

Big 12 Conference Football Media Days

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Las Vegas, Nevada, USA
Allegiant Stadium

BYU Cougars Kalani Sitake Press Conference

KALANI SITAKE: We're excited to be here at Big 12 Media Day. I think the year two, last year being in Dallas and this year being in Vegas, been really impressed with how the Big 12 does it, and it's first class all the way. Myself and our BYU personnel and our players have enjoyed the hospitality and the wonderful things that Big 12 thinks of everything.

Just been really impressed with the Big 12 leadership, specifically Commissioner Brett Yormark has done an amazing job. Looking forward to his leadership and following -- love the addition of the Big 12 and our conference teams, and looking forward to -- I've had meetings and already got to know a lot of the ADs and the head coaches from the conference and been really impressed with all of them, great coaches, great programs, looking forward to being on the field and enjoying our partnership in the conference together.

In terms of our players, I'm excited to get to know about our team. We'll have time for Q&A and hopefully I can explain the wonderful things we've been able to do from year two, learning from year one. It's been a great learning experience for us, but we've done some really cool things that I think is going to be beneficial for our program and our team, and I think it will show this fall.

Just want to appreciate all our people involved with BYU, what we stand for, our culture and our program, but more specifically our players. We brought five of them with us.

We have two players on defense, our defensive end Tyler Batty and our defensive back Jakob Robinson. And we have three players from offense, receivers, wide receivers, Chase Roberts and Darius Lassiter, and then offensive lineman Connor Pay. Hopefully you get to know them and get to see the excitement in their faces and the anticipation for this season.



We're looking forward to it. We're anxious, but the season can't get here fast enough.

Q. Seems like every year there's a strong quarterback battle. This year no different with Jake Retzlaff and Gerry Bohanon. Is this something you think you're going to go all the way down to game week right before deciding your guy, and what are you looking for in the battle between these two different but similar quarterbacks?

KALANI SITAKE: We've been through quarterback battles before and competition. That's at every position. We knew that we needed to get better at a lot of different positions, and we needed to play the best.

I can't tell you that there's a deadline other than when we know, we will know. And when the player takes it -- and we have a good amount of players that can play. We have four quarterbacks that have played college football. You mentioned Gerry Bohanon and Jake Retzlaff. There's also Treyson Bourguet and McCae Hillstead. They're on our team. All four of them had played college football and started games. That gives me a lot of confidence, knowing that a lot of things can happen in college football.

Last year we had an injury to our quarterback position, and we had to learn from that. We have much deeper position with the quarterback, but we've done that with other positions as well.

Q. How excited were you when finding out that Utah is going to be joining the Big 12 and to have the Holy War rivalry not just mean more as a rivalry but have it as a conference game?

KALANI SITAKE: Before I was the head coach and before I was a former player for the legend LaVell Edwards, I was a BYU fan. It just made sense that that game was always on the schedule.

I remember when BYU was playing Utah in the WAC and then the Mountain West, and then we went through some realignment in the conferences, and BYU tried to continue to play that game when we were in the Independent era.



Now that we're in the Big 12, makes sense that they're in the same conference and also on our schedule.

So we're looking forward to that game. We're looking forward to getting up to Salt Lake City and playing that. We have other games before that one, but we're excited that one's on the schedule.

Q. In regards to just -- because the Polynesian culture is rich at BYU, the state of Utah in general, how do you kind of ingratiate people who aren't from that? Because obviously different players that are, that come in, they already have their heritage and everybody has their own language and understanding, but how do you ingratiate that into educating people about the Polynesian culture and different kinds of Polynesian people and just growing the team together?

KALANI SITAKE: I think the main key is I had a mentor that I wish was still on this earth named LaVell Edwards that went to the islands and recruited a bunch of players from my neighborhood.

As the Polynesians started getting more involved in football and getting to the NFL, people started to know more about our heritage and our background. But just the point of what we're at, it's all about family. Doesn't really matter your background.

I think people are ingrained, are naturally about loving families and about good things and wholesome things. We just happened to be at BYU, a faith-based institution that we represent the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and one of the lessons we learned from following the Savior is love one another.

We do it with our love. I say those things, but we're playing a violent game, but there's some crazy and awesome lessons to learn following the Savior and following God and His plan for you, and that's us interacting with each other. You can do it in the game of football. It works in a lot of different ways.

It just happens there's a lot of people that have faith in Christ that are in the islands as well, and that's throughout the world. But there's a lot of people that follow just loving each other and being good to each other. Doesn't really matter the religion.

I do appreciate being at this institution at Brigham Young University where we can express our religion.

We have players that are different religions on our team and they can live their religion freely be able to express

themselves. I'm just honored to be part of a university that allows that to happen.

Q. So year one in the Big 12, up and down, last two games against OU and OSU we saw how competitive BYU can be in the Big 12. What can we expect to see this year, and how are you going to assert the BYU football into the Big 12?

KALANI SITAKE: That's a good question. I would be completely nervous if we were completely overwhelmed from last year. I know everyone looks at the record, but we had flashes of where we could compete. We do know about this conference, that it's a physical conference.

And I just got done talking about our Savior and love and everything, but we do lean on the side of being physical. We like being physical. We want to be in this sport for that reason.

I lean naturally that way anyway. So we want to get there. We want to do all those things. The issue for us would be can we do it consistently, and we've been able to get there and have moments where we can compete. How can we do it consistently, that's my job as a head coach. A lot of variables go into that.

I had to decide which ones matter the most and then how can we develop it and make it even better this next year.

I can tell you the learning process from year one to year two naturally already happens. Our guys now know what to expect. Last year was a lot of uncharted territory. There were a lot of new things that we weren't sure how guys would respond to certain things being in a difficult environment on the road, things like that.

I can tell you through all that, the one thing we can definitely count on, our fan base is amazing. They travel well. They do a great job.

They've been power conference since I've been a kid. So we can lean on that to be a huge benefit for us, but on the field, we need to be more consistent, and that's what we're going to try to sort of gain and make sure happens starting week one.

Q. You said year one was a learning process for you guys. What exactly did you learn?

KALANI SITAKE: Man, how much time do we have? Learned a lot. But sometimes the experience itself is the key. Going from year one, I compare it to being a father for the first time.

I remember when my wife was pregnant, we were trying to prepare for it, and before we had kids, we had all these opinions on how you should raise your children, things like that. Rolled your eyes when people brought their children to movie theaters, stuff like that. And then when we had our own child, it was like, we didn't know anything. We just had to go through that experience.

It's hard to get everyone ready for that. You just have to go through it. It was a learning experience, not just for our players and our team, but also for our fans.

The one thing that stood out was our fans definitely belong. And we belong on the field, too. We just need to do it more consistently. There's a lot of different variables that I've been working on as a head coach. Probably don't have a lot of time to explain it right now in one answer, but we are on it. If you look at the things we've done, we're not just hoping that what we did last year was enough. We've made some moves. We've done some things differently, and I think I'm excited to see what happens when we get to the season.

Q. Earlier today, Rich Clark talked about the College Football Playoff. I want to know about your thoughts and the future with the 12-team format.

KALANI SITAKE: I love it. I think the vision of the playoffs have never been more transparent, especially for us at BYU. So the map and the road to the playoffs is pretty simple and has never been this simple for us. It's win the conference and you're in.

So that's something we've never had, and I think college football needed it. Everyone gets to prove it on the field. Everybody has a shot to make it. And there's a lot to play for. So you're looking at competitive football, especially in the Big 12 in November. It's going to be a lot of fun. And for us, we've been in this era where you're hoping that things work out and things -- you're depending on other people to make wins and stuff like that so you can get a chance to play in a New Year's Six. Now it's pretty evident on how you can get there. I appreciate it happening and us being in this conference that gives us a path to it.

Q. What do you want the on-field identity to be of your program in the Big 12?

KALANI SITAKE: I think we need to be more consistent because we've had -- like I said, we've had flashes of some really cool things happen. I mentioned being physical. This conference is a physical conference. You have to be physical. That's got to be part of our identity.

I don't want to keep talking about it. I want to get there and

play. And there were a lot of unknowns that went into this year from your guys' perspective. I happen to know and have a better perspective of it all. I just can't wait to show it when it gets to the season.

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