

Pac-12 Conference Football Media Days

Wednesday, July 24 2019



Mel Tucker Colorado Buffaloes

MEL TUCKER: Good afternoon. How you guys doing? Just want to let you guys know that I'm really excited to be here. It's been a great experience so far. The Pac-12 is an incredible conference. I'm just really looking forward to the season. It's been a smooth transition.

I've got one quick announcement. Darrin Chiaverini, our wide receiver coach, I'm promoting him to assistant head coach. He does a great job recruiting. He's relentless. He's a CU guy, loves CU through and through. Has done a great job with me leading me through the transition. I leaned on him heavily for a lot of things, and I just wanted to acknowledge that.

I've got Laviska Shenault us today and Nate Landman. Laviska is our receiver for us, a great player; and Nate plays linebacker for us. With that, I'll open it up to questions.

Q. Coming from another conference, what are your thoughts on the potential rule changes?

MEL TUCKER: Yeah, I feel comfortable where the targeting rule is right now. I think it's a good rule. The game is safer now than it's ever been. It's important for us to do an excellent job in our teaching progressions and blow delivery and tackling, and to take the head out of the game. I feel pretty good where we are right now.

Q. Do you feel like harder to teach coaches to teach it right than to teach kids? Most coaches played in a different era. Is it easier to show the kids, or is it easier to get the coaches on board with not having it so aggressive?

MEL TUCKER: Well, it's been a change. I remember a few years back in the NFL where it was a really strong campaign to take the head out of the game, and we all had to make some adjustments in terms of how we teach blow delivery, how we teach tackling. It's made the game better. It's made it safer.

Our coaches are all bought into that. I feel really -- I feel confident that we are teaching those tackling and blow delivery techniques properly, and our players will be -- they'll be prepared and they'll be better off for it.

Q. You've been around some serious athletes. How does Laviska compare? What signs do you see in

him that he could be elite?

MEL TUCKER: Yeah, he's a rare athlete. The thing I like about him the most is he's a great young man. He's a high-character guy. He's very humble. He's hard-working. He's a lead by example type of guy. But from a skill-set standpoint, height, weight, speed, there's very few guys like him. I mean, he can do it all. He's got excellent ball skills, runs great routes, very competitive. He plays -- he's tough. He's contact tough, and he's got some leadership ability.

He's a guy that is a privilege to coach. It's not every year that you get a chance to work with a young man like that.

Q. As far as the teams are concerned, when you go through and you look -- I don't know if you looked at all the film or whatever, how do they compare with where you're coming from?

MEL TUCKER: The conference is very strong. We have a tough schedule week in and week out. It's going to be a challenge for us. But at the end of the day, it's going to be about what we do and how we compete and how we prepare, our attention to detail, our physicality, our discipline. But it's a challenging schedule, and the Pac-12 is going to be real tough this year.

Q. Do you bring like a different emphasis? You've had a different background. You're coming from a different place where they play it a little differently. Does that give you an advantage?

MEL TUCKER: Well, that remains to be seen. We want to win the line of scrimmage on both sides of the ball. We want to play a physical style of football, we plan to play relentless defense, and we want to be able to run the ball on offense on our terms, which means we want to run it or when we need, we can do that. That's the culture of our program right now.

Q. Does it take a certain amount of time for a coach to put his stamp on a program, or do you have high expectations as soon as fall camp starts?

MEL TUCKER: We have high expectations right now. Our goal is to be the best football team we can be, and we started that process from day one. My first day was December 5th, and we laid out to the players what type of program that we need to have to compete for championships. And it's a daily process, and we're

working on it every single day.

Q. Have you coached any subfreezing night games before?

MEL TUCKER: Have I? Yes, I have. I have.

Q. You will.

MEL TUCKER: I will, yes. It's not an issue. I'm from Cleveland, Ohio. I'm from Cleveland. I played at Wisconsin, and I coached for the Cleveland Browns. I've coached the Chicago Bears. So it's -- I've kind of been there, done that. My goal is to have an all-weather football team.

Q. Mel, the conference has discussed playing noon Eastern kickoff times. It would be 9:00 a.m. here, 10:00 Mountain. Would you be in favor of Colorado doing that, and how much do you think that would help exposure back East?

MEL TUCKER: Well, I know that's part of the plan. We're talking about that. But for me as a coach, I just want to play ball. Put the ball down and let's go play. So whatever the schedule is, the timing, the kickoff time, the opponent, it's really not an issue for me. I just need to know when we're going to kick off, and then I've got to get my guys ready to go.

Q. Have you talked with Rick about it at all in terms of actually going through with that?

MEL TUCKER: We've talked about it a little bit. We'll see where it goes.

Q. How do you like Folsom Field?

MEL TUCKER: Love it. It's a great venue.

Q. Had you ever been there before?

MEL TUCKER: I had. As a player at Wisconsin in the '90s, I played in Boulder. Colorado had a great team. We came out on the losing end of that deal. But I can remember Ralph running right past me. It was just a great atmosphere, and it's a special place to play.

Q. Having come from the SEC, what's it going to take to get the Pac-12 (indiscernible)?

MEL TUCKER: Yeah, well, when you sit in the coaches' meetings, the Pac-12 coaches' meetings, you look around the room, and there's a who's who of coaches. So obviously from a leadership standpoint and building-program standpoint, we have coaches in our conference that know how to do that, that know how -- that have won championships and know how to get that done.

I feel like we're going to play a great brand of football that people are going to respect, and that's what it takes.

Q. Colorado has not had a lot of coaches -- previous coaches over the years since it's joined the Pac-12 have not had a lot of success. It's a big undertaking. The Big 12 fans, they know what Colorado was. What was the one thing that you can say, that this is why you think you can be a success here at Colorado?

MEL TUCKER: Well, it's been done before, and I've been in championship programs. I know what it takes, the process, the steps that it takes to build a championship football team.

I did it at Wisconsin as a player. I was in Coach Alvarez's first recruiting class. We won a championship my second year at Ohio State with Jim Tressel, and we did it in 2015 at Alabama.

So there's certain things that you have to do in order to be in position to win a championship, and those things are in place in Boulder.

Q. So you played and coached in the Big Ten, you've coached in the pros, you've coached in the SEC; how are you combining all that experience into what you're going to plan to do here at Colorado?

MEL TUCKER: I've taken a little bit of something from every place that I've coached. At the end of the day, I have to be myself, and the team is going to be a reflection of me and how I believe the game of football should be played.

But the experiences I've had have been a tremendous asset for me moving forward. There are going to be some things from Bama, from Georgia, from Ohio State that I've learned and that I'm going to install in Boulder.

Q. With your recent pro experience, obviously a lot of kids thinking about that next level. What do you try and instill in them in terms of what they need to do to get to that next level?

MEL TUCKER: Well, like I told those guys, I went through 10 drafts, and so I know what it takes to get there and what it takes to stay there. I'm willing to help my players get there if that's what their goal is. And for those players, if that's a goal to get to the NFL, I've been there. I know at every position what they're looking for, what are the requirements.

And our program will develop our players, and they'll have an opportunity to do that. They'll be prepared, they'll be exposed so it will be a smooth transition for them when it's time to go to the next level. We know what it takes.

Q. You just came from the SEC; what was the

challenge of defending against the Malzahn offense?

MEL TUCKER: Yeah, Coach Malzahn, he has a great football mind, and he knows how to get it done. He knows how to score points. One of the toughest challenges with Coach Malzahn is that he never really gets away from the run game. So you have to defend the run as well as the pass. And he does a really good job recruiting. So he always has good quarterbacks and really good skill players, and they play relentless defense.

You know, he's a guy that I have a tremendous amount of respect for. We've had some success against him in the past, but he also has had his fair share of winning moments, as well.

Q. (Indiscernible)

MEL TUCKER: Yeah, well, I've studied Coach Malzahn quite a bit. Again, he's a tough guy to prepare for, and he knows exactly what he's doing. He has plays that he loves to run, that his players know that they can execute in crunch time. But, you know, at the same time, we were able to have some success. It really comes down to making plays, and we have some good players who are able to make some plays against him.

Q. Your first year at Georgia you got to coach against Jacob in practice every day. Now he's potentially vying for the starting quarterback job in Washington. What did you see when you practiced against him, and how much do you think that can help you now being at Colorado, potentially going against him this year?

MEL TUCKER: Well, Jacob, I love him. He's a really good player. I got along well with him. I thought he was a tremendous talent. He can throw the ball a mile. He's got one of the strongest arms that I've ever been around, college or pro.

But that was a few years ago, so obviously he's developed and progressed as a player. It's going to be interesting to see what type of player he is now.

Q. Coming from a situation where resources were as vast as they were in that conference, what are the advantages coming from that and what are the disadvantages?

MEL TUCKER: Yeah, well, recruiting is the key. Obviously good players make you a good coach. At Alabama and at Georgia, we recruit every day. We recruit every day, but we do the same thing at Colorado. We have what we need from a resource standpoint to recruit at the level that we need to recruit to.

I feel good about where we are in recruiting. Our

coaches are relentless. They understand that you have to recruit every day and you have to recruit at a high level. You've got to be willing to fight and compete for the best players, so that's what we're willing to do.

Q. These resources are really helpful, weren't they?

MEL TUCKER: Yeah, well, obviously every situation is different. I feel really good about our situation and our ability to recruit, to get to the players that we need to get to in the areas that we feel like we need to -- where we need to live and recruit in. I don't really see any limitations as far as what we can do recruiting-wise.

Q. What was your relationship like with Mario at Alabama?

MEL TUCKER: Mario is a good friend of mine. I love coaching with Mario, and I have a lot of respect for him. He's a great coach. He's a great recruiter. I mean, he gets it. I've talked to him a few times since I've been here in Boulder, and I'm really excited to see what he's going to do. But we had -- the one year that I worked with Mario at Alabama was a great season for us, and I'm glad that he's got this opportunity.

Q. The flights are a little longer, though, right?

MEL TUCKER: It depends on where you're going.

Q. Who recruited you at Wisconsin? Who was the coach then?

MEL TUCKER: I was in Coach Alvarez's first recruiting class in 1990.

Q. (Indiscernible) little town in Pennsylvania, walked in, he was eating dinner with -- who was the great cornerback who played in the NFL for all those years?

MEL TUCKER: Troy Vincent. Yeah, Troy and I are good friends. We played together and we were actually roommates one summer and we stayed in touch. It was funny, from that team, there was quite a few coaches that were on that team that we had, guys that were involved in football: Myself, Chris Ballard was on that team as a GM for the Colts, Joe Rudolph was offensive coordinator at Wisconsin, Todd Orlando was on that team as a defensive coordinator at Texas, Darrell Bevell was the offensive coordinator with Seattle, was there. George Sharp was the commissioner of the SWAC. Coach Alvarez had a pretty good influence on us.

Q. Where in Cleveland did you play?

MEL TUCKER: I played at Cleveland Heights High School.

Q. Speaking of Coach Alvarez and some of the other coaches, when you first got that job at Colorado, did you reach out to any of those guys --

MEL TUCKER: I reached out to a lot of the coaches prior to this opportunity, just in preparation for anything that might come down the pipeline. And I try to stay in touch with my mentors and guys that I've worked for and guys that I've worked with, college and pro, just to make sure that I was prepared for whatever may happen.

And so those guys, I lean on those guys quite a bit. Surround yourself with good people and experienced guys that care about you and want to help you. It's just been a blessing for me.

Q. Are you going to bring a lot of Juco players moving forward like you did this year?

MEL TUCKER: Yeah, we have some holes that we needed to fill. Depth was an issue for us, and we saw right away. We're probably heavier in the junior colleges than we will be in the future, but we'll always look to fill some immediate needs because, at the end of the day, you've got to have guys ready to go. Really whatever it takes we're going to do.

Q. All the competition at running back, have you seen a difference with college play and all the different conferences?

MEL TUCKER: Well, what I saw in the spring is that we're going to have three, four, five guys that we can rotate in and have a role for us, guys we're going to run hard, take care of the football, be good in pass protection. Fontenot had a good spring. Mangham showed some things in the spring game as a freshman.

I feel good about that position. I'm looking forward to having a stable of guys where we can keep fresh backs and guys can have roles and contribute.

Q. Have you noticed a difference given your vast experience of the players you recruit on the East Coast versus guys from the West Coast, and how much experience would you say you have recruiting kids on the West Coast in general?

MEL TUCKER: What is the difference between the players --

Q. Their style of game, or is there anything you've noticed over your time in coaching players that come from the East Coast or the South or the Northeast -- is there any difference?

MEL TUCKER: I haven't seen much of a difference. I've recruited -- I spent some time in California, I recruited Texas, I recruited Louisiana, and all in the Midwest, and recruited in Florida. I've recruited in Canada. I've recruited the Kansas JuCos, and there's good players all over the country. It's just a matter of finding the right fit, the guys that are a good fit for us.

Q. How much did that help just kind of all the experience that you've had, when you put together the staff to be a head coach, how much did that experience, knowing I want to have a guy from here, I want to have a guy that knows this area really well, how much did that thought factor go into it?

MEL TUCKER: That was a big part of it. Colorado, where we recruit, West Coast, California, Texas, Louisiana. We want to have coaches on our staff that have experience in those areas, that have credibility, that know their way around, that know where the players are. That had a lot to do with how I put the staff together.

Q. Have you ever signed a player from the state of Washington?

MEL TUCKER: Prior to me coming to CU, I had not recruited Washington, the state of Washington. But obviously they have some really good players there, and so that's an area where we're going to be in there competing for players.

Q. Do you feel like just the Northwest in general is underrated, undervalued, under-recruited? How would you assess it in your brief time?

MEL TUCKER: Well, there's players everywhere. You just have to decide as a program where you want to recruit, where are you going to invest your time, your resources, and so there's tremendous players out west. We have good players in the state of Colorado, and there's teams from every conference recruiting out west, Big Ten, SEC. Everyone is out here recruiting. There's no doubt about it, there's a lot of talent, and there's a lot of NFL players that come from the west.

Q. How much has Darrin meant to the program not only as a legendary coach but just with you, between your former staff and (indiscernible)?

MEL TUCKER: Yeah, he's been a tremendous asset. He does an excellent job recruiting. It's really important to him. He's played at CU, so being on the staff at CU really, really means something to him. It's personal to him, and I can see that in the way he works. He's done a really good job of developing wide receivers. He's had a very productive room.

And he knows the lay of the land. He knows California, he knows Texas recruiting, and he knows Boulder. So he's really helped me out quite a bit in the transition.

Q. You've had a lot of mentors as a coach. Is it a mixture of all of them, or is there one that you think has influenced you the most?

MEL TUCKER: I've taken quite a bit from each coach that I've worked for and assistant coaches that I've

worked with. I would say Coach Saban really gave me my foundation in coaching. I was with him three of my first four years in the business, really defensive philosophy and how to coach and how to recruit. Michigan State and LSU.

But I spent four years with Coach Tressel, and he's won five National Championships, four at Youngstown State, we won one at Ohio State. Just the way he went about his business and how he ran his program. And then obviously Romeo Crennel brought me into the NFL my first four years in the league in Cleveland and gave me my first coordinator job in 2008. Just learning the league and how to coach pro players.

I've been blessed. I've been around a lot of great coaches that have invested in me and that have really poured into me what they know, and that's a big part of who I am today, is the guys that I've been around, the coaches I worked for and worked with.

Q. Any offensive carryover because Darrin was kind of (indiscernible)?

MEL TUCKER: Yeah, obviously all of our offensive coaches have the input in how we do things, and obviously he recruited a lot of players that we have. Jay Johnson is our coordinator, and Coach Kapilovic is our run game coordinator. So I feel really good about our coaching staff. Darrin has a significant role on our staff, and I have a lot of respect for him.

Q. I was talking to Nate and Laviska about these monitors that track your energy output and speed. Were those something you brought over from the SEC?

MEL TUCKER: Yeah, the GPS monitoring was something I thought was very important for our program, so we made a significant investment in those units, and I really feel like it's already helped us and it's going to continue to help us down the road.

Q. What else? What are kind of the big things that you think you're bringing to Colorado that they didn't already have because of your SEC experience?

MEL TUCKER: Well, there are certain things that you have to do to be in a position to win, and fortunately I've been in those programs, seen it put together, those steps, the infrastructure that you have to have, and that's what I bring to the table, a winning formula.

These are the things that you have to do. It takes what it takes to get to that level of recruiting, coaching, how you handle yourself off the field, just all those experiences I bring to the table, and our players have really bought into that.

Q. That's all stuff that costs money; has the university been responsive to what you need them to help you with?

MEL TUCKER: Yeah, I feel extremely supported. Phil DiStefano, our chancellor, Rick George, our athletic director, we work well together. I let Rick know what I need, and we prioritize it, and then we knock them off and get it done. I'm really excited about that.