

Pac-12 Conference Men's Basketball Media Day

Wednesday, October 11, 2023

Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

Oregon State Beavers

Coach Wayne Tinkle

Jordan Pope

Tyler Bilodeau



they've come together, how hard they worked this off-season to put us in a position, we're very excited.

Q. Telling that you brought two sophomores with you, along the lines of this conversation, right?

WAYNE TINKLE: Yeah, the state of affairs that we're in right now, keeping that freshman class together, Don, is equally as important. We've got two guys that really have bought into our program, the way we do things, and it does stay a lot about where our team's at.

We made the commitment to go young, which not many people do, but we're confident we're going to be able to build this thing to last.

Q. What do you take from last year? Again, getting back to these young guys, got all this experience, got a lot of minutes. What areas do they know as a group have to be better at this year?

WAYNE TINKLE: We're normally a very good scoring around the rim team. Last year we were one of the worst in the country, could not finish around the basket. I think the fact we had some young guys, we didn't have that. Kyler Kelly, Drew Eubanks, a guy that we could throw it to down there, guys that could finish, Ethan Thompson, Tres, those guys.

Now we've got a group that has gotten bigger and stronger. Again, we've got guys healthy. And we've seen it as a staff. Coach Reveno does a great job of keeping all those stats of the percentage of baskets we're getting in the paint and our shooting percentages there, albeit in practice, which I think you know is going to free some things up on the perimeter. We weren't a great shooting team.

And then defensively, having that size back protecting the rim. We weren't a great defensive two-point field goal percentage team.

Q. Speaking of in the paint and around the rim, KC Ibekwe came in last year, was a late signee, I believe, so never really got himself into great shape, great condition, but you saw flashes. You see the footwork.

THE MODERATOR: Pac-12 media day rolls on from Las Vegas. Time to talk to Wayne Tinkle, head coach of the Oregon State Beavers. How are you feeling about your team?

WAYNE TINKLE: Very excited about this group. We've got a lot of guys healthy who were banged up and hurt last year. The returners, that young group really had a good off-season. Some of our older guys, Dexter Akanno had a great off-season physically and mentally, really stepping into his leadership role with this young group in a great fashion.

Then adding some freshmen I think are going to make an impact. So thrilled about the group.

Q. I was at a couple of your games at the end of the year, and I remember saying on the broadcast it was great that you had all these freshmen getting all this experience, but it doesn't matter unless they have a great off-season and come back looking different this year.

WAYNE TINKLE: You hear a lot of coaches talk about the biggest year of growth for their players is between that freshman and sophomore year. And the fact that they're great kids, they put in the time. Our strength coach, Chandler, did a great job with them. Nick Bies, our trainer, getting guys healthy.

We talk a little bit about where we were picked, and really we don't have anybody to blame because they don't know what they don't know. We lose Chol Marial after two league games. We didn't have Justin Rochelin or Christian Wright for the first half of the season. Justin only played a handful of games there. Christian was never really 100 percent. Those guys are all healthy.

So I think people will see fairly quickly that this group, how



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You saw him finish in the paint. Talk about his off-season, and it sounds like he lost a bunch of weight and is in way better condition and will make an impact this year.

WAYNE TINKLE: The light kind of clicked. To his defense, he was a late signee, a lot thrown at him, especially once Shoal went down. You saw, he won us the game against USC at home with a couple of key blocks late.

He's fired up. He's always been able to get up and down the court, but now he can play extended minutes. He's very focused. You've got 7'2" Chol, who doesn't weigh what KC weighs. Seeing those two go at it, they've made each other better.

So we do feel like with KC and Chol, we've got two legitimate low post threats.

Q. Are you interested in maintaining the rivalry with Oregon after this season? Just what are your thoughts in general about the future of Oregon State and the Pac-12?

WAYNE TINKLE: I think for sure Dana and I have had a couple of conversations. What it will look like until we know where everything is at, I think we'll be able to answer that more clearly. But you're talking about the most off-contested rivalry in the country. I think it would be a shame to lose that.

I don't know that we could play twice a year with our schedules, but certainly we're looking at all options and having those conversations, and we'll know more as we get more answers moving forward.

Then your second part? Sorry.

Q. (Off microphone.)

WAYNE TINKLE: Yeah, that's up in the air. I'm not a blame guy. I'm more of a solution guy. It's sad that, as a guy that grew up mostly in the northwest and Spokane, I never saw this coming. It is what it is. We've got to find a way to deal with it, but I know this. Who we are at Oregon State and Washington State could probably be painted with the same brush. We find ways to solve problems.

I know we're working hard to find, not just solutions, but solution that's are going to help us prosper moving forward.

Q. Last year 11 points per game improvement on defense. It was a top half defense in the Pac-12. I don't know if you can do 11 again, but what do you

think? How does this defense compare, when you have two freshmen playing such key minutes last year, you've got the injuries, to make a big jump defensively had to feel good. Can you make another defensive jump?

WAYNE TINKLE: I certainly think so. We kept most of our roster together. We haven't had to add a lot of new pieces. Even the guys that were injured were sitting there watching each and every day.

The funny thing is this summer -- and it was by design -- we put a lot more in. So when we hit November 6th, we'll have much more of our defensive package in than we've had the last couple of years, which I know will prove fruitful for us.

Q. I was going to ask you that, Wayne. It's funny you said it before.

WAYNE TINKLE: Not funny to me.

Q. You've gotten pretty sophisticated with your defense, where you play half the court one way, half the court the other, which not a lot of teams do. But could you do that last year with such a young group? But now I'm assuming, after a year of having them, you will be able to do a lot more defensively.

WAYNE TINKLE: You guys are both spot on. We just didn't have that luxury playing so many young guys last year. We didn't -- we weren't able to use the 1-3-1 a whole bunch last season.

The experience come game time is one thing, but just the retention was tough with so much being thrown at them. Having the summer workouts and then early in the fall we're much further ahead. I'm excited that we're going to have more to go to earlier in the season.

Q. No transfers?

WAYNE TINKLE: No transfers, yeah.

Q. Was that intentional?

WAYNE TINKLE: Well, yeah, we made a commitment after what happened two years ago to go young and to build it back. I'll tell you, people know in our programs when we have the right group of guys and we stay healthy, we get things done. And I know there's some people that have been nay saying, this, that, and the other. We don't listen to that garbage because it's been proven over time.

We feel that with this group we've got the right collective, if

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

I could use that word. Collection of guys. Because they're made of the right stuff, they bought in, and we know that it's going to -- I can't tell you how fast, but I know it's going to be quicker, more quick than we think.

Q. The other coaches that have been up here, Wayne, there's been some discussion about the state of college basketball and the portal and NIL and everything going on. It seems to me that that's the way of doing it. You reset. You got kind of stung by the portal during COVID because you couldn't have players on campus and you don't really get to meet them and talk to them and read their body language, but now, if you establish a young group and then just keep adding to it through the high school recruiting, to me that seems like a better game plan.

WAYNE TINKLE: Well, it is for who we are at Oregon State. It worked for a lot of years. It helps to build for consistency. As tough as that is in this day and age, you do have to recruit them each and every day. You're going to have people pulling at them. We had that happen last spring.

But when you get the right group of guys and they're buying into what you have, the grass isn't always greener. We talk about, if you're not happy with the color of the grass, water the one you're standing on. Our guys have really bought into that.

It was tough. I had a friend of mine say a couple years ago, you put together the dream team, and it wasn't the '92 Olympic team that he was talking about. We've gotten through that. We know that it was a heavy punch to us.

The neat thing about this group -- you remember in year 3 after we went to the NCAA Tournament, we had a rash of injuries and had a very tough season. We didn't change who we were. We kept our nose to the grind stone, did it the beaver way, and built it back. We feel like we've gone through those steps now, and we're going to be just fine.

Q. You at every practice taking half-court shots backwards. This is one of your skills. Who on this team is challenging you for the best half-court shooter?

WAYNE TINKLE: Shootarounds on game day.

Q. On game day, okay.

WAYNE TINKLE: Nobody. There's nobody that can stand up, and it's not me. My dad taught me that. He used to do it at all the father-son games. Pope is the one who will tell you, he's pretty confident his percentage is closest to mine.

Q. Tell us about your schedule, the nonconference ones and obviously the conference is the conference. How did you approach scheduling this year knowing that you had a lot of guys back?

WAYNE TINKLE: We wanted to be challenged early. We've got a couple tough early games. It's funny, we were finished with our schedule more quickly than any other year other than our opener. We could not find the opponent for that sixth date.

We've got Troy coming in early. I've known their coach for a lot of years. He's going to have a heck of a team. And then we've got Appi State coming in and other teams from different parts of the country to give us a different look.

Then an interesting one, Nebraska in Sioux Falls at The Pentagon. They have a couple of single games there. That's going to be a crazy atmosphere leading into the ESPN tournament in New York in Brooklyn. We face Baylor in the first round.

So going to be challenged early, which we wanted for this group. Then I think we'll be able to settle in as we build towards conference play with some tough opponents in December as well. I'm confident in this group, and you can't schedule 20-plus wins anymore like you used to be able to.

I'm not afraid of taking lumps early, as we've proven, sometimes to teams we should have, on paper anyway, beat in preparation for what's ahead. I remember the year we made the run to the Elite Eight. We lost a couple tough preseason games. It's all building blocks for where you're trying to peak come March.

Q. As we bring Jordan Pope and Tyler Bilodeau up, what do you like about these guys?

WAYNE TINKLE: They're great kids, number one. They understand what this thing's all about. I know part of the theme was talking about the stitch of the fabric and tradition, and we talked about what traditions we have.

Jordan made an unbelievable observation. He said, Coach, I was thinking about that last night, and our tradition at Oregon State is the Beaver way. It's how we approach every single day in the community, in the classroom, and when we put on the hard hats to go to work on the court. That's our tradition. It's who we are, which was a pretty mature statement for a guy his age.

Love the fact that they're chomping at the bit. They got a little chip on their shoulder. When we talked about where

we were picked, we didn't make it a big deal. We just said, hey, they don't know what they don't know, but we've got at least 31 opportunities to show them, and it's on us.

Q. Tyler, Coach just grabbed your arm there. You're sporting a new number this year too. A lot of people got to know your story last year during the season. Mom and dad great athletes. Tell us about 34.

TYLER BILODEAU: It was my mom's number, so I always wanted to be 34 growing up and stuff. Sports last year I couldn't be, so I was 10, but I got it back so I'm happy about that. I'm excited.

Q. I asked your coach this, but I'll ask you guys as well. Not the season you wanted. You guys were really young last year. You were in a lot of games, couldn't finish them. That usually has to do with experience in those situations. How much did last season motivate you guys for this off-season and heading into this season? Jordan, start with you.

JORDAN POPE: It was good because last year, like you said, we were a really young team, inexperienced. Having a year underneath our belt definitely will help us this year. We were in a lot of games last year that we couldn't finish, couldn't close.

Like I said, having a year underneath our belt and having the same core guys return and having some pieces and everyone develop more could be really exciting coming into this year.

TYLER BILODEAU: Yeah, like what Jordan said, we had a really young team last year. But coming into this year, we're a lot more experienced, and we know what to expect and all that. Like Jordan said, we got some good pieces healthy and some good freshmen that come in. So I'm excited for the season.

Q. Coach mentioned the chip on your shoulder. Where does that come from for both of you?

JORDAN POPE: For me growing up with all boys and a single parent, that's where it came from for me, always being the underdog and looked over and the smaller guy on the court. Just having that chip on my shoulder and proving doubters wrong and prove myself right more importantly. Just always playing with that chip.

Q. How many boys, and where were you?

JORDAN POPE: I have two older brothers. I'm the middle child. I have two younger sisters.

Q. So what was basketball like in your house?

JORDAN POPE: It was basically our lives. I had two older brothers that I looked up to growing up. They played high school basketball and then junior college. Obviously my father played basketball as well. So just learning from them and being pushed by them and beat up and teased and all that stuff growing up really built me to where I am now.

Q. How about the chip for you?

TYLER BILODEAU: I think I definitely got it from my parents. They taught me have a chip at a young age. Me and my twin brother always used to go at it since we were younger, and I think that helped.

Like Jordan said, trying to prove other people wrong, prove yourself right and all that good stuff.

Q. You both had good years individually last year as freshmen. Jordan, I think, if you guys had had more team success, you probably would have been freshman of the year in the conference. I'll start with you, Jordan. What did you take from last year in what you learned with all that experience you both got that you went to work on this summer that's going to be different this year?

JORDAN POPE: For myself personally, just physically for myself, coming back stronger and more physically prepared for what might be thrown at me next season. I'll probably get one of the tougher defenders, longer wing defenders to try to disrupt some things and make things hard for myself. Individually just coming back mentally stronger and physically stronger and making sure my guys are ready to go because last year we were young. We can't use that excuse this year.

I think we'll be ready. If we just put all the pieces in the right places, I really think we can do some surprising things.

Q. Tyler, go back with me. I know you've answered the question probably a million times. It's fascinating to me to grow up with two parents with the skills that your parents had. Were you torn between sports? What did you take from that experience watching them as you grew up?

TYLER BILODEAU: That's a good question. From a young age, my parents never really pushed me or my brother and my sister to play any type of sport. They just wanted us to go out and have fun, play whatever we loved. I did that. I took a little piece from every sport, I'd say, and

I ended up playing basketball. So it all worked out.

Q. For those of you who don't know, we talked about it a lot last year. Your mom played in the WNBA. Your dad was a longtime hockey player. Do you see a hockey player in him when you practice with him?

TYLER BILODEAU: Yeah, all he does is foul and be physical, but we need that. We need that.

Q. Fitness seems to be the theme of the day. When you're growing up and you're in high school, you hit the traditional splits, chest and tri, back and bi, shoulders, legs. When you get with trainers and get older, they like to implement their own things, push/pull legs, power lifting, whatever it may be. You talked about getting more physical. What aspects of your training have changed during the off-season that you've maybe it's a new experience to you but you also notice it's helped you, whether it's agility, physicality, strength, whatever it may be?

JORDAN POPE: Good question. I'd say being more explosive, so working more change of directions and stop and start. Because, for me, myself, I'm always cutting and changing angles as a point guard, so just being able to change directions quicker and cut people off, and then obviously use that to an advantage on offense when I have the ball and beat my defenders.

Then, yeah, just get stronger. I'm one of the smaller guys on the court. Like I said, I'll have probably one of the more physical defenders on me. So just being able to take bumps and take that type of pressure and physicality and still maintain my production and help my team get the job done.

TYLER BILODEAU: For me, I would say a big thing was getting stronger last year. Getting pushed around a lot as a freshman. But also staying mobile. My mobility needs to get a lot better. Then like keep my speed so I can go around those bigger defenders. That was the biggest thing for me.

Q. What does mobility mean? How do you work on that?

TYLER BILODEAU: Like stretching, working on my hip mobility and all that good stuff.

THE MODERATOR: I think the one thing too that a lot of young guys, and now like the gentleman over there said, there's so much more sophisticated now in sports performance. It used to be you just get bigger, but you're bigger, but you're not better because you're just heavier.

The key is to get stronger without putting on extra weight so you could still, like you were saying, Jordan, keep your explosiveness, keep your change of speed, change of direction stuff. It's important for you guys to bring that to this season. Whatever you did this summer needs to translate into this season physically.

Q. Your mom was a pioneer, first with the ABL and then the WNBA. Knee pain sidelined her career. What are some of the biggest lessons that she taught you that help you today?

TYLER BILODEAU: Shoot, she's taught me so much growing up. I would say the biggest thing is just like my mindset. She's always helping me. I get down on myself or not as confident, things like that.

She gets me out of that really fast, and she's there for me in that regard. Also play on the court, she helps you see things. She knows exactly what I need to, benefits like not using my legs enough on a shot or stuff like that. She's always helping me on that.

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