

Pac-12 Conference Football Media Day

Friday, July 21, 2023
Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

Arizona Wildcats

Coach Jedd Fisch

Press Conference



JEDD FISCH: I'm kind of accustomed to Media Days where you get to go up and give a little bit of opening remarks, then take questions.

I just wanted to start with that and just tell you all that I'm really thrilled for the opportunity to talk to all of you today. I wanted to thank all of you, the media, for making college football the best sport in America.

Today is my third Media Day. I certainly feel different standing up here tonight than I have in the years before. It's a privilege to be the head coach at University of Arizona, one in which I would say every single day I feel that I need to earn that privilege.

I tell our coaches the same thing: Got to earn the right to wear the block A. I tell our players the same way: You got to earn the right to wear the block A. If we do that, we'll be able to get to where we want to be, which is part of the national conversations.

We've got some great players and great coaches. What I'm most excited about is the continuity that we have in our program. We have 10 of 11 coaches returning from last year. Arizona went eight years with eight different defensive coordinators. We have the chance to bring our defensive coordinator back. I feel like that's going to make huge strides in our system.

Our entire offensive staff is back. We're coming off having one of the best offensive years Arizona football has had. We went from 123rd to first in explosive offense. Went to number 11 in the country from 107th in yards per play. Top 20 offense in the country.

What makes it personal for us is our players, our coaches, our commitment to recruiting, our commitment to the kids that we have in our building.

We've had over the last two years two of the best recruiting classes Arizona has ever had. First time in the history of

Arizona football they finished in the top 40 twice in a row. My expectation is that we finish even higher this year.

Our goal is to keep kids in Arizona at home. Our goal is to keep kids from Tucson at home. We're working very hard to achieve that goal.

Everyone we bring in we train on our culture. Everyone we bring in can speak about what it means when we say it's personal and what we mean when we say earn the honor and right to win.

The players and staff we brought in have changed the culture here over the last two years. We've had a 3.0 GPA last semester as a team with 110 guys. We've had back to back to back the four best semesters they've ever had at Arizona football. Over 3,000 hours of community service since I've arrived.

I'd say we've had some great high school kids joining some elite transfers. The team of '23 is really different. It's different than it's been since I've been here. Offensively we have 9 of 11 returning starters. Defensively we have what I would say six returning starters as well as an additional let's call it seven in the portal.

I brought two of our leaders here today. I brought our offensive captain and quarterback, threw for 3800 yards last year, took our offense to heights we haven't seen, Jayden de Laura. Came in here from Washington State, transferred here 19 months ago, and has worked hard over the last 19 months to improve our program.

Brought Treydan Stukes with us, our defensive captain. He is sitting there now in a position where he was a walk-on in 2020, as a freshman, weighed 168 pounds with no offers. He's now our defensive captain, weighs 194 pounds, is our starting nickel. Also a 4.0 student, does everything right on and off the field.

It's not just Jayden and Stukes. We have 110 great players back at home. We have a great staff, 37 members of our staff back at home as well. Really excited for where they're taking our program. Can't wait to get back with them.

ASAP sports . . . when all is said, we're done.®

We've had nine guys that are on the watch list this year, most we've ever had since I've been here. Jacob Cowing, Tanner McLachlan, Mike Wiley, Jordan Morgan all decided to return for their last year, all have gotten their degrees, are all sitting in a place where they can really thrive on offense.

Jonah Savaiinaea, Jonah Coleman, Tetairoa McMillan, Jacob Manu are some of the best freshmen I've ever been around last year, and they are now going into their sophomore year. Very excited we have a guy like Justin Flowe who transferred in here to join Bill Norton and Tyler Manoa and some of the other elite transfers we have.

I would say this, when it's all said and done, we're never going to be recognized from pre-season honors. Doesn't matter what people think now. Talking season is over. Football season is going to begin. I really believe in what we say to our players: show up early, work hard, stay late, have a plan, deliver on your promises, respect the process, admit your mistakes, tell the truth, and embrace the grind. If we do that, I believe we'll earn it and win every day.

I appreciate all of you. I'll sit down now, take whatever questions you might have.

Q. A lot of brilliant things you've done at Arizona. One player we have to talk about is your quarterback, Jayden de Laura. He's been in the news. You haven't addressed it. Would you like to now?

JEDD FISCH: Sure. I can certainly address what I'm allowed to address when it comes to this.

Legally there's not much that I can say, but I can tell you that the university, our football program and I, were all made aware of a juvenile and civil action that was brought against Jayden September of last season. We were not able to get much information. We did as much due diligence as humanly possible.

What we learned was that Jayden never pled guilty, was never found guilty of any crimes. Really for us, that's what we could live off of. That's what we could understand. We can't make decisions, it would be unfair to make decisions, based upon information we don't have.

There is no information. There won't be any information that is available under Hawaii law. Everything is sealed and expunged, so there really is nothing for us to learn. What we can ask for is for Jayden every day to be the best possible leader he can be for us.

Our culture is very important, as I mentioned. All we can

do is listen to the people that knew him the best, that knew the most amount of information. When he and I and his family all found out about this lawsuit in September, our university acted as quick as possible.

Q. Year three, you built up the defense in the off-season, how do you feel about the product?

JEDD FISCH: Yeah, I'm really excited about where we are as a program. Offensively we made a big commitment a year ago. We were coming off being a 1-11 program, really 1-23 over the course of 24 games. We felt if we didn't get good on offense, we were never going to be able to recruit defense. No one was going to want to come to a team that couldn't score.

Our offensive staff, with Brennan Carroll and Jimmie Dougherty leading the way, have done an amazing job of -- we've had the same offensive staff for all three years I've been here. They've recruited great players there.

For us, it was a matter of saying, Okay, now that the offense is in a good place, what can we do defensively? In that case, what we did was we committed to both the portal and playing young. Last year we played -- at one point in time six freshmen were starting on defense, true first-year college players. We were able to get those guys bigger, stronger and faster this off-season, complemented with guys like Justin Flowe, Daniel Heimuli, Tyler Manoa, Regen Terry out of Michigan, Orin Patu and some of these great players we were able to bring in. I think that will make a huge difference in our defense.

Q. You talked about last year in particular Arizona is a California-based recruiting school. You're getting those guys. Despite the transfers you had, aftereffects from COVID with high school kids being left out, how much has that benefited your program and how has it also hurt it?

JEDD FISCH: Yeah, well, I would say this about high school recruiting. That's the most important thing for us. We'll sign 28 high school kids every year. That's kind of been what we've done the last two years that I've been here. That will be our goal moving forward. We've had our two best recruiting classes. This one should be better than that.

We're always going to focus in on the high school kids. We're going to use the transfer portal to supplement. We're going to use it if we need a player here or there to fill a hole or fill a gap.

But we've been in this weird world for about a six-year window from 2019's class up through 2025 where we're

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

going to have to figure out guys that have that year of COVID, redshirts, how you're going to handle that six-year window.

We've gotten to a point where we're able to bring in 25 to 30 new players every year. I think that is what your goal should be as a program. If you're a little bit less or more, great. I don't think I want to be any more than 28 to 30 new players. Hopefully with roster management, it's a big part of coaching in the NFL, and I think it's a good experience that I've had in the past of trying to understand and learn how to bring in, supplement your draft with free agency, but not live off of it.

Q. Bringing in 28 high school recruits, what specific characteristics are you looking for in these players?

JEDD FISCH: Yeah, that's a great question about what we look for when we're out on the recruiting trail.

It starts with where we go. We go to programs that win games. I want to bring in as many winners into our locker room as possible. If you could see some of the high school programs that we've recruited from recently, they've all been ones that have won state championships, all been ones that have competed at the highest level, that know what it takes to win games, work hard.

I want those kids coming into our program. They have to know that we have a standard. Our standard is a 3.0 GPA or higher, all 85 scholarship players. You can't come in here and not expect to be held at a very high standard academically. It really doesn't matter to me what eligibility means. It doesn't matter to me when people talk about if he gets to this, he can get in. No, I want someone that's committed to being a great student.

My dad went to Wharton. My mom has a Ph.D. Academics is important to me. Our kids understand if you show up to Arizona, you're going to have a great degree.

Then you have to be able to be willing and want to be willing to give to the community. Community service is a big part of it. It's a privilege to play football. 50,000 people watch you play. If it was easy, 11 would watch 50,000 play.

For us, you got to understand that privilege, and you've got to give back.

Q. You're so thoughtful about the game. You talk about the changes that have happened in the past few years. If you could change one rule, what would it be?

JEDD FISCH: Just one? I have two (laughter.)

I want to move the hashmarks. I want the hashmarks to look like the NFL. That would be number one.

Number two is I don't want to throw players out for targeting. I lived a terrible situation in 2015. The team captain at Michigan, Joe Bolden, starting linebacker, was from East Lansing, Michigan. We were playing Michigan State. It was Senior Day. The first play of the game, he went to hit a guy, and they called targeting. He got ejected Senior Day from the game. And it was -- A, it wasn't targeting; but, B, at that point in time it was a hit that was a meaningless hit.

I just think if we could just look to see if there's a way we can find a common ground of not ejecting a player, but penalizing a player, unless it's obviously done with malice. That would be a great rule.

Q. You mentioned retaining defensive coordinators. With the fluidity at that position, what do you anticipate being the biggest difference in having some stability now?

JEDD FISCH: Yeah, the biggest thing to have stability is that people in your second year, it's always better than in your first year. Where we had such a great challenge is that none of our kids over the course of the last eight years were able to play in the same system twice. When you can't do that, you're going to end up being in a situation where you're never going to be as good as you possibly could be.

I think that's proven in college, in pro football, doesn't matter. Blaine Gabbert went through seven offensive coordinators in seven years in the NFL. They wonder why he didn't make it in the league. It's almost impossible. The same thing goes in the NFL.

The point is that these guys are great players, great players. To be able to have some stability in your life and stability in your coaching is going to make a huge difference.

Q. Arizona has some of the greatest golf courses on planet Earth. You guys have synthetic turf. Looks great on TV, but why did you convert from Bermuda grass to natural turf?

JEDD FISCH: That's a great question (smiling).

Well, here's the deal. This is what I was told. We used to have the greatest grass field, I was told, out there. Then in some time in the 2015, '14 time, Coach Rodriguez wanted the field to always be recruit ready, always look great. A



grass field is not always going to look great. We went to the turf.

Then, when we made a decision after the six years when the warranty was out on what type of field we were going to have, when you'd go to a grass field, you limit your amount of opportunities you can use the field.

Our university campus doesn't have a ton of grass fields or intermural fields available. We brought in 2800 kids in June for camps. I love people in our building, I love high school kids. We do camps for youth. We do camps for children with cancer. We do every camp known to man to be able to welcome and open up our building.

If I was on grass, I don't think we'd be able to use it as much and open it to the community as much as we do with this turf.

Q. The storyline is the quarterbacks. You have to protect the quarterbacks. Jonah Savaiinaea started as a freshman. Where do you see his ceiling? You've come from the NFL. What do you expect from him?

JEDD FISCH: I don't know if you know our offensive line coach, but it's a guy named Brennan Carroll. He has done an unbelievable job of bringing in not only talent that maybe everything thought was great, but then when we got here developing them into something special.

We have our left tackle I believe will be a first round pick, Jordan Morgan. He returned to us for his final year, got his degree, and decided to be a graduate and stay with us. Jonah Savaiinaea, Coach Carroll found a really not-recruited player, under-recruited. He was a freshman All-American last year.

I'll never forget this. Chris Foerster, the offensive line coach of the 49ers, came to a practice, a 30-year coordinator and offensive line coach. He said, That's an NFL player.

I said, That's a high school senior.

The amazing thing about a guy like big Jonah, we're moving him out to right tackle this year, if he can play as well at guard as he did at tackle, this kid will be a 15-year NFL player. Him and Jordan will be able to do a heck of a job protecting Jayden. We sort of like to throw the ball in Tucson, so if we can protect that quarterback, it's going to give us a great chance.

Q. We saw the jump that you made from year one to year two. What is for you the realistic expectation in year three?

JEDD FISCH: Well, I'll tell you, it's our best team. It's our best team. We're not going to shy away from that. I don't know what that means in regards to wins, but I do know what it means in regards to the type of players we have, the quality of players we have, the talent we have.

Our guys are going to go out there and play at a very, very high level. If they play at the level that I think we're going to play at, I think we're going to win a lot of games this year.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

