

# Atlantic Coast Conference Basketball Tipoff Media Day

Thursday, October 10, 2024

Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

## Cal Bears

## Coach Mark Madsen

### Andrej Stojakovic

## Mady Sissoko

### Men's Press Conference



the momentum, and we're excited about this coming season and the ACC.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, in I believe fifth grade you were assigned the nickname Mad Dog. It obviously fits as a fifth grader. Did it still fit as someone of your age now?

MARK MADSEN: I don't think so. I hope not. You can ask the players that question. Maybe they feel that way when we get them up at 5:00 in the morning to practice. But, no, they've been great.

I think the thing that comes to my mind is tenacity and work ethic. It's something that is part of the ethos at Cal, and it's something honestly that we look for in all the players we recruit.

When you look at the roster that we have, it's filled with very talented and very hard-nosed players, and very, very excited to be working with these players.

THE MODERATOR: As I take a look at some of the notes provided by your communications team, there's a note that says that you have helped invigorate the program and the fan base within the first year. How do you know that that invigoration has happened?

MARK MADSEN: Well, I think when -- let's start with attendance. I don't know exactly what the average attendance was in some of the preceding years, but we had a sellout last year. We had several games that were probably a few dozen or a few hundred people shy of a sellout.

So you have probably three games that are near sellouts or a sellout. You hear the students talking about it on campus when you walk down the street. Students are coming up to me asking me about our players, asking about the schedule. There's an excitement at Cal, and that excitement is real and palpable, and it's going to continue to build that momentum.

THE MODERATOR: When you think about the acclamation to a new conference and the acclamation of ten new student-athletes, so many variables in play, how

THE MODERATOR: We'll get started with questions for Coach.

**Q. Year one for you at Cal, Pac-12. Year two, ACC. You're seeing realignment in a real way permanently. What can you say about joining this conference and what your journey has been with Cal, albeit short so far, but being in two different conferences.**

MARK MADSEN: Let's talk about the conference situation and then the journey at Cal. When the Pac-12 imploded, that was an incredibly upsetting and sad day. Not only for me, but for the community.

There was anger. There was a lot of different emotions. And then you look at the teams and the players that have come from the Pac-10, Pac-12 as it grew over the years, that was frustration.

And then, you know, a month or two later to be joining the premier basketball conference in the country, you went from absolute -- all the emotions I described to excitement. You know, a feeling of anticipation. The knowledge that in going to such a great basketball conference it's only going to enhance Cal's ability to recruit outstanding student-athletes like these two right here and like the rest of our team.

So that was a journey. I mean, that was a journey. The pathway at Cal, you know, we had -- in year one I think the experts picked us last or second to last. Well, we were within probably two or three games of finishing third or fourth in conference in year one in a very, very good league. That's a testament to our players. It's a testament to our assistant coaches.

So we're excited about the trajectory. We're excited about



do you stay on a timeline? How do you set priority? How do you make sure the variables in place get to where you want to be?

MARK MADSEN: We've looked at innovative ways of teaching this year at Cal, with bringing so many new players in, yes, there's going to be challenges in installing a complicated NBA system. We've attacked that from day one.

We've brought the players out in early June. When we teach something, we send -- a lot of times we send the video the night before, a condensed teaching video so the players can see it once on their phone. They see it again in the film room in the morning. Then we walk through it. By the time we get to the drill, a lot of times these players, you know, know the majority of the concepts, so it really has accelerated the teaching and the learning.

It's a tribute to the players' ability to pick up complicated concepts. These things will be shown throughout the year in live play.

THE MODERATOR: Your first game is on November 4th. Will it have all clicked by then?

MARK MADSEN: I think as a coach there are moments in every season where you're in a game, and you look out, and the fans look out, and it's every single thing is clicking perfectly. Then there are games when you're out there. Sometimes those games are in January, February, or March, and nothing is clicking.

Every single team experiences this. Phil Jackson's trusted assistant coach, Tex Winter, used to always tell at the Lakers, in basketball everything can turn on a trifle. Yes, we strive for perfection in everything we do, but we also tell our players, hey, those moments are going to come when it feels like you can't even throw a rock into the ocean. Those moments come in every sport in every way.

When that moment comes, how do you react? Do you fold? Do you wither? Do you shrivel up, or do you rise to the occasion? Our players are going to rise to the occasion.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you. You can switch spots with Andre. Questions, please.

**Q. In transitioning from Stanford to California, finding out that both teams would go to the ACC, does that excite you that you get to face your former team, or is it just another game?**

ANDREJ STOJAKOVIC: Yeah, of course. I think along

with competing against new teams on the East Coast, I think having Stanford there, continuing that rival, you know, my old teammates over there. Obviously a tremendous amount of respect for that program, but I'm extremely excited to compete against them this year.

THE MODERATOR: I want to follow up on the Mad Dog nickname. Is he a Mad Dog?

ANDREJ STOJAKOVIC: To us as a coach, we don't see him as that. He's extremely quiet and patient. He's very calm now as a coach from our standpoint. He's very transparent with what he expects of us, and I think that's what makes him a great coach.

THE MODERATOR: Your father was a three-time All-Star with the NBA, a 13-year veteran, Peja. What have you learned from your father about basketball from all levels, from all angles?

ANDREJ STOJAKOVIC: Just staying the course. Obviously understanding that kids in my class are going to go one and done or go overseas and whatnot, but I think everyone has their own journey. Being patient with myself, obviously, understanding that it's going to take different time for different players. Just continuing to grow for myself and when the time is right, it will come.

THE MODERATOR: You're getting ready to switch places with your teammate, Mady Sissoko. Describe him in one word, knowing that he is going to describe you in one word when he comes up to the podium.

ANDREJ STOJAKOVIC: I would say Mady Sissoko, I would say he is a force offensively and defensively. He's a great rim protector, and he has great touch around the rim, so yeah.

THE MODERATOR: Why don't you switch places and we'll give the young man a few minutes at the podium. Mady, questions, please.

**Q. After four years at Michigan State, what led to the decision to come to California for your final year of eligibility? Is there any unfinished business that you think you can finish at California?**

MADY SISSOKO: Yes, definitely. You know, I'm very grateful for my time at Michigan State for four years, but coming to Cal, I had the same goal as the coach has too and everybody in our locker room.

Coming to Cal, the coach is the reason, and the transition to going to the ACC and how we're going to be competing every single night with the high-level teams.

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

I want to be part of that goal. I feel like we all have the same goal.

And to grow as a player too. I'm going to -- I feel like I haven't seen the ceiling of me yet. I'm going to definitely grow as a player.

THE MODERATOR: You started a foundation. I'll leave it at that. Would you describe for the room and those people that are watching at home -- will you describe your foundation, please?

MADY SISSOKO: Yeah, I created a foundation three years ago with my guardian Mike Clayton, and the reason because when NIL came, I wasn't able to make money for myself due to my visa. I was able to create a foundation. That way I can give back to my family and which lead to build school and run waters for my village.

THE MODERATOR: What type of progress have you had with this foundation over the last three years?

MADY SISSOKO: The progress I have has been just help those kids to go to school because when I grow up, I have to walk a long way to go to school. I want to see them to wake up to go to school just like walk five minutes, which is going to help them, their learning ability.

Cleaner water is very, very important over there because there's not much clean water. For them to have the fresh running water, that was a very, very big-time for them.

THE MODERATOR: Speaking of young kids, you are sort of the old man of this basketball team. What are you teaching the younger basketball players?

MADY SISSOKO: Just to understand, you know, you have to be every guy every single day, you have to bring it to practice every single day. The practice is something you can improve, and it's a chance for you to improve every single day, which our coaching staff and Coach Madsen are doing a very good job to help us, even though we have a lot of new faces, to help us to play together every single day.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you for the time today. Thank you, Cal. Good luck this season.

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