

# Big 12 Conference Football Media Days

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

## Oklahoma State Cowboys

### Mike Gundy

#### Press Conference



MIKE GUNDY: We're excited to be here. This has been a great day for us. Flew in yesterday afternoon with players, and it was fun. I've been to Vegas a lot. The players hadn't been here before. So it was neat to see them, and we had a good dinner last night with some Oklahoma State people and gave the players a chance to look around, and it's a beautiful city.

We're excited about it. I'm excited about the players' upcoming season. We've got about 20 days before we get started. So we're semi-vacation.

Other than the players, they're working hard, and we've got great leadership, I'm really excited about our team. I'm excited about the direction we're moving. Excited about Oklahoma State administration, our support. President of the university, athletic director, everybody that loves Oklahoma State. It's a great time for us. I'm looking forward to the upcoming season.

**Q. I want you to talk about your returning players. You've got a lot on offense and some key contributors on defense. What's the main difference from last year's team going into this year, and just get your opinion on that?**

MIKE GUNDY: A year ago we had 28 new players come in, and then ultimately before we started the season we had 38 new players as we added 10 more. So there were a lot of areas that we had to decide what was best for our team and how to get to that point.

A number of those players were at semester, transfers that we felt like were good enough to help us based on the portal, unlike what you would have with high school players. There was a little bit of uncertainty in what direction to go in order to be fair to all the players involved.

This year, we have fewer portal transfers at semester,

more returning starters. So coaches have a better direction in how to get there. Now it's just a matter of us kind of getting out of the way and allowing the maturity and leadership we have of our team to take over.

**Q. You and Alan Bowman are probably two of the most tenured people left in the Big 12. So just having a quarterback who has been in college that long, he's seen the Big 12, different angles, playing for you and against you, how much of a force multiplier is he helping build out the culture and teaching the younger guys and kind of setting a standard on his way out?**

MIKE GUNDY: Alan has done a really good job of adapting to our culture and buying into Oklahoma State University. When he came in a year ago, he was one of the players that I was talking about that we needed him to earn his position. And since then he's got a year under his belt. He's very mature. He's engaged to be married.

He already has two degrees. He has a good feel for us, has a good feel for our system. He's been around a long time. And I think the experience that he brings to our team, the respect and the players believe in him at this point, benefit us the most at this time.

**Q. I've got a conference question for you. Just wondering the way the league is set up now with the 16 teams and no Texas and Oklahoma, if there is an opportunity for one or two programs to kind of have a dominant stretch in this league, the way we saw like Oklahoma?**

MIKE GUNDY: That's a great question. I don't know that any of us will be able to read into that at this point. We're learning about the new teams that are coming in.

In my opinion, as we move forward, there's going to be a lot of parity. I should say more parity in college football than there has been over the last few years. If revenue sharing takes effect, I would guess that most schools in this league will distribute money somewhat equally to football.

The direction we're going, that's going to determine the



type of players that you have in your organization, whether we like it or not. Recruiting is still recruiting, but it won't be as much recruiting as it is now. It will be the ability to distribute money to the right players that you need based on the talent that you think you've seen at that particular time.

I think that we've got a number of teams in this league that have an opportunity to make a move national. Whether anybody can take over and dominate for an extended period of time would be hard to tell at this point.

**Q. You're picked third in the preseason poll. Your thoughts on that, and a conference that's gone through so much realignment?**

MIKE GUNDY: I really haven't paid much attention to preseason polls. They've always said the good news is we get to play all the games. I'm really excited about our conference. I've said that for the last few years, as we've continued to add teams. From day one I've always said that I think we have the best commissioner in all of the conferences. We have a guy that's innovative, smart, not afraid to take a chance. He's bullish on moving forward and doing whatever it takes to put the Big 12 where it needs to be for us to crown national champions in football. I have confidence in him.

With that being said, I believe that this conference is going to play better over the next four to five years than it has in the last 12 to 15, for the most part, other than the last year we were intact.

So I'm excited about the group. Could there be more conference realignment in the future? Very well could happen based on all the changes we've had in the last 18 to 20 months that none of us could have predicted. So I think everything's a moving target, but I really like where we're at, and I'm excited about this conference.

**Q. How have you handled Ollie Gordon's arrest, and how has he been handling it mentally, emotionally, those kinds of things?**

MIKE GUNDY: Ollie is doing fine. I visited with him multiple times over the last week. To be quite honest with you, yesterday we had another hour conversation. It was the first time that he smiled. I think that it affected him like it would most people.

We brought him here today so you guys could ask him that question. That was one of the reasons that I wanted to bring him here. It's hard for me to speak for Ollie. I can only give you some indication on what I've seen over the last week.

I sit back and thought about what I thought was best for Oklahoma State University, Oklahoma State football and Ollie as we move forward, and we made decisions.

The other thing I shared with Ollie yesterday was, after he decided that he wanted to come to today's event, that I told him, when this is finished today at 4 o'clock, it's over for me. I've already made the decisions that I think what's best for you and this team, and you need to make the decisions and the comments what you think is best for yourself and the team. And then after today it's over with. And that's what our goal is, and I think we'll be able to get that accomplished.

**Q. We have to talk about the offensive line, the most experienced in the nation. A year ago you and I talked about leaving the zone, going to man, counter, power. After the non-conference schedule, the numbers just jumped off the page. Was it because the offensive line's grasp of the new run concepts in blocking?**

MIKE GUNDY: After the first three games, we changed the concepts of what we were doing up front. We changed the alignment of our tailback, particularly, what we thought Ollie Gordon would be best at. And we shoved all of our poker chips on the table, and we hit. It worked for us. We made the right decision.

Ollie started running like crazy. We were better at blocking those schemes than we were the other ones in the first three games, and that was on the coaches. That was on me. I'm involved in the offense pretty heavily. Not on game day, but prior to getting to game day.

So when we made the decisions to move in that direction, it worked out well for us. Then our players started running the same plays, four or five plays, over and over, and Ollie started to create really good vision on those type of plays and the different ways he was running them.

I think he led the nation last year in yards after contact for running backs, which fit that style of play. And it worked for us. And all of a sudden it helped us become a better passing team because we had the ability to rush the football.

**Q. What improvements have you seen on the defensive side of the ball given the struggles from last year?**

MIKE GUNDY: So we have a very athletic defense in my opinion. We can run and get to the ball. We've made a few adjustments scheme-wise, not a lot. We played three down last year, played a little bit of four down.

From day one I said I wanted to have the advantage and the luxury of playing some three and four down, not just on third downs, but on first and second downs.

So we've worked toward that. I think our players will have a better feel for our system and will allow us to play faster and get to the ball. And we need to tackle better. We missed a lot of tackles. Got out of place at times on some play-action passing. If we can eliminate those two things and minimize that, we'll be a better defense.

**Q. Last season you started out 2-2 with two losses including one at home to South Alabama. Everyone wrote your team out. Then you guys finished strong down the stretch and wound up winning ten games and made it all the way to the Big 12 Championship game. With that being said, how hungry is your team this time around to get back to the Big 12 Championship game?**

MIKE GUNDY: That's a great question. And one thing I shared with them in January and then after spring ball is just what you said. We know that we're a mature team. We all know that we have a lot of returning starters. We know that we had the Doak Walker winner in the backfield. We know we have a couple of guys that had tremendous success at wide receiver position. We know that we have eight linemen that have played a considerable amount of college football during their career.

We have a defense that has maturity up front. We have a linebacker returning that had 150 tackles. We've got guys that are returning in the secondary that have the potential to be an NFL camps next year.

So with all that being said, now it's going to be on them, their leadership, their willingness to work hard and stay hungry.

In that, it's easier to work from behind and get to that point during the season than it is to be out front and stay there, in my opinion, because I don't want the team to think that they've arrived because they certainly haven't.

I'm just guessing that teams that we're playing do care less about what we did last year and they're going to try to beat us. So I stressed that to the team. And I feel comfortable with the leadership, the maturity with the guys we have and that they'll be able to push themselves hard in August.

**Q. You've got two relatively new road trips this season at Boulder and Provo. I know you played at Boulder or coached at Boulder back in 2008. But relatively new to this team, what unique challenges come with playing**

**new conference opponents on the road for the first time and just starting to get a feel for what those road environments are like?**

MIKE GUNDY: Part of the new conference we're in and the fun part for the fans, media, for everybody involved, is playing in new facilities and stadiums. And on the plane ride out here with the players that we brought to today's event, they brought that up and they were talking about that, and I was listening to them. They're excited about playing in Provo. They're excited about playing in Boulder because they haven't been there.

Man, it was interesting listening to Bowman, because Bowman has been around long enough that he's played in about every stadium in the country, but he said, "I haven't been able to play in these stadiums. I haven't experienced it."

So that's a fun part of college football, and we're excited about it playing two games in the mountains. Obviously I played and coached a number of times in Boulder. I've been to Provo and seen it. Not played or coached there, but excited about doing it.

So we sold out our season tickets a week or two ago to Oklahoma State, and I think one of the reasons that we sell out so fast is the excitement the fans have because of some of the new teams. I think they're excited about some of these new teams coming to our place. So that's been good for the Big 12 Conference.

**Q. Respect your career, but I wouldn't be doing my job if I didn't ask you to give your personal response to being in the same conference with Deion Sanders and whether that November 29th game has a little extra juice for you?**

MIKE GUNDY: Well, that's an easy -- I thought you were going to ask me who I was going to vote for in November.

(Laughter)

I thought you put a lot of pressure on me.

So I have a lot of respect for Coach's career. I know a lot more about him as a player than I did as a coach because has not coached for a long period of time at this level.

We had meetings in Phoenix, Big 12 administrative and football coaches. And I'd actually forgot about it, and we got in there, and all the coaches were around. And I started looking around. I was chairing those meetings, and so we had to do introductions, and then realized. And it was very enjoyable being in a room with him and his

contribution to a lot of the subjects that we talked about.

And I think we're lucky in our league that he's with us because he brings more people and notoriety and viewers to the Big 12 Conference, and that's what makes it go. We need viewership. We want people to watch our teams play.

It will be fun to have him in our league. It will be fun -- it's fun for me to have Colorado back in our league and to be able to compete against him. I can only imagine what his competitive level is. So that will be fun to have him in the league.

**Q. This past season two of the top running backs in the country came out of the Big 12, Tajh Brooks with Texas Tech and Ollie Gordon, Oklahoma State. First question: How do you game plan for a guy like Tajh, since you have them this year, and how important is it for the Big 12 to have star players like that that everybody in the nation knows about?**

MIKE GUNDY: The star players draw attention, make more people want to watch us play in our league, which is a good thing.

We're working hard, all the schools. The Big 12 office, the commissioner, everybody is working to get to that goal.

In preparing for those guys, football is a numbers game. When you play somebody that has a running back of that caliber, one other person has got to play the run. When that happens, you become susceptible to the pass.

As I mentioned earlier, as the season went on, we became a much better passing team at Oklahoma State because Ollie Gordon, because a much better running back, based on what we were trying to get accomplished.

So it's a numbers game. You can get him up there and stop him. You can let him rush and stay back, or you can try to play guessing games, which most people do. But basically you have to get somebody else back down there to stop the run. That's the advantage of having a good running back, allows your receivers to be much better players.

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