how you do what you do, and then what you do, and in those critical situations how you can improve, schemes, coaching, all of that.

Managing it all, I've got a wonderful staff. They've put heart into all of it, and if we're successful it's because of all of us, as a staff and certainly as a program of players. When you're not successful, it all rests right at your seat. So heavy is the crown. But I embrace that. I've always put a lot on myself.

A lot of learning and growing and reflecting, and again, really expect to, again, come back this year and learn from those mistakes. You learn a lot through failure, as we all talk about a lot in dealing with sports, and it teaches you a lot, but if you're made of the right stuff, winners respond, winners come back a better version of themselves, winners go right back at it, and that's exactly what we're going to do.

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