

Pac-12 Conference Football Media Days

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Herm Edwards Arizona State Sun Devils



Q. How excited are you about the season?

HERM EDWARDS: I think everyone's excited about the season, it's football season, regardless of what team you support or what school you go to. We know that football is upon us, and all of us start reporting to training camp for the National Football League. Most colleges report in August. That's the tradition we have in America. You realize that football season is about to start, and I think everyone's excited about it.

Q. What's the philosophy you want to instill in these young men?

HERM EDWARDS: Well, philosophy is real simple, is that we all have to honor the game on how we play it and how we coach it. We all stand on other's shoulders. No player, no coach is bigger than the game of football, and football is a vehicle. It's a vehicle for people to have a platform. You use your platform correctly in a positive way. Make sure when you say things and you do things, it's for the betterment of the game.

We are all keepers of this great game called football. You folks stand before us right now, and the fact that you're in the media, you get to cover this game. You make a living covering sports, and we have to realize as coaches and athletes we have to make sure that we play it right, we coach it right, give you information so you can write stories on the game.

The game of football is about moments and memories, and those are the things that you pass on to the people that follow you.

Q. Was there one thing that led you from the broadcast booth back to football here on the sidelines?

HERM EDWARDS: Well, for me, it needed to be the right fit. I had an inkling I was going to go back. I had opportunities before, never mentioned them. It needed to be the right place. In life, I think that I live by this motto to have a successful life, the first thing you have to realize is what is your purpose in life? Then from there, be committed to reaching your full potential at that purpose. Then once you find it, help others succeed.

When you think about football, you're able to do that,

really able to do that as a coach. I've never had a job. I've always been involved in football -- playing football, coaching football, talk about football. That's what I've done. That's what I do. It's not like it's something new to me.

I think sometimes when you step away from it people think, well, he's out of football. Out of football maybe on the sidelines, but mentally you're never out of football. It's like being a football fan. At what age do you stop watching it? You don't. You watch football as a young kid, it becomes what you like, and you watch it, and you teach your kids the game. That's what you do.

But when you step away from it, it's not like, well, he's out of football, he's out of coaching, he's not on the grass, all right, but you're still learning football, watching football. That's what you do.

Q. Why is Arizona State a good fit for you?

HERM EDWARDS: A couple reasons. One was the people that are above me that make decisions. Starts with the president, Dr. Crow. My relationship with Ray Anderson is well known. I never knew 20 years ago that he would be an AD. Never knew 20 years ago I'd be working on television.

Arizona State was one of my top two schools when I was getting recruited to figure out where I was going to go. Frank Kush recruited me. I tell people all the time one of the reasons I didn't go is because they couldn't play in a Rose Bowl. So I went to Cal. It's kind of a complete circle to me.

Q. Have you been amused by some of the actions to your hiring?

HERM EDWARDS: To be quite honest, you'll figure this out about me, I don't know what happens on the outside world. And I'm not saying that to belittle what you guys do. I was in your world. I was in people's homes every night, every morning.

I don't read it. I don't watch it. I am a football coach. When I'm not a football coach, I'm trying to be the best father I can be. That's what I concern myself with. I don't concern myself with the outside elements because the outside elements don't coach the team. I've got to coach coaches and players, and that's my

obligation. I've got to stay focused on that.

Q. How good is K'Neal Harry?

HERM EDWARDS: He has a special quality and one you need in anything in life that you do. He competes. He competes. You have to compete at whatever you do in life, whether you're a media person, a television personality, you have to compete every day.

When he walks on the field, whether it's in practice, whether it's in the weight room, whatever it may be, he competes. I saw that when I coached him in the Under Armour game, to be quite honest, in practice every day. I watched him and said this guy's going to be a good player.

Obviously, now that I've been around him even more, we've got a relationship, and that's what football is about, as well as it's about relationships with players and coaches.

I always go back to my head high school football coach. I still talk to him today. I still talk to Dick Vermeil. I mean, it's the relationships that you have with coaches that give you words of advice when things sometimes are tough. You know, that's what this game is all about.

But he's a special player. He really is. He's going to have a career at this. I mean, there's no doubt. He's going to play at the next level. It's just a matter of when he decides to go, but he's going to play at the next level. He has that talent.

Q. What's your reaction to being slotted sixth in the media poll?

HERM EDWARDS: Somebody's got to be first, somebody's got to be sixth. It's great. Doesn't matter to me. We don't go by polls. We've got our own aspirations. I told you at the press conference, we're trying to win a Pac-12 Championship. So whatever people write, they can write what they want. That's good. Hopefully no players are listening to that, because no coaches are listening to it.

We've got to play. We haven't played a game yet. It's hard, I get it. I was on this side of it. I can remember going in the studio saying, Coach, you've got to rank the divisions. I said, What, I've got to rank every division? Yeah, you've got to rank the divisions. I go, Really?

And I studied it. I actually like played football, like real football. Like, you know, played in some of those divisions and coached some of these players and did it. I was sitting there going, I've got to rank all these divisions? Really? How do you do that? This is hard.

So when your editor says you've got to rank the divisions, somebody's got to be first, somebody has to be last, somebody has to be second. I get it. At the end of the year, if you're right, you'll feel good. If you're wrong, you don't have to worry about it. Somebody says, oh, you beat the polls. I don't worry about that stuff.

Q. Is it motivational as a player?

HERM EDWARDS: I would hope that if you need someone else to motivate you, that's not good. I learned this a long time ago on how I grew up. You've got to be able to bet on yourself. You don't let other people set your expectations. Don't fall into that trap.

I tell players all the time. I've been good enough in my lifetime. Bet on me, because I know the work I'm going to put in and what it takes. If it doesn't turn out that way, I can live with that.

But I'm going to bet on me because that's all you can bet on. You can't bet on anybody else. I'm going to bet on me. I've done that my whole life. I sit here today and go, betting on me has kind of worked out okay, and I'm going to continue to do that.

I hope my players understand they've got to bet on themselves as well. You can't worry about what people say, and that's the world we live in. You don't get caught up in that. You don't let people set your expectations. Some of you folks standing here today, probably someone told you, you wouldn't be standing here today. Are you kidding me? And you overcame all that.

So you don't worry about that stuff. You only can live your life. You can't let people put expectations on you. When you live in a world like that, that's scary. Because this is America. You can dream big, you can accomplish things if you're willing to put in the work, and that's what you do.

That's what's so great about football. It's a fun deal because it's a journey that every team takes. We all take the same journey. At the end, you figure out where you end up.

Q. It looks like at spring practice, what aspect excites you the most going into fall camp?

HERM EDWARDS: Offensively, I mean, we're going to be driven by our offense. A lot of veterans -- there is a veteran presence over there. Obviously, you have a quarterback like Manny Wilkins, you have a receiver like N'Keal. You've got some offensive linemen with some veteran presence.

I think we've brought in a good core of running backs. So, you know, they get it. They know how to play over

there.

Defensively, I think we progressed. We have to continue to progress. With that being said, it's a new system for players to learn. So offense will have to carry us some. But I think defensively as we continue to play during the season, we'll get better, you know, and that's how it works.

Q. What is the type of student that you're looking to recruit or student-athlete that you're looking to recruit?

HERM EDWARDS: I'm real big on -- I shouldn't do this, but I'm going to do it. I'm at the point in my life that really --

Q. Nobody's listening anyway.

HERM EDWARDS: I hope they are listening. I don't say stuff where I worry about if people are listening or not. I just tell the truth. Obviously, you haven't spoken to me before. So this might be reference to you, too, because you're holding that mic.

There's two type of people in this world, there's the people that are interested, and there's people that are committed. I want committed players that want to be the best student-athlete that they can be, along with playing the game of football. That's the kind of person I want, okay? Is that okay for you? Good enough answer? Okay. Just making sure.

Q. What's been the most striking thing about the recruiting process that you've experienced in the first few months, being in the world? You obviously -- when you had the showcase games, those were an introduction, but what's it been like in the full field?

HERM EDWARDS: 70% of your day a lot of times is spent on recruiting. It's a year-round process. I never would have imagined, and I've been in college football before. I've been recruited as a college athlete, that the degree of recruiting now where it's gone, you're talking about 2020 kids. We already are looking at 2020 kids. I'm going, Really? 2020. How do you make a decision on a 2020 kid?

But when you watch tape, evaluate, think two years from now: You're going to be this, hope he's going to be that kind of player. If I get him as a coach, how can I help him? All those things.

That's been interesting and fun.

Q. Given your NFL background and preparing players for the NFL, does that give you a leg up when talking to some of these kids?

HERM EDWARDS: I think it helps you in the sense

when you say -- when you basically make a statement that we've got a pro program, there are a lot of coaches that have pro programs, they just don't say it. We actually said it.

I think more than anything else, and I say this humbly, when you've been in the National Football League for 30 years, if I'm talking to a player, I've got a feeling he's going to listen. I've just got that funny feeling for some reason. He would probably go: I think Coach might know what he's talking about on this one.

I don't know a whole lot. My box and my world is really simple. Kind of small. I don't get outside my lane. I just get in my box. I think I know a little bit about the game of football. Not a lot, just a little. But enough to warrant if I speak, they're going to listen. I hope, anyway.

Q. When it comes to important incidents, like Tyler Hilinski at Washington State last year, preventing things from happening, with all the experience you have being around the sport, what can be done differently or what is your take on that, given that you're now in college?

HERM EDWARDS: It's always about gathering information from events that have taken place, and when they're tragic like that, more information is required. I think the safety of players, in general, is on the uptake. It's advanced as far as -- look, I became a professional in 1977. The advancement of safety in football, period, from 1977 to right now, it's just unimaginable how far it's come.

It will continue to grow. I think with coaches being more aware, with the physicians being more aware, with players themselves being more aware that I don't have to act like I'm a tough guy all the time; if something is ailing me, I actually can say something is wrong and I'm okay.

I just think the more we make players aware the safety of the game is critical, because it's about the game, it's about the protection of the players. And I think it has really taken -- from the '70s to right now, the era that I played in, it has advanced and helped the game tremendously.

Q. You're used to putting out an injury report from the NFL.

HERM EDWARDS: Yeah.

Q. They don't require that in college football, but it's something that's been discussed. With your experience having dealt with that, how would you feel? Do you like this better?

HERM EDWARDS: I think as a former player, you like

to look at the injury report of your opponent because if a guy had a sore shoulder and he was going to play, guess what? You're going to ask him does his shoulder hurt? No, you're going to hit him on the shoulder, right? So I think as good as we want to be forthright with letting know people's injuries, you kind of put the player in a bad position if he's going to play, right?

So if we're trying to protect the players on one side of it, if he doesn't play, that's one thing. But what if he does? Look at it that way. Because me being an opponent, when I play corner, I looked on that list. I was in there Tuesday looking at the list. Falcons, who we got? Oh, really? And that's what you do.

That's human nature, right? So I would just be careful of -- and I know the other reason, and I'm not going to get into the other reason. Stay away from that one. It's not for me to comment. You guys can figure that one out.

Q. What's your biggest concern going into the start of practice?

HERM EDWARDS: My biggest concern, I think, is getting the guys that have just come in, the new players, the tempo of practice. They haven't felt that yet. You can already tell they don't understand the tempo of just running with those guys and lifting. It was kind of shocking. Because when you're talking to them, yeah, Coach, I've been running and I've been lifting.

And I'm chuckling, yeah, just like a rookie coming into the NFL. Yeah, I've been working, then all of a sudden the first day you go, oh, they're a little bit different. So I just think getting those guys through the first couple days as you guys know and you guys are local, we're not going to have the ability to go to Camp T after Camp Kush.

So with that being said, and I don't know if you know yet, you might as well know. I'm telling you, we're practicing ton, but we are going to go to Camp Kush. We're going to travel up there on a Wednesday. We're going to go through the ceremonies of going up there and paying tribute to one of the greatest college football coaches that's ever coached in Frank Kush, and we're going to take the team up there and do a little something that Wednesday.

So we're going to make sure these young guys understand the history and legacy of going up there. I think that's important. So we're still going to do that. But we're going to practice tonight. Just for the day. Maybe have a walk-through, a little meeting or something, have them walk the hill, do a little deal. I think that's good. Want to keep that alive.

Q. Manny Wilkins has gone through a different coordinator the past year. Does that help him accelerate what you guys are trying to do as a leader?

HERM EDWARDS: Well, I think what helps him as well is he's been able to adjust, but also Rob Likens keeping a lot of the offense in order. That's why, to be quite honest, when I took the job, I knew Billy was eventually going to get an offer to be a head coach. We discussed that.

I kind of go back with Coach Likens when he was at Cal. It's kind of ironic when I played up in American Century in the golf tournament, and played with Jared Goff. So about the fourth hole, we get Likens on the phone. What are you doing? Said, We're playing golf. So it was me and Jared talking about Coach Likens, and he was asking, Coach, why did you hire him? I said, Well, I've watched him from afar. And I thought for Manny's sake and the offense's sake, we'll do some things a little different, but for the most part, it's Manny's offense, and it should be. He's worthy of that. He's been the quarterback. So you didn't want to disrupt that.

So I think that was important. I was fortunate enough that he would take the job.

Q. Where is Manny Wilkins at from a leadership standpoint?

HERM EDWARDS: Continual growing. A lot of these guys on the committee have never been asked to do that, and I think it's good for them. They've got to do that. They've got to get out of their comfort zone. Most young people in today's world, they want to be liked. It's almost like on that phone, they want their likes. They want to be respected. Sometimes you've got to fight across stream to be respected. So I think they're learning that, and they've done a pretty good job.

Q. Are all of the newcomers qualified and good to go?

HERM EDWARDS: Yes, as far as I know, as of today. It's a good group. We're excited about, as we talked about in the spring, we're going to get some more guys to compete. A couple of them right away, when they were running with the guys, they kind of stood out, and a couple of the guys that were already on the team said, Coach, who are those guys? I said, Hmm, kind of like those guys, huh? He said, They look a little different, Coach. I said, Well, that's kind of what we're trying to do, get some different guys in here. They caught the attention of a couple of them's eyes already.

Q. Who are those guys?

HERM EDWARDS: I'm not going to mention their

names.

Q. What did you know about the Pac-12 when you took the job? What have you learned just in studying over the summer?

HERM EDWARDS: Well, I knew a lot about it. I'm a West Coast guy. I'm always -- I played in the Pac-8. So this is who I am. I'm a West Coast guy, followed the Pac-12 when I was young. It was the Pac-8, I played in it. Very competitive in the sense, and I said it, Stanford the last six years won the conference four times. They've been very consistent.

When you look at the overall view of the South and the North, Stanford in the last three years have won 21 games. Washington, Washington State, 19. I believe Utah has won 14, we've won 12 in conference play. So that kind of shows you where it's at. There are a couple of teams 21-19 that are pretty good, three years.

So you want to aspire to be one of those teams. How do you do that? So I think that's kind of a little bit of the vision that when I look at those teams -- because when you've been in football your whole life, you study your conference. You study the division you're in. Well, I studied the conference. And you go: What makes this conference? Big, athletic people, right? Throw the ball around a lot, right? Okay? Lot of good quarterbacks.

You're talking 30-plus players got drafted out of this conference, and I understand the talent. I live on the West Coast. I know where all these kids are going. You say to yourself: How do you build your team in that image to be competitive consistently in the Pac-12?

I think that's the work we have. That's work in progress. But I think we've done a nice job of starting it. We have a good group of players that have played in a conference. They know how to win in a conference, so that's exciting. You play at night some and you don't get the recognition you'd like on the East Coast because people are going to bed. I get that part.

If you want to watch skilled athletes at all positions, the Pac-12 kind of brings that. It really, really does. So that's exciting for me to be a part of it.

Q. As a former cornerback, do you like what you saw from Chase Lucas and Kobe Williams this spring?

HERM EDWARDS: I do. And we've got a couple of young ones that are starting to develop. We will stress the corners in our system. They're going to get stressed because I just think the way college football is played now, there's a couple things you have to realize.

You're not going to stop people from gaining yards. It's impossible.

And I say that when I went to Alabama and I watched some of these great defenses with six or seven NFL players, they don't stop people. How they stop them is really simple. They get them in bad downs. They play really good in the red zone. You take the ball away, make them one dimensional.

Even though we're spread offenses and all that, you cannot allow people to run the football on you. You just can't do that. Then the one that always holds up in defense is you've got to knock the quarterback down. I mean, a lot. You've got to hit him. You've got to hit the guy. You've got to storm the castle and hit the guy.

You've got to knock him down. When you knock him down, the game changes. So you've got to be able to do that. I think if we can do that enough, then you've got a chance.

Q. I know you played for Dick Vermeil and coach Claude Gilbert was a great coach as well.

HERM EDWARDS: You got that right.

Q. Is he a great resource for you? How much do you still talk to Coach Vermeil or coach Gilbert.

HERM EDWARDS: I haven't talked to Claude in quite some time. And Claude was my coach at San Diego State. He took over and offered me my first job at San Jose State. Gave me my first coaching job. I'm indebted to that man. A great football coach. Learned a lot from him.

And Dick's like my second dad. My father died my first year in the league, and Dick became kind of like my dad. I've known the man since I was 17 years old. He still calls me once a month, It's Coach. And I call him Coach. Coach, how you doing? I'm doing good, Coach. And we have a nice little conversation.

He's one of the best. I mean, he is a great human being and a fabulous football coach. It's kind of ironic. He sat out a little longer than I did and came back. I can remember I was calling him on the phone when I was coaching, said, Coach, you've got to go back, you've got to go back. He goes back. When I came back, one of the first calls I get, right? Oh, I'm glad you're going back. You've got to go back. He's all excited. He's my guy. Coach Vermeil is my guy.