

Southeastern Conference Football Media Days

Tuesday, July 16, 2024

Dallas, Texas, USA

Oklahoma Sooners Danny Stutsman

Press Conference



Q. What type of defense did you have to play to compete in the SEC from what you've seen on film?

DANNY STUTSMAN: You've got to be very physical. Obviously in the SEC, the games are won in the trenches. I think we've already had that mindset since spring ball, kind of since the season ended. We had to get bigger, faster, and stronger. Up front we've done a phenomenal job this off-season doing everything we do to be able to compete at that level.

Q. You guys are almost all the way through summer workouts. How have they been going for you guys and you coming back after almost leaving for the NFL? How has your mentality changed from the previous year to this year from not so much as a leadership standpoint, but more so you personally?

DANNY STUTSMAN: Obviously coming back, I knew there were some areas I needed to improve upon myself. I think you have every opportunity every single day to make the most of it. When you wake up, you kind of have to know how you're going to get better. You have to have a plan. You have to know what you're going to do.

Myself and all the guys in the room on the defense have done a phenomenal job of having that mindset every single day. It's easy in the summertime to take a day off here and there. We have a very clear plan of action, we have a vision. We know our goals, we know our plans. There's been very, very few times where someone's kind of slacked off or not reached the standard. If there is, there's automatic correction from the leaders.

I'm impressed how big that group of guys has gotten, of guys you can trust that uphold the standard every single day, and I'm just proud of it. How it was when Coach V got here is not how it is to this day, and that's just something I've dreamed of.

Q. In the big room, you talked about Jackson's

leadership, how this morning he's really vocal. Think back to when you were young. When did that leadership really pick up for you as a young leader, that trigger point for you? It's really seemed to kick in for Jackson. Can you take me back to when you found that leadership role as a young player? Is it nice to see that with Danny? Or Jackson.

DANNY STUTSMAN: Jackson is kind of -- it's difficult for him. Only playing one game last year and having all these expectations thrown onto him. He's done an amazing job of filling that role and doing whatever it takes.

For myself, I look back to my sophomore year, kind of earning that starting spot. It kind of took a while. I thought the guys on the defense kind of were leaders. I realized quickly that someone needs to step into that more vocal role.

I took it upon myself kind of around week 8, week 9, and said, all right, I might not be ready, but I need to get ready quick. Where I want to see myself, this is what it takes.

From that moment on, it's been every single day. Sometimes guys don't want to be there, and you see it right away. You have to be the person who wakes them up, gets them going. Sometimes that person is myself, and I have to kind of understand like if I come to practice or come to workout and I'm not 110 percent, I'm not the one who's getting everyone clapping, getting everyone with that energy, then people are going to feed off of that both ways.

So if I'm not 110 percent or giving all my effort, then the freshmen looking up to me, Lewis Carter, Sammy Omosigho, are not going to be doing the same thing and upholding the standard. For myself, it's done an amazing job of getting better every single day.

I think Jackson is starting to understand that and trying to do everything he can to be turned into that leader.

Q. Back during your recruitment, I know A&M was recruiting you. Mike Elko was the defensive coordinator at that time. He's now the head coach at A&M. What do you remember from Elko and his staff



and kind of their recruiting to you?

DANNY STUTSMAN: Looking back, you guys talked about it earlier, and I thought about it, it was Santucci, who kind of recruited me exclusively. He was the guy who was always talking to me, always in contact. So I didn't have many conversations with the defensive coordinator.

That program, the tradition there is elite. The 12th man, what they have going for them, it's exciting. I wish we had the opportunity to go there and play them. Unfortunately, we don't, but it's a great to be in the same conference as them.

Q. You had mentioned earlier about how the leadership has really grown in the team. Is there anyone that's maybe been kind of a surprise leader this season and maybe how they differ in their leadership style compared to maybe some of the other guys?

DANNY STUTSMAN: Not really so much of a surprise, but Ethan Downs. That's someone he's not the most vocal guy. He's not someone who's always going to hype everyone up, but you look at how he acts, what he does off the field, how he's out there 30 minutes before helping a young guy with certain pass rush moves, that's something that you don't see very often from a senior.

A lot of times, guys get very selfish. Ethan Downs is the most selfless dude on this team. That's someone that you look up to. It's contagious. When you see someone like that, it makes me want to, if any of the younger guys need help, I want to be available like he is to his group of guys.

Q. You guys had Damonic Williams over the summer. How's he fitting in with the group, and what kind of impact do you expect him to bring this fall?

DANNY STUTSMAN: From the second Dom came, he's a beast. We had our conditioning training when he first stepped on there, and we didn't know where he was going to be. Obviously in the portal, you can't work out with the team you were with before.

He came in and dominated right away. There's going to be no fall off. It's going to take no time to get acclimated. He's going to be ready to go. He's done a phenomenal job of learning the system, getting with Coach Bates as much as possible. I think he's going to be extremely prepared for what we do, and for the SEC, he's the type of guy we need.

Q. I've heard your coach say before that you guys aren't looking to prove people wrong this season. You're looking to prove yourselves right. Can you just

speak to what that means to you and what that means to the defense?

DANNY STUTSMAN: When you look at our team, we're not outside-in. Everything starts from us. We obviously -- we kind of block out that noise. We know when it's great, the noise is the best thing ever. Everyone loves what they're saying about you. As soon as adversity comes, obviously those same people are quick to turn on you.

When you look at our team, we know what we're capable of. Like he said before, we've got to prove ourselves right. That comes from every single day, every single workout, we have to prove ourselves right. And then eventually you just have seen so much growth, so much progress that it comes to fruition.

Q. Going back to the Texas game last year, Coach Venables talked about building this program off of toughness, playing with the physical edge. Not just the year over year result, but the way you guys won the Texas game forcing turnovers, had the big goal line stand. How much for you guys did that validate that you're headed in the right direction with this program, building it in the way, kind of that mold Coach Venables wants to build it?

DANNY STUTSMAN: Obviously when you look at a game like that, like you said, validation, that's huge. When you're able to perform the biggest of stages, come out there, especially after two years ago, what happened on that field, it's painful. You have to use that pain, use that anger, use how you felt that game as motivation.

To this day, we have a lot of guys that haven't experienced that. So us older guys have to be able to give out that motivation, to explain, look, it's not like that every single time. Winning is hard. Especially where we're going, it's even more difficult.

Every single day the leaders have to kind of do whatever they can to motivate and give that sense of understanding.

Q. Danny, what does year three look like under the Brent Venables system regardless of the conference change?

DANNY STUTSMAN: Year one was learning it, kind of getting the general understanding, finding what I need to do. Year two was kind of more so understanding, having a deeper sense of confidence, finding myself. Year three is more so been teaching it. Having the young guys come in there, running meetings, being a little mini defensive coordinator. I have it all go through me. I want to be the main gate.



Everything Coach Venables has taught me and Coach Alley as well, he's been a great addition to myself. It's helped me play faster than I've ever been before. Having a sense of understanding and play with a sense of anticipation so you're one step ahead of everyone else.

Q. The OU-Texas rivalry being in the SEC is new. How would you explain that to just a normal SEC fan that kind of looks at it as just another game to a lot of people?

DANNY STUTSMAN: I have a Longhorn tattooed on my body. Like it means that much to me. You go to bed thinking about how big of a deal it is. You look at every single person in the state of Oklahoma, every single person in the state of Texas, and you know how much it means to them.

That's one game in the season once a year that these two states can compete against each other in the biggest sport in the United States, and it's going to go on. It went on long before me. It's going to go on long after me. I get a little piece of that shine to prove myself and to prove my state.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports