

# Pac-12 Conference Football Media Days

Thursday, July 27 2017

## Mike Leach Washington State Cougars



MIKE LEACH: All right. Any questions?

There's Peyton Pelluer over there. He's got the samurai hairdo going, middle linebacker, great player. And then Jamal Morrow, running back. And he continues to walk away, very disinterested. And a very versatile running back. Does a tremendous job. Very consistent out there. Two quality players getting their degrees, and basically everything that my parents wish I was.

Okay, go ahead.

### **Q. Coach, you've struggled with season openers since getting to Pullman, how do you get over the hump against Montana State?**

MIKE LEACH: I think the biggest thing as we get older, we've got a little more experience. Last year we were predominantly freshmen and sophomores, and I think we struggled as far as adjusting to being on the field for the first time in some cases. We did some really good things in practice. Go out there, first game, college football, first time. All of a sudden, eyes got wide and we tried to do too much.

But then I think that we assembled ourselves pretty good as a team as we played together some more. In the last two years, even though we've got quite a bit of youth, I'd have to look at it, but we won as many games, I think, maybe more than anybody the last two years as far as the conference goes. We're a work in progress, like anybody. But we're getting better.

### **Q. Do you think an early signing period is good to push up the calendar even more?**

MIKE LEACH: I'm generally against that. It depends when. I think anything before December is ridiculous. I think this business of everybody forgets what it was like when they were 18, you know, and maybe I remember better than some. Part of it is because I'm around 18-year-olds all the time. But when you're 18, trying to sort out a decision of when to go to college, you could make the argument February is challenging enough. Then all of a sudden, you're going to make kind of a binding, significant decision, and all of a sudden people are, you know, you move it up even more. I think it's difficult.

### **Q. How are you adjusting to the elimination of two-a-days?**

MIKE LEACH: Really no adjustment. We haven't had many two-a-days for quite some time. It's not, you know -- it's not just some nice, generous, benevolence, I just felt like if you get too ground down, you're working on something, you're not working on football, you're working on something. You know, toughness, persistence, pushing through, your body hardens up to develop around playing football, I think there's benefits, but then as far as the pace and the timing, you want that sharpened, and if you overtrain, it's counterproductive.

So I think that years ago this would be -- well, I would say even clear back to when I was at the University of Kentucky, we didn't have two-a-days back-to-back. We'd go two-one, two-one, and a lot of times on the double day it would be like helmets and shorts, that type of thing. It wasn't mandated. It wasn't suggested. We just felt like that was the best way to do it.

So I wish they had two-a-days. I think they ought to have four-a-days so hopefully some of these teams will pound their teams into submission and make our work a little easier for us. But it doesn't sound like they're going to let them do that. So we'll just go about our business as usual.

### **Q. Is there any chance the running game is going to have some more prominence this year with all the guys coming back?**

MIKE LEACH: I think we have the most productive backs in the league. If you add up the yards, we had the most productive backs in the league. I think it went us, Oregon, Stanford. That's good company right there. But I do think we've got them all back. We've got some young guys that have some experience under their belts. So I'm hopeful that we'll be better.

### **Q. I have a Twitter question, and I know that you love Twitter.**

MIKE LEACH: Well, I'm getting the hang of it.

### **Q. They want to know is a hotdog a sandwich?**

MIKE LEACH: I don't like hotdogs. I never liked hotdogs when I was a kid, and I think that some of that started with when I was a real young kid. I'd have bologna sandwich after bologna sandwich. So

anything that even remotely resembled bologna, I hated. Everybody says go to the ballgame and eat a hotdog. Not me.

No, it's not a sandwich. I'm not into hotdogs, with all due respect to those that are, but they can have mine, so there will be more for them.

**Q. How can Luke Falk grow as a player this year?**

MIKE LEACH: Really doing the same thing that he has been doing. I would say that's one of his strongest qualities. He's always been a focused guy. Always been a guy that's constantly worked to improve. Always been a guy that understood as he improves that it translates to others. He's not a guy that has a bunch of highs and lows. Just kind of steady, focused, intense work ethic without any panic to it. I do think his best football is ahead of him. I think he needs to just keep doing what he's doing.

**Q. What is the most challenge with Millennials and the most fun?**

MIKE LEACH: The biggest challenge is, I think, a lot of times there is a sense of a lack of accountability. I think that. But also I think it's a lot like Frank Martin said. He said something to the effect that players haven't changed, parents have.

But I think -- then the other thing is their best feature, probably, well, they're experts on technology. Heck, when I was a kid, I would watch Star Trek. These guys could have invented the plane, the computer, Scotty, the whole thing. I do think that, you know, just the knowledge base at your fingertips is such that at a very young age there are a lot of people that know a lot. But I think along with that is as soon as something gets hard, you don't give in. You push through it. I think, you know, nowadays there is a temptation to do that.

I do think we'll cycle out of that. There's always been a cycle. Heck, we got out of disco, you know? We survived that. We had punk rock briefly as we were recovering, you know. So then things evened out.

I do think, you know, stuff goes in cycles, and I do think we'll cycle through it. Paul Harvey always said, Tomorrow's always better than today. And he was supposed to be the old-fashioned guy, right? I believe that, so...

**Q. There's been a push on your campus by students to ban athletes who have any history of sexual violence. I was curious if you have any thoughts on that. Is a blanket ban a good solution in your mind?**

MIKE LEACH: I don't know that a blanket ban is. I think it's a tremendous issue. I think it's a huge issue.

The thing is the combination of innocent until proven guilty, but then if you are guilty, I think you get rid of those people. I mean, that's terrible. I think the worst thing, I think, would be to be the victim of some level of sexual assault or something. That's terrible. Somebody's weak or somebody's stronger, and you're helplessly taken advantage of. That's terrible. The second worse thing would be accused of sexually assaulting someone. I think with an eye on innocent until proven guilty, I think definitely it needs to be addressed. I think it should be addressed quickly as you get all the facts, and I also think it's serious enough that probably ought to be suspended until sorted out.

**Q. Talking about concussions and CTE, Pac-12 and studies about that, you know, Luke Falk has had some pretty heavy hits and his share of concussions. Can you talk a little bit about that? Specifically, is a little bit of a red flag for you with Luke? Do you have to be more careful?**

MIKE LEACH: He's only had one that I'm aware of. I don't know about a bunch. He's only had one that I'm aware of.

I think you always have to. I think everything goes hand in hand. I think the technology of protecting student-athletes, the treating and diagnosing, I think, I think it all goes together. And I think we have to constantly elevate it, the work and attention on it.

The other thing that I think that I would be curious about, and I haven't read anything on it, I think there is maybe something like that, but some of these things in the past. I'd also be curious like drugs or steroid use, how that impacts some of the people that have had the scans where their brains are bad and things like that. So I think we need to address all the variables on it from every angle we can.

**Q. In coaching, have you seen a turnaround like USC's last year?**

MIKE LEACH: Yes. Ours would be one.

**Q. You've had the running games materialize and the defense is great. What can the fans expect this year in terms of improvement in position?**

MIKE LEACH: Well, I guess I feel good about saying -- I mean, the best problem to have is just a glaring weakness. You don't want to have a glaring weakness. I don't feel like we have a glaring weakness. I feel like just steady development, really, at all of the positions, which you always want. But I don't feel like we have a glaring weakness. I think we're stronger some places than others. But you try to avoid having glaring weaknesses. You try to have a balance where you're not just horrible somewhere. I think we are pretty balanced that way.

**Q. Is there one area of your team -- a Friday night game in September, what is your feeling about the short week and Friday night game?**

MIKE LEACH: I'd rather have it on Saturday, but it's on Friday, so we'll be there. We'll be there bouncing around. The other thing is that the other consideration is, yeah, I'm a little sensitive about detracting from the high school efforts on Fridays.

**Q. Is there one area of your team that you're particularly confident will be better this year than it was last year?**

MIKE LEACH: Well, we've got so many -- we've got a number back. I think we'll be better in the secondary. I mean, I don't know, there is not a sane coach around. I think we'll be better everywhere. You know, heck, by Thursday of game week, I think we can beat New England. You're not getting a lot of rational thought out of somebody in this business.

**Q. What is your thought on early signing recruits, and how do you think that could impact your recruiting?**

MIKE LEACH: I'm guardedly curious about the December. Anything earlier than that I think is a bad idea. I'm not sure December is a great idea, but we'll find out. I guess I kind of treat it like the JC signing period a little bit.

**Q. What would be your concerns?**

MIKE LEACH: Guy's 18 and making a very important decision, and between him and his family needs more time to make that decision. In addition, as a school, you try to evaluate character and things like that. The more opportunity you have to get to know them and spend time with them and their family, the better your chances of making accurate judgments on that. So from that standpoint, I think the additional time is helpful.

**Q. Peyton said he was shocked when Joe left in January from Oregon, were you stunned?**

MIKE LEACH: I wasn't stunned. They're a quality program. The other thing is he did a tremendous job at our place. He did a tremendous job at our place. But also, I think that, you know, the opportunity to go to another spot, do something different, and then, of course he gets to work under Jim Leavitt, which I think he's kind of excited about that. You know, just kind of a change of scenery.

But I'm excited about him and his career. Hopefully they have a horrible day when we play. But other than that, unless we're behind by additional games and we need him to lose more, I hope they do really well.

**Q. Can you sum up what his contribution was for the defense --obviously he wasn't the coordinator, but just from that line?**

MIKE LEACH: I think a good recruiter. I think a good presence as far as the D-line in general. He's a really passionate guy. I think that rubbed off on really everybody. Not just defense but offense.

**Q. Larry Scott was talking about experimenting with shorter halftime and shorter TV timeouts and the early signing period as well. I just wonder how much input you as coaches are having on these things. Signing period, it seems most of the coaches aren't exactly thrilled about that, and also your thoughts on the shorter halftime plus TV timeouts?**

MIKE LEACH: We have almost no input. Less TV timeouts, I think, is fantastic. Shorter halftime, I don't know if I'm a big fan of that. We're talking about five minutes. I don't know how much they need that five minutes. Plus we're not going to get it all the time, anyway, if the other team doesn't agree to it out of conference.

But, yeah, I thought we had too many TV timeouts for a long time.

**Q. Do you feel coaches aren't getting enough input on some of the experiments and rule changes?**

MIKE LEACH: Generally, no. Almost never.

**Q. What's the biggest challenge of building a program in the Pac-12 and how long does it take to fully feel like you're going in the direction that you want?**

MIKE LEACH: I've never felt like -- you know, I don't think you ever feel like you're set. This isn't really a destination business. You just continue to work, continue to develop. And somebody graduates. You continue to work, continue to develop some more.

I think it's a constant growth process. I think that's what makes it exciting. I think that's what coaches and players need to embrace the most, because I think that's the biggest point of all of it.

And then I think it kind of depends on the situation. Washington State, they were on outright hard times. They were on hard times facility-wise and talent-wise and all the rest. I think different places vary. It's hard to give just one answer for that. You constantly plug away and do the best you can.

I think one thing, when it comes to recruiting, they become familiar with you, your staff, and they kind of see the vision, direction, characteristics of your team, and you can illustrate that. I think that does help the

recruiting process because then they have something to draw on.

**Q. What is the philosophy behind the Conference schedule? And how'd you go about preparing for it?**

MIKE LEACH: I think the biggest thing is to prepare yourself. You want to prepare yourself for conference. I think that you want them at home. You try to get as many as you can at home. You'd like, you know -- also, I think you want to go out there and play well so hopefully you can get some other guys in so they can get some game reps. As you get into conference, somebody sprains their ankle, you've got a little experience with with your guys. That's very hard in the Pac-12. If you think about, really, most of the Pac-12 games, those things will come late into the fourth and that type of thing. It's hard to get a bunch of people in in a Pac-12 game just because the conference is so quality from top to bottom.

**Q. Do you think it's fair that the SEC has four non-conference games with one of them usually in November when most of the rest of the country -- I think they nicknamed it the Cupcake Wars -- where most of the country is in rivalry games and the meat of the conference schedule?**

MIKE LEACH: I think it's very smart by the SEC, and I think it's a lesson we can learn from the SEC. I think there is a lot of kind of figurative muscle flexing that goes on with regard to how many conference games and who plays who and who they play non-conference, and all this chest beating is kind of -- quite overrated.

I think it's important to win your conference. I think as a result of that, I think the SEC laughs all the way to the bank. And I think other conferences would be able to laugh a little louder if we learned some of those things.

**Q. Interestingly, yesterday Saban was talking about exactly the opposite of that, about making the Power Five conferences play only for Power Five conferences in nonconference.**

MIKE LEACH: Well, then, see it would be even. The biggest thing is you want it to be even. Every conference should play the same number of conference games, I think. You know, just you try to even the thing out. Right now it varies all over the map, which is the other reason that I would like to have a lot more extensive playoff system. Everybody else does.

The most amazing thing to me is the befuddled expressions that Division I gets. Well, how can that happen? It's impossible. How's it impossible? Everybody else does it. You know? States with a lot of states have a 16-team playoff or more. The NFL does

it. Lower division colleges do. We're the only ones that don't. So anybody that can draw up a softball bracket, you know, go out there and play, you know, men's league softball or something can draw up a bracket.

It's pretty easy to sort out. You can get the whole thing done in 16 games and have some well-placed breaks in between. Half the country's off, half the country's playing next week, the other half off, the other half playing. It would be incredible fun.