

University of Oregon Football Media Conference

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Mario Cristobal

Postgame Press Conference



Oregon - 35, Stanford - 14

MARIO CRISTOBAL: First win of the 2020 season, other than that one back on January 1st. Just your general feeling, I guess, in this first ball game. You have a whole new offensive line. You got a lot of new pieces to it. In general, without looking at the video, what's your feeling?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: In general that for not having played a football in 311 days really happy with the result. Obviously we did not start fast, almost like it was, took us a little while to get in rhythm on both sides of the ball. I think that as much as we practice in an empty setting like we have throughout camp, it just, it was different. It was different. I think once we realized that we're the ones that were going to have to pack our own juice and our own energy, I think guys settled in and we started getting our feet in the ground, started getting our hands inside, started knocking people off the ball a little better, stopping the run better. And then overall just played better football and ended up pulling away during the second half.

Q. It's a first time for your new group of offensive linemen really to work together in a game situation. Were you happy with the progress they made from the practice to that first game?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Certainly we improved as the game went on, and rushing for, I believe, 270 yards. Some of those are quarterback scrambles as well, so it should be in the 200-yard range. Protected the quarterback fairly well. Some of the free hitters or some of the five-man protection where there's an extra guy. But just thought that from day 1 they have committed themselves to working and playing with toughness, finishing their blocks. A lot of guys that just, again, playing their first significant football and I thought the moment was not too big for them. Thought they handled what we felt was a good defense and overall just really proud of that group.

Q. Talk about your quarterback Tyler Shough. He made some good decisions tonight for his first real

start. A few things to work on too. Talk about him.

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Well, I think you hit it on the head right there. He did some really good things and I'm sure he's got, he's thinking about a couple he would like to have back right now. The one interception and just going through his progression and working all the way through to the open back. And then you see some of these other, those other deep shots that he took were really good throws, gave the receivers a chance, and the receivers just did a great job coming down with the ball. Also just a really good command of the offense as well, just every signal, every call, adjustments, protections at the line of scrimmage, decisions. When he did keep the ball and when he handed it off for the most part were on point. So I thought Tyler did a really good job tonight.

Q. He has weapons around him, but one that picked up right where he left off last year is C.J. Verdell running just as hard and again, behind that offensive line I thought he was a bright spot for you again.

MARIO CRISTOBAL: He was. C.J. rushing for over a hundred yards. Sometimes we take that for granted, but -- I guess the outside world does, we don't. We know C.J.'s a great player and feel he's one of the best in the country. He ran hard, really got behind his pads as the game went on and started to really feel just back at home. Started feeling how, and picking up where he left off in terms of just feeling where the blocks are, where the push is, how to set runs up like he's always done here. Then when he was running, just running really hard, running really hard and breaking tackles and getting contact plus two. All that stuff is critically important for down and distance situations.

Q. You have a long list of tight ends, some really good ones and we have seen a lot of them perform, but D.J. Johnson, a nice surprise tonight.

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Sure was. Some guys just weren't available and D.J. was and D.J. stepped up, did it in the run game, did it in the pass game, did it in protection as well. We asked a lot of a guy that was playing defense a year ago, had a pretty significant injury in the summertime,

and just kept chopping wood and kept finding ways to just find work, learn the system, get healthy, and then it showed up tonight with not only with the touchdown, but with some other really significant important plays.

Q. Does it take a game like this, the first game of the season, to begin to see some of those backups, some of those guys you're going to need to be in rotation?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: You probably saw the offensive line the way we rotated those guys. And you saw it all over the field tonight. You saw a lot of guys even if it was just a couple snaps but just about everybody got some playing time. We have been practicing like that. And it's a different year and being a different year we're going to have to be ready for whatever comes our way, whatever's thrown at us. So that's what we told the players in there. Told them we are really proud of them. I know our team, and our team, they're not happy unless they completely and utterly dominate an opponent, and I wanted to make sure that they knew that we're super proud of them, excited for them because again they haven't played in such a long time. And when you win a football game, winning is hard, and to be able to just bring it all together like they did in the second half, just it's a great start. It's a great start to the year. And the best part about it, there's so many things to get better at. You can coach it hard. You can improve. You can bring your hardest and toughest coaching at this team knowing that they're going to take it and find a way to get better.

Q. Final question: You had three new coaches: Offensive coordinator, quarterbacks' coach, and the communication tonight was surprisingly smooth. Didn't really notice any glitches in your team and your staff communicating with each other during the game.

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Those guys are pros. I firmly believe I'm blessed with the best staff in the country, as -- not only as professionals, they're elite teachers, but they're also elite human beings and when they grind as hard as they do and they want it just as badly for the players as anything else, it's fun to be around and it's a really unique and very efficient, productive operation and we feel that we can tighten it up and get even better as well and we plan on doing that.

Q. Tyler really ran well. How much of that was by design, particularly in the second half? And what were you thinking on that 15-yard run that he had where he avoided falling down and then two plays later scores? That was a really pivotal play on that drive.

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Well, we have always known he's a really good athlete and we have always wanted to run the

quarterback. And in this offense, there are going to be some opportunities. It's not something we'll do every single week, but when people start squeezing us like Stanford was doing, playing a post safety and a lot of man coverage, sometimes the opportunities were there. Sometimes it was called. And honestly sometimes he made things happen and that's part of his progression as well. When things aren't there, take the ball, tuck it and run. So just all -- but very pleased with his athleticism in finding ways to, I know he stumbled one time. That part didn't look too athletic. But aside from that, very athletic and productive in the way he ran the football.

Q. Most rushing yards against Stanford since 2018, for any opponent for them, yet you said that there's a lot of room for improvement for your offense. What does it say about the potential of what this unit could become once you kind of iron that out?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Well, these guys have a lot of pride and I know that they're going to watch some things on tape and say, Wow. We can get a whole lot better.

So right now, we're in the mindset of it's great to have a win against an opponent like Stanford, especially after such a long time and especially with so many new starters and some of the injuries we have had. Then at the same time, we know the culture is going to make these guys stay up at night a little bit and say, We left a lot of meat on the bone. We left some stuff on the table that we aren't going to be as fortunate if we leave that again going forward.

So the competitor and the guys that want to be perfectionists, they're going to take this game and they're going to be certainly fired up about the win, but they're also going to want to improve, and so it says that this group just wants to get better and we need to.

Q. Your guys' last drive, last touchdown drive starts with Tyler nearly throwing a pick, but then you guys regroup and you go, like, nine plays, 76 yards, and that's really what kind of iced the game there. Is that something that, is that a type of drive that, did you learn anything from that, especially week 1 here?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Well, I mean, I thought we had some really good drives today and actually killed ourselves on one drive with an unforced error. But I mean, we, we're going to play aggressive and I know a lot of people are going to say, Well, you know, why are you throwing the ball on first down. You know why? Because it's a good play and we should have a productive result. And it wasn't. It was almost picked off, but yet the second play came back and trusted our guys, got behind the O-line and knocked some people back and made some chunk yardage. So

that's the type of offense. Credit to Coach Moorhead, the rest of the offensive staff for putting together a great game plan and for really just grinding at it and getting our guys in tune with not many, not making many mental mistakes. We had a couple. We had a couple on corner fires and some of those nub sets that we had, but aside from that, just again, good work.

Q. Your thoughts on Noah Sewell tonight and his debut.

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Well, I mean, it's what we expected. Physical, downhill, knocking people back. He's just scratching the surface. He's going to be as good as it gets. He really is. We expect him and Justin Flowe and Jackson LaDuke, those young guys, that trio right there is going to be something special in college football for as long as they're playing college football. But back to Noah, yup, special guy, puts in the time, puts in the work, and certainly made some really big plays today on defense and his presence was felt strong.

Q. What was it like to coach in an empty stadium that is usually an atmosphere that's second to none?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Well, that was, it was different. It really was. It was. It was strange at first. I don't know if, we try to train our team all camp long, Hey, you got to be able to deal with it and bring your own juice.

But it's different. It is. I see, geez, I feel like I see you guys more than I've seen any of our fans. I should get cutouts of every single one of you and put them in the stadium. Starting with James, I think.

So it was. It was. Certainly, I think our guys, like, had to adjust, had to adjust. But credit to, again, the administration and the resources provided to provide that scoreboard. That thing was awesome. To the Autzen faithful, the Oregon Duck faithful, man, we miss you guys like crazy, but we felt you from far away, and I hope we made you proud tonight and one day, one day we'll all be back in there.

Q. Had D.J. showed signs of that throughout camp, and I guess how much run did he get with the first team? And how many tight ends did you even have available tonight?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: D.J. has been working first and second team for a long time now, and yeah, he's shown up. You saw that. That's a 270 pound jumbo athlete and he's fast and he has good hands and he's a good blocker and he's conscientious and he's tough. He's got all the makings of a great one. We had a couple guys that

warmed up and some looked good and some didn't look so good, so, but we went with what was available and it worked out well and hopefully improve from there.

Q. I was wondering, I realize you've only played four quarters of football so far and it's a weird year, but you said you know your team and talked about their perfectionists. What's your gut feeling as to how good you guys can be, based on your knowledge of what you've seen?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Oh, I don't know. That's kind of a tough prediction. How good can we be? We can be really good. We could be an excellent football team. And I feel confident that we're going to get there. I feel confident that these guys will wake up and be really eager to get right back at it. The processes that we have in place are built to provide feedback, to provide the right type of correction, right? Critique as opposed to criticism, things that come with teaching moments. And I bet if I checked my phone now, that's what I would find. I would find like 17 questions on, Hey, on this particular play, Coach, what could I have done, blah, blah, blah.

So that's the expectation. It's been competitive. It's been really competitive in camp and I think that has nurtured that type of DNA and environment as well.

Q. It seemed like in the first half it was trouble finding room to run in the middle of the defensive line for Stanford, but that second half starting with that drive right out of halftime, you guys were really just able to go downhill on them. What were the adjustments you guys made to make that possible?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Sure. I think it was a couple things. A couple times in the run game, we got caught with a corner fire that we should have made an adjustment to at the line of scrimmage and we missed it. Another one, a field -- when I say fire, just a blitz, a pressure. And we had a similar situation with pressure from the field and a line backer plug that involved like a stunt up front that really put the center and the play side guard in a pinch. So they got penetration. So it looked ugly. It looked like we got knocked back pretty good and we weren't finding much room in there. But the eyes of Coach Mastro, Coach Mirabal, Coach Moorhead, those three guys working together felt that if we stuck to our plan and just found ourselves making the right calls, the right judgments, the right formations, we could get back in the groove and get down hill. So a combination of all those things and then the O-line just feeling comfortable and working together and then coming off the ball. And that's where they did a better job of making contact and running their feet through contact which, in games like this, it's critical when you start

pounding the ball.

Q. Kind of a natural follow-up to that, how much of the second half in particular in the run game was by design and that I think you guys went after Keck a lot more, almost like I think on like three out of four plays, C.J. had runs of seven and nine yards. How much of it was by design to attack him in particular, since he was a backup and inexperienced, and their backup corners because they were also inexperienced?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: We didn't game plan any particular player tonight from a personnel standpoint. More from a schematic standpoint we felt there were some things there that we could take advantage of. But we didn't, we felt like we analyze those matchups earlier in the week and talk about whether it's schematic or whether it's from a personnel standpoint and felt we saw something schematically that we could hit and we did, but it wasn't personnel driven.

Q. Your young guys on the defensive line, seemed like a lot those guys made some plays. What was the adjustment you guys made between the first and second quarter, like it seems like at that point their run game really slowed down.

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Their offensive line is a good offensive line. Those guys played together last year and then they got banged up. I think four of them are returners, certainly I know the tackle real well, it's a guy I recruited before. So the credit to them, they have always been good at running the football, they have really good running backs and they mix it up well with the play action, catch you losing your eye discipline, they get you, they get you for big plays. Adjustment-wise, number one, we started striking blockers, getting our hands on blockers, being able to press, shed blockers and then get to the football. Our tackling wasn't as good as we expected it to be. We're going to improve that, we need to improve that. And some of those backs they bounced off some of our tackles. So, but all in all just striking, striking blockers, striking blockers and the art of block destruction is something we spend an enormous amount of time on, it showed up better as in the second quarter than it did early on.

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