

Pac-12 Conference Football Media Day

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Washington State Cougars Coach Jake Dickert

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Head coach of Washington State, Jake Dickert.

It's hard to believe that you're entering your second full season as head coach. Give us a state of the union, how things are going. Two new coordinators you're welcoming in.

JAKE DICKERT: I think one thing, when you step inside of our building, I think energy is a key word, it's something that you feel, it's something that's real. It's something through the connection of the players on your team that really shows.

I think that's what we have in year two. We have a bunch of veteran returning players that have carried that over. The big phrase we're talking about is change has equaled growth, when you can talk about a new offensive coordinator, new defensive coordinator, new strength and conditioning coordinator. But we've really grown as a program. I think we learned from year one, I've learned a lot as a head coach in year one to year two, how to run a program.

I think those are the things that you're really going to see as we go throughout this season. Our guys are bigger, faster, stronger. I think coach Ben in the weight room -- good strength coaches train physicality. Great ones train mental toughness. There's a blue-collar, there's a chip on our shoulder. I think this team in '23 has a real humble conviction. I think we know who we are. I think we know how we need to win games. But I think it's going to be an exciting brand of football.

On offense the one thing Coach Arbuckle has done from the moment he stepped in our building was just inject life into our offense. The stats are out there. He led the number one passing down the field in Western Kentucky last year. That fits Cam Ward's skill set to a T. To bring somebody in with that type of life, quarterback training, we fixed Cam's drop, the fundamentals. People are seeing it

all over Netflix on the quarterbacks show, the synergy between Coach and Cam, what we have going into year two, I think you're going to see that on the field. I think our offense is primed to take a big step forward.

Coach Schmedding on defense, there's no harder job than what he does. We've been running the same system for three years. Jeff has adapted to being a little bit more multiple, involving.

The challenge in this league is real defensively. To have Ron Stone Jr., Brennan Jackson, elite edge rushers in this year. Dare I say Ron is a colleague from the championship game as a student commentator. But we feel like we have one of the best corners in the country in Chau Smith-Wade, freshman All-American, Jaden Hicks coming back.

So four All-Conference players, I don't have the history of it at Washington State on defense, I think it's going to be pretty special, consistency in the special teams unit. Like I said, I think we know who we are. Our slogan this year is all we got, all we need. It's a no-excuses approach to knowing what we need to do. We control our effort, our execution, our character, our connection, our finish. Just excited about making the journey with this team this year.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. After the bowl game, you had time to reassess everything. How did the players mentally recover from that? What was the biggest thing you took away from that?

JAKE DICKERT: I think the biggest thing is football is the greatest representation of life out there. Adversity, whether it's happening now or happening later, it's coming for us all.

One of the biggest things we try to train in our program is just how you handle those situations. So, yes, we've been thrown curve balls. We didn't have those coordinators, but we had our team. We had conviction of what we wanted to go out there and accomplish.

There's only been a few teams in the history of Washington



State to win eight games. We were on a mission to do that. We fell short. Those are things we can grow and gain from. Bowl games still to me, you earn that. It's a special thing.

I want to give a nod to Coach Leach because I know everyone used to remember him for his funny things at media days, talking about pirates and mascots, all the fun things. We remember him at Washington State for making us believe we could win again. We're going to honor Coach Leach at our September 9 home game against Wisconsin.

But excited about building on that tradition. Five straight bowl games. We've continued to do that. Seven bowl games at Washington State is now the new standard. We're excited about preparing and playing in those games. I take away nothing but positives from that week in L.A.

Q. What do you think you learned most from being a head coach in year one? How does that affect year two?

JAKE DICKERT: I don't know if we have enough time (smiling).

I think in any walk of life, year one, you really pour every ounce of everything you have into it because it's yours. I think we all make fancy plans: I'm going to do this, that, this is how I'm going to build the program.

I think at some point it's got to go to application. I love the X's and O's. I love sitting in the meeting rooms. I miss that with a great passion. I think I've been called to something greater than just the fundamentals of the game. That's being a true culture builder, trying to find a way to get 18 to 23-year-old young men to see the game outside of their own little atmosphere. I think it's tough to do in today's world, in today's climate.

I like to say balance in college football, it's impossible. It's managing the imbalance. The one thing I learned is about having better presence in my personal life. Pullman is no better place to do that. I have a Lewiston tournament I have to get to, a 10U baseball tournament when we get back. I can see my daughter doing theater in four minutes.

There's a lot of things as a head coach I'm more convicted than ever in how we want to run a program. I think clarity, when you can provide a mature group of young men clarity, make them understand exactly why we're doing something, in our program we talk a lot about 'why' is a special word. For us it's why with an exclamation point.

When I tell our guys this is why we do it, this is why we

have to go about it this way, this is why we're going to execute it, they're mature enough to do it. I challenge our coaches: Are they leaving your room thinking why, question mark? Why am I doing this? Well, this is exactly why I need to go out there so I can be the best that I can possibly be.

I think that's well-rounded, but empowering our coaching staff, empowering the leadership council on our team to take ownership. Those are things I learned you can't do it all by yourself.

Q. What upgrades has happened to the program that will best help get the outcomes you're looking for this season?

JAKE DICKERT: Well, I think I alluded to it a little bit in the opener. Change equals growth. College football is changing at an incredibly rapid rate.

The biggest thing is we have the greatest game on the planet. I believe that. We're different than the NFL. We're unique. We're high tempo, fast paced. Sometimes I watch Sundays and I fall asleep at the pace, what's going on.

I think there's a lot of things. We got to stay above the curve at Washington State. I'm excited in September, we're opening up a brand-new indoor practice facility, state-of-the-art Taylor Sports Complex, a few feet away from our current Cougar Football Complex.

In January we're opening up what we're calling the Champions Center. It's going to house our academic resources. It's going to be a state-of-the-art place where our guys can go learn. Part of that is player development, but also half of it, two-pronged, house our mental health resources. That's a hundred feet from our dorms.

I'm proud of Washington State in being at the forefront of what we're trying to do not only physically for our student-athletes but mentally as well.

We got new practice turf. There's a lot of things that we're doing institutionally to show who we are. I think there's a misnomer out there that Washington State, just because we're in the Palouse and we got a bunch of tractors and combines in a small town, that we're some side-bar to the Pac-12. The 10 teams that are going forward, Washington State I think is fourth in TV viewership. There's Cougs all over this country that see that flag waving on College GameDay that know exactly what it's like to be a Cougar.

Our passion, donor base, what we want to do going forward is going to keep us where we want to be not only in the Pac-12 but nationally, as well.



Q. I was reminded when we were in the Palouse, driving the rental car, seeing the winter wheat coming in, just this bucolic community and the cool fall chill in the air. I thought to myself, Wow, you compare it to Seattle or the Bay Area or Los Angeles or Phoenix. I was thinking immediately about how do you draw that NIL and how do you stay competitive? What is that landscape like with that NIL support?

JAKE DICKERT: I think more importantly you got to know who you are. I think Washington State, I'm at a place that really fits me. My graduating class was 27 kids in high school. I know wheat fields. I know small town. I know great people. I know blue-collar toughness. I know what that means. I'm at a place that I really, really fit.

Yogi knows. I got Yogi up at 6 a.m. for a practice this spring. It was good for him. Chilly, 30 degrees. But we're different. Different is good because when you come to Pullman, you come to Washington State, you better love football.

There's a lot of players out there. The college landscape is changing. NIL might be a big city thing, rule. We're going to continue to evolve to do it our way.

I think we've doubled down on recruiting kids from the Pacific Northwest, guys that understand what it's like to be in our place, have a passion for it. I don't care about stars. I care about finding the best fit for our program and the right guys that are going to attack it.

One thing I tell our guys each and every day, when you snap the football on Saturday at Martin Stadium, doesn't matter what the guy across from you makes. It's about toughness, the factors, can you do your job in the toughest of moments better than they can.

I know the money gets the notoriety. I think we need a federal legislation to equal the playing field across the country for everybody. I don't know if there's a great league that doesn't have consistency as they go throughout the rules. I think there's one way to do that.

We will continue to navigate it. That's part of the all we got, all we need. It's a no-excuse approach. Whether we win or lose is going to have nothing to do with the NIL that we have in the collective. It's going to be our guys executing better than our opponents.

We had a lot of learns last year. A lot of adversity that we went through, learned from those situations. Excited about going and finishing off those this year, and once again, that has nothing to do with NIL.

Q. Speaking of leveling the playing field, what was your reaction when the conference decided to get rid of the divisions and just play best two? A lot of teams could benefit from it. How do you feel the Cougars could benefit from that?

JAKE DICKERT: Competition is one of our four core values of our program. From a little kid when you compete on, when you win, you go to the dance. You go to the prize. Probably in our little sphere, we used to have to be the best of six teams to make the championship game. I understand that. In the broad spectrum of college football, teaching our guys about life and competition, you win, this is what you get.

We have side competitions of kickball, dodgeball. We call it The Race for the Roses. We have a lot of team competitions, and the victor gets the spoils. It replicates life. You don't get to be the CEO of a corporation just because you're one of six. You're one of the best of the best. It's a philosophy that my dad taught me. He never let me win ever until I was about 16 years old, I was finally good enough to beat him.

It's one of those things that competition is the core of life. I'm really proud to say the Pac-12 went to the right format.

Q. Trent Dilfer made comments recently about tampering with the portal. Have you had any experiences about this or any thoughts?

JAKE DICKERT: I think it's a pertinent question. I appreciate you asking that.

I think my comments are well-documented, if you followed our journey all the way since December. I think it's an issue. I think Coach Kiffin hit it on the head with the pay-for-play, some of those things that are happening, the inducements and enticements that are happening behind the scenes.

I think it puts a lot of pressure on young people because you look at some of the numbers, whether they're real or not, there's a pressure that comes with that.

I think that's something that we need to do, obviously from my seat as a head coach, but in college football, to preserve the game. It's a competitive balance that is needed. Consistency in NIL, consistency in scheduling. Let's determine who the best team is.

I'm proud of the CFP. I'm excited that we're going to a true 12-team league, the Pac-12 champion is going to get its rightful seat at the table. Play against the best. Show why

we've worked so hard.

I think it's real. I think it's out there. I don't have any immediate solutions for you or any big 'wow' moments. It's putting a lot of pressure on our student-athletes.

Q. Take us inside your office for a moment. When that happens, they come to you, what is dialogue like for you?

JAKE DICKERT: I think, first of all, you have to realize I built such a relationship with that kid that he trusts me to go do that in that moment. A lot of times they would run from that and hide, right?

One thing I like to do is make sure my guys never see my door as the principal's office. This is not the place you go to get in trouble. Come in here, hang out. There's a lot of trust that needs to be built to go through that.

We work through it together. Some of the numbers you're talking about, I put myself back to being a Division III player, GA, paying for school. I think one thing I'm really proud of that you guys do is really share the stories of student-athletes. It unveils what's behind the mask.

We talk a lot about Washington State. It's person over player. That's a hard line. It's not a gray line, not a dotted line, not a blurred line. I think once you understand that these are people's real lives, these are real temptations, let them know that I'm here for them. I show the value of our program.

I try to be really proactive instead of reactive. This is what's going to happen. In three or four weeks, this is what is coming. Are you ready? I'm here for you. Have a great support system. Make sure you know and educate yourself on what happens.

Some of the numbers, it's taken me a long time to make that amount of money in my life. Ten years ago I was making \$27,000 as DB coach at Southeast Missouri.

So it's one of those things that there's a new pressure that comes about at it, and I think when you take it from the approach of real care, I think that's when you can work through those situations successfully.

Q. Your new offensive coordinator, Ben Arbuckle, 27 years old. He said when he got a call from you, he thought it was a spam call. What was it about him as a first-year coordinator at Western Kentucky that made you believe he could run this offense?

JAKE DICKERT: I think it came from the vision of what we

needed to do on offense and not restart. When we're trying to build a program, yes, continuity is everything and stability means a lot. There's a certain amount of guys that have a style of offense that I think allowed us to take the step forward.

The more I talked to him, I just saw his energy and his life. But the language of the offense is the same. When you studied his film, I meant it, I look at it from a defensive perspective. Defending his offense, actually him and Jeff played each other last year at Western Kentucky, Auburn, so it was an amazing -- just as you went throughout that process, you saw him being the right fit for our offense, for Pullman, Washington. He's a small-town Texas guy.

I love it. I've had an opportunity to coach at every level of college football, okay? I think throughout my journey, you realize there's a lot of great coaches that don't get that opportunity. I've been blessed to be around a lot of the right people that believed in me and invested in me and more importantly, around a lot of great players.

Age doesn't even come into my factor. It's what you're doing, do you fit our place, and what can you bring value to. I think Ben every step of the way has shown he's the right person for Washington State.

Q. Who made the final decision on the poster that went viral around you and the fellas?

JAKE DICKERT: Dallas Hobbs and Carson, Dallas is a former player of ours, I think he slid it by my desk but didn't really say the whole idea. I know my wife says, You will never have a beard, as she looked at me with the beard and everything (smiling).

Very fitting. It works for our program. It just shows who you are. You got to have a little fun with what you do. I get to wake up every day and coach football. To bring back Ron and Cam, do this thing, it's pretty special.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you for your time.

JAKE DICKERT: Thank you.

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