

Big 12 Conference Football Media Days

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Allegiant Stadium

West Virginia Mountaineers

Neal Brown

Press Conference

NEAL BROWN: Excited to be a part of the new Big 12. Four players we brought with us today. We have defensive lineman Sean Martin from Bluefield, West Virginia; safety Aubrey Burks from Auburndale, Florida; and Garrett Greene, quarterback, from Tallahassee, Florida; and Wyatt Milum from Kenova, West Virginia.

Glad they're here representing our team. They're about the right things. Also joined by what we feel is the best communication group in the country and two of our cheerleaders and the best mascot in college football.

Excited about the '24 season. Offensively just real quick, we return one of the most dynamic playmakers in the country in Garrett Greene, return an offensive line that we're extremely proud of. Also have a tight end that led us in receiving in Kole Taylor, and a really good 1-2 punch at running back in Jahiem White and CJ Donaldson, and a young receiving crew that we think is going to make a huge jump.

Excited about that group and what our potential is on offense. Defensively, we returned most of our defensive line that was highly productive in sacks and TFLs and playing the run, a young linebacker group that we feel like is going to be much improved.

And then secondary is kind of the question mark for us. We went out and addressed that in the portal. And so looking forward to getting that group complete and working with them in fall camp, and then we return all our specialists, our snapper, our holder, our kicker, our punter.

So a lot returning from a group that won nine games and finished off with a big win against North Carolina at Charlotte. And we've got a challenging schedule.

We open up with Penn State and we'll have our hands full, but we're really looking forward to that contest. With that,



I'll open it up for questions.

Q. What's been easier for you to kind of develop this program, the character of your team, when it first hits or doesn't, or just their identity going into the season?

NEAL BROWN: I think speaking -- I'll speak from a program perspective more so than this team because this team I think is to be determined. I think the character piece is a lot of that happens through recruiting and making sure you have processes and systems in place to make sure that you're bringing in the right type of individual and people with character, and then you try to develop that character once they're on campus. The identity piece for us is something that we really spent a lot of time on really over the last 19 months of who we need to be to be successful in West Virginia.

Feel like we found that. And our team has bought into it. And more importantly the leadership of our team is we're going to be a tough unit that is really disciplined. They play smart football, and we do those things with an underdog mentality with a chip on our shoulder.

Q. You mentioned the developing receiving corps. What do you feel Jaden Bray could add to that?

NEAL BROWN: Jaden, he scored a touchdown, as you know, from Stillwater. He scored a touchdown against us last year. Once he went into the portal, we couldn't beat him; so we felt like we needed to get him on our team.

But Jaden is really talented, and I thought he was slowed by injuries last year. He had a couple really big games. He's a tremendous human being, first of all. So he's been a great addition to our locker room. The type of character he has, how he was raised. Those are all real positives. And he's long. He can jump and he can run.

So now, for us, is about getting that production from a week in, week out perspective, but I'm excited to coach him. He's been a joy since he got there in January, and I think he's sitting on really not just one but two quality high-production years.



Q. You mentioned a minute ago doing things with kind of a chip on your shoulder, and that's kind of how you pushed this program forward. I remember last year, you kind of had that same mindset about being picked towards the bottom of the league. And I'm curious how your team responded to that sort of attitude and using it to win nine games and a bowl game.

NEAL BROWN: There's no question, we rallied around that. I stood up here a year ago, and we were picked 14th and I said we wouldn't be there. And our team proved me right.

And I said that a year ago because I knew what we had on both fronts. To win at college football, you've got to be really talented at skill positions and you have to have difference-makers there, but you've got to win the trenches, and you've got to win on your offensive and defensive line, and I knew we had those type of guys and they were experienced and had been productive.

So that is something we rallied around, that 14. And now it's similar. We're coming off 9 and 4, I look at most of the preseason Top 25, we're not in it. With a team that finished strong last year that returns a lot of production, that has one of the most dynamic players in all of college football in Garrett Greene.

We were the number one Power Four rushing offense in the country last year. And we're picked seventh in the league. And we're not in most of these preseason Top 25s. So I think there's a similar dynamic that works with this team, too. And, more importantly, to me on a personal level, I believe some of our players are undervalued.

Garrett Greene, here's not getting talked about as much as some others, and his production speaks for itself.

Wyatt Milum, we feel he's as good or better than any offensive lineman in the country and he's our starting tackle. I could go on. I think some of our players are being undervalued as well.

Q. You've got an early season game against Albany that's sandwiched between two monster games. You've got the game versus Penn State and the Backyard Brawl, what's it take to mentally prepare a roster for a game like that against a team that was in the FCS championship last year and no joke of a program?

NEAL BROWN: I appreciate your knowledge of all of college football, and from a guy that finished his playing career at FCS level, great amount of respect for that football and Albany.

When I was coaching at Sacred Heart, which was my first full-time job, we played them. It's kind of full-circle moment for me. And what they've done with their program is tremendous. They've really grown, and the national semifinalist last year.

We should have scheduled a little better, honestly, with our FCS opponent. But I think the way you look at it is from our schedule perspective, I don't look at it from a whole standpoint other than travel and how we're going to handle some of those things.

What I really pay attention to is how do we get ready each week. So once that Penn State game's final, boom, you've got to move on and you move on to Albany and then you get ready to play Albany.

Q. That Penn State game has big ramifications. We're in a situation where the Big 12's fighting for establishing itself compared to the other two conferences. I know you've got to beat the Nittany Lions for yourself, but how important is it for the conference if you or anybody else in the league can record a victory like that?

NEAL BROWN: I appreciate the introduction. I appreciate that. I've got to get used to the last piece. Congrats on the new gig. But I think the Penn State game is huge for us. That's a regional rivalry, which I know that you're very entrenched in traditions. It's not a rivalry that's gone in West Virginia's favor very often. So that's a great opportunity for us. It's Fox Noon Kickoff. All their Big Noon show will be there. We're fired up about that.

Our fans will be ready for that, too. I think we'll show really well on national television. But it's not just a big game for West Virginia. You're correct, it's a big game for our league, and it's an opportunity for our league and this new Big 12 without a couple schools that have been a part of the Big 12 for a long time in that first weekend on a marquee stage to show what kind of football that we play in this league.

Without a question, it's something, whether it's West Virginia or any other program in the Big 12 gets those kind of marquee wins, our brand will continue to grow and we've got to make some noise in the playoff.

I think Commissioner Yormark spoke about this yesterday, we're the most competitive league. I would say we're the deepest football league in the entire country. But we've got to go. TCU had a nice run, but we've got to have more wins in the playoff once we get in.

Q. With your top three rushers returning this season, are you going to split carries similar to how you did last season, given the dynamism as you talked earlier about Garrett Greene and how you're going to split carries this season?

NEAL BROWN: We'll continue -- I think offensive football is about getting your best players to football any way possible. And so we have Jahiem White coming back who I think is dynamic. He finished the year off really strong. And he's only going to be a sophomore. So I think he's ready to take the next step, be a premier player.

CJ Donaldson was kind of beat up last year. He's a big, powerful running back. I think he'll go back and show, remind our fan base and college football fans across the country what he showed as a freshman and the type of potential he has. And then Garrett Greene is an elite runner.

We also have some receivers we get involved with. Rodney Gallagher we used a lot last year and DayDay Farmer. We'll use him. Enough touches going around. That's part of the game plan. You've got to figure out how to get your best people the ball and get them in a situation in space where they can make plays.

Q. Obviously NIL's blowing up all over the place. How have you managed to use NIL and the players in general to kind of strengthen relationships locally, like obviously part of a favorite restaurant or favorite whatever, how have you bridged that gap with NIL and getting the community to invest in the players more?

NEAL BROWN: I wish it was as simple as just a local concept, right? I think you've got to think big picture on this. From an NIL standpoint, from a head coaching perspective, it's money in and money out.

And we're tasked with a lot of the money coming in, and so I've grown in that realm of how to do it and how to be productive in it. And also I think it's about figuring out what people are -- I'm talking about donors and supporters of your program -- who's wanting to help in what areas. There's some that are really interested in NIL. There are some really interested in facilities.

And you've got to figure out which people to go to. And that takes a little bit of time. And that takes -- but there's definitely a fundraising piece to the NIL that I don't know if anybody's arrived at it but we feel like we're in a better rhythm.

For your players, these are opportunities like everything you do in life is about relationships. And what we talk

about is if you can garner those relationships, you can build those relationships, then it's only going to increase your value while you're at West Virginia and beyond.

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