

Big 12 Conference Football Media Days

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Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

Allegiant Stadium

UCF Knights

Gus Malzahn

Press Conference

GUS MALZAHN: We're very glad to be here, second year in the Big 12. I've got five of our players, five of our leaders I've brought with me. I'm going to tell you a little bit about each one of those guys.

KJ Jefferson, the quarterback, transferred from Arkansas. Really his skill set fits what we really like to do. I recruited him out of high school. We knew each other well. He was one of the better offensive players in the SEC the last three years.

RJ Harvey, a running back, he had a great year for us last year. A guy that went into college football as a quarterback and was really still learning to play the position as of last year. The sky's the limit for this guy. Really excited to have him back.

Wide receiver Kobe Hudson, a transfer from Auburn, actually played for me at Auburn, one of the leading receivers in the league last year. I think he's set up to have a big-time year.

Lee Hunter, another guy that was with me at Auburn, a defensive tackle, transferred in, turned him into one of our team leaders, a big athletic guy, really has a chance to be a dominant player really in the trenches.

The last one is a linebacker safety, kind of hybrid, Deshawn Pace, transferred from Cincinnati. We needed some playmakers on defense after last year, and we're blessed to have him come in. I think he's probably the first guy that was at Big 12 Media Days last year with another team, and then he's at Big 12 Media Days with our team. That's kind of a sign of the new age of college football, also.

We're blessed to be here, looking forward to our second season in the Big 12. Questions?



Q. Coach, recruiting in the state of Florida is always a super competitive mess, basically, and with so many schools currently surging, including UCF, in terms of recruiting, we saw South Florida under Alex Golesh have a great class this year, Miami, Florida State, Florida, all those programs recruiting at a high level. Could you talk about the knife fight that happens in the state of Florida in terms of recruiting and how you've experienced that here?

GUS MALZAHN: Yeah, first of all, state of Florida is one of the best places in the country if not the best place to recruit. We're right in the middle of the state. We recruit against Florida, Florida State, Miami. That's really what it's about. It's really big for us.

They have a lot of money in their collectives and competitive and all that. We're fortunate to play one of them, we play Florida in the middle of the season. That's going to be big for us in a lot of different ways, but specifically recruiting. But yeah, that's who we're up against.

Q. Coach, obviously you bring in KJ; how do you speak to the value of what he brings as a quarterback because throughout your coaching career you've always had a guy at quarterback who was just -- he had something about him, an X-factor. What does he bring on the field, and how has he improved since he was at Arkansas?

GUS MALZAHN: Well, he definitely fits what we like to do. He's a dual-threat guy. He throws a great deep ball. You're talking about one of the more experienced quarterbacks in all of college football. Two years previous to last year, he was one of the better players, offensive players in the SEC. Last year they changed offenses, they lost some playmakers around him and all that.

But we're really excited to have him. We think he's a perfect fit for us. We're glad he's leading us.

Q. Deion gave you a shout-out a few minutes ago. Talk about being in a conference with a team that's coached by Deion Sanders.



GUS MALZAHN: Yeah. First of all, I'm a big Deion fan. Goes back to his playing days and all that. The exposure that he's giving our conference I think is excellent. He does his own way.

But I think he brings a lot to our conference. I think he is doing a lot of great things. His son is one of the best quarterbacks if not the best quarterback. We play them early. That'll be a huge game. There's no doubt about that.

But he does a great job.

Q. You just talked about Deshawn Pace a little bit. You welcome in Cincinnati transfers Myles Montgomery and Bryon Threats, as well. Talk about what you've seen from them.

GUS MALZAHN: Yeah, it's kind of a rival team of ours. So we know them well. We've played against them really the last two years, the last three years since I've been there, and we know a lot about them. They're both three hard-nosed, really good football players. So we're really blessed to have them on our side this year.

Q. With the stable of running backs that you have, how does that open up play calling, including Jefferson? Are we going to see a more, I guess, vintage Malzahn offense to this offense this year?

GUS MALZAHN: First of all, I'm really excited about the playmakers we have. We're a run play action team with emphasis on throwing it deep and playing fast. When you can run the football, it opens up everything. We've got R.J. Peny Boone is a transfer that come in; we're really excited about him. KJ is a run threat, too. Then of course we've got playmakers at wide receiver with Kobe Hudson, Xavier Townsend. So really we've got the pieces of the puzzle; we've just got to get it done on the field.

Q. Coach, with Kenny Dillingham now in your conference, where have you seen him grow since he coached under you at Auburn, and what is it going to be like to face him this year?

GUS MALZAHN: Yeah, first of all, I'm a big fan of Kenny's. He did a great job with us in 2019. He was my coordinator. We had Bo Nix as a true freshman, we had some huge wins over Oregon and Alabama. He's young, but he's got a lot of wisdom as far as football goes and his approach, and he's got his own way, too.

I think nowadays in college football, the guys that are true to themselves and the way they go about it, I think they're

going to have an advantage.

I think Arizona State is lucky to have him. I think he's one of those guys that are really rising up in the coaching profession.

Q. Just to follow up on what you were talking about with your running back RJ Harvey, he had a monster campaign last season, and now don't you think opposing Big 12 defensive coordinators are going to be keying on stopping him? How do you plan on utilizing him? Are you planning on doing anything with him in the backfield, or are you going to use him as a workhorse, or is it going to be running back by committee?

GUS MALZAHN: Yeah, he's very versatile. I think one of his biggest assets is he was a college quarterback coming out of high school. So he sees the game differently.

When I said he was still learning to play the running back position, there's nothing like getting out there and having to be the guy, understanding protections and everything that goes with it. Yeah, teams will key on him. There's no doubt. But he can do a lot of different things, catch the ball out of the backfield.

We've got some other playmakers around, too. So I think that helps him, also. But I'm very excited. I've been real blessed to have some really, really good running backs in the past. He's at least in that same conversation.

I think the sky's the limit for him if he stays healthy this year.

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