

# Pac-12 Conference Football Media Day

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

## Oregon State Beavers Coach Jonathan Smith Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: 10 wins last season. You're entering year six. You look at what you were able to do last year, you finish with a blowout win over Florida in the Vegas Bowl, you have facility upgrades, great players, great new quarterback. Sustained success is the goal. Where are you, big picture, coming into year six?

JONATHAN SMITH: That is the goal to continue to grow and sustain. We've made some nice progress over the last five years. Facility-wise, opened up a brand-new completed Reser Stadium this fall. I feel really good about the locker room.

Got a lot of returning players that have been productive, at the same time some new additions to add to that. Coaching staff has had solid continuity. Allowed us to establish an identity on both sides of the ball. That allows you to sustain.

Again, each year is new. Just 'cause what happened last year took place doesn't guarantee you anything for this fall. I know our guys are excited about the challenge that this conference is going to represent.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

**Q. Prior to this head coaching gig, you have never been a head coach, correct? I just want you to explain to everyone how you got here, what inspired you, and what do you think were the biggest factors in getting to where you are right now?**

JONATHAN SMITH: Yeah, that's a good question.

Like you mentioned, you become the head coach, we've been doing it now for five, six years, I always try to keep in the forefront of my mind what it was like to be an assistant, the experience of that. Things I appreciated, things I didn't being an assistant.

I do think for me, leadership role, it's people-focused. It's

the others that are around you and their experience of how their day to day is like. Are we doing things at the cutting edge? Are we competitive? You want that continued buy-in.

Been fortunate with the people we've surrounded the building with. The head coach's role has continued to change over those five years. This job now I think is quite a bit different than it was five years ago with the ever-changing landscape of recruiting and whatnot.

I still think that core piece of the people you have yourself around, remembering what their experience is like, you're trying to create an environment where people can do their best work. We're striving to do that every day.

**Q. You had a couple of guys that have been with the program for a while in Tristan and Chance. What kind of a feeling is seeing them get chances at other programs? Bittersweet feeling?**

JONATHAN SMITH: It's really sweet, to be honest with you. Each guy is unique. Tristan wants to long-term get into coaching. What an unbelievable opportunity that is for him to go to a big-time program with a big-time coach and coaches and really learn. Opportunity to compete for one year. He's done a ton for our program. In no way was I down on him to finish his career doing that.

Really same thing with Chance. Chance did a lot of good things for us. Won games as a starting quarterback. Looked for a new opportunity, which we were fully supportive of. Now he's going to place that won a bunch of games last year. Couldn't be happier for both those guys.

**Q. After the schedule that you had last year, the addition of DJ, how much further along is this program? What does he bring as far as championship pedigree?**

JONATHAN SMITH: He brings a lot. Again, I go back to the experience we had last year, this roster continuing to grow and improve. But it's college football. You have to replace some guys. If you want to win a championship each year, you need newcomers, next guy up,

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development of your freshmen, sophomores that need to be ready to play.

Again, with the landscape, transfer portal, opportunity to create more competition in the QB room, I think that only makes the QB room better. We're living that experience right now. DJ comes along, he's played in some big-time games, this is a whole new offense on him, but also competing against a guy that started eight games for us, then we recruited I think a really freshman that has a bright future in Aidan Chiles. You have three guys competing that way, I think it will only make everybody better.

**Q. You got the best running game top to bottom in the Pac-12 with Martinez, Fenwick and Griffin. With the change in not stopping the clock after the first down, how does that help Oregon State against some of those high-powered offenses like Southern Cal?**

JONATHAN SMITH: You're kind of all over it there with our ability. We want to be able to run the ball. Let's face it, when you establish the line of scrimmage, we do shorten the game, play some good defense. That's a recipe that can work for us. We'll try to take advantage of that.

We do need to throw the ball better, in my mind, than we did last year. You have all these quarterbacks coming up on this stage all day today, in this league, with the level of quarterback play, you got to score some points if you want to win. We got to be able to do that.

With the rule change, I do think that helps us because we want to run the ball and we're into shortening the game.

**Q. Based on the way the USC game finished last year, with the way they're allowing to push the scrum, do you see any change in that rule? To me it's ridiculous, there's no forward progress rule anymore. It's basically until these guys go down, you get five big guys pushing the guy for the two yards.**

JONATHAN SMITH: Yeah, I don't think it's an easy thing to officiate. I will say that. We did, yeah, got on the wrong side against SC. We got some fortunate movement, too, from our O-line against the Ducks from about three yards out.

All I'll say is I don't know if there's a rule change. The way they interpret it maybe needs to be defined better.

**Q. You talked about your staff. What has led to the continuity?**

JONATHAN SMITH: I'm totally into our guys ascending. I think we do got assistants that are ready to be

coordinators, coordinators that are ready to be head coaches. We've had a little bit of that, going to the NFL.

There's a quality of life, you can compete at a high level in Corvallis, Oregon State. You can be the type of dad and husband you want to be, location, proximity to home. We've been fortunate that way.

We've worked at it. They've been compensated. The administration has been supportive to try to retain these guys doing a good job. All of that has come to the point where guys like it around there, but we are in no way trying to hold them here if they have opportunities to ascend.

**Q. You're part of the group, one of the six teams that finished in the top 25 last season. Going into this season, there is a sense from the outside that there's the top six and the bottom six. Which of the other six, which team there do you think has the best chance of getting into the top six?**

JONATHAN SMITH: Well, yeah, predetermine who is top and who is not, I get that. I just think week in and week out in this league, you better bring your A game or you're going to be beat. I think the bottom twelve can beat the top one on a given Saturday.

Having said that, I have so much respect for these guys on the stage. Justin Wilcox, the defense he always had, how tight the games we've had year in and year out with those guys. He does a phenomenal job.

A lot of new buzz, excitement, in Colorado, down at Arizona State. I think both those two have a proven track record. Coach Prime, what he got done at his previous stop, winning a bunch of games. Kenny was phenomenal offensively for the Ducks this last year. Got new buzz and energy there.

I think Jedd has done phenomenal for being the two year, the turnaround that's taken place, their ability to score, now that they got the third year into his system with that quarterback.

I'm not totally answering your question with one. I think all of them have opportunities to do really, really well this year.

**Q. Can you talk about your quarterbacks, Aidan Chiles, DJ, and their play. Will they be able to compete?**

JONATHAN SMITH: Yeah, we do like our quarterback room. I'll start with Aidan because you mentioned him first. He got here in January straight out of high school. Really performed well in spring practice.



You think about spring practice. 90% of the guys practicing have been in the program for a year. You only got a small amount of newcomers that are brand-new. He's one of those, and competing at a level right with those guys, for a kid who is 17 years old, he won't turn 18 till October.

DJ came along as well in January, got a bunch of reps through the spring, got more and more comfortable from practice 1 to 15. They had a good teammate in Ben Gulbranson, started for us last year, eight games. They worked well together, communicated. Well understood we're going to let this get into August, give a bunch of reps for the first couple weeks and let the dust settle.

**Q. As a former quarterback in this conference, would you reflect on the level of quarterbacks this year in this league. Does it remind you of anything?**

JONATHAN SMITH: I don't know if I've seen it quite this deep, how many just -- the talent level, but the returns, statistics, it's going to be a challenge.

Obviously Caleb had a phenomenal year last year. Penix. So impressive to see those guys play live against us, accurate, competitive. Jayden de Laura statistically, Cam Ward running around and making plays left and right. Cam Rising, probably the most competitive kid in the league.

I can't remember a year that it's this high level of quarterbacks. I think we're going to be a part of that. I just go back to you get that many quarterbacks that good, you got to score enough points to win games.

**Q. How about the variance in scheme within the other 11 teams in this league? How different is it?**

JONATHAN SMITH: It makes it tough. You're not getting the same cookie-cutter stuff week in and week out. Offensively there's some uniqueness to our place, Utah. You go to U-Dub, they're shifting motion, more in the open set, USC that can change the pace and do some stuff. Jedd, how creative he is at Arizona. We steal a bunch from those guys.

It's on the flip side, too, defensively. Different scheme, good players. You get to know each other. You always got to be trying to stay a step ahead. You get into week seven, eight, nine, more tape out there. We got good players, but we got great scheme in this league, too.

**Q. Anthony Gould, he says he wants to co-host the show with Ashley, much like Jack Colletto did a year ago. Here is a guy who didn't really get on the field**

**early on. Now he's the face of this program at a position you need. What does it say to you about him?**

JONATHAN SMITH: He means a ton to the program. Been here a long time. College graduate. He's one of the smartest guys we've had in the program over these last three, four years because we can move him different positions. Competitive and tough. I think he's got a ton of fearlessness doing the punt returning thing. He represents us in a big way.

Then you look at this offensively, we're going to count on him. He needs to get touches for us to be as productive as we want to. Silas Bolden will be next to him, Jesiah Irish, receiver-wise. But he is going to be a mainstay for us, hopefully making a bunch of plays down the field.

**Q. You mentioned Jack Colletto. Has there been a bit of a transition? Is there a little bit of a void?**

JONATHAN SMITH: There's a little void, not just on the field, his personality, too. We're happy for him. He got an awesome opportunity with the 49ers. He's going to be tough to replace. He did a lot for us offensively, special teams, defense. We'll probably replace him with three guys. But he will definitely go down as one of the legends of Oregon State football.

**Q. Kitan as well being here, a walk-on who came back to get his degree. Now he's the leader of the secondary that lost a lot of guys. What does he need to do with that unit?**

JONATHAN SMITH: He's got to help bring some of these younger guys along. We'll count on that. He'll do it. He's one of my favorite stories. A walk-on back in 2018. Had some ups and downs. Took him a little bit to figure things out and go.

Now he's allowed his talent to take over. He's gifted, dedicated, learned the scheme. We're counting on that veteran experienced to bring along a few young DBs. We lost two starting corners that were really good for us for a long time. That secondary will have some new faces. Counting on Kitan to lead it.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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