

# Pac-12 Conference Football Media Days

Wednesday, July 24 2019

## Mario Cristobal Oregon Ducks

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Good morning. Appreciate you guys having us here. Obviously an honor to be here, and certainly a lot of excitement, a lot of momentum being carried over from the bowl game, the bowl victory, spilling over to spring practice and the off-season.

And blessed to be here today with two guys that have chosen to come back for their senior year, both of them the leaders of our football team, two real special guys in a lot of different ways, not just as athletes but also as people in Troy Dye, who is just about to set every record imaginable defensively for us and is looking to do even bigger and better things, and of course Justin Herbert looking to return for his senior year. Both these guys lead our defense and our offense respectively on our team.

That being said, open to questions.

### **Q. How is your recruiting affected when prospects leave the footprint?**

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Well, I just think the world is smaller. I think traveling is easier, and in our case, I'm obviously going to be a little bit biased, but we have a great product to sell, and our coaching staff and the people that surround our student-athletes are really high-caliber professionals with a super high care factor. And I think people feel that. I think they see the investment in the student-athlete when they see the facilities and the resources that we have, and they also see the trajectory of the program. We have a lot of momentum going on right now. They see the types of players and athletes that we're signing, the caliber of people that we're signing, and I think a lot of people want to be a part of that.

But I think around the country in general, I think you see a lot of movement, and you see a lot of out-of-state signings because of the fact that it's just easier to travel now, and I think the cost of attendance alleviates a lot of the things that usually hindered guys leaving the state.

### **Q. Do you feel that local schools -- do you feel like that's opened up things for more people coming here?**

MARIO CRISTOBAL: I think the local schools are great



schools and great programs, and I just think that, again, the whole traveling part of it has become just a lot easier. I really believe that's what's going on.

You know, you never saw that back in the day, right? Back in the day everyone stayed home and whatnot. But it's just different times, and it might be a phase and it might not be, but I think that's what's transpiring right now.

### **Q. Talk about the recruitment of Kayvon Thibodeaux.**

MARIO CRISTOBAL: I don't know if I'm confident in anybody until the very last minute. I think obviously we're blessed to have him, and I want to -- I've said this a few times, and I really mean it. The most impressive part about Kayvon is not the five stars that sit beside his name, it's his five-star attitude and work ethic.

Now, in terms of his recruitment, was I sure? You know, even when he made his announcement and I saw all those people sitting there in crimson, I was like, I don't know, that's not a good look for us right now. But we felt strongly that he had a great experience at Oregon. We felt extremely good about the fact that he connected with us on a personal level as well as his opportunity level, and so it just -- it was -- I'd hate to say yes and no, but it was somewhere in the middle.

### **Q. What are your expectations for Thibodeaux?**

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Well, I think guys like him and guys like -- I could go on and on about guys like Mase Funa, Mycah Pittman, Mykael Wright, Keyon. It goes on and on and on. Sean dollars. All these guys, they're really talented guys, and we expect these guys to be contributors, and we expect them to contribute quickly. They've played at high levels. They've had extraordinary coaching at the high school level. There's a lot of pride. We love Southern Cal football, absolutely love it, the entire state of California, just phenomenal football and great coaching.

So that's why we're so heavily invested in the area.

### **Q. What was your immediate --**

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Jonah is another one. There's another one. Sorry about that. There's a lot.

### **Q. I was going to ask your immediate reaction to**

**being picked atop the Pac-12 north and how you handle those expectations internally.**

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Well, I think the expectations inside never really change. I think you always acknowledge what the noise is on the outside. When I say noise, I say that respectfully because I certainly respect the media and the choices and decisions made, but it never really factors into the process, never really factors into our preparation. I think the guys have understood pretty clearly when we prepare well and we focus on what we're doing, we're pretty good; and when we don't, we don't play very good.

We have a challenging schedule and we have a lot of challenges on the road, and it's something that we know we have to improve upon because we haven't done a very good job. And it starts with me. It starts with coaching. We've got to make sure that we are prepared mentally and have a mindset that's a different level. Help enhance the DNA.

Again, even though it's something that's always a compliment and we respect the fact and appreciate that fact, it doesn't factor into our preparation.

**Q. You mentioned the road struggles. Have you had any soul searching about what kind of measures you can take to create that?**

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Yeah, I think the process has taken its course and it's gone fairly well. Two years ago the struggles on the road were monumental. There were double-digit defeats and absolutely no chance at winning to last year winning three of them but still having difficulties in other ones, and now understanding that, you know what, as this thing gets harder and you go deeper into it, especially when it goes into conference play on the road, the level of attention to detail and the shutting out of the outside world has to be at a level where nothing -- there is no distraction, there is nothing that can derail you from your mindset and your approach to the game.

As much as we've done a lot of mindset training in the off-season, sports psychology, we've changed the setting on our guys and are going to do different things during camp to help enhance that experience and make our guys feel comfortable in uncomfortable settings.

**Q. The starting O-line is down 38 pounds this off-season, and these were accomplished players, but then you have backups (indiscernible) down like 70 pounds in seven months. What was the point of emphasis for the starters to be down --**

MARIO CRISTOBAL: I think Penei might be down in moon pounds. He weighed -- today I think it was 334. He played mostly at 342 to 348, in that range. Sala

came in at 380, so we had to get him down. We felt that now his body fat is at a level we could build him back up, and his playing weight is probably 328, 330.

But most of the guys have hit their target weight. Some of the bigger guys that were more -- I wouldn't say that they're a project, but their body weights and body comps were projects. We've done an extraordinary amount of work just changing their body comp so we can build them to their optimal playing weight. We treat them like prize fighters. Guys fight their best at a certain weight. We've identified that weight. We did the reducing part of it; now we start the climb back up.

**Q. Those were the guys who were down, but Patrick Herbert is up 20 since spring, and then you have freshmen -- I'm sure none of this comes as a surprise, but what does that mean that freshmen who were able to put on weight, whether they were on campus or not (indiscernible) --**

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Yeah, you got to eat at our training table. I think you'll get a good feel for what happens in there now, when they start walking out with that cedar plank salmon and all those other goodies that come with it. At the same time, a lot of these guys in high school, they eat once, maybe twice a day. Their breakfast is a bag of chips and a glass of Gatorade. Now they're eating four, five, six times a day including all their shakes and snacks and everything else.

It's a big change for them, and you combine that with the type of strength and conditioning program that we have, and you're going to see some pretty immediate results.

**Q. You've been out here for a couple years now getting comfortable. What are the differences between the Pac-12 and the SEC and the ACC?**

MARIO CRISTOBAL: You know, I think there's a lot of similarities in a lot of different areas. There really is. Especially the level of competition at the skill positions, offensive line play, quarterbacks are extraordinary out in this part of the country.

I think what -- as it relates to -- it's probably reflected in the draft. You've seen probably more defensive linemen drafted out of maybe the southern part of the country and east of the Mississippi. But there's a lot of similarity.

I know that there's always conversation about which conference is the best, this and that. I think what you're going to see, especially with the enhanced recruiting with the amount of some of the coaching changes that you're seeing, that the Pac-12 is going to show out and going to show out really, really well. I

see more similarities than I see differences.

**Q. Do you see any cultural differences as far as the approach?**

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Well, all I can speak about is our culture. We brought over a blueprint that's pretty demanding now. I mean, it's -- it'll test you. It'll push you. And you wondered how that was going to be accepted, whether it was going to be taken in or whatnot, because culture is a word that's overused. Everybody is culture, culture, culture. We really like to think within the walls of our place it means the world and that there has to be an intolerance for anything that doesn't support or uphold the culture.

Our guys have been accepting, they've been phenomenal with it, and they enhanced it because they enforced the principles and values of it.

**Q. What did you learn from taking your staff to Alabama?**

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Well, the first thing is since the blueprint is very similar is watching the practice regimen and not only how it's structured but how it's run. A lot of the drills are two spotted so that you really have to spread out your coaches and you have to assign certain sets of eyes to certain parts so that the eye discipline and the coordination of practice is on point. Just because a tempo is extremely fast, it doesn't slow down.

I thought in meeting with their coaches and sharing ideas with them from the season, and from other schematic challenges that both have faced or are facing, where it was very positive, as well, I thought looking -- having our coaches look at their players and see where they are in their developmental process as opposed to where our guys are at to see, hey, where are we and where do we feel we have to continue improving. A lot was gained out of it. And obviously those are familiar faces, so it was good to see some folks I hadn't seen in a while.

**Q. How did that experience inspire the players seeing that from their coaching staff?**

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Well, I think the inspiration is more in the fact that we're always telling players, hey, lift, get bigger, get stronger, get better. Well, what are you doing as a coach? Right? Are you sitting in your office just pointing fingers and directing, or are you doing it yourself?

We did spend an extraordinary amount of time visiting different places and had people come in and visit to -- anything that could help us. Anything that could help us gain an edge in any part of our schematics, our culture, our discipline, our regimen, the way we travel,

the way we eat, the way we sleep, the amount of hours we sleep. You name it, we take a snapshot of the entire program, and we assess everything to see if it's good enough; and if it's not, then we try to find a way to enhance it.

**Q. Since you've taken over pretty much from day one, you've been talking about building not only for the next season but two, three, four years down the road, especially with recruiting. Does having so many players back this year, especially on offense, does that accelerate kind of the window that you guys were initially kind of planning for when you were building this program?**

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Well, I think the challenging part was that the classes weren't staggered in an ideal way. Last year we played with 72 scholarship players. That's really low. We signed three -- I'm sorry, three graduate transfers at the end that got us to 75. That's still 10 under. Those are depth issues. Those are practice issues. You don't have the quality of scout teams that you want. That really hurts you.

So what I think now, at the end of this cycle, it ends up being, what, about 50 players or whatnot, however many we sign to get to whatever number we get to, with this kind of leadership and the caliber of freshman that we sign, I think it's an awesome combination to have guys like Justin Herbert, guys like Troy Dye, guys like Jordon Scott, Austin Faoliu, guys like our offensive linemen teaching these guys what the expectation is, knowing that their turn is coming up.

And the best thing we can do is have those young guys watch our older guys do it the right way, exactly like we want them to do it, how we want it done, to the level we want it done to. I think that is invaluable. That's more valuable than the talent itself.

**Q. You don't have a ton of major position battles, but I think the most significant on the offense would be the Brady versus (indiscernible) competition. From your perspective between the end of spring and the off-season workouts, where do they stand in that? Because what Alex had said at the end of spring was Throck doesn't have to be (indiscernible) which makes it sound like Brady was ahead.**

MARIO CRISTOBAL: I think it's more than that, too, I think you've got to throw Steven Jones in the mix, I think you have to throw in a guy like Alex Forsyth in the mix, as well, because they've done really well. They have shown they can play football. Our offensive line took a lot of snaps over the last two seasons, and you'd like to have eight guys that can play, and we're at that level now.

But Brady has proven he can do it. Throck has proven he can do it anywhere. He's a Swiss Army guy, right, center, guard, tackle, he's done it all. We're going to let that thing play out and give them all a fair opportunity because they deserve that. However it works out, they're all going to play.

**Q. Recruiting high school freshmen and eighth graders, what's kind of your philosophy? Is it ever too early? Is it dangerous or how do you handle that?**

MARIO CRISTOBAL: You know, it's all subjective as opposed to objective. I can say this: If we're aggressive, and we're not going to stop being aggressive, if we feel strongly about somebody and we feel they can help us win championships and they're good people, we're going to go. We're going to make a move.

We don't shy away from that. People have different philosophies, and more power to them and God bless them. That's just our philosophy. I trust our guys, and when we see it and the background check matches up -- because you do have to save yourself from yourself sometimes, great film, great player, not doing the right things, you should probably hold back. But if it matches up, what are we going to wait for? For the next team to offer him first? To each his own. You'd like to identify your guys so you can get their process rolling as soon as it's warranted.

**Q. The recruits rave about the intensity and energy of the coaching staff when they visit. What does that do for the program?**

MARIO CRISTOBAL: I think that's who we are. If it wasn't natural and genuine, it wouldn't work. We are what we are, and we are what we are 24/7. We don't put on our recruiting shirt and change what we are and have a happy glass of water and go get it. We just -- we brought in high-energy, high-octane, passionate coaches that have a super high level of expertise because the ability to connect is extremely important to us. What would you like for your son, right? You'd like your son to be around a high level of expertise guys that knows what he's doing that has a super high care factor that's going to bring it every single day. We believe you can't separate -- you bring it for practice but you kind of let your foot off the gas for recruiting and do you let your foot off the gas for -- no, if you're recruiting, playing checkers, if you're playing football, bring it.

**Q. There's been a trend of (indiscernible) you guys have really embraced that. How big a part is that?**

MARIO CRISTOBAL: I think it's a fun thing. You know, I don't know if it's a deal breaker, but it's certainly fun. I think the coaches have more fun than the players do. I mean, Coach Feld is on more photo shoots than any of

our prospects probably.

But I think our guys enjoy it. I think it's neat sometimes the families are around and have a chance to take some family pictures. But it does create a memory, and a memory is always important in recruiting, right, especially as the year goes on longer and longer, you'd like something to remind someone of, hey, that was a really special experience.

**Q. About 10 days away from the start of fall camp. Is there anyone you can rule out for the beginning?**

MARIO CRISTOBAL: The only one I would say is Justin Collins just because he's still rehabbing. But he's close, I think. I know we'll have him for the season. I would hate to say on this particular date. But everybody else is good to go. We've been very fortunate. Strong off-season, really strong off-season. Our strength and conditioning numbers have gone up.

But this is the year that you've been really working towards, right. 18 months means two entire off-seasons in the weight room, and two entire off-seasons and fourth quarter programs with your strength and conditioning staff and your football staff running it.

The numbers and the results of this year are significantly different than year one where you're kind of setting the base, setting the foundation. So that's exciting. That's exciting.

But again, the accountability factor in the locker room is extremely high, and it's directed and guided by those guys over there.

**Q. You had one of the highest rated recruiting classes this past year, which means you have a lot of highly rated football players. Are there one or two guys that maybe were underrated that you're looking forward to seeing?**

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Gosh, I think so. I think there's a lot. There wasn't a guy that we signed that we didn't feel could make some kind of an impact and help this year. But where do I start there? There's 27 signees. If I name one, the other 26 are going to be upset.

But no, I just thought that the importance of recruiting California and Southern Cal led -- almost was like a firestarter and really ended up leading to a really excellent recruiting class. But I could answer that question probably in about 14 days. I feel pretty good about it, but 14 days, I'll send you a nice little --

**Q. What have you seen from Mykael Wright?**

MARIO CRISTOBAL: He's special now. He's as explosive and as body quick -- his foot and body quickness, his balance and body control are off the

charts. But he's a jokester, too. He likes joking around.

**Q. USC is back on the schedule for you guys. Can you talk about the stress the air-raid offense puts on the defense?**

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Well, obviously it's a very challenging offense, and I think USC and the caliber of athletes they have, obviously not only are they a talented football team, but with a schematic change like that, it potentially presents a lot of problems. Certainly have a really strong front seven returning. We know they're a really good football team.

**Q. How much does having a healthy Cam McCormick affect the tight end position?**

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Drastically. That position, when that position is in effect a blocker as well as a receiver, it changes your entire offense. Living with open edges isn't exactly our world. Some people do great in it and they specialize in it. We prefer to have the ability to do both, go open edge and also use the tight ends.

So healthy Cam McCormick with it, Jake Breeland weighing 251 pounds now, it lends to us having better success at the tight end position.

**Q. Will Cam go back to being a starter or are you opening up the competition?**

MARIO CRISTOBAL: I think we're going to open that up. We start not with a depth chart, we start with an organizational start. This is how we're going to go practice and you guys win those jobs. In terms of depth, I don't talk about depth until the day before the game. That's when we'll settle that.

**Q. What about the Univ. of Oregon's philosophy on meshing men's and women's sports?**

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Rob Mullens, you're not going to find a better AD than Rob Mullens. He's off the charts as a leader, as an administrator, and the passion that he has created within the athletic department is contagious, so the support for each other and within the walls and within the programs is off the charts.