

Pac-12 Conference Football Media Days

Wednesday, July 24 2019

Kevin Sumlin Arizona Wildcats

KEVIN SUMLIN: Good afternoon. Glad to be here. Excited to get this thing kicked off. I was just talking on the radio in the other room, got to excuse us if we're not here completely because we actually play what some people call zero week, it's actually minus one week, we play the week before Labor Day Weekend. We're anxious to get this thing kicked off and get out of here tonight because we start camp tomorrow.

We've got a lot going on right now, but in the back to the left you've got outstanding young people in both corners. J.J. Taylor, one of the leading rushers in this league, over 1,400 yards last year, exciting, dynamic player and kickoff returner, and then Khalil Tate in the back corner. So those guys are here representing us this year, and I think they'll be available for questions any time.

But certainly the off-season was -- last season was not what we wanted, players or coaches, but I think if you look back at the inconsistency of how we played last season, that was revealed in the record. We came back in January, we met and discussed openly what our expectations were as a football team and what that looks like consistency-wise, on and off the field.

These guys have accepted that challenge. Our coaching staff has accepted that challenge, and I'm really proud of how these guys have responded. There has been some transition, some guys, and then there's been some recruiting that has helped the transition. How these guys have responded in the off-season with work in the weight room, work in strength and conditioning, and in life, because you look at certain things for a benchmark and what your team is doing, obviously there's numbers in the weight room, obviously there's numbers with what we use in analytics and GPS with speeds.

But probably one of the biggest things that you can say about this team is what we've talked about, they've tried to execute, and not only that, but we had the highest spring GPA for football in the history of the program.

So what that's telling me is that these guys are listening and they're operating at a different level on and off the field, and that's where that level of



consistency that we did not have last year begins.

Because of that, the energy and excitement in that building, when we came here yesterday, is something I look forward to for that first team meeting tomorrow afternoon.

Q. Are there opportunities for wide receivers to step up this season?

KEVIN SUMLIN: Well, the question is about wide receiver. There's some unknowns publicly, but there's some knowns personally for this football team. If you had have said that last year, I don't think anybody in this room would have thought Shawn Poindexter was who he was. He was certainly a guy who was not highly recruited, was a beach volleyball player. So we've got some guys in the wings, I think, in the off-season, been really, really impressed with Cedric and how he's come along. Casteel has had an excellent, excellent off-season.

So you know, we've got some older guys with some experience, even though we lost three or four guys that played a lot of football. But I think that Cedric Peterson has shown us throughout spring camp, spring football and the off-season that he's ready to be a leader not just in that position but on our football team. He's looking forward -- he's embraced that role because of, as you said, the loss of three or four of those guys.

Q. There were a lot of expectations around Khalil Tate last year. What does it say about his talent that you guys have such high expectations for him for success?

KEVIN SUMLIN: Well, it's like anything else. What is success? And success is not measured by statistics. Success is measured by wins and losses, right.

And with that, it's just -- as I've said before, the head coach, quarterback, you're tied at the hip. Guess what; you get way too much credit when you win and you get all the blame when you lose.

For him to continue to battle, miss a game, which that was a difficult time for him because of all the games to miss, UCLA was a big one because he was going home to play.

But yeah, I think it was -- the things that happened to

him have really -- it's hard to talk about. He's talking right now, but I think -- because you couldn't be at a higher point in your career than he was walking in here last year, and then from an expectation standpoint, and you couldn't be at a lower point when you're in the Rose Bowl in your hometown and you don't even have a uniform on and you can't help your team.

I think that's affected how he's approached the off-season. I think it's as good as things were and as bad as things were, given him a perspective that maybe he didn't have at this point last year, and I think it has affected his approach in the off-season, and that's why we're looking forward to tomorrow to getting going.

Q. J.J. said that Khalil has really taken a huge step forward, and he saw it this past spring. How would you describe his evolution or maturity?

KEVIN SUMLIN: Well, I think in the off-season, it becomes, hey, listen, we're in the weight room, we're not practicing. It becomes a player-led practice. Really anywhere I've been, it's been more of a quarterback-driven seven-on-sevens, one-on-ones, those workouts, because those have to be voluntary. As a coach, you don't set those up.

It's given him the opportunity to grab guys and get them to go with him and get some extra work in and communicate with his teammates.

I think, like J.J. said, I think that comes with the territory when you want to take that next step, whether it's you personally, but even as an offense because you can't do it all by yourself. I mean, to get those guys together and do that, that helps all the leadership qualities that you're looking for.

Q. Khalil said he's gotten a chance to sit down with you more this off-season. Do you know him better?

KEVIN SUMLIN: Yeah, I think it's just natural. I think a year later into this thing, he knows us a lot more, and we know a lot more about him. That's just natural.

But yeah, there was a concerted effort on my part to sit down and say, hey, man, here's what we see, where do you want to be, what do you want to do, here's how we can help you. It's part of maturity, because it's a lot different when walking in here last year when everybody told him how great he was and there was nothing that -- gotta be honest. Now you've got a whole body of work, and so what are those things that maybe you're not doing so well that you need to pick up to make you a great player.

It takes maturity, just like anything else, to know where your flaws are, accept those, and then say, hey, you

know what, I'm not -- I'm being critical for a reason because our goal is the same. We want you to be great. We want to be Pac-12 champions, and in order to do that, here are the things that you can do to help yourself be the best player in this league.

But not put it all on him because it's football. It's 11 guys out there, and there's 10 other -- it takes everybody to be successful.

Q. In the off-season a lot of big picture questions are discussed about the transfer portal - what are your thoughts on how it's working or not working?

KEVIN SUMLIN: Well, you know, it's interesting, I get a lot of questions about the portal. We're year one into this thing. When you have any major legislation like that, there's some things that people don't think about, the repercussions.

I think for coaches everywhere right now, the biggest repercussion is roster management because, particularly if you come into a new situation, you've got coaches -- Chip and I were just talking about this the other day. You come into a new situation, you've got some guys who you signed up maybe for the last coach, maybe the philosophy is different, the roster is different, maybe different defense, whether you're odd front, even front. So where those numbers come, roster management becomes important.

Now you throw in the portal. Now you've got a guy and you're trying to figure out, he puts himself in the portal, now he's gone. And the college cycle, if a guy leaves during the season, it's really two years, because you've got to recruit a guy, then get him here.

The portal is an interesting situation. But there's probably going to have to be in the end some sort of relief on the back end for a signing date because there's no way to recover in a 25-guy cycle of signing things if you've got guys constantly in and out of the portal.

I was talking to Coach earlier this year, at one point they had 16 guys in the portal, and he was spending as much time recruiting his own team as he was guys outside of there. So that's the challenge. You add that to that along with graduate transfers, which is as big as it's ever been right now. So the roster management piece, because of the portal, becomes the real challenging issue for coaches right now.

Q. How do you feel about college football being associated with free agency? And there could be players left over in the portal?

KEVIN SUMLIN: I don't know if -- free agency is one piece. But if a guy is not happy and he doesn't want to

be there -- and we had this discussion at our place in January: Hey, listen, we want guys who want to be here, and we want guys that want to do things. And here's our philosophy, here's what it is, here's where we're headed, and it's not good for me or you if you're unhappy and you don't want to be here.

You know, that's happened -- we had our share of guys in the portal this year, too, just like everybody else. I think the amazing thing I saw a stat in, what was it, February or March, how many guys were in the portal. There's not that many scholarships out there, right, so that's the other piece. That portal is a two-way street. You get in there, yeah, you're able to transfer, but a coach can cancel your aid. There were so many guys in there at one point last year, there was no way that there were that many scholarships at the Division I level.

Q. What do you think about cancelling aid as a way to run people off?

KEVIN SUMLIN: I don't know. I mean, it's -- I don't know that run people off would be the right word. I think that the situation -- just being honest, I think there's a real feeling out there, we spend a lot of time and resources in recruiting student-athletes, and yeah, sometimes mistakes are made, but the only way you can get better -- you cannot get behind in roster numbers, and depth as we know becomes critical and something that -- in every league that I've been in.

And in order to do that, you've got to -- like the position that we're in. For us to be better, we have to recruit, and we have to develop our players, and the more turnover that you have and guys going out of there and leaving, you don't have the opportunity to really develop players.

So from that standpoint, I don't really agree with that, but the issue, as I said, is numbers that match up with the portal to get you to 85.

Q. You faced a Kevin Steele defense in the past. What is it about his schemes that are so special and hard to face?

KEVIN SUMLIN: Well, Kevin has done it for a long time. When he did step away, he didn't really step away because he was an analyst at Alabama, and that gave him the time to even refine some things, working with Nick and Kirby and those guys. He definitely knows what he's doing. Like you said, it's a little bit different than some other people.

If you're an odd front team, just like Alabama, you know there's a big difference between a 3 technique -- it doesn't seem like much -- between a 3 technique and what people call a 4-1, where that shade is and how you're going to block that guy, and you have to have the

right guys to play that in the front and keep those linebackers free.

He's an interesting guy from the back end and the rotations, but with the safeties and the run fits and things like that, he'll mix them up. But no, it's a little bit different than some things you see out here.

Q. Outside of Khalil Tate's injury last year, what do you guys need to work on?

KEVIN SUMLIN: We've got a lot of things to work on. When you win five games, there's a lot of things. I think one of the big things was -- I was just talking about it in there, one of the big things is consistency. Consistency in your life, consistency in your approach to the game and where are you as a team and as teammates. Is this just something you do, or is this something that you take pride in? In order to do that, you've got to invest. What we were investing in at that point was not enough individually and as a football team.

Again, I couldn't be happier with the consistency and the effort that these guys have put in in the off-season.

Now, now we've got to go to work, and let's see where we are as a team starting tomorrow. But the energy in that building before I left and when we get there tomorrow, I'm really, really excited about it, they're excited about it, and we're ready to get rolling.

Q. What did you guys get to talk about this off-season that might make a difference as far as getting to know each other better?

KEVIN SUMLIN: We talked about everything. Everything. Not just football, everything. You know, it's -- conversations are about -- for me as the coach, it's -- you talk to guys about a lot of different things, not just about football, because he's got a lot going on. He goes back and forth home. You name it, we talked about it.

Q. What have you kind of told him about leadership? He said that that's something you guys have focused on.

KEVIN SUMLIN: Well, you know, as I said earlier, it's been a whirlwind for him. He was here last year and everybody was telling him how great he is. And then we get halfway through the season last year, and he's frustrated because he's in street clothes in LA and in the Rose Bowl and can't help his team.

I think the experiences that he had last year were experiences that he could learn from, and part of maturity is how you handle everything, highs and lows, and then he's certainly in a different place right now than he was last year walking in the door and sitting

back there.

That's how you handle it, and that's part of growth, that's part of maturity. And, again, I think he'll tell you that's part of growing up, is how you handle life, because life will throw you all kinds of curve balls or a fastball or whatever you need, and how you handle that is really what growing up is all about.

Q. You mentioned kind of almost enjoying that there's not that hype anymore and that he can kind of get away from that.

KEVIN SUMLIN: That's good. That's fine. That's all right.

Q. Was it more -- as far as him not running last year, I know it's probably been asked a million times and it'll be asked a million times again, was it mainly his injury, what led to him running less?

KEVIN SUMLIN: If the strength of your game is that and you have an ankle like that, that becomes difficult.

Q. So you think we'll see a more athletic and mobile quarterback?

KEVIN SUMLIN: Yeah, he's athletic and mobile.

Q. I ran into Jalen Harris the other day. He's a big dude for a high school wide receiver. Do you have any expectations of him to step up this year?

KEVIN SUMLIN: You know, he's had a great off-season. When I left the other day, we had some weigh-ins, I think on Friday, and he was just under 250. So he's like 249. He's got length and athleticism. Had a great spring. Really coming on as a pass rusher, and we need him to come on. If he continues to develop, we hope and we want him to be that guy, the pass rusher that we need to have to pressure and add pressure and create havoc on the pass rush and disruption.

He's had a great spring, had a great off-season. With his weight, he's been able to carry it. He's always been able to go up and down and not carry it, but he's been consistent, and at just under 250 right now, so we're looking for big things from Jalen.

Q. How do you think the growth of 7-on-7 and passing tournaments at the prep level is going to affect the next generation of college football players?

KEVIN SUMLIN: I think it's already affected them. I think the state I was in, there was a big difference because 7-on-7 is a big deal now all over the country.

What I've seen it do is help develop quarterbacks and receivers because some of the things that you used to teach in college maybe 10, 15 years ago with freshmen

coming in from high school, they know now because they're playing year-round. They're seeing single safety, two-safety rotations and they're all over the place. And receivers are doing sight adjustments, adjusting routes in the coverage.

So I think what you've seen is, because of 7-on-7, offensive players are at a higher level coming into college right now, and it's as high as it's ever been. And the same thing with defense.

It's like anything else: The more you work at your craft and the more you understand it, it's just practice. And so I've just seen -- I've seen the level of the -- the mental level of high school players because of 7-on-7 and their capabilities rise as they come in as freshmen.

Q. So does that factor into recruiting? Do you look at that type of stuff?

KEVIN SUMLIN: I don't know, it can. It can factor into recruiting. But as coaches we don't get to go to them.

But there's different people that will host tournaments and 7-on-7 tournaments, but away from that you don't get to see them. Like I said, those guys, it's like anything else, basketball, the more you play, anything else, right, the more you play it, the more you understand it, the more situations you're in as a young person, you can't help but be better.

Q. Kind of piggy-backing off of why offensive players are so (indiscernible) you see all these true freshmen playing in championship games, I know 7-on-7 you talked about, but the private quarterback coach industry, how have you seen that grow at all?

KEVIN SUMLIN: You know, it's like anything else, right? You've got -- everybody talks about the private quarterback coach industry. There's probably no bigger industry than kicking, the private kicking industry, right. Kicking and punting gurus, quarterback gurus, you name it out there right now. I saw there's a guy sending me stuff as a pass rush guy.

Everybody has got their guy that's going to help you get to the next level and refine your craft. Personal trainers, you name it, they're all out there right now. It's not just the quarterback side of it, it's everything.

Q. How often do you hear from those guys on that level, the private coaches?

KEVIN SUMLIN: Well, if you've been in this as long as I have, you know a lot of these guys, right. You know a lot of them, you've got all the different camps and different touch points, whether it's -- all these guys that I have an opportunity to bump into just because of the number of quarterbacks or kickers or punters or guys

that I've been around, they've worked with different guys. And there's some that are nationally known, there's some guys that really just work in certain cities and deal with some guys locally.

But it's like anything else, the more that you work at your craft, the more that you have those opportunities, the better off you're going to be.