

Art of Sport LA Bowl Hosted By Gronk: California vs UNLV

Wednesday, December 18, 2024

Los Angeles, California, USA

SoFi Stadium

Cal Bears

Justin Wilcox

Craig Woodson

Jack Endries

Press Conference

UNLV - 24, UC Berkeley - 13

THE MODERATOR: We have Travers Family Head Football Coach Justin Wilcox here, safety Craig Woodson, and tight end Jack Endries.

Q. Coach, despite the loss and obviously your first season in the ACC, how would you describe this team's character and the leadership?

JUSTIN WILCOX: I've got a lot of love for so many guys on the team. It would be hard to name them all. These guys are living through the most dynamic environment in college football history. I have empathy for all that they're going through. I certainly don't feel sorry for them because we all get to take part in the greatest game ever created in college football.

I'm sure bullish on college football. The current system we're in may need some work, but man, I could go down the list of guys, and they put in so much time and effort. You don't always get the results you want. I've always appreciated their work ethic and what they bring to meetings and practice.

There's no better examples than the two guys sitting right here.

Q. You're one of the last Gerald Alexander recruits. Then there was other DB coaches that came. And then also the transition from the Pac-12 to the ACC. But overall, looking back at your college experiences, how worth it all was it in the end?



CRAIG WOODSON: It was all worth it. Glory be to God, first of all just allowing me to play this game at a high level and giving me the opportunities to be blessed with being on the field and all the things off the field. I'm just grateful for it.

I'm happy that I stayed this extra year coming to Cal. Honestly, everybody's got options nowadays, but I think this is a special place. The special relationships that I built here, I wouldn't trade it for nothing.

I'm grateful for my teammates, the way that we fought today. Even though we didn't come out with a victory, we're going to fight to the end every time.

I'm proud of these guys. The people that are going to be here next year, they've just got to keep going. They got to use this as fuel to just go into next season with a chip on their shoulder.

Q. Justin, how would you evaluate the offense tonight, and what was the plan with the quarterback switch in the second half with Caminong?

JUSTIN WILCOX: It was tough slipping on offense. We had a couple opportunities to score some more points. We had a field goal opportunity earlier in the game that we missed, and then we had the ball on the 1/2 yard line on a second down, I believe, and then went backwards. That one hurt us.

The plan at quarterback, C.J. was going to start. C.J. had an injury during the game. E.J. was ready. So he went in there and competed like crazy.

I thought some other -- there was a lot of guys playing today. They got more opportunities than they had all year, both sides of the ball and on special teams. There was just a lot of things in flux.

We had great opportunities to evaluate guys. Offensively, whether it was the quarterback or the receivers, or defensively with some linebackers and DBs and guys that are going to be playing that are working to earn their spot kind of going into spring.



We knew that there was going to be limitations on some guys with reps on defense, and then we knew obviously on offense we were going to have some new guys. I thought E.J. competed really hard, and I'm really proud of him. Not the easiest situation to step into, but he sure competed really hard.

Q. Jack and Coach. Jack, you had a play where you reached out and it looked like the ball crossed the plane. Can you talk a little bit about what the ref said about why that wasn't a touchdown? Also, Coach, the backwards pass that was recovered as the guy was going out of bounds, did you get an explanation for that and why there wasn't a review?

JACK ENDRIES: I reached and thought I got in, but they said I didn't, and their word is their word. That's all I know that I didn't get in.

JUSTIN WILCOX: I was told they reviewed both of them, Jack's play and the fumble recovery on the sideline.

Q. Justin, emotions are understandably raw, and it's only been a few minutes since the game ended. If you had one phrase to describe this season, what would it be and why?

JUSTIN WILCOX: You're probably asking me at the wrong time in all honesty. These are emotional moments right now. I've got a lot of -- man, I just got so much respect for so many of these guys. This dude right here has been here six years. Came here, went through some injuries, worked his ass off, damn good player. He's going to play after college.

Got a Cal degree. Could have left, didn't leave, like forever I'll be thinking about this guy. So I'm very grateful. Very grateful.

I think there's other times this season it was a bit frustrating. If I'm being honest, there's some frustrating moments in there, but certainly never hopeless. There's a lot of emotions, but I really try to stay measured and be grateful for guys like this and other guys in that locker room for doing what they've done for the program and also we need to demand more from ourselves. The players do. The coaches do. The whole program does.

There's a lot to be done before we come back and when we come back.

Q. Coach, you talked about just having the support of the university. Obviously the switch from one conference to another to travel and what have you.

How much did you feel like that helped in getting that type of support, and what do you have to do to build on from this season, the positives from this season to build on to next year?

JUSTIN WILCOX: Very grateful for the administration and the support, especially our new chancellor. College football is changing every day. You see it. You read about it. You know it.

So the move to the ACC couldn't have been more seamless thanks to the support of our admin and also investing heavily in football and NIL and revenue share. That's where we are.

Again, I'll always be bullish on college football. It's the greatest game out there. It's a complicated world right now. It needs some work. It needs some work.

The players are just a part of it. They're being pulled every which way, but very grateful for the university, our new chancellor, our AD Jim Knowlton for the support they're given and the commitment that they're making moving forward in this new world of college football.

Q. You spoke about the type of work that it needs to improve upon. What type of work from your vantage point needs to improve?

JUSTIN WILCOX: We finished the season, the regular season, and we had -- there's four losses by nine points total and five losses by seventeen. Do you think it feels different in the last week of the season if we can make up those 17 points? I sure do. Those margins, I say it, the margins are the hardest ones to make up, so everybody has to do a little bit better.

The coaches, we have to recruit. There's got to be more competition. The players, the support from everybody that touches football has got to be this much better because that's what it takes to win.

That's why I'm saying it's not hopeless, but we've got to be this much better. I know we can do it. I know we have the support to do it, and we've got to go do it.

Again, it takes everybody that touches football -- and ultimately it's my responsibility because I'm in charge of football, but that's what's got to happen. Coaches, players, academic support, sports med, nutrition, strength and conditioning, I could go on and on, but that's what it takes to make up those 17 points so you're going into the last game 11-0.

Q. There were a lot of young players that played in

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

this game. Josiah Martin obviously showed out. On defense it looked like in the second half there were a lot of young guys out there. Was Teddy out injured, were there other guys that were injured, or were you getting a preview?

JUSTIN WILCOX: Like I said, college football, these guys have got to make decisions. We knew there was guys on defense, it's either they're not going to play or they're going to play a certain amount of reps. We knew that going in. We understand why they make those decisions, and we support those guys.

We knew there was going to be a lot of guys playing in the game. It was going to be -- regardless of the score, like a lot of guys were going to play. We're going to get great evals, and some of those guys really helped themselves, and it helps shape recruiting decisions because those guys get reps. We want to see, can he play winning football? Can that guy play winning football? What is it that's going to show up on tape? Because practice is one thing. We try and create those environments in practice, but there's nothing like the game. So we want to watch them.

Physically, what can they do? Mentally, how are they handling the speed and the checks and whatever might happen? The love of the game, competitiveness, the behavior, all of that. We got a ton of great evaluations today. Obviously we wish we won the game, but we knew going in that on both sides of the ball were going to have a lot of that.

Q. You talked about Jaydn's impact before this game even went on and the year he's had and how he struggled and battled through it. After how he played tonight, the big run early, how do you kind of assess what he's meant to this program, especially after playing the way he did tonight.

JUSTIN WILCOX: Jaydn Ott, he's had some big moments in his career here. Going back to his true freshman year, you probably remember the Arizona game. He's had some really big moments. Unfortunately, he had some injuries this year that slowed him down a little bit, but really pleased that he was able to go out there and compete today.

He had the big run, like almost a 50-yarder, I think, early in the game, and gave us some juice. I wish we could have capitalized on some more of those runs, but it just wasn't in the cards today. Appreciate what he did.

Q. Justin, how important was the fake punt, the long pass that they hit coming off that play?

JUSTIN WILCOX: The game came down to the fake punt they got a score off of. We had the ball on the 2 yard line. We couldn't quite get it in the end zone. We had -- unfortunately had a turnover that turned into a touchdown. So missed field goal. So there's some plays in there. Special teams had a few. Punt return I think they got that ended up, I believe, resulting in a field goal. They had a long punt return.

So the defense being on a short field a couple times and gave up some points, and the offense, when we got down there low, we didn't quite put it in the end zone. Obviously the fake punt was a tough one. Yeah, really unfortunate that we couldn't quite get that done.

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