

# Big 12 Conference Football Media Days

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Las Vegas, Nevada, USA  
Allegiant Stadium



## Kansas State Wildcats

### Chris Klieman

#### Press Conference

CHRIS KLIEMAN: It's great to be out here in Vegas. Thanks to Commissioner Yormark for getting this all set up, and we're excited to get things started here at the end of July.

We're excited about our football team. We've got a lot of returning guys, but as everybody does, we've got a lot of new guys as well. So it will be nice to mesh those guys together come August.

Competitive league, as usual. Great parity with the amount of schools and new schools we have, especially the ones we play.

We're excited about the challenge.

**Q. You obviously came from North Dakota State. There's been a few other notable coaches that have come from FCS, Division II, even NAIA with Kalen DeBoer and his success after his time at Sioux Falls. What does it mean to see these guys getting these opportunities, and do you think those guys tend to be overlooked sometimes?**

CHRIS KLIEMAN: I've said this since the day I arrived in Manhattan, and football is football, and you just need opportunities, and when you get opportunities, and if you're having success, you're going to get those opportunities. And I've known Kalen for a while. I was so excited for him with the run they made last year.

There's a lot of good football coaches at all different levels. And I think you're going to continue to see coaches from NAIA, Division II, FCS, so forth, get opportunities.

**Q. The esteemed voters of the Big 12 preseason poll picked you guys second but they put none of your guys on the All-Conference team. How do you rectify those two decisions?**

CHRIS KLIEMAN: Don't pay a whole lot of attention to it, to be honest with you. Everybody sees it, but it's not something that we talk about an awful lot. I hope it shows people the overall depth and value of our roster and how important our role players are and how important our players are as far as if you're a successful team, individual honors at the end of the season are going to come.

I'm sure that our players, if you asked them, they probably saw both polls, and I don't know if they're excited, disappointed, but I know they were aware that there was nobody from K-State on one of those teams, but you still have to perform, and we've got a lot of work to do before we get to the end of August.

**Q. Hiring Matt Wells, comes in as co-offensive coordinator, huge history with quarterbacks, specifically 2018 Jordan Love at Utah State. What does he bring to Avery Johnson, and what led you to bring him in?**

CHRIS KLIEMAN: Matt and I have been friends for more than a decade, always talked, even when he was at Tech and I was here at K-State, when he went to Oklahoma. He and I have always stayed in contact.

It was maybe the right time for him to get back on the field and truly coach. We talked all through that bowl prep, and he was the one who I wanted to hire. He was just trying to get through that bowl time, and it worked out.

But a wealth of experience and a wealth of knowledge with quarterbacks, and I've already seen, in a short period of time, just the second semester, the value of him being with Avery.

There's a great mesh there. There's a great comfort between the two guys. They are on the same page an awful lot. And I know that Avery, as well as our offensive staff, coaches, Coach Riley, our offensive coordinator, are excited about some of the things that Coach Wells will bring to K-State, especially the pass game. And everybody wants to know what the heck we'll do, but we'll wait until the fall to unveil that.



But super excited to have Matt and his family in Manhattan.

**Q. The secondary returns a lot of talent this past year. How important is it as you transition into the season with a fairly similar defensive structure?**

CHRIS KLIEMAN: It's really important. There's such talented offenses in this league and skilled players, for us to have bookend corners back in Keenan Garber and Jacob Parrish is really important for us. Those guys have played a lot of football. And then to have most of our safeties, VJ Payne and Marques Sigle played a lot of football, Colby McCalister has played a lot.

And then we've got some freshmen that are ready to step up as redshirt freshmen, a couple of transfers, a kid named Jordan Riley that I think people will learn and know an awful lot about by the end of the season.

But you need to have great depth in the secondary, and we feel that that's an area that we have done a really good job of recruiting and developing talent and then sprinkling in a transfer because you need to be really good in the secondary in this league.

**Q. You kind of have the unique nature of playing 10 conference games with the Arizona game not counting towards it. Was there any discussion of pushing that off because of the fact that they're in the league now?**

CHRIS KLIEMAN: I think it was probably too late when everything got finished up with scheduling. And I'm glad that we're playing Arizona. They're a terrific football program, and it's a great early-season game for the Big 12 to get on national TV on a Friday night. So that excites us, and I know it excites Arizona. There's really good talent on both teams.

I'm hoping that we ultimately get to an even number of conference games so that we're not in the nine, five away, four at home, that it's more of a four and four split of eight games, or even a ten, because if you have to play a Power Five, you might as well play it in your league and get five and five.

But, no, it's going to be a great game. It's going to be a great showcase for the Big 12 in early September.

**Q. I believe you play five teams that are either new to the conference or second year in the Big 12. To what extent, if any, did that mean any extra work in preparation for your coaching staff?**

CHRIS KLIEMAN: Yeah, it definitely gave us a lot more

work in the summer. The month of June is already busy enough with recruiting and camps, and now we don't have the database like you'd have with a Tech or a Baylor or a TCU. We've got five new schools, or even BYU and Cincinnati have been in our league, but we didn't play them last year, so we don't have much data on them. Then we've got the two Arizona schools and Colorado.

So a lot of extra work. I think it's excitement, though, for the fans, for both schools, as far as whether it's us going to Provo and seeing a great environment, because I've been there and I know it's a phenomenal environment, to us going to Boulder and seeing a great environment, or those other schools potentially coming to our place and seeing a great environment in Manhattan.

I think the fan base of all the schools are going to be excited because they're going to see really good football, and they're going to see some different teams that they haven't seen throughout the year.

**Q. You lose a lot of senior leadership in Beebe, what he meant to the offensive line, and the offensive line, the quarterback's best friend. How have you kind of just this offseason tried to get the O-line to embody his spirit, and when will he be put in the ring of honor?**

CHRIS KLIEMAN: I don't probably make that decision, but Beebs had a phenomenal career. He'll be in the ring of honor for sure.

But it's interesting, we lost four really good senior offensive linemen, but we have four really good senior offensive linemen returning.

And that's something that maybe goes overlooked a little bit, the value of what Conor Riley does for our offense and for our program and for that room and the offensive line room, to lose the amount of seniors that we had and then still return the amount of seniors. Hadley Panzer, Taylor Poitier, Carver Willis have really taken over the reins from those guys that have left and have tried to kept that engine running.

And we've always been really, really good up front, and it's due to Coach Riley. But it's those guys that have been in the program that want to stay and want to be developed and not want to get in the transfer portal just because they don't play in their first year.

The offensive line is a different deal. It takes sometimes a few years to develop. We've got Hadley and Carver back that have played a lot. T.P. has played a lot. Andrew Leingang is going to play a lot of football that's been around. Sam Hecht will play a lot of football that's been

around.

We have experienced guys that have been with our program, they're just going to gain on-field experience quickly in the non-con.

**Q. Going from the offensive line to the defensive line here, how important will the physicality and experience up front defensively be, given the talent of the ground games in this conference as well as the importance of the pass rush?**

CHRIS KLIEMAN: We've been really fortunate that we've always had a lot of depth in our defensive line. Coach Tui and Coach Wyatt do a great job, and we're probably going to have eight or nine deep on the defensive line, and we've always rotated guys really well.

But we've got two six-year defensive ends in Brendan Mott and Cody Stufflebean coming back that have been in the program for a long time. And those young kids will play a lot to a high standard, to high expectations.

But I'm really comfortable and excited about the amount of defensive linemen we have that have played a lot of Big 12 football, as well as some of the new guys we have coming on, some freshmen that will be redshirt freshmen that I think can really be effective pass rushers. And there's no doubt about it, you've got to be able to stop the run, and you've got to be able to get a good rush on the passer.

**Q. You guys played Oklahoma State last year when Ollie Gordon was just getting going. You obviously know what really good running backs look like at K-State. I'm curious, just what impresses you about him, and obviously in Manhattan this year, what's the challenge of handling him?**

CHRIS KLIEMAN: He's a tremendous talent. He's got really good speed. He's a home run hitter, as well as he can run through arm tackles. He had a breakout season and it started around our game and he continued to elevate. He's a terrific football player, and we're glad we play him in Manhattan and not Stillwater.

We've struggled in Stillwater and we've played better in Manhattan. But that's the nature of our league. You're going to face really talented running backs each week. You'll face talented quarterbacks, and you've got to stay healthy and you've got to do a great job of trying to eliminate explosive plays and last year Ollie got us on a couple of big ones, and we've got to prevent that.

**Q. You have one of the most talented running backs in this league in DJ Giddens. Last season he split carries**

**with Treshaun Ward. Do you plan on giving him more of a workload this year or how will that work out?**

CHRIS KLIEMAN: It will probably be similar in the fact that DJ can carry it 30 times, and he did that a few times for us last year. He can carry it 20 times. DJ is an every-down back and underrated in our league.

DJ is just a phenomenal football player that's a great kid, great pass protection, great out of the backfield catch the ball. He's going to have a dynamite year for us. We've surrounded him now with some more talent that we don't have to rely on him that much. There are some games we are. We're going to give it to him, and he'll be ready for it. There's other games where we've got to spread it around more. We've got to throw the ball a little more so that the offensive or the running game does open up.

So we've got another tailback in Dylan Edwards that's a really good complement to DJ with some speed as well as electricity elusiveness in the open field that's probably the thing that excites us the most offensively we have a lot of guys around Avery.

**Q. For the four new teams to the conference that maybe aren't familiar with Kansas State. How would you describe your brand of football?**

CHRIS KLIEMAN: Consistent. Don't beat themselves. Try to play really good defense. Try to rush the football. Try to not turn the ball over and hit the explosive plays when you have the opportunity. But hopefully a physical brand of well-disciplined kids that play the game the right way, and I'm excited because of all those teams, we're going to find out a lot about them, too, because there's really talented football teams coming into this league, and that's why it's so hard to predict how any order of finish could be with all the new teams that are coming in.

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