

PAC-12 Men's Basketball Media Day

Tuesday, October 8 2019

Mick Cronin

UCLA Bruins

MICK CRONIN: Well, first of all, I want to say hello to everybody. It's obviously my first Pac-12 media day. I'd rather be seen than not, so it's great to be here.

My transition to Los Angeles has been extremely smooth. We're still undefeated (laughter). All the pressure right now is on Dave Roberts tomorrow with the Dodgers.

But the guys have been working really hard. I appreciate our players have embraced our program and my staff, and all 10 of the returning players stayed, both our recruits honored their initial commitments to UCLA, so my biggest recruiting job has been our current players. I'm a big believer in that. I think you have to invest your time and energy in your current guys.

For the last five months have been trying to get to know these guys, get them comfortable with my coaching style and my coaching staff and what we're trying to stand for is a basketball program, and remind myself every day to be patient. They're not used to the way we do things or how we do things, let alone the way I deliver my message. So it's a daily -- every day we go through something daily that's extremely new to our guys. Just trying to remind myself to stay patient with that and trying to keep things moving forward, and looking forward to getting started here soon. I think we're about a month away from opening night.

With that, I'm sure you guys got some questions.

Q. A week ago David Singleton was not cleared for contact. Has there been any development there?

MICK CRONIN: David is still the same. Nothing has changed with him. So he's still progressing. I think he's at a point where they're trying to get him comfortable with the movements of running and jumping and getting his muscles all firing back to make sure that he's -- I don't want to get too technical with you, but basically he's running and jumping like he was before he broke his foot, before he goes full speed against his teammates because if he's running funny, jumping funny, protecting his foot and he's out there full speed, he could reinjure it. So right now we are trying to get his mechanics back to normal.



Q. The hope is he'll be okay for --

MICK CRONIN: Well, I hope so. He'll make us a better team. Did he lead our league in three-point percentage last year? He's up there pretty high. He's a good kid. He plays really hard. And when you're in my situation, I think coaching becomes a lot more fulfilling when you make it about the players, so you don't want him to have to have a season abbreviated. Somebody is always going to play if he can't, but for him, for his sake, hopefully he can get back sooner than later.

Q. What's the adjustment like going to LA just in terms of housing prices, traffic, income tax, all the new stuff you have to get used to?

MICK CRONIN: Well, first of all, my father worked for the Atlanta Braves for 30 years, and one of the architects of the 14 straight Western Division titles, a guy named Paul Snyder. He's a legend in scouting. He said, if you're paying taxes, be thankful. There's a -- so I'm thankful. I'm one of those.

But the sticker shock is real. (Laughter). Took me a few months. Sticker shock was very real, although I have a lot of close friends in Los Angeles. Part of my move was my comfort level with Southern California and how many friends I have in the area. So that part of it was smooth.

But yeah, actually sticker shock is tough. But for me, the biggest transition is getting better and better by the day, getting my daughter acclimated. She's in her school. Campbell Hall is a great place, she's on the volleyball team right now, so things are going well in school. And I just had, I think, six 13-year-olds at my house Saturday night, and me. I made it. Let's just say that I made it through. Thank goodness for pizza delivery.

Q. What ultimately tipped the scales for you to make the move from Cincinnati to UCLA?

MICK CRONIN: Well, first of all, the time -- there's never a good time to leave. I thought that -- where I'm at in my career, if I was going to make a move, it would need to be in the age range that I'm at. But for me, it was -- I mentioned my daughter, her life, opportunities for her. You know, I'm not a one-man band. There's obviously a lot of opportunities for people in Los Angeles, from being in -- from the school she was at in Cincinnati, being in a great school.

But hey, professionally if you're going to make a move, you get a chance to sit in the chair that John Wooden once sat in, and it's an unbelievable opportunity. Our tradition and our history, ex-Bruins or however you want to say it, former Bruin players are second to none. Not many people have the collection of guys that played at their school that we have, whether it's guys -- the 15 guys now I believe in the NBA on the roster last year or all the guys in the Hall of Fame. I think we had nine Hall-of-Famers. I mean, it's crazy when you really think about it.

And you get a chance to recruit the best players and the best student-athletes. I think -- UCLA affords you the opportunity to try to recruit the best of the best.

Q. What would you like to see success-wise that you were able to do at Cincinnati translate to UCLA?

MICK CRONIN: Well, I think you've got -- when you look at a program, are you maximizing the results, because expectations are commensurate with support. Obviously the programs are different, but we've won a lot. That's what I would like to see translate. We've won a lot, now I'd like to obviously win it all.

I think there's different ways you can win it all. I think in coaching, my thing to try to win it all is any time you can have a win where you're helping young people achieve their dreams, that's the number one way to win it all, and you can be a positive influence along with their parents and those around them to get them on the path to life to where they can become who they were destined to become. Obviously winning it all on the basketball court would be wonderful. As a competitor what I've poured my whole adult life into, to try to have the opportunity to recruit some of the best student-athletes and basketball players. To have that chance to really win it all some day at UCLA, that was a big draw, as well.

Q. In recent years UCLA has been known as NBAU. What identity do you want the UCLA Bruins to have?

MICK CRONIN: I would love for us to -- I would love for all recruits to believe that they're going to be an NBA player if they come to UCLA, and not recent -- you meant recent being the last 60, right? Because you have over 100 something former northbound players that played at UCLA.

But I think at the same time you want to be synonymous with winning. That's important. Not just a stopover on the way to professional basketball. You want to try to leave a mark. You're coming to win. If you're coming to UCLA, you obviously have hopes of

playing professional basketball because you're running towards the light. I mean, the expectations are always high at UCLA.

So I think the type of guys you're going to get are people that do expect to be at the highest level of college basketball or they wouldn't come to Westwood.

You obviously want to continue to be -- I think we were tied last year with somebody else with the most players in the NBA on the roster last year, so we'd love to continue that and make sure that we continue to develop pros. That's important. That helps winning. The more future NBA players you have, the more you're going to win.

Q. If this California bill -- it's law now, so I guess it is going to happen --

MICK CRONIN: Well, a law in '23, I guess.

Q. Right. But if it's just in California and the NCAA doesn't do anything with it, is that going to be a good thing for you because you can use it as a recruiting tool?

MICK CRONIN: No, I -- first of all, I wouldn't think that the NCAA would let us let our student-athletes use their name, image and likeness and compete against other institutions that did not allow that. So you know, to give you the big broad answer on that, I think by hopefully even way before '23 -- we've made a lot of progress in college athletics, okay, over the last 10 years as far as student-athlete welfare. The NCAA has really tried to be progressive with it. The autonomy of the Power Five, whether we're sitting around on a recruiting visit and thinking about the unlimited meals now and how far we've come in different areas. I think we need to just make sure with this bill we continue to do the same thing.

That's my opinion. I don't think we should dig our feet in the sand. I think we should find a way to make it all work for everybody's benefit. That would be for Olympic sports, as well. You don't want it to hurt them, the outcome of this. That's the last thing we would all want because college athletics, obviously I've dedicated my life to it, so not only just -- like Doug Martin is the golf coach at Cincinnati is one of my close friends. You wouldn't want to see his team go by the wayside because money is going to men's basketball.

So I have a lot of friends in Olympic sports. At UCLA we have some of the best Olympic sports in the country and multiple National Championships. So you don't want the outcome to hurt them. But at the same time you have to deal with reality. Times have changed immensely. The money divide has grown immensely, and I think we need to make sure that we're looking

forward to a solution.

And I think it'll happen. I'm not real -- really like I'm not -- my long answer, I'm not that concerned about it. I think everybody is going to have to deal with it. As you see, it's popping up everywhere in politics, and name, image and likeness to me is something that is something you should own yourself. That's just how I feel about it.

Q. You bring a tremendous defensive pedigree to the Pac-12 Conference. It's a little bit different than most hires we've seen. We now have coach Hopkins and coach Altman have gone to a more defensive style, but you're also taking over a very offensive-heavy roster. How does that mesh look like for the upcoming year and for future years?

MICK CRONIN: Well, I think you've got to be good on offense, defense, and you've got to play great situational basketball if you're going to try to win. When Sean came from Xavier, obviously his teams play hard, they defend. Ben Howland did it forever. I think Coach Altman has always been a great coach. I would call coach -- having watched film this summer, Coach Boyle's teams are tough. I know Coach Krystkowiak, I kid him every time he see him he's tan. Pretty tough guy.

I think some of this stuff gets all blown out of proportion. We had some great offensive teams at Cincinnati. Two years ago we led the nation in scoring margin. So people tend to focus on the one hot take that it is. If you're going to win a conference like the Pac-12, you're going to have to be good in a lot of areas.

The old adage, if you don't defend, you can't win. Well, you'd better be able to score, too. It's not baseball, no shutouts, right, you've got to be able to get the ball in the basket, as well.

Yeah, I don't think it would be fair to say that any connotation about the West Coast not having any toughness. I never bought into that in the first place. I think that's more of a fallacy than a fact. I don't think it'll be much different.

Now, for my players, changing coaches, changing styles is very different. Whatever it may be, offense, defense, you name it. Just even the way we practice, like I said earlier, the way I deliver my message, what we expect of those guys day-to-day. That's my focus, just the adjustment of getting those guys where we're all on the same page. I'm just a big believer in you have to all be on the same page to have success. But obviously I do believe -- it's hard to win if you're easily scored upon because if you go play Dana Altman's

team, they're not going to let you score easy, so you'd better not let them score easy. When you go on the road, it's hard to score the basketball against good teams and good coaches.

Q. Can you talk a little bit about Shareef O'Neal? I watched him in the summer play in the Drew League along with two of your freshmen, Jaime and Jake, and they all competed very high with a bunch of NBA players and international players. Can we dispel the rumors right now -- not rumors, but people are always asking about Shareef's health. I think he looked great.

MICK CRONIN: Yeah, well, I'm not going to comment on summer leagues that I could probably score 25 in.

Q. I don't know, it's getting better every year.

MICK CRONIN: We'll leave it at that. But I saw Shareef -- somebody showed me a highlight and the guy guarding him looked like he had just served me lunch.

But Shareef is a great kid. It's unbelievable -- just to speak about him for a second, he's just a tremendous kid. He's extremely humble, and it's hard to get upset with him because he listens at all times and he hustles at all times, and he's learning every day. And he's like a sponge. He wants to learn. He believes -- he's been raised by obviously his mother and father, both disciplined people. So they believe in teaching their kids to listen.

So it's easy for me. They've done their job. So that's not always the case. Sometimes you've got to do two jobs. Shareef is unbelievable, and his humility is great. I've got to probably get him to play a little meaner. He's too nice of a guy at times. You know, it's getting him out of his shell that's going to be important as a person because if you've interviewed him, you see how quiet of a guy, how good of a guy he is.

But we've got two great -- with Tyger as a freshman, I'm talking eligibility-wise, Shareef, and then Jaime Jaquez and Jake Kyman, both really good players.

Q. Jake likes to shoot the three a lot.

MICK CRONIN: No, I like when Jake shoots the three because it usually goes in, and Jaime is an excellent shooter, and I love Jaime's toughness, but I wanted him at Cincinnati bad.

So very excited about -- we've got good young players. People keep talking about recruiting. We've got some guys that I think are going to impress you when we get them up to speed on what it takes to play at this level. So I'm really high on some of our younger players.

Q. And Shareef is very close to Josh Christopher.

MICK CRONIN: Well, I can't comment on any recruiting, so I've got to stop you there before you get me in trouble. Don't get me in trouble, this is Media Day.

Q. How has the process been with building relationships with your players in your initial stages at UCLA, and how do you think getting up to speed really quickly with the guys you have will lead to success throughout the year?

MICK CRONIN: Well, I think that's the most important thing is building your relationship with guys, and for me it's just being honest and direct about who I am, what I believe is important, what I think they should believe is important. I think a lot of young people, they worry about things that don't matter. I have a daughter, so I'm well aware of that. They worry about what people say about them. They worry about how many people like their things on social media, and things that don't matter.

You know, I'm a big believer in just coming right at these guys and saying, here's what we're going to be about, and here's what you need to be about to be a successful basketball player, to be successful in the world. I think that's -- it goes hand in hand on and off the floor. So I'm just straightforward with the guys. They see that I mean what I say, and I say what I mean, and they've got to get used to that.

The one thing, I'm not throwing curve balls. I don't have a lot of tricks. I don't have a doghouse. I don't even have a dog. If I don't like it, I'm going to tell you. You need to listen, and then two plays later you can't be over there -- you've got to get back in the game. So I think you've got to create men that can deal -- part of our job is to create young men that can deal with things and move on and not hang their heads. I think that's the biggest part of what I've been trying to do for the last five months with these guys, and I think that's the biggest key to us having a successful season this year.