

# Atlantic Coast Conference Football Kickoff

Tuesday, July 23, 2024

Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

## Cal Bears

## Coach Justin Wilcox

### Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We'll start with questions for Coach.

**Q. How excited are you to be joining the ACC?**

JUSTIN WILCOX: Yeah, well, it's great to be here. We're incredibly excited. I can speak for the coaches and the players. Not only the team, but our students, our alumni. We're going to visit some new venues, new teams coming in. Couldn't be more excited to be a part of the ACC this year.

**Q. Let's say the people on this coast weren't up at 2 in the morning watching Pac-12 after dark, what do you want the ACC fans to know about Cal football?**

JUSTIN WILCOX: Well, we got a rich tradition. Reaches back a long, long time. Some great players and great teams throughout our history. It's a proud university. We take a lot of pride in the way the guys pursue their education, what they do after football, but also the product we put on the field.

We got some great representatives with us here, smart guys, tough guys. They love playing football. We're looking forward to competing at a very high level against the great competition in the ACC.

Again, couldn't be more honored to be a part of the conference moving forward.

**Q. Looking at your schedule, you guys go back and forth. What kind of goes into those long haul trips?**

JUSTIN WILCOX: Really good question.

We spent a lot of time on the logistics. Our administration has been incredibly supportive. Looking from 10,000 feet, we leave a day earlier. We make sure we got a big plane, the biggest one that Delta makes. The big lie-down suites. There's going to be a good number of players who are really, really comfortable.

You know us, the coaches and administrators, we'll sit in the back. We'll make sure the guys are well-fed, Gatorade and water. Make the trip.

In terms of our week, we have it all planned out. Leaving on Thursday, once we get back what we need to do to make sure their bodies are taken care of.

**Q. You were struggling mid-season, late season, came up with a big three wins to end the year. Was that a good springboard leading into this new conference opportunity?**

JUSTIN WILCOX: I think it kind of speaks to the guys that we have on the team. We had come off a really bad loss. For them to come together and finish the regular season like we did was really impressive.

We got a lot of those guys back, most of 'em. Really proud of them. I think it shows the character they're made of. This is a new year, a new team. We got a lot of new faces. I think those things are important because you can learn from your past experiences. But we got a lot to do moving forward.

They've had a great summer. We're ready to start fall camp next week. What we do from here on out is most important.

**Q. Moving to a new conference, what are the challenges with all that both on the mentality side and the physicality side of the game?**

JUSTIN WILCOX: There's obviously great football in the conference. ACC from top to bottom, you look at the competitiveness. I believe last year it was the smallest margin of victory of any conference in the country. From top to bottom, the coaching and the players, quality of play, we know it's going to be really, really high.

For us, it's really how good can we get from now until we play our first game and throughout the season. We need to be focused on playing better and better football.



We have a ton of respect for the teams on our schedule and looking forward to competing against them.

**Q. ACC is calling itself the conference of quarterbacks. Last year you went up against three first round picks. Wild game against USC. How did last year prepare you for what the ACC is billing itself as this year?**

JUSTIN WILCOX: It's hard to compare teams and players. We did play some really talented teams last year. We're going to play talented teams this year.

The quarterback play in the league is very, very strong. Returning talent, then transfers. We also feel very strong about our quarterback room. We're looking forward to that challenge.

I think throughout college football you're seeing rosters getting better and better and better with the movement that's happening in college football. We feel the same about our team.

To compare one league to the other, this quarterback to that quarterback, I don't really like doing that. I just know we're going to face some really good teams and really good players. I also think highly of our roster and quarterback room.

**Q. With technological advances, how does that change the way you coach?**

JUSTIN WILCOX: I think it's great. We actually used the headset communication in our bowl game last year. We'll work on it all throughout fall camp. We're going to work the tablets in fall camp. You have to be efficient. When you talk about coach to player communication, that can be a very beneficial thing.

I'll open it up to more and more players, being able to hear. For right now you have one on each side of the ball. I think the coaches and the players during the game being as efficient as possible with how we talk to them, that's something we're going to be emphasizing and work on as coaches to make sure when we're talking to our quarterbacks or inside linebacker, safety, we're not coaching them on what happened last play. You give them a nugget and the play call, then we're moving forward.

Once in a while coaches, we can get a little too involved. I don't know that giving them too much information helps them. We want to be lean and mean on the information we give them so they can go out and apply it the next play.

When it comes to the tablets, being very efficient on the

sideline, what you are looking at, making sure you're identifying the plays from the press box that you need to talk about on the sideline before you get to that point.

I think it's all about efficiency. We're going to be practicing that throughout fall camp.

**Q. You promoted Mike Bloesch as your offensive coordinator. How excited are you about that?**

JUSTIN WILCOX: Very. He's done that before. Mike has a history of calling plays, running the offense. He had a lot to do with our transformation last year in terms of the success run, and at the offensive line position. We're looking to take another step there.

From year to year, you're always going to have wrinkles and changes because your roster changes. We got a great offensive staff. Really excited about Mike. He being the play-caller. We got really good cohesion on that side of the ball.

Will it look a little different? Yeah. I think that's common from year to year. There's been really no disruption in terms of language and teaching. We're looking forward to getting him to the first game.

**Q. Team and player development. In terms of development, can you highlight a couple of players that you want to highlight or are emerging talents on the team?**

JUSTIN WILCOX: There's some guys we want to highlight right here. We have four of them sitting in front of you.

That's the beautiful thing about college football: from year to year there's going to be guys that maybe it's because of the physical development or their experience, a year older, the game has slowed down for them.

We have some ideas on who that might be, but you never really know until you get to game time. That's when you truly see it come out.

There were guys last year that you could look at on offense and defense. You could talk about Trond Grizzell and Fernando, on defense Cade Uluave, a Defensive Freshman of the Year last year. A year ago would we have known that was going to happen? We were hoping, but you're never quite sure. You haven't seen enough.

Guys mature at different rates. I'm excited to see who that's going to be this year. I think there's a lot of good candidates. Our net talent has improved significantly. I'm looking forward to seeing some of those position groups

fight it out during fall camp to see who is going to get the reps.

**Q. Looking at your schedule, it's wild. You're traveling in the second week to Auburn, then two weeks later down to Florida State. Did you ever think in your wildest dreams you'd be making such road trips that early in a season?**

JUSTIN WILCOX: Well, I guess if you would have asked me two or three years ago, I probably wouldn't have thought of that.

I'll tell you this, we're glad to be doing it. We're excited to play, to be in the ACC.

As far as the schedule goes, yeah, it is a bit different. Is there more miles? Yeah. But we're going to be comfortable. We're going to leave early, we've got a big plane, we've got Gatorade and water. Air travel is amazing. They'll be more comfortable than they are sitting right now.

The schedule is what it is. We're excited to go play these teams. What's most important is that we prepare the best that we possibly can so we can play good football. But the travel will not be an excuse to not play well.

**Q. You return about 80% of production on offense. You rushed for over 200 yards in four games last year. Returning one of the best running backs. Talk about the foundation that ground game does for your offense.**

JUSTIN WILCOX: It starts there. If you want to have a great offense, it's really hard to do it being one-dimensional. To be able to run the football, obviously we have an exceptionally talented back in Jaydn. That O-line has come a long way.

Being able to incorporate that passing game, the RPO game is everything. You got to score, put up points, be able to run the football.

We're excited about taking another step. As you mentioned, we had some really good games running the football. What we need to do now is got to be more consistent. That consistency in performance week in and week out of moving the football, running the football, putting points up, doing whatever is necessary. That's the goal of the offense and the guys sitting up in front of you.

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