

July 14, 2016



An Interview With:

## SONNY DYKES

SONNY DYKES: It's good to be back in LA. I think it signals to all of us kind of the end of the off-season and the beginning of the season, so I know it's an exciting time of year for really all college football fans, especially players, coaches, and I know for you guys, as well. It's a slow time of the year from an athletic standpoint, so we're getting ready to dive in with both feet.

As a program we're excited about the progress that we've made. We've done some pretty significant things in the three years. We got off to a bad start, and have build on that. Really proud of our players and of the guys that played for us last year, and were part of the turnaround, going from 1-11 to an eight-win season and a bowl win was pretty significant.

As good as that was, I think the thing I'm probably most proud of is what our players have done in the classroom. We went from, I think, a 923 single year APR to a 997 last year, went from dead last in the Pac-12 to the first in the Pac-12, and again, that's a real credit to the student-athletes and who they are and what they stand for, their work ethic, their maturity. I was really impressed with what they've done, just the way they've handled adversity that we've had in our program, and again, it's a real tribute to them.

You know, I've told our players this: I really think in 20-something years of coaching, this is probably my favorite team. I like these guys. We're young, we're invested, we're a very unselfish group, very mature group, very focused group, very hard-working group, so I'm really excited to see what that means for us. We have a very challenging schedule, just like everybody does in the Pac-12. This is an exceptional league.

I've been around, been in the SEC, been in the Big 12. From top to bottom, I always say this, but I believe it's the best league. I think the parity in this league is so different than there is

anywhere else. You just have games with teams that are perceived to be not very good against teams that are perceived to be very good that come down to one or two plays week after week after week after week, and that is very unique, and I think it's something that the Pac-12 should be very proud of, and I think it's a real tribute to the quality of coaching in the league but also the quality of players in the league.

There is so much parity and so many good football players, and a lot of it has to do with the population base. So many of those players are here from California, and there's just so many good football players that allows the teams to recruit guys.

Really proud of the two young men that we have with us today, DeVante Wilson and Steven Moore. Steven is going to be our right tackle, is going to be a four-year starter. He's a guy that came in with Coach Tedford prior to my arrival and has been probably the most solid player in our program. He's just been a guy that's worked incredibly hard, a blue-collar guy that is exactly what you want as an offensive lineman, has really developed into being one of the leaders in our program. Really proud of him.

DeVante is a junior college player here from Southern California that is much like Steven. He kind of got a second chance, went to a junior college, went to USC originally, went to a JC, and has overcome a lot, and really proud of who he is and his family and what he's developed into as a person and a student-athlete. He's going to have a big year for us, going to be a defensive end, going to be very productive. He's a name you may not know that much about right now, but he's certainly a guy you're going to know by the end of the season.

Really proud to have those guys representing this university, really proud to be a part of this university.

We have a lot of momentum right now in our program. We've got a bowl win and we've



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really built on that. I thought we finished recruiting very well. I was really proud of the recruiting class we put together. I think it's going to be a very impactful class. I think there's going to be some guys this year, some freshmen, that are going to have an opportunity to come in and play for us. We're going to be a young football team but a very talented team.

I think our talent level has improved dramatically. As everybody in the room is aware of, we lost a pretty decent quarterback last year with Jared Goff. He's going to be a fun guy to cover, you guys that are here in Los Angeles. He's going to do a great job for them. He's going to do exactly what he did for us. He's going to continue to make the people around him better, and I think that's what a great quarterback does.

We have a lot of momentum, as I've said. We went into spring football, wrapped up that great recruiting class, got that 997 APR rating, which was very significant. We believe that Cal, as a university, deserves to be one of the top universities year in and year out when it comes to APR and the way our student-athletes perform in the classroom. It's something we take very seriously. It's something we're very dedicated to, and those are certainly some great results.

Had an outstanding spring and then got off to a good start in recruiting for the 2018 class. A lot of good things happening right now in our program, and we're excited about the direction we're going into.

The thing that we have done every year is we've gotten better. We went from 1 to 5 to 8, and the challenge for us is going to be to improve on 8, and that's going to be a big challenge.

Obviously we're going to have to replace our quarterback, which is going to be very important for us. The good thing is we have some very viable options, some guys that are very good players, you know, and some interesting battles will take place in fall camp. We're going to need to make a relatively quick decision, figure out who the guy is going to be, build a football team around him and his strengths, and go out and win.

Really proud of what we've done defensively. We've gotten a little better every year. We need to take that next step, as well. We have more depth, we have more athleticism in our program than we've had at any point. We have competition. Really when you look at our depth chart, there's more ors than any depth chart I've ever seen, and that's exactly what you want to

have. You want to have guys that are fighting to keep their spots, getting pushed by younger players, and that's exactly what's going on with our program right now.

So again, I'm really fortunate to be at Cal. I love the university, love the student-athletes that I get to work with, love this team, and it's going to be a fun team to watch. I'm excited about this football season.

**Q. How much research and planning have you done for your upcoming unique situation?**

SONNY DYKES: Yeah, we're really excited about the Australia game, just the experience for our players. It's going to be just a great opportunity for the guys to go experience something they'll probably never experience again the rest of their lives, and having a chance to go spend some time down there. It's going to be really unique. I'm excited about it.

The good thing is we're taking a mature team down there, a mature group of young people, and I know they're going to be able to handle themselves the right way. It's going to be an important six, seven days for us as we get ready for the first ballgame, but it's also part of our training camp with the way the schedule fell.

So it's going to be important that guys get work done, but at the same time we want to allow them to enjoy the unique opportunity they have.

There's some interesting, challenging travel things involved, 14 and a half hour flight over. The way we're going to handle that, trying to get the guys acclimated is going to be really, really important. We've got a good plan. We've invested a lot of time and resources into making sure that we prepare the right way. But it's going to be a great trip for us, and again, we're excited about it. I know people in Australia are excited, as well.

**Q. The plan is all set up already for the travel portion?**

SONNY DYKES: Yeah, the plan, we've been working on this really since January. The first step for us was getting passports for everybody. Very few of our players had passports. You can imagine trying to get passports for 120 kids, so that was a challenge in itself. You've got to give our staff credit for getting that done. Everybody is ready to travel and got it all done, and so that in itself was a big duty.

Just tying up all the loose ends. When you're taking 300 people to Australia to go participate in a game, there's a lot of moving parts. So I think we've done a really good job of preparing. We've got a great plan for how we're going to travel with our players, what we're going to do on the airplane, all the little things we can do to try to make the travel as easy as possible.

**Q. Have you consulted other coaches?**

SONNY DYKES: Yeah, we've talked to everybody. I've talked to a lot of other coaches, especially some NFL guys that have taken teams to Europe. We've talked to everybody, strength and conditioning coaches, I spent a lot of time talking to different people and how they've handled it.

We're going to use some compression things to try to make it easier on their legs and the recovery process. We've got a great plan in terms of getting our guys up and walking them around the airplane and exercising, so we'll go straight from landing on Tuesday morning to practice and try to get them acclimated as quickly as we can and ready to play by Saturday.

**Q. Given what's going on with your strength coach, to you see your players come out like they did, to see the athletic director come out like he did and stand behind Damon and say he's one of the reasons --**

SONNY DYKES: Yeah, I think anybody that knows anything about our program sees the positive impact he's had in our program. The people that are around our program understand how important he is and the contributions he's made to getting us where we want to go.

**Q. In terms of free time or activities in Australia, how does that compare to say the bowl game?**

SONNY DYKES: Yeah, it'll be a little bit different. So what we'll try to do is practice and prepare in the morning and give our guys the afternoon to try to see some sights and experience part of Australia. You know, we're traveling a long way, and again, it's a great opportunity for our players to have a great trip and a very memorable trip.

So we've got to do a good job of balancing preparation, and at the same time allowing them to enjoy it, because the worst thing we could do is take them over there and not teach them anything.

We're in the teaching business as coaches, and it's a unique opportunity for our players to have a once in a lifetime experience, and so we're going to try to give them every opportunity they can to see the country, to have a chance to interact with the people, and to create a lasting memory.

**Q. Did you have any concerns when they first approached you about this, about taking --**

SONNY DYKES: Oh, yeah, I had a lot of concerns. The big thing for us was just how it was going to fall in our schedule. You know, I thought it was really important for our players to come back and have an open week after the trip. Fortunately, we were able to make it work, so we're going to play early. That was a big part of it, was getting the waiver by the NCAA to be able to play the game early so that we could have an open week the next week to get our players back in class and get those guys focused on academics and give them a chance to rest up and prepare for a road game against the San Diego State team, who's probably going to be an 11-game win streak when we go play those guys. We're going to have to play very, very well, and it'll be a big week for us.

**Q. Are you still planning to keep the same type of coaching style with the talent you've had the last couple years?**

SONNY DYKES: Yeah, you know, what you try to do as a coach is figure out what your strengths are. That's what we do every single year. We sit down as a staff, we say, okay, who are the best players on our team, how can we allow those guys to become impactful, what can we do to allow them to use their skills, because they all have something that's unique and they all have different strengths and different weaknesses. And how can we build our offense around the quarterback and what he's capable of doing, and then same thing at the wide receiver position, same thing with the offensive line, what does our offensive line allow us to do, what kind of team can we be with those guys up front, and you know, that's going to be the strength of our football team is our offensive line, no question about it.

We've got a lot of experience. We've got guys that I really like their toughness. We have a great culture in our program. That's the thing I'm most proud of is just the culture that we have. The work ethic, the unselfishness, the dedication that

our guys have to each other is I think what makes this team special.

So anyway, that's part of the process is going through that and figuring out who's going to be our best pass rusher, how can we get our best pass rusher on their worst pass protector, and all the little things that you do from a scheme-wise to create good match-ups for you.

**Q. What is the situation with Griffin Piatte? Is he taking a medical --**

SONNY DYKES: Yeah, yeah, Griffin kind of got to the point where he just felt like he had to move on. It's a big loss for us. Griffin is a really good football player and a guy that has meant a lot to our program, just incredibly mature. Just the injury just wasn't responding the way he wanted it to, was having some issues, so medically just didn't feel like he was going to be fit to play.

**Q. He had surgery this off-season, also, a second surgery?**

SONNY DYKES: Yeah, he did.

**Q. Another knee?**

SONNY DYKES: Yeah, two knees.

**Q. What about Demariay Drew? What's his situation?**

SONNY DYKES: Yeah, we'll see. We're not going to have him early, and in hopes that we might have him late at some point, but chances are we're probably not going to have him at all during the season.

**Q. You're probably not going to have?**

SONNY DYKES: Probably not going to have him at all, no.

**Q. What about Davis Webb? What are the things that have impressed you the most about him? You're probably aware most people from the outside are expecting him to be your starter.**

SONNY DYKES: Yeah, the thing that's really honestly been the most impressive thing about Davis has just been his work ethic. Since he got on campus, he comes to work at 7:00 a.m. and leaves at 10:00 p.m. That's what he does every day. Shows up to our office at 7:00 a.m., sits in there with Coach Babita, wants to watch film, and goes in the virtual reality room and does all these

different things that he can do, wants to do on his own to make himself better.

And so he's always around asking us questions. He's always trying to find receivers to throw with. He's always doing extra workouts. You know, I think what's been most impressive to everybody, his teammates, coaches, everybody, has just been his work ethic. He just wants to work. It's incredibly important to him. He's very passionate.

He comes from a culture at Texas Tech that I was part of that culture being built in 2000, when Mike Leach was the head coach, and basically the work ethic of the quarterbacks, and that culture still exists today, where those guys who started with Kliff Kingsbury in 2000, where those guys work harder than anybody else in the program. Davis was part of that. He understands that. He appreciates it, and he loves football. He sees this as an opportunity to accomplish his goals.

His work ethic has been unparalleled, really.

**Q. Your timetable is obviously moved up because of the Australia game. At what point do you think you're going to name --**

SONNY DYKES: You know, we're hoping it happens quickly. We're hoping it's obvious to all of us quickly. But we'll decide when we think it's the best time to decide.

It could be five practices in, could be a week in, could be two weeks in. You know, I think the sooner the better for us, but it's a big decision. It's a decision that you want to let play out, and it's an important decision, so you have to make sure you have enough credible evidence to base a decision on.

**Q. Where is the quarterback competition going into camp? Is there somebody that's pulled ahead?**

SONNY DYKES: Well, I don't think so. I think coming out of spring football we felt like Chase Forrest and Ross Bowers were kind of neck and neck for that spot. They both did some good things over the spring, and it was a little bit of a new system for them, so there was some growing pains, but they got better and got more comfortable as we went into the spring game especially. I thought they all performed well at the spring game.

We'll get Victor Viramontes, a true freshman, get him in the mix, as well. He's on campus right now going to Summer Bridge and learning, and he's got a unique skill set. And then obviously we added Davis.

So between those four guys, I'm confident that we'll have a good quarterback. I mean, our quarterbacks have always performed well, and I don't expect anything different this year.

**Q. Have you been in favor of the graduate transfer rule?**

SONNY DYKES: You know, it's overall -- you know, not really. I think it's good for the kids, which I think is most important, so I'm certainly in favor of it from that standpoint, but I think, like most issues in college sports, and particularly college football, there's some positives and some negatives about it.

You know, I think it's something we haven't done, but this was a unique situation. I don't think any of us -- we didn't leave spring football saying we've got to go find a quarterback. We didn't feel that way at all. We felt like we had two good, solid quarterbacks that were ready. But this was a unique situation based on his relationship with Jake, his relationship with me, and more importantly, his experience in this system, being at Texas Tech. It's a very similar system.

So it was a unique opportunity and we felt like it was something we needed to look into, and as we got to know Davis, we were just impressed with his maturity and work ethic and how committed he was to joining the team and having a role on the team, whether that's the third team quarterback. He wants to be the best third team quarterback in the country. If he's going to be the third team guy or whether that's being the starter. So I think that's his mentality, and I think that's what made this a unique and different situation.

**Q. You've been on the other side with Brennan Scarlett and Michael Barton was a graduate transfer. Have you had others? I don't recall.**

SONNY DYKES: Yeah, Hardy is doing that, Cedric Dozier, as well. We face a little bit different situation being at Cal in terms of being able to get admitted into graduate school. You know, the guys that graduate have to be able to get admitted into a graduate program at Cal, and that's not an easy thing to do.

There's a high percentage of our players that graduate that can't get into a program. So that's going to be something that's going to happen from time to time.

**Q. Is that something you'd like to work with the University on?**

SONNY DYKES: Yeah, it's something that I think we're certainly aware of. It's something that I know Mike Williams is trying to find us a solution, because our role is to graduate student-athletes, and so the last thing in the world we want to do is not do that. We want to give them opportunities once they graduate to go to one of the elite graduate schools in the country, and so it's a tough situation. I don't know that there's an easy answer for it right now, but it's certainly on everybody's radar and certainly something that we're all working towards.

**Q. What are your thoughts on the perceived hostility on the academic side given where he came out?**

SONNY DYKES: Yeah, I mean, look, I think we're just trying to figure out ways to do well academically and to do well on the football field, and that's what we're all about. As I said earlier, I think the more that people get to know our program and our players within our program, I think the more they're going to be proud of what we're doing and how we're doing it.

I think the important thing is people to understand. Come get around our program. That's why we have been really transparent is so that we can answer a lot of these questions, and the problem sometimes occurs that people just don't know. I think the more that people know about us as coaches, about more importantly our players, then the more they're going to be receptive to working with them.

**Q. Do you get the sense that there is a divide between the academic side and the athletic side?**

SONNY DYKES: I don't think so. I think it's like anything else. I think sometimes things get blown out of proportion. But we're certainly not unique to that. I mean, I think that's a situation that occurs on many college campuses across the country. It's just something that is -- again, the thing I'm proud of is that we have a track record of keeping our players eligible and graduating. You

know what I mean? You look at what we've been able to do since I've been there in terms of recruiting junior college players, every one of our junior college players that we've seen except for one is graduated, and the one that hasn't graduated is in an NFL camp. So all those kids that we brought in, all of them have graduated.

So we're doing things the right way, and we've got to do a better job of getting that message out to the people that need to understand that message, and so a lot of that is on us.

**Q. How is it you've been able to go from 1 to 5 to 8 along the way?**

SONNY DYKES: Well, I think more than anything else, you've got to adjust. That's what happens sometimes. You go someplace and you think it's going to be a certain way, and it's not.

We had to do the same thing when I went to Louisiana Tech. It was a lot different situation than I thought it was going to be, and Cal has been that way. You have to figure out what your strengths are and you have to build around your strengths. You have to understand your weaknesses and address those weaknesses, you know, and figure out a way to make it work.

I believe having a successful football program is all about finding a niche, and I think we have found our niche, and when it comes to going out and recruiting kids, we can recruit academically-oriented kids as well as anybody in the country.

If you're a guy across the country, anywhere in the States, that's serious about academics, you're going to look at Cal and you're going to consider this University, and we're starting to get on those kids' radar and starting to recruit them. And there also happens to be a lot of good football players in that group, as well.

**Q. You've lost your top six receivers. How confident are you in the replacements and what can you tell us those kids?**

SONNY DYKES: Yeah, Melquise Stovall had a great spring. We lost a lot of guys that had made a lot of plays for us, but then we had some guys step in and pick up where they lost off. This is a different group. This group will be built much differently. We haven't had a lot of catch and run guys, guys that can catch a screen pass and turn it into a big play, and I think this group will be a little bit more inclined to do that.

We have to develop some of the guys that we've been able to develop. In other words, guys like Bryce Treggs who can run through the middle with speed and make plays. Guys like Kenny Lawler who had a big catching radius, and guys that were incredibly consistent like Stephen Anderson and Darius Powe and guys that made big plays like Trevor Davis. They're all tough to replace because they did that for us for a long time, but the group that we have is really, really talented. They're really talented, different skill set, but we're not quite sure what they can do when the lights come on.

We think it's going to be very good, but they still have to do it on Saturdays.

**Q. You go from splitting time with Jared Goff, and then last year making a transition, 12 tackles against Arizona State, gets an interception in a bowl game.**

SONNY DYKES: Yeah, Luke is going to play safety for us. He went through spring football, wanted to take another turn at football, went through spring and just felt like he could contribute more at safety. You've got to love a kid that does that. I mean, I can't say enough positive things about Luke and what he means to our program, just his unselfishness. He came in and played as a true freshman at quarterback, and not many guys move to safety after they play some as a true freshman at that position. He's done everything we've asked him to do and then some. He just wants to help us win. He wants to help his teammates, and again, he's the culture that we want in our program, a guy that works incredibly hard and a guy that's incredibly unselfish, and all he wants is for us to be successful. Whatever he can do to help, he's going to do it, and those are the kind of guys that you want to have in your program.

**Q. Would you bring him in as a cameo?**

SONNY DYKES: No, I don't think so, no. He's going to be a full-time safety.

**Q. You mentioned Jared in your opening remarks, but for people here in LA maybe who haven't gotten a chance to see him, what would you tell the Rams' fans here in LA?**

SONNY DYKES: Well, I can tell you this: He's going to work harder than anybody in the organization --

**Q. When you say work harder?**

SONNY DYKES: He's a consummate professional. He's 21 years old, but he was a professional for us at 18. What I mean by that is his approach, just his maturity and his approach. And you know, he's going to give it everything he has every day. He's incredibly talented. He can make the throws. He's got a very unique skill set. He maneuvers in the pocket and creates throwing lanes better than any quarterback I've ever seen, really at any level. He's very unique in that regard. I think that's why he was the first pick in the draft is because of that skill set.

You know, he's a highly intelligent guy. He's somebody that's going to handle success the same way he handles failure. He's going to continue to work hard every single day. His ceiling is very, very high, and the fact that he's 21 years old, he hasn't gotten close to reaching his ceiling yet, and I think the Rams got them a special player and somebody they can build around for many years to come.

**Q. At such a young age, do you think they'll be able to play him?**

SONNY DYKES: I think so. I mean, I think that's going to be a process. It's certainly going to be a process, and it's certainly a process that he's going to be able to maneuver through successfully, I think.

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