

# University of Kentucky Football Media Conference

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Lexington, Kentucky, USA

**President Eli Capilouto**

**Mitch Barnhart**

**Will Stein**

Press Conference



(Stream started with press conference in progress)

PRESIDENT ELI CAPILOUTO: -- create and perform at the highest levels and to their full potential. Some of our trustees and governors from our champions blue board are here, too, to mark and celebrate this day. We thank them.

These announcements share something else that is enormously important, they are both about the most important thing: Kentucky.

We are building this new arch district on our campuses always to ensure more students are ready for careers and lives of meaning and purpose. They in turn will make a better and stronger Kentucky.

The coach you will formally meet in just a few moments is going to do the same thing: build and prepare young people for success on the field. And just steps away from here, we'll all enjoy it. When these student-athletes step away, we'll be sure that they, too, will lead lives of meaning and purpose.

He intends to be wildly successful at it.

His background and his résumé are evidence of the potential and of ours. You will hear in his voice the passion and commitment you want your coach of your university, Kentucky's university.

He bleeds blue. He is of Kentucky. You'll know it from the second you hear him speak. I know he's already got started, and you can feel the support of the Big Blue Nation.

I'm also honored and excited to introduce the man who leads our program and who found our coach. For nearly a quarter of a century, Mitch Barnhart has led a program of excellence at the University of Kentucky. With his

leadership, our teams and students have won championships on the field and courts, and achieved outstanding results in the classroom. They've gone on to live wildly successful lives and mark careers across Kentucky and around the world.

Kentucky, too, is in him. This place is deeply felt for him and his family. You know it every time you hear him speak. He's our athletics director. Once again, I believe he has found a leader for our program who will make us all proud as members of the Big Blue Nation.

I learned over the last few weeks that Mitch is not just the athletic director, he's the athletic director of millions of athletic directors, none of whom were shy about giving him some advice.

I watched with admiration and appreciation for what guided Mitch through these times. It's what is at his core: his respect, care, concern for those he serves, starting with the students that come our way, his unwavering commitment to maintaining the integrity and dignity of collegiate sports and all who answer its call to enter the arena.

Please join me in welcoming our outstanding athletic director, and an even better human being, Mitch Barnhart.

MITCH BARNHART: It is a heck of a good day to be a Wildcat. It's awesome. It's wonderful that everybody came here today. It's great to see our lettermen over here on our right, our team over here on the left. It's great to see everybody in the blue and white.

Dr. Capilouto, thanks so much. Dr. Eric Monday, thank you so much for all you've done in supporting us in this transition.

The team worked quickly. A lot of timelines that were unique to college athletics this year that we've never seen before. That is reason the pace of a lot of these things have gone differently than they ever have in the past.

I want to take a couple of moments to thank a couple folks on my staff that have been with me through this as we worked with our football program.



Ray Oliver, I want to acknowledge his help for all he does for our team, working with our young people every day.

Then Mark Hill. I don't know where I'd be without that guy. He does more than anyone will ever know in our department. I'm so thankful for journeying with him. Really appreciative of all the things that he gets done for our program.

Thanks Mark and Jenny for your dedication to Kentucky over almost three decades.

We've really enjoyed having an opportunity to watch young coaches take their first step as head coaches. Some of them are here today. I think we've got our head coaches here. Not sure where they are. They've come to support Will and his family today. I'd like to give them a hand. They do such a great job representing Kentucky.

I think there's always a special, special time when it's the first time you get to don the hat, whatever you call that, being a first-time head coach. I think all of those coaches also remember that moment, the first time they walked out of that tunnel, that venue, they became the leader of the people they're in charge of. It's very special.

We have one of those moments today. I want Will and Darby to be able to cherish it, love it, remember it forever and forever. It will never come again. Make sure you cherish every moment of that.

We're fortunate that we've got Will's mom and dad Matt and Debbie here with us. Also members of the family. We're excited that they could join us.

Matt was an 1984 letter winner, played for Coach Jerry Claiborne. I think we dug up a special video that we just wanted to roll up here.

(Video Shown.)

MITCH BARNHART: Old videos are pretty cool. Pretty good stuff (smiling). It's fun.

As Dr. Capilouto alluded, Darby, Joey and Demi are over here. We're thrilled that they're here with us today. Looking forward to spending more time with them over the years.

Many things about Will Stein that intrigued me as we began to think our way through this. First and foremost as a player and a coach, he's won at every level, whether that's from high school, college, to the different places he's journeyed along his way in his coaching career. That's what we want to be about, we want to be about winning.

He has a deep love for the Commonwealth of Kentucky. I think that's super important. He grew up in the shadows of Commonwealth Stadium and Rupp Arena. I read an article he talked about sitting in section 128, row 13. We may have to visit and see if he can recreate that seat for us.

He attended Tubby Smith's basketball camp. I Tayshaun Prince was his camp counselor, who he met last night. Had a chance to see him at Rupp Arena last night.

He has a unique passion for this program and this community. He has local knowledge and connections. Very, very special to Kentucky. It's a bonus for us. It's not where we started. It's not why he is the new head coach at Kentucky.

He's widely considered an innovative and exciting offensive mind, play-caller, with a dynamic scheme that stresses defenses. That's what we want. We want to be able to stress opponents in a lot of different ways, whether it's offensively or defensively. He is with a system right now that does that at a very, very high level.

He's a quarterback coach by trade. Has the ability to be in the helmet of the signal caller and relate to them. That's going to be super important as we continue to grow in the game of college football. We have to score points at a high level to be able to have a chance to compete where we want to compete.

He's coached Heisman Trophy finalists the past two years, guys that were drafted in the NFL and were ready to be starters in the league as rookies. That is not easy to do. That means they were well-prepared as they came out. Super excited for our guys that are coming along.

He's taken calculated risks at various points in his career to climb the highest mountains in college football. We must be willing to do that.

He had an interesting comment. If you read his résumé, he took risks in his career. One was to leave college football, go back to high school football, so he could learn how to be a better play-caller. He took a risk. He bet on himself.

You don't want to take a lot of risks sometimes, but you want to take calculated risks. It's amazing the things he has done and how he has done that.

They say sometimes conservative folks can win; risk takers can win it all. You also lose a little bit. You take a risk and sometimes it doesn't work. This guy knows where to take his risks. He's shown that over his career in an amazing



way.

You didn't come here to hear me talk about him, other than he is well-prepared for the job he has been handed. He has the keys to an amazing, amazing vehicle at the University of Kentucky to sort of take care of our football program, be the caretaker, lead our young men. I'm excited about that.

I'm excited about what lies ahead for us, for our young men, and our fan base who want us to compete at the highest level.

Without any further ado, let me introduce you to the new head football coach at the University of Kentucky, Will Stein.

WILL STEIN: Do you see how Mitch had to lower this down for me (smiling). What's up with that?

You might hear a lot of Demi as I'm talking. She's a talker (smiling).

I wrote some notes for everybody.

First of all, I am honored is an understatement. I really don't know what to say. I thought today was a dream. I thought yesterday was a dream. It's just been an unbelievable, unbelievable last 24, 48 hours.

It's something that a coach can only dream of, to get his first head coaching job, and to do it at a place like the University of Kentucky, it really is truly a dream.

It's really cool I'm standing on the Rich and Karen Brooks football field right now. I got to link up with Rich when I was out in Oregon. Phenomenal coach. Look up to him. Really cool that I'm standing on his field.

I have to thank Dr. Capilouto, Mitch, Mark, Ray Oliver, really just thank Big Blue Nation. This place means a lot to me.

We mentioned my dad, my background here. I've been coming to this place literally since I was born. I think my parents used to take me to games, put headphones on me, I don't know if they had them back then, whatever they put on kids. I was in the stands. It's a real surreal moment to be standing in front of everybody in this building.

I'd be remiss not to talk about Dan Lanning and Rob Mullens, the entire University of Oregon, the players there, the support there. I would not be in this position without them.

I know what got me this job. It's winning games. Being at Oregon, working for Dan, working for Rob, who worked at this university, they mean the world to me.

I also have to thank Jeff Traylor. He took a chance on me. Housed me when I was at the University of Texas. Hired me back from the high school ranks to the University of Texas at San Antonio. Made me his pass game coordinator and receiver coach, then promoted me to offensive coordinator and play-caller there for the Road Runners.

I have to thank Hank Carter, as well, from Lake Travis High School. Another guy I talked to today. We actually signed one of his players, which is cool and surreal for me.

I have to thank Bob Beatty, my high school coach at Trinity High School. Really instilled discipline in me. Was able to win three state championships there under Bob, his direction.

The most important people to thank besides all those people that helped me get here, the number one is my wife Darby. She is my rock. I'm going to get emotional right now thinking about this. She's our everything. She's my biggest fan, my number one supporter. I'm so thankful to be married to you and to see you be just an unbelievable mother to our two kids. Joey and Demi are right there.

Joey's favorite color is blue. It's been blue his whole life, I swear. It was green a little bit for the Ducks. I thought maybe Trinity High School, the Ducks, green. But it's been blue. Joey and Demi are my biggest fans and my world. They are my why and I do it for them.

I have to thank my parents, Matt and Debbie. Mitch recognized them as UK alums, which is really school. My brothers Matthew, Nathan and Lee. All of my Stein, Nutt, Dudley and Caruthers families, I would not be here without them.

I'd be remiss not talking about Coach Stoops, what he's meant to this program. Really thankful for his 13 years here as the head ball coach. Kentucky football and Big Blue Nation would not be where they are without him. I think we all owe him an incredible amount of debt for his efforts and success here.

I want to thank the players that are currently on this team, the lettermen that decided to come out here and support me. It means the world.

This is your program. This isn't Will Stein's program. This is your program. It's always going to be. It always has been. The doors are always open for you guys. I want you



guys to feel like this is your home, because it is. You are the reason why I'm standing up here. So this is your program.

I mentioned that I grew up a Kentucky fan. I remember old Commonwealth Stadium, the two sides, the grass field, the bleachers on the end. I remember walking through them as a kid.

I was at the '94 Peach Bowl, the Outback Bowl with my dad and older brother against Penn State with LaVar Arrington. We went to Busch Gardens after. We rode a roller coaster rides. My dad couldn't handle it. My brother and I did all the other roller coasters after he was throwing up at a park bench. Never forget that (smiling).

This is not a great memory for everybody, but I remember the Bluegrass Miracle. I do. Might say, I don't know.

I do remember later getting revenge against LSU. Big fourth-down stop here in Kroger Field. I remember when Tebow got knocked out. Do you remember that? I remember that. I remember growing up watching all the great plays, teams.

Jacob Tamme, I met him last night. Unbelievable person. I remember watching Tim Couch as a kid. Dusty Bonner, Craig Yeast, Wesley Woodyard. I talked to Randall Cobb yesterday.

You name it, the players are here. They have been for a long time. We're going to continue that tradition here at Kentucky.

The vision is simple: it's to win, it's to win. I didn't come here to be average, to be mediocre. I came here to win and win championships.

I've won at every single level that I've been at: high school, college. Now the goal is to win here. Not to win five years down the road, 10 years down the road. Do it now. The way you do that is you work, right? Success is not free. Rent is due every damn day that we're here.

We're going to work to get that done to make Big Blue Nation proud and make our players proud and do it the right way.

How do you do it? I said work. But number one, we've got to recruit every day. We wake these kids up in the morning. We put them to bed at night. It is like shaving: if you don't do it every day, you start to look like crap.

We have to recruit, we have to sign great players. Not okay players, we got to sign great players. That's how you

win. It's a players' game. It always has been, it will always be.

I look like a much better coach when I'm coaching great players. So I need everybody's support in this building to get that done.

You have to develop your talent. It's one thing to acquire talent, but in order to retain it, you have to pour into them on and off the field. It's got to be a product that we all love to watch on Saturdays.

Then connection is huge. I mentioned the door is always open for our lettermen. The doors are always open for people that support this program.

In order for us to be a strong program, we got to be connected all the way from the top, to the president, all the way down to the lowest equipment manager. Everybody is going to be connected in this program.

We're going to play an exciting brand of football. That's the only way I know how to do it. We're going to take risks, like Mitch alluded to.

Our offense, our plan is to light up the scoreboard. Why not? I've seen it done here many a times. That's the goal. It's not easy. Football is not easy. Not meant to be easy. It's the toughest game in the world played by tough men. I know doing it the right way, the way I've seen at the highest of levels in college football, it will be done here at Kentucky.

On defense, man, we're going to play relentless from Point A, to Point B, attacking the football and having great ball excellence.

Special teams, we say we're going to change the game. I want to fake punt. I want to on-side kick. I want to take advantage of opportunities to steal possessions in the game so we can maximize our points.

We're a national brand. We work in the best conference in the world. There's no reason why we can't be successful here, zero. The excuses are done. It's time to get to work. It will work. It does take work.

I told the team this yesterday. I think this quote really sticks out to me. Losers think about winners, okay? But winners think about winning.

That's all I'm focused on, is winning. It's not going to be easy. Everybody knows that in this room. But it will be done. It takes everybody, it takes the support. I cannot wait to get started. We already signed a great class today.

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

First day on the job, signing day. Enjoy that. That's real fun (smiling).

We're going to create great culture for our guys, hire an elite staff. I have some of the best coordinators in the country that are going to follow along. Those were not be announced yet. Trust me, everybody wants to work with Will Stein. Everybody wants to work at the University of Kentucky.

I'm fired up. Go Cats. Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: Coach Stein will take some questions from the members of the media.

**Q. Will, you talked about the SEC, competing at the highest levels. What makes you think you'll be able to come in and flip a roster and be ready to compete among the other programs?**

WILL STEIN: That's a great question.

I think about my path here. I really am a product of great coaches in my life. I mentioned a lot of their names. Obviously worked in an elite conference in the Big Ten. I don't think it's quite the SEC.

Dan Lanning and my training with him has been a phenomenal resource for me to be prepared for this job and for what's to come.

The only way to win, like I mentioned, is to recruit. You have to sign great players. Great players, like I mentioned earlier, they are what make the game fun. They are what make us win.

My training, I trust it. I don't try to make stuff up that I might not know. I have great resources in my life to call on when need be. I believe what I've done the past three years at the University of Oregon has set me up to be successful immediately here at Kentucky.

**Q. You talked about roster building. How do you come between the high school recruiting versus transfer portal? Which way do you feel you'll lean on more?**

WILL STEIN: Sure, yeah, I think it all starts at the high school ranks, I really do. I think the first thing that we have to win is Kentucky, win this state. When Kentucky is at its best, the best players in the state play for the Wildcats.

It always starts in high school. You build your roster out and manage it according to your numbers, according to where your needs are.

The portal is a great supplemental tool. It's not the end all, be all. But I would like to think it always starts with high school ranks. That's where your development happens, retention. That's where you get to know these people the best, their parents, the people that matter to them. Then they want to stay at your university longer.

**Q. You mentioned recruiting, the importance. Do you feel you're resourced to be able to financially compete to get the players you want?**

WILL STEIN: Yeah, of course. Of course. I mean, Mitch, Mark, laid out a great plan. I feel like we're right there to be successful right away.

Let me say this. I worked at a place that everybody thinks Phil Knight, Nike, these people have the most money in the world. There's money there. Don't get me wrong. But we beat recruits because we win the relationships. That's where it start.

Guys still want to be recruited old school. You have to know mom, grandma, aunt, coach. Have you to be completely entrenched in these people's lives. When you can do that, you don't always have to be the highest bidder.

If the first conversation is about money, probably not the place for you. Not because lack of it. We have plenty of that here. I talked to about 10,000 people at the basketball game, all willing and supportive of the program. I know we have that.

But that can't be the first thing you talk about. I want guys that love football, that want to compete every single day, be the best version of themselves and win.

**Q. You were able to do some great things with three different quarterbacks in three different seasons at Oregon. Why will that continue here at Kentucky?**

WILL STEIN: I think me playing the position definitely helps. I can meet these guys where they're at. I tell them all the time, I'm not very tall, but I did stand in the pocket. I've gotten hit throwing the ball. I've gone through progressions. I've called plays in the huddle.

So being a quarterback by trade, doing it since I was four years old, I have a relate-ability to these players. I think that's really what makes me different.

Then I have the ability to morph the offense into what suits them. What we did with Bo Nix was different than when we did with Dillon Gabriel, different than what we did with





Dante Moore, with Frank Harris, Hudson Card.

The offense never looks the same. It may have the same principles in it. We play to the strengths of the QB. We always will. We always have been.

I'm looking forward to working with all those guys, building that room, building the culture of really the quarterback tradition that lies here at Kentucky.

**Q. The last three guys you got were, for lack of a better word, damaged goods. The other schools they were at didn't want them. When you're evaluating quarterbacks, what are you looking for? What jumps out to you that says I can turn this guy into a winner?**

WILL STEIN: Everybody wants to look at height, weight, speed. I mean, I'll be the first one to tell you that's where you start kind of in recruiting. Do they fit the measurables?

As a quarterback, it's so much more than that. Do they have the mental makeup to be the toughest MF'er on the field? That's what they have to be, mentally and physically tough. That's really where it starts with me.

Then processing ability, being extremely accurate. I think if you look the guys that I've coached recently, all over 70% passers. If you're not over 70% at high school, what makes you think you're going to be 70% in college? We look at that.

Arm talent only takes you so far. You rarely throw it 70 yards unless it's a Hail Mary situation. Can you be accurate, throw on time, withstand the confines of a pocket?

In today's modern football, you have to be mobile. Doesn't mean you have to be a 4.3 guy or run extremely fast, but you have to be able to escape outside the pocket and make plays outside with your feet.

**Q. How did your meeting go with the players yesterday? What is there about Cutter maybe that you remember from a couple years ago when you tried to recruit him, he told you no thanks?**

WILL STEIN: It was great to see the players. Obviously it's been a lot the last 12 hours because of signing day. Everything is different. The calendar is different in college football.

I would like to say I would love to spend more time with them yesterday. Obviously I introduced myself to them and my family. Kind of gave them me raw. I might have said an F-bomb or two. I'm sorry, Mitch, but I did.

I'm passionate. I hope they felt that passion and my commitment to them. Not just Cutter, but everybody on the team I'm excited to coach. This is a great opportunity for me. I know we have a lot of great players here. Ready to get working with them.

**Q. Will, when you were growing up in Louisville, could you picture a day like this when a building like this is filled for you to be a head coach?**

WILL STEIN: No, no. I really couldn't. I always wanted to be like an NFL quarterback. This is my Hall of Fame speech, something (laughter).

No, I quickly learned, especially when some guy named Teddy Bridgewater came in the game here for me, I think my playing days might be limited, so...

You only dream of this stuff. You never know if it's actually going to come true. You just try to be great where you're at, be where your feet are, work your tail off, treat people the right way, have a lot of really good players in your life that afford you to have this opportunity.

**Q. Who is happier, you because you have what you called a dream job, or your mom because those beautiful grandbabies are back home?**

WILL STEIN: I think we're equal there, okay? I won't choose me or her (smiling).

No, my family's extremely excited to be an hour from Louisville, easy drive. It's definitely a game-changer.

**Q. A lot of coordinators make the step up to be head coaches. How did you know in your heart and soul that you were ready to take this step?**

WILL STEIN: That's a great question. It's like, When are you ready? When are you ready to get married? When are you ready to have your first child, buy your first house? You don't know. Do we all know? If we did, I don't know.

You just feel it in your heart. You feel it in your heart. It's not like every opportunity is one that you want to jump on. There's been some opportunities prior that just were not to this degree of importance to me.

So yeah, you don't know. You just prepare for the moment, just like a backup quarterback, like I did. When you get your opportunities, you make the most of it, trust what you've been doing, that the last 15 years of your career were all meant to be for this moment.



**Q. I asked your mom a question. She blew me away with the answer. If I asked your mom 30 years ago would you have expected that your son would become a head coach? She said yes. When did you get the bug? When did you know? When did it hit you that you want to do this?**

WILL STEIN: I mean, I've been throwing around the football since I was born pretty much. Maybe that was her take. I think we need to get like an SID for my mom or something. See a video, she's talking to KSR. Holy crap, right? This is going on. Might need some detail on that.

No, I mean, you just don't know. You just do your best. I've been on a team my whole life, I really have, since I was four years old. That's why I got into coaching.

My dad's a lawyer. Should I do this when I'm done playing? I got my MBA at Louisville. Should I get into real estate? I've been on a team my whole life. I have guys here that were on my T-ball teams.

To not be on a football team or any sort of team was never going to happen. When I got offered the opportunity to be a graduate assistant at Louisville, it was a perfect opportunity, perfect transition.

I've just been around great men and women that have helped me up to this point. Yeah, it's just been a really fun ride.

**Q. In the first few pictures you were taking around the facilities, you had on Jordans. As a collector of Jordans, how is your collection? How are you going to balance over the next few weeks managing hiring a staff, bringing in players, meeting with current players, and the opportunity you still have at Oregon?**

WILL STEIN: Sure, yeah. The Js, I was never a sneaker head until I got out to Oregon. I think I've changed my mind a little bit. I like the shoes a little bit more. I have cowboy boots on today. Figure I come back to Kentucky, horse country, I'll put some boots on. I do like wearing Js.

Balance is hard. Unfortunately in this business there is no balance. There's none. I can balance my work life, be at home at this time, there's not. The president told me yesterday to make sure I balance that. We do our best, we really do.

Just like I said, it's going to be relentless. It's going to be a grind the next month. It's something that I've been dreaming of and wanted to do.

There's a team back in Eugene, Oregon that is also

counting on me to call ball plays. I know there's great support back there. The guys are grinding. I owe it to those players, I really do, to finish what I started.

It's unfortunate that the calendar is this way. You've heard coaches across the country talk about the calendar. It is what it is.

Excited about the challenge ahead. We're going to build a great staff. Signing day today. Went as good as it could have gone, being that we had about 12 hours to assemble an initial group of players.

What I'm proud about is those guys stayed committed to the university because they love Kentucky. It wasn't about one single individual, it was about everybody as a whole, Big Blue Nation, their visits up here, academics, the campus, Lexington. That's what I'm proud about.

We're working diligently around the clock right now.

**Q. I think everybody in this room is seeing the Feed the Studs video. You got about 20,000 hits on that. You refer to your defensive philosophy. How do you Feed the Studs on defense? Describe your emotions when you made the Y last night.**

WILL STEIN: Three parter, okay (smiling).

Feed the Studs, it's a real simple philosophy: get your best players the ball as many times as you can.

We know players win games. Scheme is great. Think we have great scheme, we have the way we game plan. What makes a play? I tell the guys every Saturday, they make the plays possible. They do. It comes to life with the players.

We can all draw up curl flat or four vert, power, counter, but the players make the plays. They do. We do that in a variety of different ways, like I mentioned with personnel groupings, formations. Really lives through the quarterback's lens.

On defense, I mean, defense is power of unit. It's not about one individual. Really offense isn't about one individual. All this is a unit-based. Defenses, how can you showcase that? You can have great third down packages with your edges. You can blitz a corner that might be really good off the edge. Put a safety down in the box. Might be good against the run. There's multiple ways you can do that schematically.

It truly is power of unit in all three phases.

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Your last question, I actually blacked out, to be honest. I didn't really know what was going on. I know I did a lot of fist pumping and yelling. The cheerleaders that escorted me out, I think I wrestled away from them to get going as quickly as I could.

I'm like, you're choosing me over Tayshaun? What the hell is going on here? It was really a special, special moment (smiling).

**Q. We heard about you growing up as a Kentucky fan. How did your relationship with the program change when you didn't get the chance to play here and went to Louisville?**

WILL STEIN: It obviously changed. I went to the rival. Four or five years of some bad blood. That's the competitor in me. Yeah, out of high school I would have loved to have the opportunity to come here. Everything happens for a reason.

Like I go to Louisville, Steve Kragthorpe starts me as a walk-on. Think about that. Who said I would have had that opportunity here? Unfortunately, God rest his soul, I love Coach Kragthorpe to death. Obviously was a really important person in my life.

When he was let go, Charlie Strong gets the job. Guess who I meet? I meet Charlie. I meet all those guys that coached me there. He put me on scholarship. I went from a walk-on to scholarship. My school is paid for now. I don't have to have student loans any more.

The opportunities came about not coming here the first time set me up. What happened? Charlie gets to Texas. I meet Jeff Traylor at Texas. I get hired at UTSA by Jeff. It all works out. I get to Oregon. I'm in Kentucky, where I always wanted to be and wanted to play as a kid, and now coach.

I'm a firm believer that everything happens for a reason. Never take anything for granted. Just be where your feet are, be great where you're at.

Yeah, I'm extremely thankful for my time at Louisville. I am. Would lie to you guys right now if I said I wasn't, really because of the people, my coaches there. They're so proud of me.

I've had so many texts from people from everywhere, from all different teams, all different stages of my life. They're super supportive. Just proud of this moment for me.

**Q. You have an incredible group of players sitting over here hungry for a win. What do you see as their**

**greatest assets that you want to build on?**

WILL STEIN: That's a great question.

Listen, it's really hard playing football. It's hard practicing. It's hard working out.

I just appreciate their toughness. I appreciate their ability to show up right now and support me 'cause I'm going to be their biggest fans.

I got the best seat on Saturdays. I get to watch our guys play football. It's an honor to be their coach. It's not going to be easy. Like, this off-season, my goal is to make it the hardest off-season we've ever had here. The hardest. Has to be. If we want to beat the people that we want to beat, I'm not just talking about people down the road, I'm talking about the people that Kentucky has beaten. I'm talking about the real people we got to beat. It takes freaking work. It's a grind. If you don't want to wake up in the morning, you got to wake up. You got to show up and show out.

That's what I'm excited about to get with this group, to see them strain, to see their toughness, their desire to get better. I'm ready to do it with them.

**Q. You've talked a lot about getting talented players the ball to make your offense work. It's been reported there's a general manager joining. What does that structure look like of player acquisition?**

WILL STEIN: Yeah, I mean, the first thing any talent acquisition is the evaluation process. Evaluation happens a lot of different ways. It's in-person, on the phone, Zoom, it's doing background checks, height, weight, speed, getting them to campus. There's a lot of facets to the evaluation process.

Then it's about the recruitment. Recruiting is still old school. It really is. I know y'all might be like there's no way, NIL, what is NIL, this stuff. There's a cap now. What's a cap. That is part of it. That's why we're going to have the best general manager in the country being here with me.

I know I can't report on that just yet. I'm sure that will come out very soon.

Yeah, there is a financial piece to it now. To me the best trait of a college football coach now is adaptability. We got to adapt. If you all are still saying, I wish it was like the old days. It ain't the olden days. It's not. Get that out of your mind. Let's push forward. Let's move forward in this process. How do you do that? It takes everybody in this

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®



room, young, old. Everybody in this room.

But yeah, evaluation, recruiting, in-person evaluation, out-person evaluation. Get them to the campus as many times as possible during the recruitment periods. Then just closing the deal, got to close. How do you do that? Like I mentioned, it's building the relationships. Not always being the highest bidder. But this is the best place people can come play football. They got to believe that in their hearts.

**Q. You guys do a spring game very much like an actual game day at Oregon. Is that something you're planning on bringing to Kentucky? The fans would absolutely love that.**

WILL STEIN: For sure. The best way to get better at football? Play football. This isn't like basketball. You can't play five-on-five hoops out in the backyard. You got to put the pads on, you got to hit, you got to tackle. That's how you get better, how you become tough. That's how you win games on the road in the SEC. You got to play football.

That's what we'll do through spring. It will be a tough camp. Fall will be a tough camp. But what is that going to make us? That will make us tough on Saturdays, going to make us tough to beat.

Exciting getting really through the strength and conditioning this winter. Setting up a great plan for these guys to get bigger, faster, stronger. Getting greater in our offense, defense and special teams, then moving to spring football.

**Q. You mentioned the juggling with Oregon and here. Have you tried to lean on Coach Lanning in terms of how he dealt with that staying at Georgia through their Playoff run?**

WILL STEIN: 100%. 100%. Dan, he's been phenomenal. I mean, talk about just an amazing person, human, supporter, innovative. He's taught me so much. He's been 100% in support of this. It's been really cool to see.

He's going to be somebody I'll lean on while I'm here. He's leaned on his mentors throughout his process. He will be the first one to tell you he's growth mindset oriented. He is always going to try to look to get better.

I am going to use Dan as long as I live, as long as he wants to answer my calls because he means that much to me. It's cool he's done that. The Playoff format was a little bit different.

What does give me a little bit of ease is that it is going dead in recruiting, right? It is dead. You can't go on the

road. Before it would have been three official visit weekends, signing a little bit later in December. You'd really love to have all of your staff here starting to work the road. We'll be able to do that in-house with Zoom calls, FaceTime, text group, everything you can imagine to juggle the recruiting.

I get great support back at Oregon. Those guys are working their butts off to create a great plan against whoever we end up playing in the first round.

**Q. Being part of Big Blue Nation yourself, now having the support from Big Blue Nation, what has been your most surprising moment from Big Blue Nation so far?**

WILL STEIN: I was, like, floored yesterday when we landed. We got off the cool private jet that they flew us on. It's pretty great, Mitch. Thank you for that (smiling). I'm not kidding. There was 15 cop cars in front of our car and 15 cop cars behind our car. I felt like the President of the United States. I was like, What in the heck is going on (smiling).

I took a picture on my phone. I have never seen anything like that, so... It kind of woke me up. I was like, This is a big-time gig. This is big-time. That was probably the most surprising to date.

Thank you so much. Thank you for coming out and supporting. Cannot wait to get rolling with the Cats. Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: Coach Will Stein, we'll let him get to work. Thank you for coming.

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