

Pac-12 Conference Football Media Days

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Mario Cristobal Oregon Ducks



Q. You've been aggressively recruiting kids in this class. Is that because of the early signing period? Is that to make a statement?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: No, talent acquisition is always going to be one of the three parts that make a program what it is. So we're very aggressive, but we're aggressive when we identify something that we see that really fits us at Oregon, what we want to be and what we want to become.

But part of being aggressive is being very real. We are very real. Very genuine. We attack this process. But when we see something that we feel needs to be at Oregon, we're going to get after it and be aggressive.

Q. I know yesterday you got a commitment from Bryan Addison and he has been cleared. So what have you seen from him and how excited are you to have someone of his caliber?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Really exciting. A tremendous blessing. He is an exceptional athlete. 6'5, just about, 180-plus pounds. He's played both ways. He has special teams value. He is intelligent, he's tough, he's athletic. Great balance and body control. Explosive. Incredible ball skills. He can help us on both sides of the ball. It's a position where we need help on both sides of the ball. So we'll figure that out here in the next couple days or so. So we're blessed to have him, we're excited to have him.

I know he's got a lot of teammates and friends on the football team already. So I think that part played a major role in him ending up at Oregon, and we're thrilled to have him.

Q. So there is no position set for Bryan Addison right now?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Not right now. In the next couple days we'll settle in. Because for him, the best thing we could do is get him to a position, settle him in, and let him attack it. If we start bouncing a guy around that hasn't been here for no more than a couple days, it's unfair to him. So we'll settle him into something.

Q. In your opinion, is there too early of a time to offer a kid or too many offers to send out in one class? How do you balance both of those

elements?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: I wouldn't put a limit on talent as it relates to your program. If you identify something that you truly feel is good for your program and could help you, I think you go forward.

I think the question is how young should a guy be -- allowed to be offered, right? I saw a YouTube video yesterday of, I think, he's eight years old playing one of those sports. I think it was rugby or whatnot. If there is a better rugby player at that age around the country, I'd be shocked.

But are we going to offer him? No. I'd rather see him get to high school. But I think once a guy gets to high school in the first couple year, you have a pretty good idea of what he can be. Even more important, you want to find out what is his make-up: What type of competitive character does he have? What type of human being is he? Does he do the right things? Does he have the right DNA?

All those things that we take a deep dive into in investigating and looking into players that we want to sign.

Q. How much do you get your recruiting prowess from Nick Saban when you had a chance to work with him? How much of what you use at Oregon now is built from Alabama?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: You know, I think -- I mean, there's some. There is always going to be that influence. I think when you go there, you essentially kind of -- I know I used it before. I don't mean to sound like a cliché. You essentially get your Ph.D. in certain parts of your coaching regimen and structure.

Recruiting is the lifeline of every program. It has to be addressed every single day. You cannot -- I think a lot of times programs are in year two, year three, and you realize we've got to fix this and that. Well, it's too late. Because what you're recruiting now is going to help you in those years down the line. So there's an influence there. There is an influence from Jimmy Johnson and Larry Coker of our time. You name it. I've studied it a lot, and studied just about every program in the country, how they do it, what they do, why they do it that way, and are tailored just to fit us.

A credit to our staff, I can't say enough about Joe Salave'a, Keith Heyward, Marcus Arroyo, Mastro, all these guys get after it. They get after it, and they're genuine. They don't try to put on a show and whatnot, and hopefully it will result in some good recruiting for us.

Q. You've been around Justin Herbert for a while now. How has he changed as a leader?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Much more vocal. He now is becoming a field general. I think he was a quarterback last year, and now he's becoming a field general. That guy understands how to flip protections. He understands, well, we're getting a seven-man rush here, they're going to play cover zero. I've got to keep seven guys in to protect, how to call a tight end, change the running backs, and get them a protection opportunity.

He understands the run game like a coordinator does. Meaning, he could get us into advantage runs when we're not in one or facing pressure, potentially, a negative play. In my opinion, that's the biggest step as a quarterback, when he can look at it like an offensive line coach can and understand where can we get hit? Where can we get hurt? How can we make this an advantage if play for us?

He's got a great -- he's not a sequential guy. He's a spatial thinker. He can see it. He could see the whole field and recognize exactly where it's being disguised, where the pressure is coming from, where the rotation is going to be, just by seeing leverage and whatnot.

He's a special guy that is driven and works at it. He likes getting pushed. He allows us to push him and drive him. He's been a tremendous blessing.

Q. It's pretty apparent seeing him walk around over the last year he's gotten bigger. His body has transformed.

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Oh, yeah. How about the hair? Did you see the hair? What about that? I was afraid someone was going to kidnap him out here in Hollywood and make him an actor or something.

Yeah, he's transformed his body. He's committed to being excellent in everything he does. Same thing with Jalen. So I've spoken about our strength and conditioning department a lot because I think it warrants that the way they've brought this culture to our program, because it is. It's not just how he looks. It's the mindset that comes with it, the confidence that comes with it. The ability to create a galvanizing affect for the guys in the locker room, because you know you're preparing and holding each other accountable.

He's a big part of that as well. He's got to be durable.

He knows that. He's really prepared himself to be able to take on -- not that we're a quarterback running operation, so if he does have to carry the ball, if he doesn't slide, which we like to talk about sliding eventually, that he's able to withstand some of the punishment going with it.

Q. Any concerns going into fall camp?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Concerns? It's hard to -- I guess I'm not wired that way in terms of looking at something as a concern. I think every team has its so-called warts. Everybody has its imperfections and it seems to work on. I feel like we have more positives than things we have to remedy.

So to me, the concern is I wish we had more practice time. That's the only thing. We have our 29 days, we're going to use them wisely. It's a new collegiate rule that you have to start 29 days out. We want to make sure we use them to maximize productivity as it relates to our season and our players.

Q. How do you think the new red-shirt rule impacts everything for you guys? It seems like a game changer?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: It is a game changer. We love it. But at the same time, we don't want to let it affect the dynamic of our football team. We don't want playing time to be something, hey, you can red-shirt, let's just play you. I think that would destroy your locker room. I think playing time is something that is earned, rightfully so.

But this red-shirt rule allows for so many things. The one that sticks out to me as the season goes on, guys develop. I mean, the football -- I know everybody wants to play as a freshman, but football is still a developmental game. The most developmental game that there is.

So as guys develop or guys down the line get injured and guys have developed to play and be good enough to play, now those opportunities are used. They're taken advantage of without costing that young man a full year, if he hasn't played more than four games.

So we've been pushing for it forever. It's genius, in my opinion, to be able to do that. Now, it does create a roster management issue because your roster contained guys that maybe you planned on being there four years, now they're there five years. It's our version of the salary cap. The NFL has the salary cap. We have the 85 plus 25 initials, right. That's inclusive in that 85. So you have to do a better job from a roster management standpoint.

Q. Your 2019 recruiting class has nine kids from

Southern California or something. So what is it about the Southern California area that's been good to you guys?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Unbelievable football. Unbelievable coaching. Tremendous commitment to the game itself. I mean, if you get online, you've seen it all summer long there is a type of activity or event, seven-on-seven competition. I see events on the beach, the shore, tug of wars, obstacle courses.

Football is very important, very important out here. We really want to make a tremendous investment not only in California and Southern Cal, but on the West Coast completely. So we love it. We love the players from here. We want to make sure we litter our roster with players from Southern Cal.

Q. You won as a player at Miami, and you've seen it at Alabama. Can you tell a guy what it takes to win, or do you have to show them? How do you do that?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: I think that a good chunk of it has to be in them. There's got to be a certain level of DNA. There's got to be a drive. There's got to be a self-motivating type X-factor inside for it to be the level that we want it to be.

Can guys get better? Absolutely. You can make everyone better. That is the intention. But we would be hurting ourselves if we weren't recruiting guys that are already -- that didn't have that as part of their make-up.

So, yeah, we're recruiting guys that this means the world to. When I say that, I mean the academic side as well. Because, to me, the best part about Justin is the fact that he's an Academic All American. Okay? That guy does it on both sides and takes it to a whole new level. It changes the priority mindset of your team when they see guys like that have success.

I know that's a long answer to what you were asking, but you've got to find the guys that do have it and want it.

Q. Speaking of recruitment, how have you been able to generate the level of excitement and what has given you guys the ability to bring energy?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Well, the energy is awesome. But let's call it what it is. Oregon's an awesome place. When I was in Miami, I knew Oregon was an awesome place. When I was at Alabama, I knew Oregon was an awesome place.

When you combine that with the fact that we have high energy, relentless, tireless workers as coaches, most importantly, they're very real, very genuine, no head

faking, no nonsense. The fact that when you look at the level of expertise from the guys that we put on our staff, if I'm a student-athlete and I look for a place to go that's committed to me and has the ability to take me to the next level, it's hard to beat.

So we don't negative recruit or get involved in that stuff. We just work, work, work, work. I think our guys have an understanding that working hard is probably not good enough. That we have to work relentlessly to make it work.

Q. Do you have updates on Logan Bathke, Malik Lovette, and Jalen Hall?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Logan Bathke has gone on medical. He had a significant amount of injuries. Look, he's still a member of our football team. He's going to be involved with us the entire time. He's going to help as a student worker coach, I think the way it's termed, or whatnot.

He's an exceptional young man, and again, we obviously don't want to see a young man's career cut a little short. But it is from a football standpoint academically and part of the team, he'll continue to be that.

Jalen Hall, I don't have an update on. But when we can, we'll get you an update as soon as we get that. And there was another one you asked about?

Q. Malik Lovette?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Malik Lovette will be a grad transfer. He has the opportunity to pursue a grad diploma in something he really wants to do. Again, a great young man and someone we are helping and want to make sure he does well. But he will not be a member of the 2018 team.

Q. What kind of influence has Jim Mastro had so far?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Mastro is awesome. We went to Mastro's Steakhouse last night, that was pretty awesome too. But Jim Mastro is an exceptional teacher. That's what hit me first right between the eyes when he came in and interviewed at the University of Oregon.

His ability to teach conceptually, his ability to push and demand, to kind of put things in perspective for our players and get them to understand what we're doing, how we're doing it, and why we're doing it that way. He is an exceptional coach, exceptional teacher, exceptional leader, and brings some ideas to the table that are a little foreign to what we've done at Oregon, even what we did at Alabama and Oklahoma State.

So I think the wrinkles that he's going to bring into the

offense are really going to help us.

Q. What do you make of the fact that nearly half of this conference has first-year head coaches coming into their teams? What is that going to do to the competitive environment in the Pac-12, do you think?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: It's super competitive. Football is cyclical. Sometimes conferences run into that when you have a good number of coaches that are new in the conference. I look at the level and their pedigree and where they've been and what they've done. You're looking at competitive guys that know how to bring it and want to establish championship programs. So we look forward to that challenge.

Q. I know you've been a head coach before you got to Alabama. I was a fan at Florida International. I remember it. But so many coaches who worked with Coach Saban have moved on to become head coaches. What is it that he does that gets you guys prepared to be better, that you being a head coach before, did you learn more being on the staff for four years?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Sure. He's been around 42 years. I think 43 years now. And he's bounced around too. He's established the organization with the resources, and I would say kind of a flow chart how it all works and ties in together.

I think when you have an opportunity to be part of that culture and organization, you learn the ins and outs of everything.

As the assistant head coach, the responsibilities that came with that allowed me to take a really deep dive into every aspect of how that program is run. It's been extremely beneficial and helpful. Just after a couple years you really feel like you could finish the sentence. You could really run it, and manage it. So a tremendous blessing which has created a great opportunity.

Q. How do you think Coach Pruitt will handle Tennessee?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: I think he'll do a great job. Jeremy is a good friend and a tremendous professional, and I really enjoyed working with him.

Q. How close is the Conference and your team in particular to getting back to that national prominence?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: I think this is a good year. This is a good year to put us back in trend upwards like the conference has done for so many years. Obviously we didn't do a good job last year when it came to the bowl season or whatnot.

This season has nothing but opportunity in front of it, and we've got to do it. There is no way to sugar coat it or try to dance around it, there is not. We've just got to get it done.

Q. Are there inherent disadvantages being out here versus being in the SEC and ACC?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: I don't think so. I think sometimes you might not get the exact same exposure, but we need to create our opportunities for exposure and take full advantage of them. We need to be proud and rightfully so of our conference. The prominent coaching staffs that we have. The prominent team players that are up for so many postseason awards. I mean, we're really at a very special place during a special time. I think everyone is enthused and aggressively will pursue these opportunities that we have.