

# Pac-12 Conference Men's Basketball Media Day

Wednesday, October 11, 2023

Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

## California Golden Bears Coach Mark Madsen Keonte Kennedy Grant Newell



THE MODERATOR: We continue Pac-12 media day from Las Vegas. It's good to have our new coach. Mark Madsen of the Cal Bears, welcome Coach.

MARK MADSEN: Great to be here.

### Q. Catch us up year one at Cal.

MARK MADSEN: We get the workouts in the summer months and then we get the 20 hours starting in early, mid-September. Our guys have been going hard. They've been learning the system. It's been awesome. It's been a great experience. I'm incredibly excited about our team this year.

### Q. I was kidding just now, but things haven't gone great at Cal the last few years. We know that. Could it be, Mark, and I've known you for a long time, your energy and enthusiasm, your effort, is that kind of what Cal basketball needed?

MARK MADSEN: I'll say this. I'll say this. It was a tough year last year for Cal, but it's not like there wasn't a lot of work going on behind the scenes. We're probably benefitting right now from a lot of the work, just even in terms of infrastructure and a lot of things like that that honestly administration and Mark Fox worked really hard on last year, and now we're bearing the fruit of it this year a little bit.

As a new staff, we're coming in and trying to inject even more energy, our own version of energy, to help get this thing to an even higher level.

So I've never been more optimistic, and I love our team. I love all the changes that have happened, that Cal administration has stepped up in a major way, and I love what our staff and our players are doing.

Q. For those of us from Los Angeles who remember you on the stage with the Lakers after a championship, have you broken out any of those moves yet? What's it going to take for your guys to see those?

MARK MADSEN: (Laughter). First of all, great to see you again. It's always nice to see old friends from L.A. I absolutely hope to be dancing. I think any time we get to the Sweet 16 I will be dancing.

I want to reiterate, we have lofty goals. We're not trying to just win -- we have lofty goals coming in. So that's part of the excitement that I feel.

You look at our personnel, I think we're the team that a lot of people don't want to play this coming year. Other coaches, they can see what we've done, they can see the personnel, they can see the players. Other teams are not going to want to play us because we're going to play hard, we're going to play with great energy, we're going to be sound in terms of our coverages and in terms of how we attack teams.

Look, as a coach, we all know, it's never perfect, but we're going to go hard at this thing.

### Q. Mark, you were a great player at Stanford, and you've got a history in this conference. What is your take on this being the last year of the conference and moving forward?

MARK MADSEN: I'm incredibly sad about it. I'm incredibly sad about the breakup of the Pac-12. In the back of my mind, there's always the hope, 20 years from now, 15 years from now, things don't work out with some of these other conferences and it gets put back together in some way.

But that's the reality we live in, and we're still going to be able to embrace it. Where some doors close, other doors will open. I'm sure a lot of these West Coast rivalries, even though we're in different conferences, a lot of us are still going to try to find a way to play each other and keep some of those rivalries going, even though it's not in the same conference.

Moving forward, just moving forward, we're in the ACC next year. The ACC has always been a phenomenal basketball conference. Already in recruiting, it's been phenomenal to talk about the ACC because we can talk about having a West Coast presence. We can talk about having an East Coast presence.

The travel is going to be tough, but we're already looking at creative ways to help mitigate some of the effects there.

**Q. Coach, it's been mentioned that you've taken over a team that's coming off its worst season in history. What's been the mindset? You mentioned the underdog mindset, but can you go further into that and how you're going to use that to compete with the powerhouses of the Pac-12 this year.**

MARK MADSEN: The great thing about playing a game is that all the experts can weigh in and try to pick who's going to win. Vegas can make their line and all those things, but when it's all said and done, every team still has to play in the game. Every team is going to have to chase our shooters around on the court. Every team is going to have to deal with our physical and tough inside players, posting up, stealing, rolling to the basket.

At the start of every season, it's such a great thing because the media will pick the winner. They'll pick the all conference team. But then even a guy that's picked first team all conference, he still has to go out there and prove it every single night.

So the word I would use for Cal is grittiness and toughness. Again, I'll reiterate that, just as a coach, there's certain teams you just don't want to play them. We're that team. Teams are not going to want to play us because we have a lot of weapons, we have a lot of ways to attack another team.

**Q. You took Utah Valley to new heights over your time there. How do you think that will help prepare you to rebrand this struggling Cal program?**

MARK MADSEN: Over the course of four years at Utah Valley, there was growth and improvement every single year. We had some great successes. We had some tough losses along the way. You almost learn more from a tough loss than you do from a great win because there's that pain. You feel that pain.

Then you look at what went wrong. You relive it, you watch the tape, and then you say to yourself, okay, this is never going to happen again. Then you try to put the systems and philosophies in place so it doesn't happen

again.

But that experience, especially in the WAC, which the WAC is different than the Pac-12. A lot of teams in the WAC, it's a lot of little guys running around on the perimeter. So you have to learn how to deal with that style, along with traditional teams that play two big guys as well.

**Q. Speaking of style, Mark, how are you guys going to play?**

MARK MADSEN: We want to play fast, great ball movement, and unselfish play. We want to have great spacing. We definitely want to play at a much faster pace than has been accustomed to, and we want that ball to move, to fly around.

**Q. I want to ask you about Fardaws Aimaq, who was a great player for Utah Valley, two-time WAC Defensive Player of the Year, won the Player of the Year. This time last year was preseason All-Big12. Goes to Texas Tech, only plays in 11 games because of injuries. Where is he, and what do you think about reuniting with him?**

MARK MADSEN: It was awesome to reunite with Fardaws. Obviously we've had a strong relationship for three or four years. Four or five years now actually. Fardaws is completely healthy, and he's worked hard to be in phenomenal shape.

The year at Texas Tech last year was kind of an aberration year because of all the injury, because of adversity he went through. He has been fantastic with the team. He's been fantastic in practices, and he's going to have an extremely strong year this year in the Pac-12.

**Q. It's interesting, Mark, it's a cool story and it's not a cool story to me. It's a cool story in the sense you coached him up, he had tremendous success, he left, and he comes back to you at a different school.**

The part that isn't cool is why he had to leave at all and why players leave programs now, enter the portal. It's not for basketball, it's for other things. To me, we can celebrate this story, and it's great for you to get him back because he's a productive, good player, but it just kind of says a lot about the state of affairs in college basketball right now too.

MARK MADSEN: You played in the NBA. You played high level at UCLA. Back in the day, everybody stayed four years. Now it's one year free agency every single year. The difference between college and the NBA -- and you said it on your broadcast -- in the NBA you can put

players under contract. In college it's free agency every single year, every single year.

That's good for the players at times, at times, but it does make it -- it's almost like you're coaching a G League team in terms of all the movement.

**Q. One thing that's created this as well is you guys have to recruit the portal harder than high school players now, which is way different than it used to be.**

MARK MADSEN: Yeah, it is. It used to be you had that lull in April, May. Coaches had a little bit of downtime in April, May. Now there's no downtime. That March, April time frame hits, you're on a plane flying around to visit players. You're burning up your Verizon cell phone plan. You're doing all that.

**Q. No one's asked you yet, maybe because it feels like old news already, but you'll be asked again about it. When was the last time you put on a Stanford T-shirt?**

MARK MADSEN: It's funny.

**Q. I got one in my bag, Mark!**

MARK MADSEN: Casey Jacobson has a Stanford uniform in the bag.

**Q. Casey's got his game bag in case a game breaks out.**

MARK MADSEN: When I saw Casey, you're in phenomenal shape. Looks like you can still play a 40-minute game. I'm not quite there, Casey.

The first couple of days at Cal, seeing all the Blue was an adjustment, but I've embraced it. I love it. Obviously I love my alma mater. I love my friends and teammates from there. I'm a Cal Bear now, and I'm excited to put all of my energy there.

**Q. What impact has Mike Montgomery had on you as a coach?**

MARK MADSEN: Huge, huge. Mike Montgomery -- obviously Casey played for Mike. Mike was someone who demanded perfect or near flawless execution. Every set that Mike ran, it had a primary option, a secondary option, and multiple counters. Everything we did was so fundamentally sound, and the level of repetitions was huge.

**Q. What's interesting about that, mark, and you guys aren't that old, you and Casey. I'm a little bit older**

**than you guys. But I think back to that, and I wonder about former players who are now coaches that played in the '90s or the '80s even, like me. How much can you take from when you played in college because the game has changed and evolved so much since then?**

Like I think about, if anybody tried to run the UCLA high post offense right now, it wouldn't work. Defenses are too sophisticated now. So I guess my question to you is how much of that stuff, to Guy's point, have you taken from how you played in college and can implement it now to what you're doing?

MARK MADSEN: I think one of the biggest things I take is that -- the game has absolutely changed. It's all about spacing. It's all about opening up the lane.

**Q. Shooting.**

MARK MADSEN: Shooting, rolling to the basket to create pressure on the rim. But all that being said, the principle of have a set and have multiple, different things you can do out of that set, have multiple different counters.

That way defense, if they look out there and if they see a certain set, they have no idea what you're going to do. So that, I think, carries over. The style of play, very different.

THE MODERATOR: We're going to bring up your players here if you could give us a thought on Keonté Kennedy and Grant Newell and getting to know them the last several months.

MARK MADSEN: Absolutely. Let me start with Grant. Grant is gritty. Grant just brings a toughness. They're coming up now. What's up, guys? I heard footsteps over there.

Grant is someone who just, even if he -- he brings that Chicago toughness. He's not afraid to back down from anybody. He's been one of our best guys in terms of attacking the basket and getting to the free-throw line, and he knocks down his free throws every time.

He stretches to the three-point line. He runs. He can handle. He can initiate the offense. And Grant, just in addition to being a phenomenal basketball player, he's a tremendous person. It's been great to get to know Grant.

Keonté Kennedy, my man right here. Keonté, I tell the team over and over again, I say, guys, 95 percent of the time, Keonté Kennedy, when we identify the other team's best perimeter player, it's going to be one guy who's guarding him, Keonté Kennedy. Why? Number one, because he has great technique, he understands angles,

he studies the game.

Number two, you can't measure the size of his heart, the level of his toughness, the character. He's not afraid to have fun. We're running a conditioning drill, and he's yelling at the camera. We play in the Haas Pavilion. He's calling it the house of pain. He's putting that out there right now publicly.

KEONTÉ KENNEDY: Haas of pain.

MARK MADSEN: Exactly. Oh, yeah. But these two players are a reflection of all the players on the team, but these two young men are extremely special, extremely unique, and we're lucky to have them.

THE MODERATOR: We've got Haas of pain and we've got Newell Court, no relation. But it's great to see you guys. Welcome.

**Q. Grant, since you were on the team last year, let's start with you. What's it great to get to know Mark Madsen as your head coach?**

GRANT NEWELL: It's great. He's a really enthusiastic guy, hands-on approach. Teaches me and the rest of my teammates a lot about the game that we're going to need down the line.

**Q. Since you're new, Keonté, I'm going to ask Grant this. How much carryover from last year and the disappointment of your season is there this year? Or did you just flush that, we've got a new coach, new system, new everything. We're not thinking about that. We're just moving on. Or did it motivate you getting into this year?**

GRANT NEWELL: Of course it motivated me, but for the most part, definitely flush it all out. We're just focused on what we have coming this season. We're really excited about all the pieces we have, from staff to players, everyone.

**Q. Keonté, you're from Austin, Texas?**

KEONTÉ KENNEDY: Yes, sir.

**Q. Compare Austin and Berkeley.**

KEONTÉ KENNEDY: It's different, but there's also some similarities too. I don't know, it's different dynamics, but it's similar in its own way. You've just got to be there to see it. But I like both. I love both for what they are.

I think that's one thing I've been trying to value, just

appreciate everybody and places I've been for who they are and what they are.

**Q. I was just going to ask you, Keonté, based on what Coach Madsen just said about you, he obviously likes you, and you've made an impression here early. It's your fourth school in five years. How experienced are you now at implementing yourself into a new system and having an impact right away? Because you've done it before.**

KEONTÉ KENNEDY: Just being who I am. I've been energetic. I'm always going to bring a positive vibe. I think that's something I can always carry to whatever team I'm on. Like he just said, I'm a defensive player first. I can play on both ends, but I pride myself on defense, and that's where we win championships.

**Q. I have a question for Grant. Being on the team last season, as mentioned, how do you see -- and then you're entering your sophomore campaign now. How do you see your improvement over the off-season, and what kind of leadership role do you see yourself having on this new look Bears team?**

GRANT NEWELL: One thing that I've been working on ever since last season ended was my three-point shot, fixing my shot mechanics. I've been working day in, day out, every single day, taking a lot of shots.

Also leadership-wise, I feel like I just can lead by example, not really a whole lot of a big vocal leader, but things I do on the court just shows, speaks for itself.

**Q. Grant, a question for you about Keonté. You guys post a lot of videos. Your social team posts a lot of videos from practice, which is cool, and Keonté was mic'd up, and he was extremely positive, getting everybody hyped up for practice. What's it like to have a new player come to the team who is as vocal, and I would say has as many leadership qualities as he has?**

GRANT NEWELL: I think it's a big, important piece to have for a team, really, really energetic, all over the place offensively and defensively, high energy guy. One thing that Coach Madsen always tells us, and the rest of the staff, is that the best teams are player led. We need things like this.

**Q. Keonté, where does being a defensive guy come from? When did you decide that's who you were?**

KEONTÉ KENNEDY: Actually, I have a little story. Growing up, I always played for my dad, and I was a shooter. He was just like, when your shot's off, you've got



to find something else to do. It just clicked on me in high school.

I started defending, and I realized the impact it had on my team. I just got the crowd going, got us going, gets in transition. A lot of teams I played for play fast, and we're athletic, so we have to get on the rim. I think that's where it came from, just from the heart inside, and stopping the other teams best players.

**Q. He's new to the league so we obviously haven't seen him. Talk about Fardaws. His numbers when he was at Utah Valley are eye popping. How good of a rebounder is he?**

KEONTÉ KENNEDY: Phenomenal, elite.

**Q. How? Physical? Long? Jumps?**

KEONTÉ KENNEDY: He's strong. He's athletic. He has that it. He knows where the ball is coming off. He studies the game. I think he watches our jump shots. He's really intuitive on where the ball's going to go.

He's just so strong and just overpowering.

**Q. How has it been to deal with him, Grant?**

GRANT NEWELL: He's for sure a problem. He's probably one of the strongest guys I ever played in my college experience so far, also in my life, you know what I'm saying? It's going to do us a lot.

**Q. How was your freshman year? You started 28 games last year. What was it like to start that many games? And as the season went on, was there fatigue? Did you have to battle any of that? What have you done this off-season to build off last year?**

GRANT NEWELL: It was really good to get a lot of experience despite the results we had last season. It was for sure some fatigue that came with it. Took care of all that this past off-season, cleaning up all the thing I need to to keep getting better as a player.

**Q. Last year, Grant, you guys played a really lower possession game because you felt like you had to. When you're the lesser team, you want less possessions. So you guys played really slow. It sounds like Mark just said you guys want to play really fast. How different was it last year to this year in terms of style of play?**

GRANT NEWELL: It's a big difference. One thing I can say is we play a lot faster, we're going to play a lot faster.

It's really exciting, and we like it too.

**Q. From your perspective, Keonté, what has that pace been like? It sounds like the more possessions for you, the better on defense.**

KEONTÉ KENNEDY: Absolutely. We want to put up numbers. We want to play with a fast pace. It's been fun. It's fun to see everybody get out and run. We're playing with freedom. We're playing with pace, and it's really unselfish basketball.

It starts from the defensive end. I can hang my hat on that end because I'm the anchor for that.

**Q. Have you guys gotten yourself in great condition for that?**

GRANT NEWELL: Yeah, 100 percent.

**Q. Players say they want to play fast. It's harder to play fast because you've got to run more. If you guys are in great shape, yeah, players want to play faster.**

GRANT NEWELL: Miami Heat drill, we all had to do that. I don't know if you all heard the stories.

**Q. I played Miami, the preseason conditioning test, the five tens.**

GRANT NEWELL: Yes, sir.

**Q. Explain that real quick.**

GRANT NEWELL: Honestly for me it was easy. There's probably a video of me running backwards at the end of it.

**Q. Did they allow you to bank time?**

GRANT NEWELL: They did. For me, we're doing ten of them. I'm running to get all this in my bank for the last five, cool. We get done, and one of our assistant coaches, Maz, he's like this is the last one.

I'm like, all right, of the set? So I get back, he said we're done. I'm looking around like we're done? It was actually kind of fun. I was able to get out with my teammates in the second group to push through. We really have a team atmosphere. But conditioning-wise, we're going to be in great shape as a team.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports