

# Pac-12 Conference Football Media Day

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Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

## Arizona State Sun Devils Coach Kenny Dillingham

### Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: The new head coach at ASU. There's a lot of people excited for Kenny Dillingham. You being able to take this job, being at media days for the first time, what has the experience been like for you so far?

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Yeah, I mean, just people. That's what this is about, is people. That's why coming home to Arizona State is special, because I grew up watching the people play. It's back home to where my family is. It's just about the people. That's what this big old thing we call life is about. That's what makes Arizona State special, is not just the place but the people that represent the place.

THE MODERATOR: I'll ask about Bo Nix.

KENNY DILLINGHAM: He was talking. I wanted to listen to him talk (smiling). He's a smart dude. I wanted to see if I could learn something.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

**Q. A lot of talk in the room about quarterbacks. You're trying to find your quarterback. Update on where you think that's at going into fall camp, the capability you have from that group?**

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Yeah, I think we have Drew, we have Trenton, Jaden who are all going to compete for that spot. When a leader emerges, we'll name a starter. I think that's the thing about quarterback, everybody should know he's the quarterback. Shouldn't have to be me stating this is our quarterback.

You would hope, right, that one person is clearly the guy. When that person steps up, we'll name the starter. No matter what, we'll name the starter at least a week prior to the first game if nobody clearly separates themselves. It's not going to be, like, random starter runs out there week one, it's a mystery. Our team needs to know who their captain is. The sooner we can tell them who that is, the better.

**Q. The first guy that ever gave you a coaching gig, Charlie Ragle from Chaparral High School, is currently on your staff. Talk about that full-circle moment to come and work for you at ASU?**

KENNY DILLINGHAM: I was playing for him. I tore my ACL going into my senior year of high school. I tried to play without it. He's like, Kenny, you're 5'9", you're unathletic. Let's just skip this. If you love ball, let's just start coaching.

That's how I started coaching. Sixteen years ago now is when he convinced me to start coaching.

For me to be able to bring him on my staff now is really special for me, not just because of who he is to my life, but the impact I know he makes on all of his players, the players that are going to come through our program.

**Q. Talking about the culture you want to establish, are you pleased or surprised how quickly everything did come together?**

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Yeah, I think the culture that you are as a person is going to be the reflection of your team, right? I don't think you can say "we want this culture" but that culture doesn't reflect how you live every day. If you try to create a culture that's not how you're going to live, eventually people are going to see through it.

The culture is we're going to have more fun than anybody in the country, working harder than anybody in the country. You have to fall in love with the process of growth. You truly see where you stand as a team through adversity, the highs and the lows. It's hard to simulate those highs and lows when you haven't played a game.

**Q. Between the freshmen and the transfers, you have a whole lot of new players on this team. Are you pleased with how the chemistry and the camaraderie has developed?**

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Yeah, I think the guys understand the opportunity we have. I think the guys have a chip on



their shoulder, a variety of chips. You have guys that were here last year, part of a 3-9 team. You have guys that didn't get an opportunity at their school. You have guys that didn't get an opportunity out of high school to play at this level, then they played at their current level so came up a level. Different guys with different chips on their shoulders.

To see them come together, that's been the challenge, right? I think that's the most important thing that wins in college football is culture.

You look at Coach Whittingham at Utah, man, if we can embody that culture, what he's done, what Coach Smith has been doing at Oregon State, if we can tap into those two cultures, that's what we're trying to do.

**Q. Obviously everyone knows this was your dream job. When you first got it, how did you temper the excitement of getting the job into saying what area I'm going to tackle first to make sure we're successful as a team?**

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Yeah, I mean, I think the first thing you do is relationships. The relationships have to start with your own guys. That was always the goal, is first thing I did after my press conference was go meet with my guys, was go meet with the players on our team.

Then the next thing was I had an individual meeting with every single player on our team. I spoke to every player on our team before I spoke to, I mean, not one recruit, but no more than five.

Everybody thinks you show up and you recruit. My vision was show up, meet our team, see what our team is. Ask our team what we need. Don't just come in here and say, This is what we do because this is how I do it. What do we need to do here to change things?

I think I learned a lot of insight asking Jordan Clark, Jalin Conyers, guys on our team, What can I do to help this football team? Because we're in it together.

**Q. How do you feel about being picked to finish 10th in the Pac-12? You talked earlier this week about how it's hard to have any expectations for your team from the outside looking in because of how many new guys you have. What is your perspective?**

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Yeah, I think it's fair. If enough people feel that way, I think it's completely fair. I think we have to go out there and try to be the best version of us we can be. That's just trying to be successful. How we define success in our program is being the very best at whatever

you're doing all the time. Doesn't matter if you're opening doors, you better open that door till everybody walks through it, because that's how success is defined in our program.

For us, it's not about where people rank us, it's how can we be successful every single day, then the next day, the next day, the next day. However many wins show up is however many wins show up. I want to see our guys compete and get better every single day at everything they do.

**Q. We had Coach Lanning for Oregon, we asked him about your relationship. The first thing he said is you're his brother, but he also wants to kick your... I'll let you --**

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Butt?

**Q. Yeah. We'll say that word. Talk about the relationship you guys have. The second part, as you were looking over on the side to Bo Nix, I could tell you had admiration. What skills did you learn in Oregon that's going to help you out with Arizona State?**

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Yeah, relationship with Coach Lanning, that was a guy we were at -- he was at Arizona State when I was a high school coach. I used to come over and see him on the ground floor working.

We joined up in Memphis. He was my guy that I would throw all the crazy ideas off of. I'd go, If we put the tackle over and then get an unbalance and then shift, what's the defense going to do? He would tell me his opinion. He would ask me the same thing on defense.

He was like my whiteboard enemy at Memphis. We go back and forth on the whiteboard. Whoever had the pen last before our meeting won. It grew me as a coach to learn the defensive side of the ball.

In terms of what I learned at Oregon, how to play the NIL space. That's a cutting-edge thing in today's day and age. I think Phil Knight almost created the space. That's how we built an entire company. To be there and to learn how they navigate, what they did to navigate it, be cutting edge with one of the biggest things in college football that's changing, I think I learned a lot.

**Q. Going from the X's and O's guy to the CEO, what has been the hardest part to give up?**

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Meetings that have nothing to do with football. That's been the hardest thing. We're about

to hop into an offensive meeting and watch GT counter vs. the odd front. Yeah, I love it. It's one of my favorite plays. Then I'm pulled into a meeting to talk about if we can get a slab of cement on the practice field for ice coolers. You know what I mean?

Those are the things that are new to me, that I'm learning, that I've got to manage better. I've got to adapt and change; that way I don't miss watching GT counter vs. odd four eyes.

**Q. Great coaches have a signature style of play, types of players, personalities. Can you define what a Coach Dillingham-led program looks like and what can we expect?**

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Good people. I say it all the time to our guys, I want good people. Be a good person. Everybody knows what right and wrong is. I don't care how you grew up, you know when you're doing something right and when you may be toeing the line or doing something wrong.

Just be a good person. That's it. That's my kind of guy. A guy that works their butt off, that is competitive as all get-out. I don't care if we're playing tic-tac-toe, chess in the locker room, shadow boxing. I don't care what it is. You better compete your guts out, and at the same token, just be a good person at the same time.

**Q. To piggyback off the Oregon conversation, when you're coaching against somebody that knows your tics and you know his, how tough is it to develop a game plan for a game like that?**

KENNY DILLINGHAM: It's about players. He can know my schemes, I can know his schemes. It's about the players. Can you put your players in the best position for them to be successful? If you're going to look at what we did last year at Oregon offensively and compare it to what we do this year at Arizona State offensively, you're going to see 50, 60% similarity. You're going to see a lot of change. Why? We have different players.

I think in this league alone, you look at a guy like Chip Kelly, that's something he's done better than almost anybody in the country. He's adapted his style of play to the personnel he has. I think I would hope that's something that we do well, is a change and adapt our schemes to our players.

**Q. On the topic of Oregon, other than NIL, what are things you learned from Coach Lanning going through with him his first year as a head coach that you wanted to take with you?**

KENNY DILLINGHAM: I think the meetings. They have Wednesday meetings. They probably talked about them in some way, shape or form today. Wednesday meetings, just have hard conversations, to grow together as a team.

I think taking that mantra and putting my own spin on it, making sure that you as a team are building relationships year-round. You don't just flip a switch and say, It's fall camp; get to know each other. It's a year-round process to get to know each other and build that 'family'.

**Q. Earlier you mentioned running counter against four eyes. You run a lot of counter. What is it about four eyes that makes it difficult or easy?**

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Well, you just have solo blocks at tackle. When you have guys head up, it turns into a one-on-one game. Attaching tight ends to the right side, counter versus four eyes, see if they shade the front or tilt a front to the tight end. Whatever that looks like, it just makes it more difficult to create angles when you don't add tight ends or you don't arc block. You have to be more creative offensively when teams end up in four eyes and you're trying to run GT counter.

**Q. Up to this point, what do you like most about the team you assembled and what still needs the most work?**

KENNY DILLINGHAM: I like the fact that our guys are hanging out with each other. When we have all the new guys, it's really easy to be clingy. I'm seeing a guy who showed up a month ago hang out with a crew of kids that have been friends for three years mixed in with a kid who showed up in spring.

When you're trying to build a culture, which is the number one thing, who are they hanging out with? Is there a kid that is going through a hard time, and I can call a kid on our team and say, Call this kid and invite him to your house tonight. Are they frustrated with it, or are they like, yeah, okay. I think that's what I'm most pleased with is the guys are bonding, building relationships with each other.

Greatest challenge that I'm looking forward to see is how we respond to adversity. It's roses and candy canes right now. We can make it as hard as possible at practice, but until you step out on the field and fail, right, we don't know who we are as a team.

**Q. When you look at what you want from your quarterback, a guy like Drew Pyne, are you looking for something more like a quick strike? Do you expect to take a lot of deep shots in this offense?**



KENNY DILLINGHAM: I would say take what the defense gives you, which is like the coach answer. So I'm sorry. But it's the truth. I want to see a guy who just takes what they give you. If they're going to let you throw slot hitches, fit 10 times in a row, take it. If they're going to let you throw outside hitches, because they're playing thirds, walling the vertical, take it.

I want to see a guy who plays smart and with confidence. If you get up to the line of scrimmage and you don't like the play we called, change it. I'm not the one playing. I started coaching at 17 for a reason. I can't throw. So change it.

I want to see a guy take control of the game, play with confidence, but understand Patrick Mahomes' average touchdown pass last year was less than 4.5 yards thrown distance for a reason, it's because smart wins, so be smart.

**Q. You have a deep quarterback room. What are some of the strengths that you've seen from some of these guys up to this point?**

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Yeah, I think Trenton has a really good grasp of football. His dad's a coach. He wants to be a coach in his future. He has a really good grasp for the game as a whole. When you're teaching him a system, it's really easy to translate into what we're trying to get accomplished.

Drew has such a quick release. When you watch his film, he can get the ball out now. He plays point guard.

Then Jaden has an unbelievably strong arm, can make any throw on the field.

If I had to point out one thing, those would be the thing.

**Q. Last year you were coaching Bo Nix. He talked about how he finally was happy again, playing with joy. You have guys that are labeled in recruiting. How are you making sure they play free and can tap into the potential you described?**

KENNY DILLINGHAM: I think knowledge. I think knowledge is power. When you teach somebody the why, and actually they watch it and learn and grow, and they understand they see the game different.

There's been many times that Drew or Trenton or Jaden have come to my office and they said, Man, watching film, I watch it different now. I have a whole different outlook on the game. I think that's what confidence is because if they watch the game different, if they see the game different, if they see it in this new light that we're seeing it together,

then when they do make a mistake, we good get on the headset or talk about it.

It's not me yelling, Why did you do that, why did you check this play? You shouldn't have checked this. It's me understanding, Okay, I can understand why they got you there. It's okay, make the next play.

It's that confidence of knowledge. Knowledge is power.

**Q. You mentioned the guys you brought with you today. Your thoughts on the two of them, what they've meant?**

KENNY DILLINGHAM: Yeah, I mean, Jordan is just competitive. So me and him clicked instantly. I'm the same way. I compete in everything. I mean, I meant that. If I'm holding a door, I'm not going to let you hold the door, I'm going to keep holding the door because I want to win, right?

That's the mindset. I grew up in that lifestyle where you just competed. If I'm laying in my bed, I'm playing chess.

Jordan is the same way. Jordan wants to be the very best at everything he does all the time. Me and him just kind of bonded over that competitive grittiness that he brings all the time.

Then you have Jalen who is almost the other side of my personality. Bubbly, smiley, goofy, this big teddy bear that is the nicest kid you'll ever meet. He has that competitive fire in him. He came up to me in the middle of a practice, he goes, If that freshman does that to me again. The guy got in his way, bumped him on a route.

That's what you love to see. You love to see these good people but understand when they can be aggressive, when they can be competitive. Understand you can be a good person, right, and flip a switch between the lines, then just turn it back down outside the lines. I think Jalen is a great example of that.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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