

Pac-12 Conference Football Media Day

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

UCLA Bruins Duke Clemens Laiatu Latu Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Couple of linemen from UCLA. How has the day been? So far so good?

DUKE CLEMENS: Yeah, it's been pretty fun. Long day. It's just been good to represent UCLA and kind of show us what we're about.

Q. The weirdest question you got today?

LAIATU LATU: It was how big of an animal you think you could take on.

Q. What was the answer?

LAIATU LATU: I'm I said a bear, but I don't know.

DUKE CLEMENS: I respect nature, so I said like a deer or something like that (smiling).

Q. Laiatu, talk to me about the mindset, everything you've been through, when you had to medically retire from Washington?

LAIATU LATU: I think during the two years that I wasn't able to play football, I really had to lock into the mental aspect as well as the physical aspect, make sure that I'm still in shape.

The whole time I really had to overcome like a certain type of adversity. I had to remind myself every day why I'm doing it, my dream of playing, dream and aspirations of playing in the NFL. I wanted to make that happen. I wasn't ready to quit.

I can't accept somebody telling me what I can and can't do, so I'm going to go out there and prove what I can do.

Q. Laiatu, did you ever think there was a time or day you would not be here and playing football ever again?

LAIATU LATU: Personally, that was never true for me. I never thought that I would never play again. I was told by doctors that I wouldn't be able to play again, but I never told myself that. I think that's why I'm here this day.

Q. Obviously you lost a lot of senior leadership. Jon Gaines, what did he mean to the line and what did it mean going up against him in practice every day?

LAIATU LATU: I think me, Duke, as well as a couple other teammates on our team really had to step into that leadership role, which is not natural to a lot of people. The team definitely needs it, our team needs it. We're a young team. I think we step into that role pretty well for everybody.

DUKE CLEMENS: I think Jon Gaines being a leader last year, definitely a big role to step into this year. Ever since I've been at UCLA, Jon Gaines has been there. I got to see him grow. He's always been my big brother. It's my turn, I guess, to lead this O-line, see what we can do this year.

Q. What motivates you as leaders to play for your teammates?

DUKE CLEMENS: Something that motivates me is just the accountability factor. They rely on me to do my job, I take that to heart, that's my responsibility as a player. That's also part of the reason why I kind of play this game, to help each other out. Me being an older guy kind of helping out the younger guy, it feels good in your heart to do that.

At the end of the day it just leads to the whole team growing, so yeah.

LAIATU LATU: Yeah, I say for me it's seeing everyone in the facility day in and day out, same hours of the day, having to come back, check in for lunch, dinner, seeing everyone literally from 7, 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. I think that's what motivates me and why I want to be able to win it for my teammates and my brothers.

Q. Duke, you've had the privilege of playing for two of



the better offensive line coaches. How are the two coaches different and the same?

DUKE CLEMENS: Honestly, I think I had the best of both worlds. Coming into college football, you're not really certain on the actual game of football. You learn a lot in college. Having Coach Frye as my coach was able to teach me step by step in a systemic way of understanding the game. That was good for early on in my career.

Now me being more of a veteran, having Coach Drev, it's more little techniques here and there to kind of improve. He kind of trusts the players more to do their technique, what works best.

I think I had the best of both coaches. I'm really grateful for that.

Q. Duke, you grew up in Hawaii. Rumor has it that a bunch of teammates came to visit you this off-season. You toured them around. Who came, what happened?

DUKE CLEMENS: So we kind of got a bunch of Hawaii guys on our team. Me, Titus, Darius, CD, they're all from Oahu. A bunch of the guys, they talk about it every year, I'm going to come over, stay with you for the summer, something like that. They actually made it out of the group chat.

A couple of the linemen, Noah Pulealii, Yutaka Mahe, Garrett DiGiorgio, those are the linemen that came with us. Some of the skills like Kam Brown, Josiah Norwood, Bradley Schlom, Beau Gardner, Ryan Cragun. A big group of us.

It was just funny seeing their reactions, them staring out the window, tripping out on what they're seeing. I grew up with this so I didn't find it a big deal.

Q. Take them to the North Shore?

DUKE CLEMENS: The whole thing, the scenic route up the coast. Took them to PCC.

Q. Jump off of Waimea?

DUKE CLEMENS: They weren't ready for that.

Q. Laiatu, as you were coming back from injury, you'd be practicing, but it was basically non-contact. Watching you practice, it felt like you wanted to be in 11-on-11. How did you manage your mental health?

LAIATU LATU: Yeah, it was a hard time not being able to be a part of the physical aspect. When offense and

defense went against each other, I was longing for that so much. What helped me through that was being with my teammates, being able to go back to the locker room with them. Be with this dude, just kick it like normal, to know that I'll be back one day.

Q. When you think about what your goals are for this year, what is your expectation, goals?

DUKE CLEMENS: The expectation this year is kind of to win it all. It's the last round for UCLA in the Pac-12. That's pretty exciting. I'm just looking forward to having a great year, especially being in the veteran role. It's kind of nice to take that ownership of the team, I guess, kind of do it the way you want to. Coach Kelly always says player-led not coach-fed. I'm excited for that.

LAIATU LATU: To finish out teams and to close it all till the zero second shows on the clocks. I think that's what we'll bring this season.

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