

Pac-12 Conference Football Media Days

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Justin Wilcox California Golden Bears



JUSTIN WILCOX: Good morning. Good to be back with you. Eager to get going.

This morning we brought two of our players that I'd like to introduce you two real quick. First is Evan Weaver, who's a linebacker. He'll be a senior. And Camryn Bynum, who is a junior corner. And both those guys are great ambassadors, great football players, and encourage you to get to know them.

Eager to get going, starting next Friday, and looking forward to a great season.

Q. I wanted to talk about you're missing a big piece in Laird from last season. How do you assess things for this season?

JUSTIN WILCOX: Patrick did a great job for us the last couple years, on the field and off the field, as well, just setting a tone and being a great leader.

That room, we've developed some more depth. We're encouraged about the group as a whole. They've been unproven, as you mentioned, but I think if you look at spring -- last year at the end of the year and then spring football, I think Chris Brown, who was a true freshman last season, did some really, really good things. He was really noticeable in the spring, being a powerful guy, good runner.

And then the rest of that group, there's certain guys, Marcel Dancy, DeShawn Collins, DeCarlos Brooks who's coming in who can do certain things. So I think there will probably be somewhat of a committee going there. That's what fall camp is for. So we're about to find out.

Q. You have been with Peter Sirmon forever and you have known his family forever. How weird is it having his son at linebacker?

JUSTIN WILCOX: Yeah, since the day he was born. It's college football, and it's pretty neat, but on game day, you're so invested with your team and your players, you're doing everything.

Q. What aspect of the team most improved?

JUSTIN WILCOX: Just spring practice. I mentioned Chris Brown. I think Cam Goode, who's coming off of injury, played really well for us a couple years ago, and

then last year got injured the first game, Cam Goode. He did some nice things in spring. In fact, some of those -- Will Craig at left tackle, the young receivers, Monroe Young. Got two transfers in this summer at receiver, we were in need, to help us. So a number of guys.

Q. What are some of the things you're looking for the most clarity in coming into camp?

JUSTIN WILCOX: What do you mean by that?

Q. Unanswered questions that you're kind of interested in seeing an answer to.

JUSTIN WILCOX: Yeah, well, I think you look at it by position groups, it's depth at offensive line. We're going to be the rotational guys there, how is tight end position going to shake out and who can do what. We've got some talented guys in there that haven't played much.

The receiver room is obvious in terms of there's inexperience. We've got some athleticism and how is that going to look and develop. And it won't be settled by Game 1. We've got to continue to improve in all those areas, but I think it's going to be something that starts to get sorted out during fall camp.

Obviously the quarterback situation, running back room. I think anywhere you don't have -- like on defense, like the secondary, those guys have played a lot of football together. They're all returning, so it's a little cleaner right now. But a lot of those -- the linebacker spot, don't know what's going to happen there. The rotational guys at D-line.

But that's the fun part. Guys have been working extremely hard this summer, and they're prepped and ready for fall camp. And that's the fun part of this, to see what shakes out.

Q. What's your assessment of Kuony Deng since he came in?

JUSTIN WILCOX: Yeah, Kuony is a very talented guy. He's got great measurables. He's 6'5", 6'6" and athletic and he's very, very eager to learn. That's what was noticeable in spring. I thought the way he approached meetings and practice, he's very mature, and really excited about his development.

Q. Is it kind of nice to see him behind the scenes in that show?

JUSTIN WILCOX: I haven't watched the show. You tell me. Is that what he was doing, handling his business?

Q. He seems to be handling his business.

JUSTIN WILCOX: Yeah, he's a very mature guy, as I mentioned. I don't know the story lines of that show. I don't watch it. But he's driven. He's mature. He's still a bit raw as a player, but he's working extremely hard to get better.

Q. What are the reports about his transition to the inside?

JUSTIN WILCOX: Well, we had him in spring, and actually had him a little bit in the bowl practice. But he's done a really nice job. Traditionally a guy that tall, it doesn't seem natural sometimes, but he plays very natural in there. He's got instincts, got long levers. In run game he's just got a tackling radius that's bigger. And in the pass game just the windows. If you talk to the safeties, they notice it. Because when they throw seam routes, they got to throw it over the top of his hands, the quarterback does, so it puts more air on the ball. Or if it's choice routes and underneath stuff to the tight ends and backs, he's tipping the ball away.

He's got potential, which is great. But he still has a long way to go in learning how to -- and he's got to go out and perform, and he's just still a work in progress.

Q. It feels like you have recruited the whole of Arizona. Have you seen anything from the Arizona guys you have coming?

JUSTIN WILCOX: Well, they all just got there, so they've been in with our strength and conditioning group, and we'll get a chance to go hands on with them a week from Friday. But really, again, talented group of guys. But they're young and haven't played college football yet, so we'll see.

Q. How have you guys been able to pull that off?

JUSTIN WILCOX: I think it's all about the fit. We're looking for guys who are going to fit in to Cal academically, socially, obviously that have the talent to help us win, and we have kind of the primary recruiter down there is Charlie Ragle, who's been a high school coach in Arizona forever, and he's got a lot of great relationships in terms of getting information so you know the in-depth knowledge on the players. Those guys have been a natural fit for the reason I mentioned, the talent, the academics and fitting in culturally.

Q. Talk about breakaway plays on offense. What are you prioritizing when it comes to efficiency, passing game?

JUSTIN WILCOX: Yeah, I think the big things for us on

offense, the obvious ones are protecting the football. At its core, when you have the ball you've got to keep it and when you don't have it you've got to get it back. We gave the ball up too much last year, way too much. So there's a lot to that. It's not just one position.

The other thing we have to get better at is creating some explosive plays. To think you're going to drive the ball at three, four, five yards a play the whole field the whole game is very, very difficult. The primary indicators in scoring points is creating explosive plays, and we were not good in that area last year. It's coaching, it's development of our players, it's recruiting, and going out and performing.

When a scheme things to get guys wide open and create big plays, but the other teams are well-coached, too, so sometimes you've got to make somebody miss, you've got to run by somebody, you've got to throw it over their head, you've got to break a tackle. So it's everybody involved. It's coaching, it's playing, it's all of that. That's what we've got to do to get better.

Q. Do you feel any additional pressure since it's your third season to make a statement?

JUSTIN WILCOX: As soon as you start coaching college football, there's pressure. It's no -- that's how we operate. We're trying to do everything we can to win every game. That pressure comes from within, yeah.

Q. Any report on Brandon and his decision.

JUSTIN WILCOX: Yeah, he's just been with strength and conditioning right now, but he's settled in and it'll be a transition for him. He's a talented guy, as you've seen on the tape, but there's a transition to playing at this level, and so we'll --

Q. What new challenges are being presented this year using an air raid offense?

JUSTIN WILCOX: All the offenses create challenges. There's different ways. I know they'll have great players, they'll be well-coached, and just like the other teams in our conference. If you look top to bottom in our conference, the quality of the players and the coaching is extraordinary. I know SC will be loaded and I know they'll be well-coached, and we kind of do our work on us. I'm sure their version of the air-raid or whatever you want to call it will be different. They'll have wrinkles. Everybody has got wrinkles. No two teams are the same. So we know it'll be a hell of a challenge when we line up against them.

Q. I have to ask you about Washington game on week 2. Is that something that is on your calendar?

JUSTIN WILCOX: You could probably -- I bet you could answer this question. Again, I mean, the schedule,

they don't ask me, hey, when do you want to play which team. They don't. They send you the schedule, and it's like here's who you're playing and when you're playing them. So that's how I look at it.

You know, we open with UC Davis. Before we get to UC Davis we have to work on ourselves. We'll start working on it when that time comes. We go to Washington in week two. They're a phenomenal team. That will be a challenge. But we don't even -- I don't really think about schedule other than what are practices going to look like leading up to the first game and then moving forward. Like in terms of schematics, we do all that in the spring, fall camp, summer, fall camp, so we're introducing things we might use week two or five or seven. We don't create a new offense or defense on Tuesday of that week. I don't know how you do that.

In terms of the schedule and when we play which team, I don't really have yet. It doesn't matter. If they ask me to fill it out, I might fill it out a certain way, but they don't, so I don't spend a lot of mental capital on that.

Q. In the NFL, running backs seem to be deemphasized but emphasized in college football. Why is that?

JUSTIN WILCOX: What do you mean deemphasized?

Q. People view it as hard to get a second contract.

JUSTIN WILCOX: Why is that different? I haven't spent a lot of time thinking about that. I'm sure if I did, I might come up with something for you. But -- well, in our offense, we need to be able to run the ball to throw the ball. We run RPO game. So it's important to have a productive back or backs in order to make your offense go. We spent time talking about creating explosive plays and moving the ball down the field to score points, and so that's why we need them. So in terms of how that relates to the NFL and why they get contracts and don't get contracts, I don't really know.

Q. As sort of a defensive-oriented coach, going into game in the Pac-12, is stopping the run always the first thing?

JUSTIN WILCOX: Yeah, if teams run the ball efficiently on you, it's going to be a long day. I think that's part of your structure on defense, how are you built. It's not like you line up on the first play of the game or play two-man all day and say we're not going to try and fit the runs. Like you have to have an answer to fit the run game or else people are going to run it down your throat.

So absolutely. It's one thing we talk about every week, what do our numbers look like in order to stop the run

and how do you create some negative plays to put them in longer down and distances. Absolutely.

Q. Evan talked about losing body fat. As good as he was last year, how much better do you think that can make him this year?

JUSTIN WILCOX: I think it's just one of the things -- when he gets to his age, he's learned more and more about playing linebacker, and now it's, okay, physically what can he do to be better and then mentally what can he do to be better. So one of the things we challenged him with and he challenged himself was kind of getting leaner. And he's still a big guy. He's almost 240 pounds. But that'll just help with his flexibility and his change of direction.

Q. He laughed about being a linebacker wearing No. 89. Do you give him a hard time wearing that ever?

JUSTIN WILCOX: No, as long as he tackles people, I don't care what number he wears. No, I think it's great.

Q. What's the toughest part about evaluating quarterbacks, trying to recruit quarterbacks, and how far -- basically how young these days --

JUSTIN WILCOX: Yeah, that's a great question.

Q. -- 12-year-old youth camps or whatever?

JUSTIN WILCOX: We don't really get into all that. We might be on the other end where we want to see guys perform in high school in a game. I think it's become so specialized at such an early age and guys can learn how to throw the football and they go to 7-on-7, and all that's great, but you still have to go play 11-on-11. Somebody might hit you. What's that going to look like when you get out of trouble, what are their instincts like, are they accurate.

So we really like to say them play. But recruiting is very, very competitive, and to get in early is a big thing. But I think we try to be really diligent and know kind of who we're targeting, what they've done and what they might be. I don't know if anybody -- I think identification and people are -- a lot of the kids getting recruited -- like a lot of schools are recruiting the same guys. So the information is out there, and then it's trying to make sure you get the right ones.

Q. How much has it changed and what has changed about recruiting quarterbacks?

JUSTIN WILCOX: Oh, I think recruiting in general, the calendars change. People are getting recruited so much earlier, the visits have changed. Again, it kind of goes back to you really want to see them play. You want to see them play high school football, and some of the recruiting off of a combine or a workout or a 7-on-7 can be a bit misleading, I think. You've got to be

guarded against that.

Q. I was wondering if you expect (indiscernible) to take on a leadership role.

JUSTIN WILCOX: We really haven't -- there's no determination. We're going to let that thing play out. I think Chase after spring -- if we were playing tomorrow, Chase would be our starter, and he did a good job in spring. He was more comfortable with the offense, threw the ball with command. He has to play better. But again, he's also a second-year quarterback. So I expect him to play better.

Devon only had 15 practices, so kind of a small sample size, and we'll get him a lot of work in fall camp. There's enough reps in fall camp to get good evaluations. And then same thing with the newcomers. We'll get everybody enough reps to get them evaluated so we have the best guys on the field.

Q. What's your expectations for Chris Brown going into the fall?

JUSTIN WILCOX: I expect him to go out and run hard. We'll see. I mean, again, he played -- he did some real good things at the end of the year. I thought he had a strong spring. Potential is the word that comes to mind, and I think he's got the right mentality, he's got the physical tools, but you've got to go out and perform. So that potential can be a scary word because it means you haven't quite done it yet. But I think he's got a bright future, just time will tell.

Q. That history of starting freshmen (indiscernible).

JUSTIN WILCOX: Absolutely, yeah, that position as well as others. There's other freshmen that played some that we would expect to make a big jump. But I think at that position, as well, just with all that comes with it, I think he's naturally going to make a jump, and his mentality has been great, and he's working extremely hard. We would expect him to make a big jump, and I think he will.