

Atlantic Coast Conference Football Kickoff

Tuesday, July 23, 2024

Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

Cal Bears

Fernando Mendoza

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Questions for Fernando. Who would like the first question?

Q. The offense found a spark when you stepped into a starting role. It took a while for you to get that first win. Talk about the resilience this team showed working through that losing streak, ending on a strong note.

FERNANDO MENDOZA: Yeah, first of all I want to thank everyone from the ACC for having myself, Chandler, Craig, Coach Wilcox and Jaydn here. We all appreciate it. Thank you for your support.

Getting into that question, as you said, the last three regular-season games we had, we were on a three-game win streak especially after a brutal loss against Oregon.

That speaks to everyone in the locker room. I think the locker room culture doesn't get talked enough about in college football. We have a strong locker room culture here at Cal. We all came together as players and said, We're going to do this thing. Three games left, we need three more to make a bowl game, we're going to do it.

We put our heads to it. It was pretty unlikely to beat a ranked Washington State, a rivalry game against Stanford, and a ranked UCLA.

Coming together as a team, not quitting on each other, putting our best foot forward, our preparation and effort in practice, our resiliency, really launched us forward into a bowl game, and even more momentum this year.

Q. You came into the season third string. Midyear you ended up being pressed into duty. What is the different mentality coming into this season? What are you looking for out of this team this year? A lot of optimism?

FERNANDO MENDOZA: Yeah. There's a ton of optimism

with this team. Last year, I was third string, didn't have much playing experience. This year I believe seven games under my belt.

But the goal is the same throughout fall camp, to be a better football player. The more I can improve my talents, my chemistry with my teammates, whether it's talking to Coach Wilcox, Coach Bloesch, Coach Gilbert, my teammates, I'm going to do that.

I know all my teammates and myself included, we're going to prepare our best we can for week one, UC Davis.

Having more experience this season, especially with the transfer portal era, everybody on the entire team, offense and defense, we've done a great job with team chemistry.

Locker room culture, it's huge, especially at Cal. I think that it's going to be something that carries our optimistic faith from last year and spring it into this season with a new conference.

Q. The Stanford and California rivalry that goes back years and years. Now y'all are joining the ACC. How excited are you to keep that rivalry going? How has bringing in Chandler Rogers helped you with your game over the off-season?

FERNANDO MENDOZA: That's a great question.

First off, talking about the Stanford and California rivalry, I'm from Miami, Florida. I'm from the East Coast. I was an ACC kid growing up. When Cal was my only scholarship offer, I was honored and blessed and so thankful that Coach Wilcox took a chance on me.

First year, I was a signal caller. Now it doesn't really matter because we have the helmet. I was actually the fake signal caller. I was doing little whips and sprinklers and stuff. I looked like a fool. We played Stanford at home. That was our sold-out game that year. It was crazy. After the game everyone stormed the field, alumni came up to me shaking and hugging me while crying. Thank you so much. I'm like, I'm the fake signal caller, man. I would love to think...



Being a scout team quarterback that year, I helped the team. At that moment it really showed me how much that rivalry meant. That's something we look forward to continuing. As long as I've been here, Jaydn has been here, I know Craig has had his fair share of big-game victories, it's something we look forward to sharing with our older and new teammates that we got through the transfer portal and new ACC fans.

Chandler is a six-year quarterback, a lot of football under his belt. Quarterback competition and competition in general, whether you might be uncomfortable with it, you're comfortable with it, it always makes you be a better player. As I referenced before, my goal is to be the best player I can be at the NFL camp. Chandler is helping me do that because he has a ton of experience, probably over thousands of college football game reps. That's something that's invaluable. That's something that I've learned from playing seven games last season, from my first game to my seventh game, I saw how you can grow so much as a player physically and mentally. That's something I'm excited we have on our offense.

Especially as an aspiring leader on the team, when you're able to welcome in competition, there's nobody else on the team that can be, Oh, I don't want to compete. No matter who you are, if you're Jaydn, All-American running back, in a competition battle at another position, there's going to be competition at Cal. I think that's a great culture that Coach Wilcox embraces.

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