

July 14, 2016



An Interview With:

## MARK HELFRICH

MARK HELFRICH: Very excited to be here with Royce Freeman and Johnny Reagan. Johnny Reagan is a native Oregonian linebacker, Royce Freeman, an Inland Empire, Southern Californian, two great representatives as students, as young men, and really good football players, and happy that they're with us today.

Don't have a long opening statement, we've had a very eventful off-season, culminating last week with Devon Allen. I know Devon Allen will be a topic of conversation and just a great story, a guy that I remember sitting in his living room in the recruiting process talking about -- we have a lot of very unrealistic discussions in recruiting sometimes. And just the distinct viable, tangible possibility of playing in the NFL and participating in the Olympic Games was something, from day one, the guy had a plan and then a willingness and a desire to see it through has just been unbelievable. And to see his family react and his teammates and his coaches and everybody crying and excited for him, the guy has never lost a big race.

So being the second fastest guy in the world in that discipline is exciting for all of us. It is also the biggest excuse and the longest excuse, the most eventful excuse, to miss fall camp I've ever seen, and we'll give him a couple days off. He and our strength coach Jim Radcliffe obviously had a good excuse, and we've already made adjustments for that.

As far as his long-term future, it's to be determined. His focus and our focus is him winning the gold medal, and we'll figure it out from there.

Had some coaching changes, Brady Hoke obviously taking over our defense, it's been a great fit from a staff chemistry standpoint, the players and the buy-in, and how that went this spring.

Obviously no tangible results on the field yet, but very excited about how that's going.

I'll be happy to take your questions in regard to that.

Quarterback position is up for grabs. We had a three-man race early in the spring, and that will continue into fall camp. This summer is pivotal for those guys as far as developing within our offense and executing at a high level, and get it to Royce Freeman and one of the other talented backs. Very excited about our depth at wide receiver, our depth at tight end, our depth at tailback, and then quarterback and the remaining part of the offensive line is up for grabs.

On the defensive side of the ball, just the freshness and the newness, I think that the scheme brought in was very exciting for our guys, as competitively, position changes, all those things that went along with that, and that will continue into fall camp.

With that, be happy to take questions.

**Q. Do you think it helped David Yost that he did come into a situation as like a fourth-year starter, the fact that everyone is sort of new?**

MARK HELFRICH: I think it did, yeah, and we actually -- I know it did, because having that conversation with him, it's kind of good and bad, you know, of -- it would be nice to just look over to an experienced guy and go, hey, is that what we call this or is that our adjustment? But I think he kind of is a sponge. He learns things very well, and his biggest thing is how he then directs that to each individual and gets to know how they learn, how they respond, how they think. And that's such a big deal at quarterback is you have to be totally confident in everything you're doing and then have it completely fail and then play the next play with that total blind confidence again.

He did a great job, I think, too, of kind of questioning a lot of things that we do and why we do it and how we do it, which I think validated a

M. Helfrich - 7.14.16.doc

1

bunch of things that we do and why we do them, and also tweaked a few things and polished a few things that we changed a little bit.

**Q. Does he have a different kind of perspective after working with wide receivers?**

MARK HELFRICH: No, he's a quarterback guy, and I think that's always what he wanted to do and wanted to be, and I think that probably helped. I think it helps to coach wideouts from a quarterback's perspective a lot more than it helps to coach quarterbacks from a wideouts perspective, so that probably helped a little bit more that way. Any time you're expanding your expertise and expanding your knowledge, it's going to help you as a coach. Very sharp guy.

**Q. How long would you be willing to let the quarterback competition go into the regular season? Is that something you've contemplated at all?**

MARK HELFRICH: It's got to happen. It can't be something where you're 52.7 percent of the vote and somebody else is -- you don't want those little tiny nuances. You want it to be obvious and glaring and everybody kind of looks at each other and goes, yeah. Like last year was a unanimous vote. No question about that.

It can't be fake. It can't be artificial, staged, any of those type of descriptors. It's just got to happen. And right now is the time where a lot of that happens for those guys, guys that go to work and re-learn their terminology, or in some guys' case, learn it for the first time, and then hit the ground running in fall camp.

Our deal is we have to put them in their best kind of avenue of our offense, within our offense, to succeed.

**Q. How would you size up the two quarterbacks at this point?**

MARK HELFRICH: It's funny, we have three guys in the spring that were all very similar and completely different, a guy in Dakota that had played a lot of college football, different plays, all those things, but completely inexperienced in our system, and you could see those wheels turning of, okay, we called that red and we called that water or whatever it is. And those gears stuck a few times. Sometimes they're all trying to win the job with their next throw, and that's the worst kind of perspective you can take into it.

I think Travis Jonsen was there. He was there for a year but didn't -- he couldn't practice. He was physically unable to practice, and so he

was there. He knows the terminology, but he hasn't actually done it, so there was that learning curve.

And then Terry Wilson hopped off the plane and started practice. It was kind of a hit the ground running type of moment for him.

Again, this summer will be big for all those guys just from a confidence standpoint, and they will all be completely different guys in fall camp, completely different.

**Q. Was Jonsen limited by injuries? Is that what you meant?**

MARK HELFRICH: Yeah, yeah.

**Q. Can you tease us on any uniform changes this year?**

MARK HELFRICH: I will not tease you. Yes, there are uniform changes. Yes, there's some that are expansive, some that are not. They're all very cool. We won't look as good as Ted Miller looks right now, but we'll all try.

**Q. From a fan's perspective how will the defense be different under Brady Hoke?**

MARK HELFRICH: Well, from a fan's perspective, hopefully they're playing with total confidence, passion, speed, commitment to our scheme. Just for whatever reason, that never totally 100 percent clicked last year. We had some great moments, had some great -- how we stood up at the end of a few games and overcame some things. But I thought that was the biggest thing coming in is just how -- with him coming in is how quickly that took place surprised me, just of the staff 100 percent buying into it, the team, the players totally buying into it was good. I think it was -- I think it helped in a way that we lost a few players. That's one of those double-edged swords. We would have found a home for DeForest Buckner, don't get me wrong. But the newness, the freshness, the competitiveness that they approached it with was awesome, and now we have to have some success and see how we handle that, and we have to have a little test here and there to see how we handle some adversity and go forward.

**Q. How do you feel about your offensive line right now? There's been a lot of talk about that group being really special potentially this year.**

MARK HELFRICH: I think our offensive line is a little bit like our receiving corps was two years ago when nobody knew who anybody was but we were excited. It's kind of that -- you expect this guy to become, whoever, Devon Allen or Darren Carrington or Dwayne Stanford, and that's kind of the same way. We have two guys that are pretty established that have played a lot, and then we have a bunch of guys that haven't played at all, at all, and we have a few guys in between. I think Steve Greatwood always did a great job of having those guys trained to play multiple positions. We know that's going to be tested, unfortunately, with the position they play in the game of football. We're going to need seven, eight, nine of them to show up and play great, and we expect them to.

**Q. Did the Utah game last year help your program in any sense, responding to that?**

MARK HELFRICH: I've been asked 97 times about the Utah game, and I'm trying to forget it with every question. No, it was one of those things. It was 21-21, I think, and Travis went on that long run, and it was a one-man breakdown. From there they played perfectly and we -- it snowballed on us. I think the key to our season going forward last year was everybody -- we sat in the same room and we sat there and watched the same film, the same play, I can't remember, maybe seven or eight plays before that, the exact same offensive play, the exact same defensive call, and it was a two-yard loss, and just that can't -- one mistake is one mistake. It's kind of like playing quarterback and you're thinking about the three interceptions you threw last week going into the next game. That doesn't help you. Knowing why you did it and not to do it again, that helps you a ton, but you have to lean forward and go, and we didn't for whatever reason, and that starts with me.

But I think our guys, our staff did a great job of ending that and doing what we did toward the latter part of the season.

**Q. Some of the FCS coaches I've talked to said they weren't worried about whether Dakota was good enough to play at the Pac-12 level, they were just worried about how physical he played at the FCS level, whether that would translate when you got bigger and faster players. Are you guys going to try to rein that in at all with him?**

MARK HELFRICH: That's one of those things you can't really do. It's kind of like somebody asked me earlier, how many carries do

you want to give Royce Freeman? As many as we possibly can without him ever losing a step. It's kind of like running your quarterback, what's the magic number, until he gets hurt, and then everybody yells at you. And that's always -- you're playing that part of it. You're playing his natural instinct. In our spring ball, our quarterback is not live, so that almost inhibits the offense a little bit and certainly inhibits their natural tendency to maybe take off running or to make something that isn't there. They might break a tackle and I'm probably blowing the whistle and giving the defense the benefit of the doubt. So that's always a little -- it's more of a psychological thing for the quarterback than anything else.

**Q. He's a lot more of a pure runner than what you guys have had in the past. Obviously Marcus could take off with it, but he was more of a traditional quarterback. Is that kind of how you guys assess Dakota, as well?**

MARK HELFRICH: Yeah, somewhere in between. I mean, he's obviously -- the biggest thing is he just hasn't played a lot in our system, and so seeing that again in fall camp, I anticipate not being able to recognize all three of those guys when we first go out there. I think they'll be three completely better, different dynamic guys than in spring ball because there's not that hesitation of uncertainty, of translation, of whatever it is. They're just going. So I'm very much looking forward to that.

**Q. You mentioned DeForest Buckner before. What kind of a pro do you think he's going to be?**

MARK HELFRICH: Well, he's a phenomenal player. I mean, I'm not a professional football coach or executive, but he's a stud. I mean, he's just a highly competitive guy. He's a guy that is really -- he was playing one-armed last year and played phenomenally well. He and Coach Aiken did a lot of work on his craft, just to overcome his wrist and his arm, and he never -- I mean, the guy never missed a rep, never missed a rep at practice. We had to physically remove him from being a scout team special teams player.

So desire and leadership and all those things, if that matters in the NFL, which I think it does, along with making some plays, I think he'll be fine.

**Q. Bringing Brady to oversee the defense but you kept one of the assistant staff to maintain that continuity, what went into that decision to keep some degree of familiarity rather than making a complete wholesale change on defense?**

MARK HELFRICH: I think a lot of things. A lot of factors. I think as I said at the time, Don Pelham is a part of the solution. He's a part of why Oregon football and the University of Oregon athletic program is where it is today because of not only DP but guys like him, Steve Greatwood, Gary Campbell, Jim Radcliffe, guys that have been there for 28 plus years, every single one of them. And he's a great man, and that's -- what happened last year, that's my fault. It's not his fault. How we can address that going forward? I knew he would be great about it and professional and all those things, but what he did blew me away. Just, again, as far as his passion to sell Brady Hoke on the recruiting trail was -- I mean, there needs to be a sociological study done on how great that was.

And again, those guys are all pros. They've all kind of known each other in some form or fashion. And just the type of guy Brady is, he can show up anywhere and he'll have 10 lifelong friends in a half hour, and he's just got that charisma about him, and I think our players have glommed on to that, as well.

**Q. It's been a long time since Oregon has not been picked to win the Pac-12 or be second in the north. I know you guys block out the outside noise, the media polls and stuff like that don't matter. But will it play a part in motivation for this team that people are questioning them maybe?**

MARK HELFRICH: No, I was saying earlier, I don't think we've ever mentioned the BCS, I don't think we've ever mentioned the College Football Playoff. I don't think we've ever mentioned any poll. No offense, but it just doesn't happen.

I think inevitably with technology and questions and all that stuff that it's going to seep into them, and if they use that as motivation, great. But I've been -- since my first day at Oregon, the first game at Oregon against Boise State, everybody wrote us off for dead back then and have done it every single year, every single recruiting cycle, every single spring since then. That's great. We can't focus on that. We can't live that way.

We have to worry about making sure that we're watching enough film to come out and have

a great fall camp. We're going to class every single day with a great attitude, to have a great summer, all those things that really matter. What the media voted, that's not one of those things that we control or really matters.

**Q. What do you feel like is the biggest question you have in fall camp with this team?**

MARK HELFRICH: Well, I think certainly quarterback is the most pressing from an offensive standpoint. I'm excited about those guys. I think it's certainly -- getting that decided will happen, and getting that -- decided isn't the right word, having that play out is an important thing.

It's not as vital as I think some systems or some -- how we go about things, we don't have the look them in the eye in the huddle moment. We don't do that. So that's where you have a guy like Royce or Charles Nelson that can lead the charge in terms of work ethic and practice and how we train, those guys can lead that, and the quarterback doesn't have to be that guy all the time. It can be. With Marcus it was. Last year it wasn't. A few years before that it wasn't. It's just kind of a byproduct of how we do it.

And then the front seven on defense, we've got a bunch of moving parts to define roles of outside guy, inside guy, what percentage of plays, nickel, linebacker, outside linebacker, all those fits of where guys end up at what percentage, that's kind of part of the exciting thing in fall camp, too, having that play out.

**Q. (Inaudible.)**

MARK HELFRICH: Yeah, my wife Megan -- that's why I got a job at Oregon is Mike Bellotti, UC Davis, right, I think that was my one saving grace is I had an affinity for maybe a UC Davis grad. But you look back, Nick Aliotti, Mike Bellotti, there's 75,000, Chris Peterson, a million UC Davis grads in football.

**Q. You were talking about how all the quarterbacks are not going to be anything in the fall like they were in the spring. Did you go into the spring realizing that you would handicap the race so much? Did you think you'd be able to take much away from the race?**

MARK HELFRICH: I didn't just because of their experience, their relative experience levels and how they -- Terry Wilson literally steps off the

plane and is practicing the next day. You're not going to -- that guy is not going to have as much of a chance maybe as the other guys initially. And yes, that's absolutely weighed in, because you also have to sacrifice. Hey, we're not going to make some plays, but we're going to find out how this guy reacts to throwing a pick, how he reacts to -- a lot of times in spring ball, you're in there with the threes and fours and whoever else and you've got to make it go. And how do you lead that, how do you capture that group, how do you respond? Do you take ownership in it or do you blame the left guard for whiffing?

All those things you're just kind of analyzing, taking it in. We didn't anticipate a great separation, and there wasn't a great separation, and that's fine.

**Q. I know every situation is different. Rich Rod was talking about changing defensive coordinators, defensive coaches. He said he felt like he couldn't just put a Band-Aid on it, that he just felt like he had to blow the whole thing up. What prompted you to make a change at the defensive coordinator position and what do you hope to get out of it?**

MARK HELFRICH: Production. Yeah, I think you must not have been here a few minutes ago. I had a similar question asked. But I think just the dynamic of our defensive staff and who those guys are, what those guys bring to the table was complemented very, very well by Brady's leadership and charisma and all the things that he brings to the table.

I think certainly knowing what they do defensively at Arizona and what Marcel Yates has done -- who I actually coached when I was at Boise State, so I'm getting old -- but knowing what they do, they're complete opposites, polar, polar opposites in terms of schematic nature, coverages are different, all those things. What we're doing from a scheme standpoint is significantly different but not drastically different, and then the rest of it is getting guys to play hard, play smart, play fast, and get guys on the ground.

**Q. How much of it is just energy, enthusiasm, changing the vibe versus the scheme?**

MARK HELFRICH: That's a great question. Yeah, I mean, that's the -- whether it's scheme or talent or -- all those things, development. Yes is the answer, and I think it's a sliding scale of what is more at varying stages of players and coaches' development, and years are

totally different. Our guys learned the scheme very well in the spring, and again, they'll be different in the fall, as well, stepping out there for the -- whatever it is, the 16th time doing something.

**Q. How much have you followed Devon Allen's journey and how cool is it to watch it?**

MARK HELFRICH: Oh, it's awesome. It's awesome. I was tearing up that night, and I get misty every time I sit down and think about it for a while because he's just such a good dude, first of all, great family, great representative of who he is, our University, and now our country, to be represented by that kid, that's a lot of good things happening.

**Q. How much have you been in communication with him and his family, whatever, about that journey, and of course about coming back?**

MARK HELFRICH: Yeah, you know, our plan right now is go win a gold medal. He's focused on the 110 high hurdles, and he's a guy leading up to the U.S. championships. We're doing some team development things, some stuff with football, and he's there every single day. It's one of those things where you're like, I don't know, don't you need to watch highlight film of somebody? But he's just a unique guy. Again, congratulations to him. I think Jim Radcliffe is another guy that needs to get a ton of credit and obviously Robert Johnson and everybody with track and field, but couldn't be more excited for that guy.

**Q. Good role model for the younger guys in the program?**

MARK HELFRICH: Phenomenal. Phenomenal.

**Q. Are you guys planning for the possibility he might not return?**

MARK HELFRICH: Oh, yeah, you have to plan for all those scenarios, and just like anything, if a guy does -- like in recruiting, if you're recruiting a guy and he's going to go to school X for all the right reasons, go to school X, man, good luck. I hope we play against you for a big trophy. If a guy leaves the program for all the right reasons, awesome. If that comes -- I don't know, whether it's endorsements or all the other things that go along with that is what is right and what is best,

great. If it's not, then we'll have that continual discussion, have that discussion.

**Q. How do you have so much depth in the receiving corps?**

MARK HELFRICH: Very excited. We're very excited about that position, and obviously we would love to have Devon back, and just to solidify everything, everything that he brings to the table. But we're also excited about our young guys there as well as our guys coming back as well as fair owe coming back and with the young group of tailbacks, as well.

**Q. Is Jalen Brown ready to contribute?**

MARK HELFRICH: He wasn't able to participate in spring, and so he's another guy that I think you kind of spin that as a coach, you're kind of spinning that, okay, that's some mental reps and less wear and tear, but we expect him to be back full strength in fall camp, or he is back, yeah.

**Q. You said you don't mention BCS explicitly or anything like that. How do you articulate goals to your players for the season?**

MARK HELFRICH: We talk about that one time, and then everything else that matters is what leads to that, and just the details of what you're doing right now and how that thing way off in the distance of -- if you're building a house, you don't talk about the finished painting and the chimney. You talk about we have to get our approval and we have to get the permits, however all that stuff works, and dig a foundation. It's not the HGTV Dream Home yet.

**FastScripts by ASAP Sports**