

**July 15, 2016**



An Interview With:

## **COACH JIM MORA**

COACH MORA: Hello, good morning, and thank you for being here. I want to introduce the two student-athletes, fine young men, that are representing UCLA here today, Conor McDermott and Jayon Brown. Connor is our left tackle, an outstanding player, a leader on our team, and one of the best offensive tackles in the country, and Jayon Brown is a young man that burst on the scene last year as an inside linebacker, as a tackling machine, great attitude, great leader, one of our captains, and we're really excited to see these guys play this year.

That being said, we're very excited about our opportunities this year. We look forward to an exciting season in a very difficult conference. We understand the challenges that face us. We're coming off a season that was, in our estimation, a little bit disappointing to us, especially the way that it ended, and we'd like to make amends for that.

Our players have had a tremendous off-season. They've been very dedicated in the weight room, in the classroom, on the practice field. We went through 15 days of spring practice. It was my fifth spring here at UCLA, and I felt that it was our most productive spring in many, many ways. Felt like we had a great competitive environment but a tremendous sense of cooperation amongst our players.

I love the team chemistry that's being built, that's being established by our leaders like Jayon and like Conor and like many, many others, and we're hoping to carry that momentum into our fall practice season.

Certainly we have a difficult schedule, but opening on the road at Texas A&M, I think that all of our players will tell you they're excited about the challenges that face them because they're competitors, and they want to measure themselves against the best, and we're certainly going to get

that opportunity in our out-of-conference schedule, and then without a doubt, playing a Pac-12 schedule.

Excited to be here today. Excited to kick off the 2016 season, and a lot of anticipation for good things to come. Thank you.

**Q. Pac-12 media picked UCLA to win the Pac-12 South. Does that have any impact on the players, coaches, on your program at all?**

COACH MORA: Well, first of all, it surprised me. I thought that USC, Utah, Arizona State, Arizona, Colorado, I thought those teams would probably be picked ahead of us, just based on the way we finished last year in a rather disappointing fashion. I would hope that our internal expectations, the standards that we're trying to hold ourselves to would weigh more on us than the external expectations.

But in today's digital world, our players will be aware of that. Hopefully we can minimize the effects on it and just stay focused on what we need to do, the process that we need to take in order to hopefully make our way to the championship.

**Q. The allegations from the McQueary testimony, was that known as a part of the vetting process?**

COACH MORA: Well, first of all, any time that you're dealing with sexual abuse and you're dealing with young people specifically, the first thing that you have to think about is the victims, and our hearts go out to the victim. As a father of four young children, I can't imagine the horror of being in that position, and I can't think of anything that could be more horrifying as a parent or as a victim.

Our first thoughts is towards that.

Tom is a man of integrity that was heavily vetted, not just by UCLA but by others, as well. We went through a lengthy process in determining whether or not we wanted to make that hire. From our chancellor on down, everybody was involved in

the decision and took it very, very seriously, knowing what the accusations had been at Penn State, not with regards to Tom but just in general. So yeah, that was part of the vetting process.

We were privy to as much information as was available at that time.

**Q. But that new information was not known at that time?**

COACH MORA: I can't tell you specifically if it was known at that time. I can tell you that any information that was public that we had access to was known and was reviewed, certainly.

**Q. Was there a new review after these allegations?**

COACH MORA: No. Tom made a statement through his lawyer, through his attorney, his agent, Brett Senior. I think it was very specific. I think this is a situation that has obviously been delved into at great depth, and I think Tom will stand by his statement. I'll stand by his statement, and we'll all stand by Tom and what he didn't do and what he didn't know.

**Q. What makes you happy about this team, and what does this team have to improve on?**

COACH MORA: I'm happy about -- you know, we talk about talent a lot of times, and talent is one thing, but team chemistry and attitude and work ethic and character and the type of culture you're building, you know, some of the intangibles are as important as talent when you're going through a long, grueling season, and I'm excited about those aspects of our team. Coming out of spring, I felt as good as I have in my five years there about where we were in those areas.

That gives me a lot of hope for the future. It's going to be a difficult season. It always is. The Pac-12 is a dog-eat-dog conference, and there are no easy games. If you don't bring your A game every week, you're going to get beat, so that is a challenge. So we need to be able to build consistency, and what people know, you all know and our fans know is that we've had some games where we were off.

I shouldn't ever -- I don't ever want to say you should have won a game, but games that we didn't play up to our potential, and so we have to develop a more consistent approach each week, and I think that comes with maturity, and I think it comes with team chemistry and the things that we're trying to build.

**Q. You said after the bowl game you need to get bigger and stronger. How has that gone?**

COACH MORA: We've done well. Our young men have dedicated themselves to that. Coach Alosi has done a great job, and part of that was the fact that we'd lost some really good players on defense, some of our anchors, but coming out of the spring practices, moving into the summer conditioning program, it's a good-looking group. I was talking specifically towards the defense, I think, and if you look at the way Jayon looks today, and getting Eddie back and adding some of the young men that we have that have some size and looking at Matt Dickerson who's now a 290-pounder and Eli Ankou is 320 and not chubby but fit, I think we've moved in the right direction.

We've got to continue to do that.

**Q. What's the status of some of those guys injury-wise, Eddie Vanderdoes, who else, Moreau?**

COACH MORA: You know what, they're all clear right now. I think the important thing is this, especially with two guys that have played a lot of football, especially Eddie and Fabian, that we do a really nice job of managing them through the fall camp and making sure that they're getting the work that they need so that they're sharp and they're prepared to go to Texas A&M and play well but that we don't wear them out, we don't sacrifice their health, and we'll do a good job of that.

You know, we've changed the structure of our training camp a little bit this year. As everyone knows, we've always gone to San Bernardino for two weeks. This year we're going to spend the first week at UCLA, and then we're going to go out to San Bernardino just for six days and have nine practices and really get after it, and then we'll come back to UCLA and start preparing for the season.

**Q. What's your biggest concern going into the fall camp?**

COACH MORA: My concerns are always the health and welfare of our players, staying healthy and that balance between getting the work in that you need to get in in order to be prepared for the season, staying healthy.

Specific to position, like probably every

coach in here, just depth along the offensive line specifically, filling in the spots that we lost, the three great receivers that left us, Devin Fuller, Jordan Payton, and Thomas Duarte and filling the production that we're going to be missing there.

But I feel good about our team, and I feel good about the attitude they have and the way that they've worked. I really do.

**Q. What do you feel your greatest strengths will be?**

COACH MORA: I think that we've got two outstanding offensive tackles in Conor McDermott and Kolton Miller. I think both of those guys have some special traits to them.

I'm excited about the running back position with Nate Starks and Soso Jamabo and Bolu Olorunfunmi, and then we bring in two pretty darned good freshmen in Brandon Stephens and Jalen Starks. I think that's a solid group right there.

I like our defensive line and our linebackers, really our defense in general. I think we've made a little bit of a change in our scheme and gone from a 3-4 structure more to a 4-3, which interestingly enough was what we played predominantly anyway because we're in so much nickel, but I think it fits the personality of our players better, and having them in the system really for the second year, although we made some minor changes, it's still essentially the same system. I think will help them play faster, more confidently, and more efficiently.

**Q. What did you learn from last year to help you launch yourself to a higher level this year?**

COACH MORA: You know, every year, every game, every week you're trying to learn and apply those lessons. I can't tell you anything that is just specific that stands out other than the need to constantly emphasize to your players preparation, work habits, attitude, consistency, taking every opponent as the most important opponent that you've ever played, and really trying to play to your standard every week rather than playing up and down to the level -- the interpretation or what people think the level of your opponent is.

**Q. How special is Josh Rosen and what makes him so?**

COACH MORA: Josh has a chance to be very, very special. He's a talented young man.

He's got tremendous arm talent. He's very, very smart. He has a great feel for the game, both offensively and defensively. He can make all the throws. And it's up to him how great he becomes. It'll be determined by his work ethic, by his ability to learn and adapt, and he's shown a willingness to do all of those things. I'm really excited about him. He's had a good off-season.

His teammates really respect him, and they really like him, and I think the great quarterbacks that I've been fortunate to be around, and I've been able to -- I don't say this in a braggadocious way, but I've been able to be around some of the greatest ever, all had a personality trait that allowed them to integrate themselves into the team, become a member of the team, well-liked and well-respected, to go out and do things with the guys but also separate themselves from the team when they needed to assume that leadership role as a quarterback, and I see those traits in Josh at a very young age, and he just needs to continue to develop that way.

**Q. Why the change in training structure? I know you've really liked San Bernardino in the past.**

COACH MORA: I have liked San Bernardino, and I still do like San Bernardino, and I think it serves us well to go out there. But, quite frankly, we were out there too long, and that first week you're only allowed one practice a day, and it became a little bit more of a grind and a burden on our players and our staff than I'd really like.

So what we're going to do is that first week we're going to stay at the new Luskin Center there, that beautiful new hotel on campus right at our fields. We're going to use our facilities. We'll have one practice a day. We'll have our normal walk-throughs and meetings, and then we're going to do some team activity things, some things that are a little bit different, just some team bonding things. We're bringing in some great speakers and things like that, and then we'll go out to San Bernardino that second week. We'll have two-a-days, and we're going to have nine practices in six days and really get after it and really grind, and then we'll come back and get ready for the season.

We just felt as a staff that at this point in our development that was the best way for us to go.

**Q. Have you ever faced a former coordinator the first game after he left your staff? I don't know if that ever happened to you in the NFL.**

COACH MORA: Yeah, many times, yeah. I have actually a lot. Yeah, a number of times. Not at this --

**Q. Does it change anything?**

COACH MORA: It needs to change some things, yeah. You need to change some signals, some of your verbiage. But that's natural for us right now because we have adapted our offense a little bit. I don't know how much we'll have to change defensively. Probably some of our hand signals. But structurally probably not anything.

You know, as everyone always asks, is it an advantage to play someone that you're so familiar with. It is and it isn't because he's familiar with you, as well. So it's all about going out and executing and playing well and protecting the football and taking the football away and doing those things.

**Q. What sort of message did you have, if any, for Josh after the hot tub, Trump hat?**

COACH MORA: The hot tub I found amusing. I thought it was -- I thought it was a young college student having a little bit of fun. You know, the Donald Trump tweet and then the NCAA tweet, we had conversations about that and about the appearance, about the image that he's projecting for himself and for his University. But I'll tell you this: UCLA has a long history going back to Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, who was Lew Alcindor at the time, and Bill Walton, of having people on their campus that are socially aware and not afraid to rattle the cage a little bit.

I just want to make sure that Josh understands that this is a different world and that everything that he does say is being analyzed and sometimes overanalyzed, and that he's making good decisions and thinking twice before he speaks once, and more for his future than anything else.

But he's a young man, and he's got his own thoughts, and we want to encourage that. But at the same time we want to be socially responsible.

**Q. Is there some reason why Josh isn't here today?**

COACH MORA: Why? Because we've always brought upperclassmen, so Jayon and

Conor have earned the right to be here. Josh has played one season of college football. These guys have played multiple. That's been our policy. It's not to hide him, and you'll have access to him every Monday this year. But quite simply, it's not to hide him, it's to reward some of our upperclassmen that we think earned it.

**Q. You talked about your team's speed, and especially the return game. I know UCLA has returned a lot of kicks and punts for touchdowns recently. Have you adjusted that?**

COACH MORA: Well, Ishmael has, and we'll get him back there again this year doing it. He's been a pretty dynamic returner, very good returner for us. I don't know where he ranks or where we rank in the return game, but I believe that we're pretty darned good, frankly. Maybe not for touchdowns, those are hard to do. But getting Ishmael back there again as a returner I think will help us. We moved him to offense in the spring. He's a dynamic guy when he has the ball in his hands, and hopefully we can block things up a little bit better for him and he can make some special things happen on his own with his athletic ability.

**Q. What was the logic in moving him from a very good defensive player to offense?**

COACH MORA: Yeah, it's a great question. Very good defensive player for us. But we've got some corners that we have a lot of confidence in, getting Fabian back, Marcus Rios is healthy, some of our young guys have come along. And as I said, Ishmael is a dynamic player with the ball in his hands, and so if we can dictate when the ball is in his hands rather than him having to intercept it or a kick that may go to an area that he can't field it, us being able to design plays to get him the ball in space I think will benefit us.

There's a chance that he'll still see some time on defense.

**Q. How is that transition going for him?**

COACH MORA: Great. It was great. One of the things I loved is that he brings a defensive mindset to an offensive position, a real element of toughness and competitiveness and feistiness, and he's -- not only is he good with the ball in his hands but he's a tenacious blocker, as well. So I think that will really benefit us offensively.

**Q. How much thought went into**

**Conor's decision to come back?**

COACH MORA: Quite extensively. Quite extensively. I tried to talk to all those guys just based upon my experience in the NFL and going through the draft on that end and what evaluators are looking for, and Conor and I spoke extensively about it, and I was pleased that he made the decision that he made.

I was talking to Lincoln Kennedy last night, who was a great player in the NFL and whose son is one of the great players in the country at that position, as well, and Lincoln's thought was, you can't get enough reps. The two positions where you need repetitions are quarterback and offensive line.

And so for Conor to be able to come back and play 12, 13, 14, 15 games, whatever it ends up being, and get those reps will only enhance his position in the draft next year.

**Q. With the A&M game coming up, he's going to be under the microscope because of Gary. Is that match-up going to be overhyped, or is it something you're already --**

COACH MORA: I think everything is a little bit overhyped. I think in a team sport when you start emphasizing the individual battles too much, it overhypes it because we'll give him help if he needs it. We'll put a tight end there, we'll chip him sometimes, we'll move the pocket a little bit, and then there will be times that Conor just has to win, and going against another great player, there will be some snaps where he struggles a little bit. But that's what the game of football is all about.

There's no one I'd rather have playing that spot than Conor McDermott. I'm very comfortable with him.

**Q. Is there any way to measure how far he came from last season?**

COACH MORA: Heck, I'll tell you, you talk about where he came from when he first walked into UCLA, he was about a 225-pound tight end, and now he's a big, good-looking tackle.

But last year he stayed healthy for the most part. He avoided -- he got lucky a couple times with the knee. We thought we'd lost him at Utah, but he fought through it.

He's become just a real consistent, solid, dependable player and team leader. Just really thankful that he decided to come back to UCLA for one more year.

**Q. How would you characterize your team right now going into this season?**

COACH MORA: Hungry. Hungry. Anxious. Challenged. Excited. I think there's just a real good esprit de corps amongst our team, one like I haven't seen maybe since my first year there, and that excites me. I love the way they're working together and pushing each other and holding each other accountable, and I think they're really excited to kind of wash the bad taste out of their mouth that last season ended with.

**Q. What do you expect to know about your guys after BYU?**

COACH MORA: You know, it's hard to go down to A&M and win, and certainly BYU will be a real challenge. Our grit, our toughness, our ability to overcome adverse situations. I think all those things will be exposed. We've been a team historically the last few years that's played well on the road. We seem to rise up to those occasions. I would expect that we'll do the same thing.

But it'll be revealing, but it won't be the end-all. Whether we win them both or split or lose them both, there's a lot of football that will be left to be played, and our team will be defined by how we end the season.

**Q. Is there anybody else position-wise --**

COACH MORA: That you and I haven't spoke about?

**Q. Yeah.**

COACH MORA: Well, you know what we've done. Let me think. Just since spring? No, no, not that I can recall. No, Leni. We're going to put Leni at linebacker, at outside linebacker. His body looks like it's going to grow into a linebacker body, so we're going to make that move now.

**Q. Would you say given that you changed the offense a little to give Josh more control, what have you seen maybe in the off-season that would lead you to believe he has a better grasp and he's developing that kind of --**

COACH MORA: You know, I've seen him spend time learning with Coach Tuiasosopo, watching some film, taking the guys out on the field and working, and when you have an intelligent quarterback like Josh, what you want to do is give

him the ability to change some things at the line of scrimmage that he sees, and so there will be times that we huddle, there will be times we get up to the line of scrimmage quickly and snap it right away, and there will be times we get up there quickly and we let him digest what he's seeing on defense and get us in the right play.

The danger is that you give him too much, that you overestimate what a young person can handle given all the other stresses they have in their life with school and social and just being a young person. But Josh is pretty unique, and I thought through the course of the spring it started off offensively a little bit rocky like you'd think, but by the end of spring, I felt really good about where we were and where he was with this offense.

**Q. When you diagnose how it ended last year, what will be the things that you think of?**

COACH MORA: Well, we lost some momentum late. As coaches, it's always our job to put our players in the best position to have success, and we certainly didn't do a good enough job of that. And then we realized that we need to continue to emphasize just getting bigger and stronger and more physical, and that's something that every coach will tell you they emphasize all of the time.

But it's no fun when a team can run the ball on you, especially the way Nebraska did, and that was a function of us not doing a very good job as coaches and us, quite frankly, just needing to continue to develop our players naturally, and that's what we've emphasized.

**Q. You talked about Fabian and Marcus being back to full strength. Is Johnny Johnson back to full strength, too?**

COACH MORA: Johnny will be back at full strength for the fall. Let's just cross our fingers and hope that he can stay healthy because he is a talented young man, and he's just had the injury bug. I'm excited about Colin Samuel, I'm excited about Denzel Fisher. I'm excited about Octavius Spencer. I think he can play some safety, he can play some corner.

I'm excited to see our defense develop. I think we've got a good defense, and I felt that way last year, too, and then we suffered those injuries and the dynamics changed. But hopefully we can stay healthy and we can reach our potential.

**Q. And DeChaun Holiday is still at safety for the fall?**

COACH MORA: He is. Right now he's at safety. He's up to about -- shoot, during the spring he was about 220 pounds. The last I checked last week he was down to about 213 pounds, which is probably where he should be. But he likes to play safety. He wants to play safety, and hopefully he can help us there, and if not as a starter, a role player on defense, I think he has a position on special teams that he can fill.

**Q. I was looking at an old team '67 Stanford Press clipping. Your dad was on Coach Ralston's staff with Coach White, Coach Vermeil, and I know at UCLA, Coach Donahue. Do you lean on -- do you ever talk to some of the --**

COACH MORA: I talk to my dad most, most often. I talk to him a lot. Sometimes I don't necessarily want to hear what he has to tell me, but I listen because he knows. I talk to Coach Vermeil quite often. I always have. He's been a part of my life since I was a young kid, and he's always very, very frank with me.

I talk to Coach Donahue quite often. I worked with Coach Tomey and stayed in touch with Coach Tomey. I wish I could stay in touch with Bill Walsh. He was a major influence on me as a coach when I was with him at San Francisco for those years. I would spend up to an hour every day in his office. I would have him come to my meetings and evaluate what I was saying and just taught me a lot of great lessons.

I talk to Coach Holmgren still. I talk to Coach Mariucci still. Unfortunately I can't talk to Coach Coryell anymore. But I've been fortunate just to have a lot of great men and great coaches in my life. That being said, some of the greatest lessons I've ever learned are from the players I've coached, guys like Ronnie Lott and Steve Young and men like that, some of the great ones.

**Q. Why do you think Stanford has been able to do what they've done? Is it a matter of them staying with what they do while everyone else went in a different direction?**

COACH MORA: Well, they are hard to prepare for exactly for the reason you said, because you spend most of the weeks preparing for some spread, some fast paced, and all of a sudden you get this big, physical, downhill run

team that's made a real commitment to the style of play that they want to play, and it's not easy. They know who they want to be. They recruit that type of athlete. They have success in recruiting because they're Stanford.

If you have the grades and you're a good enough football player, I mean, your parents are going to push you there and you want to go there, so they do have success.

I think it's just knowing who they want to be, recruiting the right athletes, and continuing to emphasize the things that are important to them.

**Q. You're now seeing a day-to-day offensive coordinator who had never really had command of an offense before. What are you seeing as the challenges in that and how is the offense actually formulating now in the scheme that he's developing?**

COACH MORA: You're talking about Kennedy?

**Q. Yes.**

COACH MORA: Well, he's been an offensive coordinator before but he had not called plays. Obviously there's some uncertainty there, but I've been fortunate to be around him and coached against him, and I have great respect for him and his knowledge of the game. He's a guy that's put together game plans. He's a guy that's willing to accept input. We've surrounded him with some coaches that I think are real professionals in experience, Marcus Tuiaosopo coming in, and Marcus has been an interim head coach. He's called plays. I think that will benefit Kennedy. We've done a lot of things through our practices just to give him a chance to call plays off-the-cuff, and he's done a tremendous job.

The thing about Kennedy, and maybe it's kind of like Stanford, is that he wants his offense to have an identity and has a clear picture about what he wants it to be, and he's not going to be wishy-washy. He'll adapt and adjust as he needs to, but he has a clear idea of what he wants us to be, and he's able to convey that to the players in a very concise manner. So I think we'll all be on the same page, and I think we'll be very detailed in how we present it to our players.

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