

Pac-12 Conference Football Media Day

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

Washington State Cougars

Cameron Ward

Ron Stone Jr.

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Washington State players. A couple Media Day veterans. Cam, how are you feeling coming into this season?

CAMERON WARD: I feel great. Coach Arbuckle, we see eye-to-eye. The first thing we implemented is what I need to work on as a leader, quarterback. I've changed tremendously since last season. That's special thanks to him, Coach Dickert, and my teammates. Those guys push me each and every day. I'm excited to see what we go and do starting September 2nd.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. Cam, after the LA Bowl, what did you mentally take away from that? Losing a guy like Robert Ferrel, especially in the slot, how have you approached this off-season?

CAMERON WARD: I took a lot away from it. Losing one of my lifelong friends, Rob, he came to Washington State with me. It was a blessing to play one of his last college games with him in a stadium like that. Also prepared me for the off-season, what I need to work on, how and when I need to work on it.

Everything happens for a reason. We were put in that situation for a reason, and everyone is going to grow from it.

Q. Cougs versus everybody has been the mantra. Where does that come from? How has that embedded into the potential DNA of this team?

RON STONE JR.: Yeah, it's been around just about as long as I've been there. It's really an identity that we want to keep going. We feel like nobody wants the Cougs to win. We're all we got, we're all we need. As long as we have each other and we can rely on ourselves, we're going

to be facing so many different obstacles.

It's us versus the world, basically.

Q. How has that landed, some of the newcomers that have come in?

CAMERON WARD: It's been great. From the transfers we had, from Josh Kelly, Kyle Williams, DT Sheffield, they've been great. I feel like Lincoln Victor, our returner, he has emphasized that a lot to the receiver room. Defensive side, Ahmad McCullough, Devin Richardson, transfers, linebackers, they're going to be immediate impact players for us. They embrace the culture.

I'm excited to see what those guys can do, and I know they're going to put Cougar Country on the map, for sure.

Q. Cam, Pac-12, obviously, a quarterbacks league. Once again this year. Where do you believe you stack up in the mix of Pac-12 quarterbacks this year?

CAMERON WARD: I believe I'm at the top two. I'm a great competitor, a great teammate. I feel like I have all the intangibles to be a great quarterback at this level and the next level.

I feel like we all have different things that separate us. Caleb Williams and Cam Rising, they're obviously at the top of the Pac-12. Cam Rising, two-time Pac-12 championship. He is at the top until somebody throws them. They are the standard right now. I'm trying to get to that level. You just take it one day at a time, one game at a time.

Q. Ron, your former defensive coordinator, Brian Ward, now down at Arizona State. I've got to believe you have the game down in Tempe circled on the calendar. Thoughts on playing against your old coach?

RON STONE JR.: It's always exciting to play against people you know. It makes the game a little bit more fun when you know the people involved in it.



But personally, it's just another game on the schedule. I'm not really looking forward to that one until we get to it.

Q. Can you talk about your style of leadership and how you feel like it's resonating with your teammates?

CAMERON WARD: I'm not the big rah-rah type of leader. I feel like I take situations and address them as a team. I feel like the team respects me, I respect the team in a certain way. I feel like every leader has to be different. We have different leaders on our team, and each one does a different job.

RON STONE JR.: Personally, I'm a vocal and outgoing guy. That's my style of leadership. I also try to lead by example. Someone's got to vocalize what we need to get done. I'm that guy for the most part. It's been an honor and privilege to earn the respect of all my teammates. Whenever I say something, the guys in the room listen.

Super privileged for that opportunity.

Q. From your perspective, as a guy who makes quarterbacks' lives a living hell, that is your goal, what is it like to play defense in your position in a conference when you look around that there are just unbelievable quarterbacks that all do different things?

RON STONE JR.: It's exciting. I mean, it's something you look forward to. To know there's this much talent in the conference, you get to play a bunch of these guys, it's all you can look forward to. You always want to play your best against someone else's best to see who really has it.

Something you definitely look forward to it. You game plan a lot harder for it with some of these explosive guys you have in conference.

Q. (Question about the alumni.)

RON STONE JR.: What I've really taken away is just how much Cougs want to give back to other Cougs. Cougs versus everyone is it for everything. It's for anyone that's a Coug. It's not just for athletics. It's us really finding a way to cling together, to really push ourselves towards the top.

I really enjoyed the opportunity to go to some of those alumni events and meet all the people, shake hands, tell them my story, hear their story. Those are connections that hopefully are going to benefit me and benefit them in the future.

Q. Cam, Coach Dickert talked about how you're the biggest decision-maker in the program. When you look at the things that you're trying to improve upon,

46 sacks from a year ago, but you watched the cut-ups and learned a lot, what have you learned from him about the way you played last year and the way you want to play this year?

CAMERON WARD: It's true. Before every game, Coach Dickert tells me there's the two biggest decision-makers are me and him. I look at the tape, 46 sacks. The O-line, that's what everyone thinks. But probably half of them are on me, whether it's bad pocket movement or not getting the ball out.

That's another thing I wanted to work on, beating the ball with blitz when teams would pressure us, which was my fault last year. Every team has their say-so, what the media says, but in the locker room I know what the situation is myself, so I take ownership in that, and I plan on doing a better job this season.

Q. A couple years ago you're at a small school in Texas. This summer at the Manning Passing Academy. Any stories that came out of that?

CAMERON WARD: It was a great experience. Thank you to Peyton, Eli and the whole Manning family. I was able to talk with Cooper. He's the funniest one out of the group. Archie, he's my guy, loves my family, all that.

The biggest thing I took out of that camp was the connection I'll have with them lifelong. We were able to talk football. Eli told me one of the most important things is you always need to be prepared for chaos, no matter game time, life.

That experience was a great experience. I'm grateful for the opportunity, the brotherhood that they have. I was also able to meet some good guys. I was able to meet Quinn Ewers, Texas quarterback, Mike Penix from Washington. A great group of quarterbacks, 30 or 40 of us. We had a great experience.

Q. We talk about quarterback position, the O-line, receivers. You guys have one of the most underrated 1-2 punches at running back in Nakia Watson and Jaylen Jenkins. Talk about that.

CAMERON WARD: Nakia is a great running back. From him, Jaylen Jenkins, Nakia is more of our power runner, he can make plays in the pass games, which I love. He's great with the check downs.

One thing with Nakia that separates him from everyone in the country is he's not a selfish player. Since last season, his pass protection has grown. If you look at the spring tape, the transition he's made from going from one read to

the next read is tremendous.

Jaylen Jenkins, he's a good third down back, great pass catcher out of the backfield. He's got a way better pass protection.

Those two guys, they're going to get the majority of the loads throughout the season. I know they're ready for a great season, too.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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