

Big 12 Conference Football Media Days

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Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

Allegiant Stadium

Houston Cougars

Wille Fritz

Press Conference



WILLIE FRITZ: Welcome. Really appreciate everybody coming out today. I want to commend our Big 12 office, our conference commissioner. Really doing a great job of promoting the Big 12. When I took the job at Houston, I mentioned that I feel like it's a sleeping giant and the sky's the limit, and I feel the same about the Big 12, so thank you all for coming.

I'll open it up for questions.

Q. You built a prestigious program at Tulane. Now coming to Houston, how do you maintain some of the intangibles that you helped elevate that program to this one, on top of trying to replace a second-round pick in Patrick Paul?

WILLIE FRITZ: Yeah, you know, when you take over a program -- I've had a few different programs. This will be the sixth program that I've been a head coach at, and there's some similarities but there's also a lot of differences. You have some non-negotiables of how you do things, with your football program, and then you've got to do a good job of learning about University of Houston and what works at Houston might not necessarily work at one of the other places I was at or vice versa.

So I'm really trying to promote our strengths at the University of Houston. We're a Tier 1 academic institution. Our president has done an outstanding job of increasing enrollment. We've got 48,000 students.

The other part of that that's so important in this day and age, we're at the epicenter of football in the world, Houston, Texas. I love the fact I didn't have to get in my car to -- I didn't have to get on a plane to go recruit. I just stayed in my car the whole time when I went out recruiting, and there's plenty of great players throughout the state of Texas.

Patrick Paul, we're very proud of him. He's a second-round draft pick. That's going to be a position we're going to have to do a good job with the guys we have there, offensive line. I've got one returning starter, Tank Jenkins, but I've got about seven or eight guys that are competing for those other four spots on the offensive line.

Q. In a conference with a lot of good running backs, it's easy for some of them to go under the radar. Do you feel Parker Jenkins in a few months is going to be more than on the radar?

WILLIE FRITZ: Yeah, I think he's a very good running back. We've got a good stable of backs. I'm very impressed with those guys this spring. One of the things that we're going to do is play a lot of guys the first few weeks, kind of figure out the rotation, how many guys -- which guys should be playing 50, 60 snaps, which guys should be playing 10, 20. And that'll be decided after a couple weeks because I haven't done a lot of live action with these guys.

But Parker has certainly had a great spring and summer, and he's got everything you're looking for in a back. He can run inside, he can run out on the perimeter, he's great at blocking both in the run game and also in the pass game. Also he's a very capable receiver, can play a little bit for you in the kicking game.

He's a quality back, no question.

Q. Given your roots in Shawnee Mission, Kansas, and your playing career at Pittsburgh State, how excited are you to get back to the state of Kansas?

WILLIE FRITZ: Well, it'll be fun. I've had I don't know how many people -- I just got back from Kansas City a few weeks ago, and I've had hundreds of requests for tickets when we go up there and play in October or whenever it is. I'm not quite sure. I'm sure that'll be a busy weekend for my wife doling out all the tickets.

But yeah, I went to Shawnee Mission Northwest High School, and they were also nicknamed the Cougars. I guess this was going to come to be one way or the other.



Q. With this being your first season with the program, second season for Houston in the Big 12, how do you go about setting expectations for yourself and for the team?

WILLIE FRITZ: Well, we've got high expectations, just like all the coaches we've got up here. We want to win every one of these ballgames that we play this season.

You know, the difference between myself and the other coaches, I guess, would be the first year I've been with these guys and just learning what they do well and maybe their weaknesses and try to keep them away from doing those types of things. That's a process, learning about your team early in the season.

Spring ball is great. Summer workouts are outstanding. But there's nothing that compares to really playing real games. We'll find out a lot about ourselves after the first couple weeks.

Q. It's no mystery everyone knows the Houston area is a very fertile recruiting area. You have SEC teams like LSU coming in here for talent every year. How do you plan on utilizing that and making a big impact in the Big 12?

WILLIE FRITZ: Well, we're going to recruit locally as much as we possibly can. I really feel like my experience going on 33 years as a head coach, it seems like kids are a little happier when they're closer to home. Parents are able to come see them play.

They're able to go -- like what happened to us, our thoughts and prayers go out to the people in Houston right now, but we had a bunch of kids who were able to go back home and take care of business and help their people out because of how close our university is and where they're from.

Houston is going to be a big part of our recruiting, the whole state of Texas. We're going to go into Louisiana, also. I was there for eight years at Tulane, know a lot of people over there, but we're really trying to make every kid that we recruit have it be drivable distance for them.

As I said before, I think Houston has got the greatest recruiting in the nation.

Q. How valuable is Donovan Smith's experience, and what does it mean for the overall chemistry of the team?

WILLIE FRITZ: I've been so impressed with Donovan. He

was injured during the spring, wasn't able to participate. But he was in every single practice all the way. Unbelievable leader. He's a big tall guy, 6'5", 6'6", 235, great speed, great movement. He's a true dual-threat quarterback, which usually guys, you hear that and they do one or the other much better. He does an excellent job throwing the ball, one ball, two ball, three ball I kind of call it, and just his football IQ is just off the charts.

His father is a running back coach with the Indianapolis Colts. I think he's in here someplace maybe. But he's born and bred football, and we're looking forward to an outstanding season out of Donovan this fall.

Q. I just asked this question a minute ago, but you're a Texas team, as well. Can you speak on the importance of those in-state rivalries and keeping them alive even though some of those teams have left the conference?

WILLIE FRITZ: I think it's huge. I'm a football historian, probably like all the coaches here in the Big 12 are, and I know all the great match-ups and rivalries that there's been in the state of Texas. Obviously my time at Sam Houston I know a lot about these different schools, and I think it's very important to keep those rivalries alive.

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