

Big 12 Conference Football Media Days

Tuesday, July 9, 2024
Las Vegas, Nevada, USA
Allegiant Stadium

TCU Horned Frogs Coach Sonny Dykes Press Conference

SONNY DYKES: Summer's officially over; you know Big 12 Media Days is here. So it's an exciting time of the year. I know our players are excited, our fans are excited. It's just that time of the year that everybody's got a little bit of optimism.

Just want to start out by thanking Brett Yormark and his leadership from the Big 12. I think we're incredibly well-positioned because of his strong leadership and his vision. I think it's led to this event today and the stability that the Big 12 has now.

I think the brighter days are ahead for the Big 12. Love the position that we're in. Again, a lot of that has to do with investment from the universities. I'm certainly blessed to be at TCU where football's important, and it's important to our university and to our leadership.

I thank Chancellor Pullin and -- Chancellor Boschini and President Pullin for their support and Jeremiah Donati, and just really blessed to be here.

Like I said, exciting time of the year. I wore a suit in honor of Brett Yormark. He's always the best-dressed guy. So I ordered an Armani suit, and then I realized mine came and it's spelled Ormani instead of Armani. I guess it's a different suit than what he's got. I did my best.

Glad to be here. Excited about my team. Have really five high-quality young men today that you guys will have a chance to get to know a little bit.

I think we're in a good place. Had a heck of a run in 2022. It's a fun year where everything went our way. We had some tremendous leadership. A lot of experience on that team. And we lost a lot of that last year and really didn't do the little things right that it takes to win football games, and that really boils down to coaching.



We've got to do a better job coaching this year. Certainly didn't get the carry-over from the national championship run in '22 to '23 that we wanted to. I think that's college football. I think you're going to look around and see some teams that are really good one year and maybe struggle a little bit the next, and that was certainly us last year, and now we're ready to get back playing TCU football.

Again, excited to be here. Look forward to seeing you all today, and let's get this thing started.

Q. What have you seen from this group from the spring, some of your offseason workouts that gives you the confidence that you guys can get back to playing TCU football?

SONNY DYKES: First of all, Steven, thank you for doing a great job covering us. You're there all the time in practice, and so it doesn't go unnoticed and appreciated, and really appreciate the work that you do for us and the pride you take in covering our program.

I think we've come a long way. I just think our attitude, the standard that these players set for each other and hold themselves to is different than last year's team.

I just like the leadership of this group. To me, it's a team-oriented team. The guys care about each other. There's not a whole lot of talk about individual accolades or getting to the league or any of that kind of thing. And the guys want to win, and the guys want to lay it on the line for each other and lay it on the line for TCU.

So it's a great feeling team. It has the hunger that successful teams have and the determination that successful teams typically have. We're like everybody else. It's a new league. There's going to be a lot of things that are going to be different. New additions to the league. A lot of uncertainty, but I love our mentality. I love our attitude. I love the work ethic. I like the toughness of this group.

I don't think this group wants anything to be handed to them. I think they want to scratch and fight and earn everything they get, and I really love that mentality.



I think it's a talented group. We've got the right mix of experience coming back but also a lot of really dynamic young players that I think are really going to help us.

Q. We'll transition from Joe Gillespie to Andy Avalos, both highly aggressive, but one runs a three-man front with Gillespie and four-man front with Andy. What drew you to Andy Avalos, and do you expect to be a four-man front even with the portal activity?

SONNY DYKES: For sure. The good thing about the four-man front is it's kind of counterintuitive to what you think. Defensive linemen and high quality defensive linemen are really difficult to recruit. So you say, well, you're going from -- if you're three down, you only have to recruit three, and if you're four down, you have to recruit four.

Not entirely true. When you are three down, you have to recruit three big guys. Those are the guys that are hard to find. What that does now is that changes a little bit of the makeup of your defense when it comes to being able to get speed on the field.

What I love about the four-down system is you're playing with two traditional big defensive linemen, obviously a nose guard and three technique, but then you can play with a lot of different body types on the edge. That can vary honestly from week-to-week in your opponent and who is going to get the lion's share of the playing time. So it allows to you get a little more speed, a little more of a pass rusher on the field.

I love this group of pass rushers that we have. I think that that's going to be the biggest area of improvement for us is pressuring the quarterback. When you pressure the quarterback, that changes the game. All have to do is look at the NFL and the two highest-paid positions are the quarterback and the guy who pressures the quarterback. Obviously those two areas are really important.

And we're going to be able to throw a lot of different body types out there and guys who can run and guys who can be aggressive and we can create some good match-ups on the edge and also hold up against the run as a four-down as well.

So I like the versatility of it. I really have been excited about Andy. He's former head coach. Two years ago he was the Mountain West Coach of the Year. 10-2 record first-year head coach. Guy has been around successful football his whole life, his whole career at Boise and as defensive coordinator at Oregon. He believes in creating havoc defensively. And I think that's what you have to do

in today's college football world.

If you let quarterbacks sit back there and have time, they're going to dissect you. The game is changed. It's just different. There's so many good quarterbacks now. There's so many effective and efficient offenses that people are running that I think it really puts a premium on pressuring the quarterbacks. And I think this team will be able to do that because of Andy and really a lot because of our players and their abilities.

Q. Coach, you inherited a lot of defense or a lot of leadership in 2022. You lost that in 2023. How are you developing it for 2024?

SONNY DYKES: That's a great question. I think when you had a year like we had in 2022, the assumption is, okay, these young players are going to watch these older players, guys like Max Duggan and guys like Dee Winters and just a wealth of experience in leadership, and you think Wes Harris and you think guys are going to watch them and they're going to learn from them.

What happens in today's college football world, you turn over almost half your roster now every year. So there were not that many players when it was all said and done. We lost a lot of juniors to the NFL Draft, guys who came out early.

So what we have to do now is we have to make sure that we don't rely on our players to teach that and to pass that tradition on. That's got to be something that we teach as coaches. So we've taken a much more active approach in trying to, number one, create relationships with our players to be very intentional about just getting together, spending time together doing things outside of football to earn each other's trust and to get the guys, number one, to just know each other.

Because, as I said, the roster turns over so much. The one thing that I think we did a good job of this year was most of our transfers came in in January and those guys went through spring ball and assimilated more into a team.

We've done a lot of things from a leadership class that we're currently teaching to our players right now to just being more intentional about the things that we teach and the values that we try to instill with our student-athletes.

So that to me is going to be critically important moving forward in college football, again, when you lose so much of your roster like you do every year.

Q. Just in regards to obviously coached at Cal for a while, you're familiar with the four corner teams



coming in. Just from how stacked the Big 12 is and when you were coaching the Pac-12 at the time, how do you kind of compare the parity of the teams you're going to be playing and the intensity in which you can't really drop a game, you can't really afford to especially with 16 teams in the conference?

SONNY DYKES: That's a good question. I'm familiar with all the new additions really over the last two years. Most of the teams coming from the American prior, when I was at SMU and now the four teams coming from the Pac-12, my time at Cal, I coached against them.

I think I've coached against all 16 current members of the Big 12. And every team has its own personality and every team has its own niche in the way they have to be successful and developing their program.

I think what makes the Big 12 unique is parity. If you look at the Big Ten, you look at the SEC, you look at the ACC, the same teams have represented those leagues year in, year out in the conference championship games. In the last three years, six different Big 12 teams have been in the championship game. So I think right there that speaks to the parity of the league.

It does remind me a little bit of the Pac-12 when I was at Cal; every team in the league is good. Every team in the league is capable of beating any other team on any given Saturday. I don't know that that's the case in some of the other leagues.

We'll see how that plays out, but I really truly believe, top to bottom, this is going to be the most competitive league in college football. I mean, I really truly believe that.

You just look at the number of one-score ball games in the Big 12 and you look at the number of successful teams and how many one-score ball games they've played. It's going to come down to one possession. You look at our '22 team; we were 7-1 in one-score games. That was the difference, with the loss being to Kansas State in the Big 12 Championship.

Look at our team last year, we were 0-4 in one-score games. So that really determines your success in the Big 12, and it comes down to very minute details, and it comes down to your players playing very disciplined, playing good football, playing with precision, playing with confidence and making good decisions.

It's going to be a great league to watch week in, week out. And obviously we're adding some very successful teams. You look at Utah and the success they've had over the last 20, 25 years, it's been on par with just about anybody in

college football. You look at the team that Arizona had last year. You look at the history of Arizona State football and the potential of that program and obviously Colorado. So there's four quality teams that all have their own niche and they're all very unique and very different.

Q. How far do you think the quarterback room has gone from last year to this year knowing the experience that Josh Hoover got and knowing the strengths in the receiving corps that returned?

SONNY DYKES: I really like our quarterback room. As you said, Josh Hoover got quite a bit of experience last year. Then we took a transfer from Vanderbilt, Ken Seals, and Ken started 16 games at Vanderbilt. We felt like we needed to bring somebody in that had experience. And then we've got a young quarterback, Hauss Hejny, quarterback at Aledo, I think was 45-3 as a starting quarterback at Aledo, had tremendous success and is a tremendous athlete and grew up his whole life as a TCU fan.

I love the room. All three of the guys are different. I think they all have different strengths. I think the experience that Josh got last year was invaluable. He performed really, really well in his first start. Came out, threw for, I think, over 400 yards, maybe close to 500 his first time out as a starter, really performed well.

And we had some ups and downs. And I think we were very inconsistent, and we didn't always put him in the best position, I think. We had some growing pains. That's what you expect when you have a young quarterback. I love his experience. I love what Ken brings to the table with his 16 starts.

And I love the big playability that Hauss brings. It's a very unique quarterback room, all different guys, different strengths, different abilities. Really fired up. I think Josh has an opportunity to be one of the elite quarterbacks in the league this season. Expect him to play at a high level.

I don't know that I've been around too many guys that are more dedicated mature and more kind of proficient in the way that he handles his business. Every day he wakes up, he's got a plan to get better and improve. And creates relationships incredibly well. The guys admire him, they respect him. I think they'll lay it on the line for him every Saturday. I'm fired up about him and what he brings to that room and what that room is all about.

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