

Atlantic Coast Conference Football Kickoff

Friday, July 17, 2026

Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

Cal Bears

Coach Tosh Lupoi

Ricky Fletcher

Adam Mohammed

Jaron-Keawe Sagapolutele

Press Conference

TOSH LUPOI: Good afternoon. What an awesome day. Cool to be a part of it. Here with Jaron-Keawe Sagapolutele, Adam Mohammed, Ricky Fletcher, representing the number one public institution in the country and the flagship university of the UC system.

We're fired up to be here not just representing Cal Berkeley but an awesome conference that we're fortunate to be a part of, extremely successful. And especially of recent times, really excited to see where TV viewership, having three College Football Playoff representatives in the last two seasons, and the direction of this conference.

Extremely fortunate to be a part of that and once again to be representing such a special place of Cal Berkeley, right down the road (smiling), and a place as we get to represent the Atlantic Coast Conference, as you look out our facility windows, you see the Pacific Ocean. Think about that. Pretty cool (smiling). That's unique. If they don't laugh, you laugh with them.

That's really unique, but so is Cal. I think that's what makes this really cool, a place that truly represents and embodies academic excellence and athletics. No secret to a storied NFL tradition that we bring to the table. Been fortunate to be part of both as a player in my undergrad and master's program, coaching there for over a decade, then to go off, be able to come back to my alma mater, truly special to represent such a high-caliber, high-class place.

Even the history of it, of all the No. 1 overall picks, teammates, the success, storied tradition of Marshawn Lynch, DeSean Jackson, Jared Goff, Aaron Rodgers. A young man that I was fortunate to coach, playing in his



16th year and will be a Hall of Famer, Cameron Jordan. One of the best all-time players out of this state of North Carolina, anybody know who that is? Elite Cal Bear, Keenan Allen.

Then to be storied right now, to be one of three teams in college football that's had 10-plus DBs selected in the NFL Draft since 2020. To have that unique blend of an NFL tradition, high-caliber football program, but to represent the academic excellence that this place represents, we're all very fortunate to be a part of that.

I think what really makes this unique and special, we're at a place where it's the sixth highest media market in all of the U.S., right there in the San Francisco Bay Area. As much as it hurt me when the Oakland Raiders left, I think at that time the Oakland A's, the Golden State Warriors across the bridge, but now we're in a really cool situation, where it's the only show in town in a major media market across the bridge there. Something that's cool to represent.

To be right there in truly the epicenter of start-up companies, 44 Fortune 500 companies right outside our facility walls, these guys and myself get such a unique experience as we try to deliver from an extremely high-caliber athletic performance, but to be around the likes of all these Cal grads that are the founders of Levi's jeans, Dreyer's ice cream, OluKai, Banana Republic, Gap, Old Navy. Guys got any more? Who did you meet these last six months? DoorDash. That list goes on and on.

As we attempt to build our culture going into this fall, we're really pumped to be a part of this, thankful to be part of such an awesome conference as we do that.

If you got any questions for me, I would love to answer 'em. If not, I'll hand over to three elite human beings.

THE MODERATOR: We'll take some questions for Coach.

Q. Since taking over, you've established a new culture at Cal. How do you honor what Coach Wilcox built while putting your own stamp on a program?

TOSH LUPOI: Well, I think it's important, we started in

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celebration of Dr. King's birthday January 19th. We had a cultural meeting, then declared what we want to be.

Ultimately whatever that is, I think in any organization, whatever words you put, T-shirts you want to put up or posters, we're ultimately going to be the culture that we live every day. It's going to be our daily transactions of how we approach, how we work, how we prepare. That was the goal early on. Now we're in month six as an organization, a new staff, new chapter, the new era of Cal football.

Obviously the results of the season, I truly believe those are going to be dictated by our daily transactions. That's ultimately what culture is. It's not about being clever, cliché, it's about living out what we want to represent every day. That's what we're in attempts to do.

I'm extremely proud of where we're at today, evaluating the hunger of our team and the challenges that these guys have accepted and attacked, both as a staff, I'm very fortunate to be part of a great staff, and being able to serve and impact young men like these three awesome individuals that are on this stage.

Q. As I'm sure you're aware, Cal has a diehard fan base with a large media presence. In the evolving state of sports media and marketing, can you talk about the importance of utilizing that not just to reach your fans but to build up your program?

TOSH LUPOLI: Yeah, I think in this new landscape of college football, it is what it is. It's extremely necessary, right? I think Cal has displayed an elite job of exactly that, right? We're the first and only team to my knowledge in the ACC to sign a corporate sponsorship of its kind with Dialpad. We'll be featuring a jersey patch. To my knowledge there's only a handful of programs that have done that. Some of those programs are the best and most successful in all of college football.

I think that displays the direction and the desire of where we're headed and the commitment from the university. That was a major appeal for me from day one two years ago when Chancellor Lyons was hired upon Cal, then another North Carolina great, Ron Rivera as the GM a year ago. To have this alignment and to tap into these incredible Cal connections and to be able to bring our cup of water to the ACC and represent such an awesome conference, that's our goal, what we're attempting to do.

Q. You had some time working under Nick Saban, national championships, then your work in the NFL with the Falcons, Browns and Jaguars, what have you taken from these experiences of being at the highest of high in college and from the NFL?

TOSH LUPOLI: Every day is (audio interruption). I think when you do that, you improve yourself. As a young coach, going back to the starting days when I was at Cal both as a player and coaching there, Cal was a perennial power, a top five program in the country, winning the conference, winning 10 games to be a part of that, moving on and learning with some of those great leaders that you mentioned. I think we form our identity on the way.

This is my 20th year now in this profession, in coaching. I certainly don't have all the answers. But it's so amazing to be able to wake up in a profession to know that you can individually improve every day, demand that amongst your staff, your players, and be a part of something together.

With all those great leaders you mentioned, it's a constant approach to self-improvement. Obviously in these leadership roles that I've been super fortunate to have, is to do that better than it's ever been done before.

Q. You've been very consistent with the alignment from Chancellor Lyons and Ron. Where have you seen the impact and benefits take shape the most in enhancing your operation?

TOSH LUPOLI: I think we mentioned one of them just now with having a multi-million dollar corporate sponsorship that we're excited to represent, to tap into some of our many incredibly successful Cal grads. That certainly personifies that relationship.

Just where we're at from an overall perspective, excitement of the program, we just had a season ticket meeting deal. To learn where we're at of having the highest sales in over a decade, the NIL allotment from these sponsorships and the participation, overall excitement of the program.

I think we all collaboratively approach that, attack that on a weekly basis. It's been really cool to be a part of that excitement.

Q. In December when you came to Cal, you had that background that you shared, when you started thinking about when you might be able to be in a position to lead the program yourself. You said you always thought about it. It sounds like you've been formulating how you're going to go about being a head coach and running a program. How have you seen it fall into place? Portal class come in, on fire with the high school class. How have you seen things fall into place as far as your vision goes? Are you excited with the progress you've seen? Is it going according to plan?



TOSH LUPOLI: Certainly pleased but absolutely not satisfied. We came here I think with a combination of a lot of these great players that we've been fortunate to sign, the staff and myself, to compete at the highest level.

I wholeheartedly believe it's a place that can afford that opportunity. That's every day we wake up what we're attempting to do.

The goal is to win every opportunity, every moment. From the first opportunity of being in a situation, you can imagine a young man that's on this stage right now, the quarterback before him, after having three great years at the University of Cal Berkeley, but to move on and win a Heisman Trophy and potentially at that time winning a national title, this day and age landscape with agents involved, how difficult that must have been of a time of what the next step is. Extremely fortunate for Jaron to have the belief in our direction moving forward and the people that potentially at that time were going to be a part of it.

That was an opportunity for us to win, right? Then from there, as you just mentioned, an opportunity to make a statement from a portal, talent acquisition standpoint. All of a sudden Cal Berkeley signs a top 15 class nationally. I think we're one of the top two classes in this conference. That was an opportunity for us to win, right?

That moment closes, coinciding with that, our quest to the fundamentals and techniques, schematics, three phases of our game, the introduction of the new staff, bringing in the Chicago Bears nutritionist, Tennessee Titans strength staff, highlighting some of the things where we can improve.

As you mentioned, going into the high school ranks now, being in a top 20 class in that position. These are all moments right now that are in our control to compete at the highest level.

I'll return back to California, and the quest will be winning Monday morning of how we lift, how we run, how we attack our nutrition, and continue our increase of a team GPA.

Q. We all know how you were able to go and get Jaron. After your press conference, you flew over, talked to him. How important is it for you to get the pipeline to -- to keep that pipeline in Hawaii as you did at Oregon to get those big guys out of there and also some more quarterbacks?

TOSH LUPOLI: Yeah, you're saying continue a pipeline? You mentioned a state in the Pacific Northwest? Is that the question you're asking, or to continue it at Cal?

Q. To continue it at Cal.

TOSH LUPOLI: Before I was in the NFL, I was coaching college ball for a while. Well before that, established some really strong connections and respect overall. The area I grew up in, the Bay Area, has an extremely strong Polynesian population and connection. A lot of those relationships extending in or coming from the islands.

I was fortunate to coach a young man who was the 10th overall pick from Cal Berkeley, Tyson Alualu. Those relationships, some of these amazing business names that I mentioned earlier, founders, same connections that are from or live on that island.

Cal has had a historically strong connection with the islands. That will certainly continue. As a young man like Jaron continues to have his success and will be on football, the magnitude of this degree, what that is going to do for Jaron for the rest of his life, that means a lot.

The respect of education within the Polynesian culture, it's something that aligns very strong with ours. I think it's the only place in the country with a 92% graduation rate of Polynesians. It's something we're going to continue to celebrate and have mentors in the community like Jaron.

THE MODERATOR: We're going to invite up Ricky Fletcher to take the next questions. Who's got a question?

Q. How has your relationship with Daniel Harris grown and developed, two SEC corners transferring? What does he bring to this Cal defense?

RICKY FLETCHER: Daniel Harris brings a lot of things to our defense. He very versatile, long guy, can run well. He brings a lot of things to our defense, for sure.

Q. What was your transition to the Bay Area like? What has ultimately brought out the best in you?

RICKY FLETCHER: My transition to Cal was really smooth. Everybody down here is just welcoming. The coaching staff, got a lot of high energy. The transition was smooth.

I feel like with our staff, having a lot of guys that's coached big-time football, knowing the knowledge they have, it was easy for me to get acclimated and be comfortable within the coaching staff.

Q. Coach talked about the season ticket holders, it's improved. What have you noticed about the energy on campus this off-season?

RICKY FLETCHER: The energy is different. Our fans are



just out the roof. They support us to an all-time high. I mean, it's just different. They always around. They always supporting us. They always coming in to talk to us. It's different.

Q. Defending pass offenses is very tough. What would you say the biggest challenge that receivers present to you and how do you acclimate to that?

RICKY FLETCHER: I would say the biggest challenge that receivers present to me is just playing the reaction game, knowing that we play defensive back and defense. Everything we do is reactionary. Just being able to get in the film room and break down their tendencies, what they like to do, is going to be a big thing for us.

Q. You're playing in a defensive backfield that has a legacy of NFL players. What does that mean? What is it like defending against a high-level quarterback like Jaron in practice?

RICKY FLETCHER: Playing behind a defensive back pedigree in Cal is a big thing. That's one of the main reasons I came here, is to be part of a tradition is elite.

Going against Jaron every week is making me so much more better. Seeing how he commands the offense, make every throw, not get shaken on everything, it's making me so much better as a player.

Q. You had to navigate some things last season at Ole Miss, coaching change. How did you get through that adversity and what did you learn from it?

RICKY FLETCHER: I got through that adversity just by being where my feet were, wherever we were in the season. Being present in the present moment. You can't really worry about things that's not really in your control. Just being in that moment, within that moment.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you. Adam Mohammed, your turn.

Q. You came down from U-Dub, a traditional opponent of Cal. What is your impression of the program from afar? How has it played out since you have been here?

ADAM MOHAMMED: Damn (smiling). I mean, just seeing the history with the running backs over here, that played a huge part into coming here. I've met Marshawn Lynch, Jahvid Best, just talking to those guys, knowing the culture they had over here, just wanting to continue it over here, that's what I'm trying to continue.

Q. Coming here to Cal, what was it about Tosh's leadership, about his message that made you believe if you're going to go into the portal, Cal was the right fit for you?

ADAM MOHAMMED: He actually flew from Miami after the Texas Tech game. We sat in the office for like two hours talking about ball, life. Just knowing my mom was comfortable. Whatever Mom says. If she's comfortable, I'm comfortable. It was just the overall better fit for me.

Q. Coach talks about playing fast and physical. How has that changed during practice?

ADAM MOHAMMED: I feel like, I mean, that's what we preach over there. Our core value is relentless effort, ball excellence and power of unit. I mean, we're going to dominate our box for six seconds, protect and score the ball. We're going to be tight together.

Q. A lot of new transfers. You're one of them. How has the coaching staff and the leaders on the team helped to foster chemistry, bringing this group together?

ADAM MOHAMMED: I feel like, I mean, from the very first day, it was really just getting to know everyone's name. After that, I feel like I've been here for, like, years. I feel like being with the guys, like, just feel like I've known them for a whole long time. It just wasn't, like, that big of a difference transferring, getting to know the guys.

We all go over to each other's houses and chill. We just kick it. It was not that hard.

Q. I covered your high school career. I got to know, have you been lobbying to let them have you throw the ball?

ADAM MOHAMMED: No, nah, none of that (smiling).

THE MODERATOR: Thank you very much. We are now going to welcome to the podium JKS.

Q. Last season you were at ACC Football Kickoff as a freshman. How has your perspective changed now as opposed to last season?

JARON-KEAWE SAGAPOLUTELE: Yeah, I mean, it's changed a tremendous amount. Same thing is the same thing. Just continue to keep the main things the main things, continue to build this culture. Just continue to get in with these guys, the continuous reps to be ready for the season. I'm just so excited to head into this new season with a bunch of great guys.



Q. Have you had an opportunity to get to know Ron Rivera? What is it like being in California knowing you're going to have to play some of your games on the east coast as well, and maintaining the Stanford and Cal rivalry at the same time?

JARON-KEAWE SAGAPOLUTELE: Yeah, I mean, Coach Ron Rivera has been tremendous, especially to our program. Being able to talk one on one with him pretty much on the weekly has been great. What he's helped me do, just making me feel comfortable in everything I do, he's been a tremendous help for me. Not just for me, but for the program.

Playing on the east coast, I really find it exciting. Being able to travel to new places, just see new stadiums and new fan bases, just being able to take on a challenge is always fun for me.

While also keeping that Stanford rivalry is fun. They're a great program as well. Very well-respected. I'm just excited for this new season, this new challenge ahead.

Q. What was it like in the first spring practice with Ian Strong, Chase Hendricks and Cooper Perry, the new offense?

JARON-KEAWE SAGAPOLUTELE: Those three, super talented guys. Their talent jumps off the roof. You see it right away.

I'm just blessed to be able to throw to those guys, all the guys that we've brought in, the guys that we've kept.

We have so much talent in our receiving room, tight end room, O-line is where it starts. We have talent all over, yeah.

Q. It's been alluded to a little bit about Tosh coming out this after his intro press conference, getting right on the plane, meeting you at a crazy late hour at night. When did you find out he was coming? What were your impressions when he came? How has it played out for you under his leadership?

JARON-KEAWE SAGAPOLUTELE: Yeah, I mean, it caught me by surprise. I was back home watching my alma mater in the state championship. It's around 9:00, I get a call from my mom that he's flying in, should land about 12. He gets in about 1:30 (smiling). We talk all the way till about 4:30 in the morning.

It was a great talk. It just felt right. I knew this is where I wanted to be. Has a culture about winning, that's what I

want to do as well. The culture he's brought has been tremendous. Relentless head coach that wants nothing but the best for the program, for the players.

Being able to just continue to meet with him weekly, just continue to talk ball, life, has just been great for me. Mental health, everything. It's just been so great and tremendous, for sure.

Q. You were invited to the Manning Passing Academy. What was that experience like for you?

JARON-KEAWE SAGAPOLUTELE: It was a great blessing to be able to be invited to the Manning Passing Academy. Unfortunately I wasn't able to attend it.

Being able to be on the eyes of such prolific people like the Mannings, it's really a blessing for sure. Definitely would love to attend it next year. Just grateful that I was on their radar.

Q. You had a staff last year that believed in you, put you out there as a true freshman. A staff this year that believes in you. What can you say to that effect, to have faith from the last staff and this staff?

JARON-KEAWE SAGAPOLUTELE: Yeah, I mean, it's tremendous. I'm just so grateful that I have people that believe in me. Especially this new staff now that has been full on, not just me but all the players we brought and the guys we have in the building.

We've been working relentlessly this whole off-season getting ready for our first game, September 5th. We're excited to show what we can do on the field. We're just going to continue to keep working the rest of the summer into fall camp, as we get into the first game.

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