

Pac-12 Conference Football Media Day

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

UCLA Bruins Chip Kelly

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Joined by head coach Chip Kelly. A lot to talk about with your team, changes, new defensive coordinator, quarterback. You told me you thought the culture was the strongest it's been since you got there. Why is that? What have you seen?

CHIP KELLY: We just have great leaders, I think kids that understand why you go to UCLA. We're about books and ball. We've got a tremendous group in the classroom. Then that carries over to how they carry themselves on the football field.

As a coach, it's so easy to coach a group of guys like that 'cause they're just so hungry to be successful that it's really fun to be around.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. I want to ask about your horse racing endeavor. You were close to getting a horse into the Kentucky Derby. How many horses do you have, what the future holds with that?

CHIP KELLY: It's very simple. Mick asked me to get involved. I don't know anything about it. Mick is the brains of operation. I am just along for the ride.

We have a couple horses that are pretty good. The two that are named after my dogs, Henry Q, then another horse Wilson Q, who is a two-year-old that has a first and second so far, is scheduled to run at Delmar sometime in September.

They're always scheduled to run while we're playing, so I'm not going to get a chance to see them in person. I am truly a spectator and I am the very silent, silent partial owner in this venture.

Q. Could you talk about your linebacker room. What have you seen from Oladejo and what are you expecting from Darius?

CHIP KELLY: Ken does such a great job, one of the all-time Bruin greats at that position. Had a distinguished career as a player, then went on and had a distinguished career as a coach, the last 10 years in the NFL. Done a great job.

Darius is back for year two. It's unique, both him and Femi transferred into UCLA. They're the only two kids that I didn't have to watch the film on because we played them in person.

We played Hawaii, Darius had 10 tackles. I kept asking why we couldn't block No. 53 when we were playing them. Then in the last game of the year last year we played Cal, and Femi had 17 tackles against us. He went in the portal two or three days later. Didn't have to put that tape on either.

Both of them have been tremendous, along with Kain Medrano and Choé Bryant-Strother, JonJon coming out of baseball. We feel like our depth at linebacker is as good as it's been there. Ken is doing a great job with all those guys.

Q. You've been in the conference for a number of years. Is there anything you're going to miss about the Pac-12 when you leave next year?

CHIP KELLY: Yeah, there's a lot I'm going to miss. I'll reminisce on that after because we're not leaving right now. Our sole focus and attention is on this season. I think the league is as strong as it's ever been. I know everybody talked about that today.

But I'm very sentimental when it comes to my feelings about the Pac-12.

Q. You sent about eight guys to Vegas for the bowl game. A lot of leadership. When you look at how you replaced that, Chase Griffin, how pivotal has he been to the program?

CHIP KELLY: Chase is awesome. He's the ultimate student-athlete. He graduated in two and a half years. He



just got his first Masters degree at the end of this past spring, is enrolled in his second Masters. When Chase leaves UCLA, he'll have an undergraduate degree and two Masters degrees. Does an unbelievable job in the community. One of the true leaders on our team. The quarterbacks voted him the squad leader at that position. Unanimously vote. They all voted for him. I think the whole team would have voted for him.

He's everything you want as a student-athlete, one of the best young leaders I've ever been around.

Q. Earlier Coach Dillingham said you're one of the best coaches at adapting your scheme to fit your talent. What is your thought on that? How do you think your scheme is going to adjust this year?

CHIP KELLY: Did he open with that or did he finish with that (smiling)?

Q. In the middle.

CHIP KELLY: I owe him \$25. I told him if he could get it in at the beginning, it would be a lot more (smiling).

No, Kenny did a great job. There's a reason he's there. I think it's all what we learn as coaches. It's not about plays, it's about players. Being able to adapt the scheme to the talent that you have, sometimes maybe more tight end, sometimes more running back, sometimes wide receiver.

But the guys who are really good at it, Kenny is one of them, is always going to adapt their talent that they have. Sometimes we're going to be big two tight ends in this game, then your tight end gets hurt. You have to be able to adapt within the game to what the circumstances are, so...

Q. You shared a quote last year, which is praise and blame are all the same. It was advice towards big-time quarterbacks. You got a big-time guy in Dante Moore. For Dante, how have you managed his approach, helped him manage his approach, if you've had to?

CHIP KELLY: We haven't really had to manage much because of him. He's an old soul. He's the oldest 17-year-old I've ever met. He's got a unique quality about him. He enjoys and is very grateful for the opportunity that he's been presented. He's always thankful. He's a please and thank you guy. He's got a unique nature about him.

I think he inherently understands that. I don't think he judges his life on what other people's opinions are. That's to me what praise and blame is all the same means. Whether someone is complimenting on what you did or

someone is detracting. The person that matters most is you. What is your opinion of yourself?

I've always said I'm not governed by the fear of what other people say. You have to look at yourself in the mirror and feel like you put in a good day's work, and if you did, put your head down on the pillow and get up and do it again.

Dante lives that every day. It's really cool that someone at that age already understands that. He's really wise beyond his years.

Q. You talked about wanting to have the number one character program. Laiatu Latu in particular, his story, his journey, from your perspective, you coached a lot of different guys, what is it like to see somebody who thought their football career was over?

CHIP KELLY: It is a unique story because not many people are told they can never play football again. But he wouldn't accept that. To watch him work as hard as he's worked with not the guarantee that all that work was going to pay off.

He was always, I'll do my part, just let's see if there's another opportunity at this. To watch him work. When we first got him, he wasn't cleared for contact. We worked on the side during spring practice, didn't know if he was ever going to be cleared.

When he got the green light to go, never been more happy for a guy because you saw him put that time in. Now the fruits of his labor are paying off for him.

He's a great example of stick-to-it-tiveness, perseverance, of overcoming adversity. He is kind of the poster child for that right now.

Q. (Off microphone.)

CHIP KELLY: I gave that look because whenever I talk about Bill, I start crying again. Amazing man, amazing impact on so many other people. What he did in his last year (tearing up).

How tough, how courageous and how humble he was. He didn't want anybody to know he was sick, not because -- the only reason was he said I don't want my daughters to have to answer questions about me every day and I don't want the players to have to answer questions about me every day.

Our administration, medical staff, select coaches knew. It was because that's the way he wanted it. But that was Billy. When I had the conversation with him, he said, You

just have to understand this isn't about me. There were only two of us in the room. It's not about me.

But that's just the way Billy was. His courage, his toughness, his humility in that last year was an amazing thing. I think the biggest thing is, I said this at the funeral, is that man's biggest fear isn't death, man's biggest fear is insignificance. Billy wasn't afraid because of how significant his life was, the impact he had on so many people.

He was at peace with, If this is what God selected for me, I'm good. He went out the way he wanted to go out. It was special that I had the honor to be with him for the last 11 months of his life.

Q. What did you learn from him?

CHIP KELLY: When you went to his funeral, there were thousands of people, because he had an impact on so many people. I said it at the funeral. If you want to touch the past, you touch a rock. If you want to touch the present, you touch a flower. If you want to touch a future, you touch a life.

That's what Billy did. Everybody that came in contact with him, he had the same effect on all of them. Good people leave a mark on everybody's heart. That's what Billy did. He left a mark.

He was gone too soon after 60 years. What he did and the effect that he had on human beings, if you can have half of that in your lifetime, then you've lived a pretty special life.

Q. You have a younger D coordinator. How did you find him? What has his personality been like in the program?

CHIP KELLY: Yeah, I found him through Billy O'Brien and John Harbaugh, two guys I really relied on in the search. When I talked to them, he's 33, but he has 12 years of NFL experience. It's a unique combination.

He grew up in a football family. His dad has been a head coach in the NFL. He was a great player at Penn State. Played a year in the NFL, then got into coaching.

For someone at that age, I didn't really know he was 33. I knew he had 12 years NFL experience. He's a 40-year-old guy. Usually it takes a little while to get into the league.

He's really mature. He really is poised. He has a great plan. He was under some really good coaches, whether it as Romeo Crennel Cornell or Mike Vrabel when he was in Houston or Wink Martindale and Mark McDonnell when he

was in Baltimore. He's been around some really, really good guys. He's got a wealth of experience. It's hard to picture him at 33 years old because he doesn't act like he's 33 years old.

Q. Couple injury updates. Ale Kaho, what's his status? Spencer and Garrett DiGiorgio?

CHIP KELLY: The last two guys were back for the end of the spring, participated with us. We anticipate Ale will be cleared for camp.

Q. You lose DTR and Zach Charbonnet. Does that make this off-season difficult not knowing who you're going to have starting at those positions?

CHIP KELLY: Well, the quarterback spot, I think we have to replace a quarterback for the first time since George Bush was president. I mean, George Herbert Walker Bush, not the other one.

We had Dorian for 48 games. I started my career with Dorian. I anticipate going to fall camp and him still being there because he was around so much.

We have a lot of depth at that position. We feel really good about how our players played in the springtime, are excited about that group. It's as deep a group as we ever had. We feel the same way about running back. T.J. Harden is back, great bowl game for us, really come along. We took a transfer in Carson Steele, excited about that. Then Colson Yankoff, good spring, continuing to adapt to that position. About 230 pounds now. Adding in Anthony Adkins, transferring from Army, another big back, about 6'3", 245. We now have some size at that position. There is an experience factor that we don't have losing Zach and Dorian, but I think depth will shine through for us.

Q. I remember during the Sun Bowl when Dante Moore committed, you said, Don't sleep on Ethan Garbers. Talk about your quarterback and what he brings to your offense?

CHIP KELLY: Ethan is the one that has the most experience because he played for us in the last couple years. Dorian, because he was such a physical player, missed some games. Ethan has some starts, has done some really good things for us. Will continue to thrive off of that.

I thought he played really, really well in the spring. He's an ultimate competitor. We always tell our players who we're recruiting who we're bringing in. Garbers was, Great, that will make the room better. Was excited with both.

It's going to be a healthy competition as we get rolling here in August.

Q. You constantly redefine your offense every few years. How do you go about challenging yourself to redefine your philosophy offensively?

CHIP KELLY: I have ADD, so I have a real hard time concentrating on one thing. It's just a matter of how my mind works that I got to change what we're doing.

No, honestly we do it because of our personnel. It's always been a personnel-driven operation. Who do we have and how do we deploy them and put them in the best position to make plays. It will always be driven on who we have available to us. That's not only yearly, but weekly. Who is up, available for this game. Cater the game plan around who is available.

Q. How does your program handle or deal with NIL?

CHIP KELLY: Well, NIL is supposed to be dealt with outside your program. I don't know if people realize that. Our school does a great job. We have the Westwood Exchange that's run through our athletic department. If businesses want opportunities to contact the student-athletes in our school, they're the entity that does that. That's really how the NIL operation works.

We have a young man, Chase Griffin, who I think was the NIL student-athlete of the year. He had 29 NIL opportunities this past year. Does a great job with it, using the backdrop of Los Angeles, then his platform as a football player at UCLA. He's really taken advantage of it.

Everything we do is done through our compliance operation, then the Westwood Exchange.

Q. You've been around the game for a long time. Some would say college football is as popular as it's ever been, some would say it is an absolute mess. Where do you net out on the state of the game right now?

CHIP KELLY: I think the game is as good as it's ever been. I'm talking about the game. There are things that happen outside of the game. Things have happened outside the game for the history of the game.

You've heard me tell the story. The first transfer was Fielding Yost. He played football in 1896, at West Virginia. They played Lafayette. After the game he stayed, went to Lafayette. Played against Penn. Beat Penn. Transferred back to West Virginia and finished the season. He ended up being the all-time winningest coach in Michigan football

history, one of the best athletic directors in the history of the NCAA. Actually started the NCAA. That was 1896 and they had transfer portal issues.

Issues outside of the game have been going on for a long time. I don't think that takes away from the game. I think the coaching is at an all time level and the players' skill is at an all time level.

A lot of it is because of the technology. You can watch what other people are doing throughout the country. It was hard to get film 20, 25 years ago on what people were doing. There's so many good coaches coming up, putting players in good position to make plays, the game is awesome. I think the players that are playing is awesome.

I think that's what the story should be about. I think players should be paid, the NIL part will work itself out. I think players should be able to transfer. I think it's crazy that they can transfer twice. You should just have one window. If you don't want to be at that school, you can leave. Don't wait till spring ball is over and say, I don't like where I'm at now. I liked it two months ago, but now I don't like it.

Let's have one transfer window, one signing date, try to unify that. I think the game itself and what happens on the field is as good as what it's ever been.

Q. You've been in this game a long time. Do you feel like players are different now than when you first got into it?

CHIP KELLY: I think they're the same. I just think that we all learn from lessons. We all say they shouldn't be able to transfer because if they're not happy... Well, that's a lesson they got to learn. Maybe the transfer is a positive thing. Maybe it's a negative thing. No one can stand there and say they have the crystal ball. That's the way it is.

If I work for a company and I have a bad day at work, if I say I'm going to quit, good, they're not going to pay you any more. I can quit any day I want. Everybody here can quit their job right now and leave, but you also have to live with the ramifications of that. There is no guarantee if you quit your job that there is another job out there for you.

I think we've sped up the decision-making process for student-athletes. Sometimes we buffered them at 18 to 22. They didn't have to make that decision. Now they have to make that decision at 18. I don't think that's necessarily a bad thing.

Our life lessons that we have to teach people is if you make decisions, you have to live with the ramifications of those decisions. If your decision is you had a bad day

because a coach wasn't nice to you, I'm going to put myself in the portal and leave. Great. If nobody offers you anything in the portal, you don't get to go back.

There's decisions that you make and there's risk and reward in everything that you do. I don't think it's as bad as everybody says it is. I think if we can get our hands around it and make it a little bit more uniform, I don't think it's the worst thing in the world.

We still got pretty good jobs. When you people are saying that coaching... We say no crying on the yacht. We're in a pretty good situation.

Q. You changed the game when you were at Oregon. The game kind of caught up in a way. Do you feel like you have to change the game again in order to continue to be competitive?

CHIP KELLY: Our goal was never to change the game. Our goal was to get first downs. We do whatever it takes to get first downs. Our production on offense now rivals any of the time from '09 to '12. I think we were fourth or fifth in the country offensively this year.

Our goal never was set out that we want to change the game. I don't want to change anything. I want to try to get a first down and score some touchdowns. If it means we got to throw the ball to do it, we'll do it. If we got to run the ball to do it, we'll do that.

Q. Have you met Crocky J yet?

CHIP KELLY: No. We're all happy that he has, it's a pet alligator that he named Crocky J, because he thought it was a crocodile. We're all pleased he decided to leave it in Indiana. I've seen pictures, but he's not coming. We were going to look into statutes in Westwood and find out that maybe you can't have a pet alligator in Westwood. He wanted to leave it at home. He said it's like six or seven feet now. I'm not sure we wanted to see that.

We'll send Aliotti to Indiana to see the crocodile. If we can get anything done, my last request is can we send the Pac-12 Network, Nick Aliotti to see the crocodile.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports