

Rutgers University Football Media Conference

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Coach Greg Schiano

Press Conference



GREG SCHIANO: Thanks for coming out. I'm sorry we had to do it a little later today. As you guys know, Aaron's mother passed away, and we had the service today and funeral. Appreciate you waiting for us to get back.

Really, really excited. I love this class. I think we got what we need. We got longer. We got faster. We got more athletic, and we got a bunch of guys who love football. I'm not sure I value all of them in that order, to be honest with you. The guys who love football do really well at Rutgers, and that's something I think that is consistent for this group.

Most of all, we have a group that wants to be part of what we're building. They can see what we're building. They understand the culture, and they're a good cultural fit.

I think this is two years in a row. Last year's class I felt very, very much the same, and just really excited. Can't wait to get to work with these guys. Some of them will be here mid-year, some will come in June. That's kind of always a floating thing.

But looking forward to eventually working with all of them and them being a huge addition to our family.

I'll try to answer any questions I can. Before I do that, though, I have to recognize, this is a multiyear pursuit. Recruiting has changed. You don't recruit one class at a time. You recruit several at a time. My director of player personnel, Eric Josephs, is phenomenal. He's my right-hand man. His staff, Tim Silvernail, who's our director of recruiting, and Cassie Petty, who's our director of recruiting operations, those three are phenomenal, and they work year-round to help the coaches and myself build this class, and I can't thank them enough because that's their primary job and focus every single day, and they're the best.

Thanks to them and to the entire coaching staff who works tirelessly to recruit this class, and it definitely makes Rutgers football better. With that, I'll answer any questions I can.

Q. Where do you see putting Ian Strong? I know he's a good football player.

GREG SCHIANO: He is a really good football player. He could be a number of things. He could be a wide receiver. He could be a safety. Depending how much bigger he gets, he could even grow into something else, but I believe he's going to be a really good safety. Why pigeonhole him? He's a good enough athlete to do several things. He's the No. 1 player in the state of New York. That's the second year in a row that Rutgers has been able to recruit the No. 1 player in the state of New York.

As I've said many times, we have more scholarship players on our roster from New York than any other Division I team in the country because New York is -- I drove today an hour and 20 minutes. I can be in Staten Island in 20 minutes. New York is certainly a huge part of what we do.

Q. You picked up a quarterback late in Ajani Shepard. Can you talk about him and what endeared him to you?

GREG SCHIANO: Yeah, he caught my eye -- I get confused now when I was out. I was out I think it was a bye week, and I went by the school. They had a corner that we really liked. I saw him, and he caught my eye. So we kept following him.

Eric kept showing me every week his games, and I just loved his -- the way he played, his temperament, the way he led his team. He's a winner. The guy wins at everything he does.

I finally at the end, I just said, I want that guy on our team. Look forward to coaching him.

Q. (Indiscernible) Florida. How important has it been to go back down there and have success and how much do you feel like you've made progress down there?

GREG SCHIANO: Well, Florida has always been an important part of our recruiting strategy, first time around and the second time around.



It's hugely important. I think we've got some really fine players and really good people, guys who see what we're building and want to be part of it, see what our culture is and want to be part of it. That's the most important thing.

You know, nowadays with all the social media and all the technology, the world has shrunk, so it's even more convenient than it was last go-around. I told you the story, when I went to coach at the University of Miami in '99 and 2000, I fell in love with Florida football. They play it year-round, they practice 15 or 20 practices in the spring, I know a lot of people down there, our coaches know a lot of people, so it's really a natural fit for us to emphasize recruiting in Florida, and there's so many flights from basically every part of Florida to the New York area. It's pretty good natural fit.

Q. I know you're a social media savant --

GREG SCHIANO: That's an understatement.

Q. I know you guys put out these videos with Scott Hanson from the Red Zone and kind of made this big splash. I was curious if that was a paid partnership and how that came about, and did you like the outcome of it, I guess?

GREG SCHIANO: I thought it was a great idea. Our creative staff, Jordan Wolkstein heads that up. Our creative staff is phenomenal. They meet and they discuss things all the time, and as you joked about, okay, I am not such a social media savant. I really don't like it.

I let the young guys figure out what we should do. They thought it would be a great idea, and I agreed with them.

I know the kids, our signees, really were excited about it, and it's gotten a pretty good feel.

Anything that you can get that excites those kids, that's good to me, and now you watch, it'll become what everybody does. It's okay.

Q. I've got a two-parter for you. Are you any closer to an offensive coordinator?

GREG SCHIANO: That recruit is not -- no. Today is about recruiting, but it's a very timely question, so I'll just say that we're working on it. I'm working on it. But the reality is we need to get the right man for the position, not the fast he's.

When I finally decide that it's the right guy, I'll let you guys know immediately, and we'll get to work building our offense.

Q. Do you plan to take a quarterback from the portal at this point?

GREG SCHIANO: Well, you know, any position, quarterback obviously is the most important position in football and maybe in all of sport, but if we have a guy, whether it's the portal or in high school, if we have a guy that I think can make our team better, we're going to recruit him. But it has to be a fit. It has to be all those things.

We've looked at every single quarterback that's come into the portal, and we've evaluated them, so we're certainly looking at them all. But if I think it can make us better, we'll definitely recruit them. But that's on an individual basis, every single guy.

Our office does an incredible job. Every player that enters the portal gets evaluated, and in rather fast manner. So you can imagine when all those guys were flying into the portal, it was some late nights and some early mornings. Sometimes those ran together for that crew.

Yeah, we'll evaluate everyone. If they make us better, we'll make a move on it.

Q. If you don't, you'll go into next season with very little experience at quarterback? Gavin played some this year; obviously he would be the starter. Does that concern you, the level of competition you would have in that room?

GREG SCHIANO: Well, it would be Gavin, it would be Evan, it would be Ajani, and then it would be our walk-on, so we would have three -- my goal has always been to have four scholarship quarterbacks. That's always been the way we've done it. If you go way back, maybe we had five, but that doesn't work anymore. The reality is guys don't hang around if they're in a four-quarterback room. Two of them usually leave.

I'm really excited; you say there's not a lot of experience, probably not a lot of game experience, but Evan has been in this program for three years now and he's played some games, and now with that room kind of those two auto guys kind of being a little more seasoned, I look at them a little differently than they don't really have experience, just that they've been around.

Now, we're all going to be starting new in whatever system it is that we're running, so there will be some of that learning curve anyway on the ramp-up.

But you've got to remember, like look at some of the guys that have come to us through the portal. They've come as late as June and July, so there's several -- everybody

wants to get excited about this window right now. There's going to be a lot of portal movement. You only have to be in by the 19th. Then there's another portal opening after the spring.

I think there's going to be a lot of portal movement after the bowl games. I think there's -- this is a way of the future that you're really just going to have to -- if you think there's a beginning and then an end, I don't see it ever being an end. I think it just goes like this, and it's something very much like when I was in the National Football League, you have your pro personnel department, right, that constantly knows about everybody in the National Football League. Now, that's easier because there's only 1696 active players in the league, but they also have to know about all the guys that are on practice squads, which is another 320, then they have to know about the guys that are on the street, so it adds up quickly.

I think college football is getting to be like that, and you have to be prepared. Do we here kind of put a little bit more premium on the guys that are from this area that went away? Sure. If we're studying guys that possibly could go into the portal, you look at those guys.

But you have to be prepared because if you wait for every guy to show up in the portal, you're usually behind. Truth of the matter, you have to stay up. So we're evaluating all the time. It's become that. Which again, I don't think -- I don't like when people say those are unintended consequences. Like you have to be a fool to think they were unintended. What did you think was going to happen, that people weren't going to evaluate people throughout college football? That would be silly to think that.

If you think that any college coach that is trying to win would do that, then you don't really understand football and the competitive nature of it.

So it creates a lot more work, and it creates bigger and bigger staffs. Who's going to do it? People have to do it. You don't want to get me started on what I think because that would be a longer conversation than we have time, but yeah, things are a little messed up right now.

Q. Going back to high school recruiting, for this class --

GREG SCHIANO: Thank you. I like it. Yeah!

Q. You took a guy who was predominantly a quarterback but you're taking him as a wide receiver, Vilay Nakkoun Jr. How do you evaluate these guys when most of their tape is predominantly playing quarterback?

GREG SCHIANO: I think in this day and age, there's so much to look at, so there's camps, there's combines where these kids go, other sports you watch hand-eye coordination. But when a guy is really talented as a high school quarterback -- you go back years ago with Coach Paterno, he recruited several quarterbacks and put them at all different positions.

You've got to remember, even in high school, I think that position requires a great decision making, you have to have hand-eye coordination. In this day and age, if you're at a school that has any quarterback runs, then you have to be able to run the football like a running back, so think of all the skills. You can pretty -- I think if you try, you can see that skill, and we're thrilled with Train, with Rochelle. I think Junior is going to be the same. I think Junior is a really fine athlete, and who knows where they end up. I don't try to -- why pigeonhole them, get them here and figure out where they fit best.

If you get guys that are great athletes, that run really well and they're a cultural fit, we'll find a place for them to play.

Q. On the OC, I'm wondering if you can give any details on people you've interviewed, any roadblocks you've hit, any interest in the job you've seen now since you've started going about finding people? Just any details you can share?

GREG SCHIANO: I know you've got to ask it, but you know the answer. I'm not going to get into any of that. That would be self-destructive. When you're working a search, you don't ever volunteer that information because that could ruin somebody's situation where they are right now. Certainly they're all guys that are working. They're all guys that have jobs. I would never jeopardize one of the candidates. But you've got to ask. I said to Steve, it's a timely question, and I don't have any problem with it, but I can't get into the details, as you imagine.

Q. When you're recruiting -- I imagine you're recruiting a lot of offensive guys out of the portal and I imagine they have questions to you about the offensive coordinator. When they ask you those questions -- one, do they have those questions, and if they do, what do you tell them in a situation where you don't have someone in that position?

GREG SCHIANO: You know, most didn't really have questions about it. Most want to know, if I'm a receiver and I know I can come in and be a No. 1 receiver, are you going to throw the ball some? Yeah, okay, I can do it, as long as there's catches to be had. If I'm a tight end, are you going to use the tight end? Yeah, if you as the head



coach tell me you're going to use the tight end -- does it help to have the guy speak to him if he's a good recruiter? Yeah, the more recruiters you have, the better.

But I don't think it's as big a deal as one would think. Again, if you're not going to use the position, that's one thing that I have to answer as a head coach. But I think overall it's not been an issue.

Q. You added two portal guys, Rogers and Dixon. Can you mention what brought you to them?

GREG SCHIANO: Yeah. I think number one, both really good players. That's the first thing that brought us to them. One is a corner and one is a safety. We had some connection with our staff to both of them, and our players, for that matter. So when they went in, we thought they were good targets.

We immediately jumped on them and got them in to visit and did all those things, and really thrilled with both of them. I think they're going to come in and really be part of our defense in a hurry, and that excites me. In the back end I think we're going to have a really strong back end of our defense.

Q. Two-part question. One, you've got some key players back. How does that excite you? And also, any thoughts on NIL and Knights of the Raritan Million Dollar match-up?

GREG SCHIANO: Did you say the billion dollar match-up? Ok, I was hopeful you said billion.

Well, you're right. Getting Mo Toure back, a lot of this, I kind of alluded to it at the end of the year, but it's probably a good time to talk about it. We had 12 surgeries that ended guys' 2022 seasons. I just did the wrap-up with our medical people, and we had 179 missed games from guys in the two deep through surgeries and injuries. I've never had it like that. I think a year ago it was 101 missed games. It was 78 more missed games from injury.

When you're doing it, you hardly even realize it. You just keep going, next man up, you keep game planning. But at the end of the year when you look at it, you go, holy cow.

Mo Toure, who was our leading sacker in both '20 and '21, and Moses Walker, who as I mentioned was the No. 1 player in the state of New York a year ago, both of those guys got hurt in the spring, and then we had 10 surgeries within the season that put guys out for the year. So 12 guys overall.

To get them back and to get some of these other guys

back is really going to be exciting to see that defense because a lot of the guys were on the defense at full force.

Then the second question about NIL, again, that's the climate and the area that we are in right now in college football. I don't like the way that it's handled. I do think players should get paid. I've said that since the day I took this job in 2000. I mean, I stood up at a coaches' meeting once and suggested and kind of got laughed at, but had we had a little more forethought earlier, I don't know if it would be such a mess right now today, but we are where we are, so there's no use crying over spilled milk.

I think it needs to get under control. I do think the NCAA is trying, but it's really hard right now. The momentum is in the other direction.

What you have to do is you have to build your own. Don't cry about what somebody else has. I've never done that.

Look, there's never been equity in college football before, so why should there be now. I'm not worried about that. I'm not trying to have equity. We find the guys we like, we recruit them, we coach them up, we develop them, and that's how we've been able to go compete.

We'll continue to do that. We will use NIL. I really do encourage our fans and our supporters that -- some people just don't agree with it. The way it's being done, I really don't agree with it in all ways, but it is what we're in right now, and if we want to compete, we have to let our players, especially our players, retain the players we have. That's the critical part for me, because people don't have a clear understanding what the rules even are. Like you cannot use NIL within the rules to recruit a player, whether he's in the portal or he's in high school. That's illegal. I'm going to give you \$5 to come play at Rutgers; you can't say that. You can't do that. Yet it's done every day multiple hundreds of times a day.

We're not going to do that. At the end of the day, I'm going to go to bed at night and know we've done things the right way, and I'm good with that.

But we do need it because you've got to retain the guys that sit in these seats right here, the good players that you develop. So far, so good, but it's just going to get more and more competitive to keep your own players.

Again, we're trying to find the guys like we did this year that want what we have and that want to be part of what we're building.

Again, I'm really excited. We're involved in it. We're going to use it the best way we can at Rutgers, and I just

encourage our fans to help support that and our supporters, our boosters to help support that because it is critical, very critical.

Q. You mentioned speed and length that you added with this class earlier. This class compared with the previous two, how much closer do you feel like it needs to be compared to when you first took over and how much do you feel like you've improved in that area overall?

GREG SCHIANO: Well, I think it's a good question. I think it's more a cumulative effect than it is this many guys versus that many guys. I look at it as a pipeline. If you start a siphon, once it starts coming out the other end, then it just keeps coming. That's where we are. We're trying to fill that pipeline so it starts pushing them out the other side, and now we have player after player after player that has those skills when you look at them.

An NFL scout said something to me. He stood there and watched all our guys come up the stairs and take to running. He said, you can clearly see the guys as you came and your staff, you clearly made that a priority, and it is a priority, because we play in -- the Big Ten is called the Big Ten for a reason; it's not the little ten. It's big people that play in this league, and when you look at the people we play, they're really, really big guys, and you have to have big people to play in this league.

Q. You touched on it on your NIL answer, but a number of college coaches in recent weeks have talked about poaching in college football; Washington State talked about it; Mack Brown at UNC talked about his quarterback. Have you heard any of your players, other programs reaching out to your players and attempting to poach them?

GREG SCHIANO: I have. Yep.

Q. What are your --

GREG SCHIANO: They're here, so we're fighting it off. But yeah, it's happening.

I don't like standing up here and feeding the fire, so to speak. It's part of life right now. But it's a life that we made. Anybody who wants to moan and groan about it, we could have avoided all this. We didn't do a good job, and it's our own fault, so figure it out. As I tell our players a lot, you've got to figure it out. We as coaches got to figure it out. That's what we're trying to do here at Rutgers. It's not easy, and there are people that have more resources in that area. That you know.

But let's be sure we're under the same understanding. This isn't new to college football. It's been going on forever. It's just different kind of mechanisms to do it now. We're going to keep doing business the way we do it, and I feel confident that it may take a little longer, but we're going to get there. There's not one concern that we're not. We have really good people in this program. We made it even better finally today with this long process in recruiting this class. We'll have more additions, and we'll just keep moving forward.

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