

Pac-12 Conference Football Media Days

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Jonathan Smith Oregon State Beavers

JONATHAN SMITH: Well, it is great to be here, being the first guy up here, it's always just a great time of year, starting a new football season and being able to come down here, see some familiar faces, talk about a great conference, and obviously we feel awesome about our university at Oregon State and some good people around. So like I said, it's a great time of the year.

18 months on the job now or so, and we feel pretty confident that we've improved. Going into our second year, the development that's taken place, on really both sides of the ball, changing the roster a little bit into year two, and really excited about some of the talent we've got coming back.

Proud of the two guys I brought down here with us, Jermar Jefferson, kind of his backyard down here, our running back; and Isaiah Hodgins, really productive receiver for us last year. Those two do a great job on and off the field. Got a bunch of talent, and great guys to talk to.

You know, the development continues, and we're confident. In this league, it's competitive. There's some good players in this league. There's some good coaches in this league, and we feel like we're right there with them. Our roster is built to last over the last couple of years, and we're looking forward to year two, like I said.

Questions?

Q. You guys were a lot of fun on offense. How much better is the defense?

JONATHAN SMITH: I think we're better. Some of it, you've got some young players that developed over a year, and going into year two with that. We've got some new talent that wasn't eligible to play last year -- from Addison Gumbs, outside linebacker; Avery Roberts, inside backer. A couple of junior college defensive linemen, we needed help there. Got it with Jordan Whittley. Had an awesome spring. Got Simon Sandberg who's going to help us there at D-line.

I think we're returning a good amount in the secondary. And some of those guys were young. I think with Kaleb Hayes, a corner who played as a redshirt



freshman, but he gained all that experience. He's had a good chance, had a good spring. I feel like we'll be better.

Q. Sandberg and Gumbs, how do they look heading in compared to last year?

JONATHAN SMITH: They're right on pace. Simon is pretty much going full go already, and Gumbs is on time to be available the start of September, get a good amount of camp, probably not full go the first day of camp, but by the end of it we anticipate him being ready.

Q. Having a guy like Addison, how big is it to get a guy that's healthy that can make a huge impact for you defensively?

JONATHAN SMITH: Yeah, it's huge. We've got to be able to rush the passer, and I think he's got that skill set. I will say I think we've got some depth in that room. We played John McCartan and Matthew Tago last year as true freshmen, and they had some ups and downs, did some good stuff. But they're in year two. They're going to be better. And then you throw in Gumbs, with Ham, Andrzej, so I think we've got some depth at the position.

Q. What are the steps taken to build a good team culture beginning the first year?

JONATHAN SMITH: Well, I think part of that culture is you lay out some expectations and then you hold them accountable to it. Some of that expectation is the work ethic you put in. It's not just at the player, it's all of us in it together. I think huge for us in rebuilding the program is continuity, and we've got that, nine out of ten coaches coming back. That was big, so it's really similar schemes, consistent schemes, the way they're getting taught. And not only the way they're getting taught but you just know your players better if you're there longer, and we've got that going. That's why I feel confident in year two.

Q. There are rebuilding jobs open every year. How do you keep your culture from slipping?

JONATHAN SMITH: Say that again. What do you mean?

Q. How do you keep your team culture from slipping?

JONATHAN SMITH: Yeah, you've got to have your eye

on it on the day-to-day. You really do. I think the consistency of holding guys accountable and really doing stuff the same over a long period of time and then small things turn into big things in a hurry, especially when you're dealing with 100 athletes and a large football staff. So you've got to keep your eye on it daily.

Q. In terms of just being the head coach, can you talk about how difficult last season was, settling into your alma mater, having a tough year on the field, and what's the optimism you have surrounding this season?

JONATHAN SMITH: You know, yeah, it's tough the way on Saturdays -- because you're a competitive guy, right, but at the same time we kind of knew what we were getting into, and it wasn't -- this league is competitive. It wasn't just going to flip in year one. We're taking a long-term approach on it.

So I was optimistic on some things last year, too, on the way guys continued to compete throughout. Guys got better. We got some good young talent. But just knowing that these things aren't easy to flip in just one year.

Q. And then offensively just talk about what you expect from Jake coming back.

JONATHAN SMITH: Yeah, we're expecting big things from him, and he's got a ton of experience. He's got some real talent. Love the approach he's taken really since January. Finished the year, got into the weight room, changed his body, weighed in spring ball, not just his talent level and the way he's playing, but leadership role, connecting with the guys, and he's got some weapons around him.

Q. Do you visualize him staying healthy, he'll have success this season?

JONATHAN SMITH: Sure, huge, but I will say I think we've got some depth in that room. I think we can score some points with Tristan. We want to keep everybody healthy. I think as much as healthy we've got to keep him upright. We've got to keep our sack totals down. That gives Jake a chance to throw it.

Q. Thoughts on the transfer portal and using it as an avenue to bring in new players.

JONATHAN SMITH: Yeah, yeah. It's another avenue that maybe ten, five years ago wasn't there. As you're building a roster and the recruiting part, yeah, you're thinking of the age, the position you need, high school, junior college, and then there is this other avenue. But also it's not just on like how you're trying to add, some subtraction, like leaving your place. So what I'm getting there is the numbers on how many you can bring, that's always fluctuating with guys exiting, as

well.

Q. Where are you with the portal issue? Where are you on the issue of -- there are some who advocate for the immediate eligibility, for a one-time immediate eligibility even within the same conference. There are others who say that that would open a Pandora's box and what have you.

JONATHAN SMITH: The thing I heard and I'm into is you sit a year but more or less you graduate on time, you get that year back. I had heard -- I don't remember who was talking about it. I'm into that kind of thought. I think there should be -- you go somewhere, you should sit a year but have the opportunity to get it back if you finish your degree.

Q. The ASA has also been taking on standardized injury reporting as an issue. Where are you with that, especially with sports gambling becoming more prevalent --

JONATHAN SMITH: There's a huge can of worms with that. I know, there's a huge can of worms with that. I'm into a uniform everyone doing it the same way. I think some of the problems come when people are doing it differently, because they can right now. Like I can decide what I want to say or what not. But it's a slippery slope with the injury thing.

Q. You've always been a hands-on guy.

JONATHAN SMITH: Yeah.

Q. How hard is it not to really get your hands --

JONATHAN SMITH: It's tough at times, yeah. I will say I'm around them a little bit. I do, whether it's practice or I'll pop into their meeting probably a little bit more. But I feel awesome about our -- Brian Lindgren is offensive coordinator and quarterback coach, does a great job. So that's actually made it easier to not be around as much, knowing how well he does with them.

Q. Has he kicked you out of a meeting yet?

JONATHAN SMITH: Not yet. He's probably going to come and try. Now that I've got this head coach title, I don't get kicked out.

Q. What did you find out about being a head coach that you didn't already know?

JONATHAN SMITH: A lot. The amount of time that it takes. Trust. You've got to trust a lot of people around you. You can't know or be engaged in every activity that's taking place. You've just got to surround yourself with some really good people, and I think I did that. I feel awesome with our staff, support staff. But the amount of time, it goes quick.

Q. What did you learn from Dennis Erickson and Coach P?

JONATHAN SMITH: Not a ton, meaning throughout the year or anything, but I learned a ton from those guys. And I think you take pieces from each guy you've been around, and not just the head coaches you've been around, some of the assistants I've worked with, and then you work and you try to make it your own.

Q. What do you think the team's greatest improvement is?

JONATHAN SMITH: I think we're going to be better. We need to be better in run defense. I mean, our run defense last year was not good, and that needs to improve. We've made some adjustments, whether it's personnel, growth, tweaked some schemes. I think we'll be better there.

Q. What are your thoughts on the changes to the targeting rule, both the elimination of the stance upon review --

JONATHAN SMITH: Good.

Q. -- and the progressive (indiscernible) for three-time offenders?

JONATHAN SMITH: Yeah, I think it's good, either it is or it isn't. It's one of the two. I like that clarity that comes with it. I like that it's going to get reviewed and they have to find it. So I like that change. Didn't love the -- whatever it was last year, possibly got thrown, couldn't confirm, but the penalty sticks, all this. I think there's more clarity.

Q. With that said, whether it's targeting or not, the commissioner is just talking about the officiating review and the findings. Some of the findings he didn't discuss in his remarks talk about a lack of concise communication from officiating to the coaches specifically. Was that even in your one year as head coach last year a point of frustration? Were there calls you asked for, hey, what should have happened here, was this right or wrong or what should we be doing to coach this properly, and you weren't getting concise answers?

JONATHAN SMITH: Right. Let me say this about the whole thing. I thought the thing was really good, like the communication -- Simpson talked to all of us. I sat on the phone with them for a while about all kinds of different issues. And I like the approach we're taking of, yeah, we're going to take a look at this and try to improve it.

I didn't have drastic frustrations on the communication end last year, but I know we're always looking to improve as a conference, and we are.

Q. Whether it was targeting or any other call, when a call is being reviewed, to what level of confidence do you have that the result will be the right result

right now?

JONATHAN SMITH: I'm pretty confident. I really am. You're sitting there watching the review in the stadium itself. We've got some good people working in there, and I feel confident.

Q. How do you go about establishing your recruiting identity?

JONATHAN SMITH: Yeah, well, you talk about identity. The type of kid that we're looking for that fits our place is looking to go and play some big-time football at a great school where they can have ultimate college town experience and really develop to go to the next level because you come to our place, awesome college town, big-time ball, you can focus on school and football, the two most important things. I don't think there's anywhere in the country better in that setup than us.

And then we're looking for a competitive, really, roster, so each individual being on that ultimate competition as they come and develop.

Q. Will the changes to the recruiting calendar change your recruiting process and timeline?

JONATHAN SMITH: Well, it's a lot sooner. Everything is just sooner now in the process because of the calendar and the way the early signing date really starts then. January is the evaluation earlier. I know it's a contact period, but then you can bring them in on visits May and June, so everything is just sped up.

And at the same time, it creates some opportunities for like a lot of people are going fast, let's hold a couple of them because some guys really develop their senior year. Back in the day you had to have a big-time senior year to go to college. There's still some guys that grow a little differently and have big time senior years. We want to have some spots for them.

Q. Do those changes benefit Oregon State?

JONATHAN SMITH: I think it can benefit us. I mean, just because we're not probably going to fill up in the middle of the summer, intentionally, so I think it can.

Q. Do you thin this is the year the Pac-12 get a team in the playoff?

JONATHAN SMITH: Yeah, I think every year can be different. Every year is new. I think the thing is a little cyclical, and yeah, the last couple of years the league has been pretty competitive. We've had some good teams, just not one of the top four teams in the country. We're not alone in that. I think we've got a chance to do it. But it's a gauntlet of playing nine conference games is not easy, but we've got some really good teams in this league, and we've had the last couple years. Just because we weren't in the playoff doesn't

mean they weren't any good.

Q. Any particular reason this year that this year the Conference would send a team to the playoff?

JONATHAN SMITH: Well, I mean, we've got some -- I think some rosters that are capable of doing it. They've got to win nine conference games and go unblemished, but with some of the -- where UW has been and continued to improve; the Ducks where they're at with their quarterback, Justin is an unbelievable player; I think the way Utah plays defense, and they've got a lot of players coming back; both LA schools always got some real talent and got some big-time coaches, so yeah, there's reasons all those schools can get in.

Q. Probably not something you want to revisit, but Benjamin had about 300 yards rushing last year against your team.

JONATHAN SMITH: Yeah, thanks for bringing that up.

Q. What stood out to you about him or that performance?

JONATHAN SMITH: Well, I think he runs hard, and he's natural with it. Making guys miss, breaking some tackles, finishing runs. He's got some good speed, and they consistently gave it to him, which I would, too, if he was getting those kind of yards.

Q. What do you think about your team's capability against the run this year building off --

JONATHAN SMITH: It's been a point of emphasis. We needed to get better. It starts up front, and so we needed to grow and add to our defensive front, and that's taken place. We've got to be better tacklers in space. We've just got to do it, so we've been working on that.

We did look at adding to and tweaking some schemes defensively to help against the run, so with all of that, confident we're going to be better against it.

Q. Last year you guys obviously opened at the big house. This year you have a Power Five team coming to Corvallis. Has that been kind of a motivator for the guys during the summer during workouts to have that opportunity at home?

JONATHAN SMITH: I know guys are excited about it to be at night game at home to start the season, great opponent coming from a good distance, and got a ton of respect for them. So yeah, I feel better about this setup than last year's game. Not that last year's game wasn't a good experience for the kids traveling, but to open at home with a fresh start, new season, there is excitement.

Q. Where are you right now with your quarterback competition?

JONATHAN SMITH: We're going to let those guys continue to compete, just like we're doing at every position. We're not naming every position starters right now, which I think is healthy, and which I think the approach both Tristan and Jake have taken is it's improved their game. So we're going to let those guys go for a bit in camp.

Q. Obviously you have some All-Conference players on offense and two defensive guys here. Do you feel that side of the ball is progressing, and where do you see that side taking a step this year?

JONATHAN SMITH: You're talking about offensively? Yeah, I think because we've got a lot of returning players and we've added, whether it's been youngsters that redshirted last year or Tyjon Lindsey and Tristan, we need our offense to take a step. We did some things for sure, yeah, offensively last year, but that needs to get better if we want to win the games we want to win.

Q. And defensively who are some new additions or guys that have matured that can make a difference on that side?

JONATHAN SMITH: Well, Avery Roberts to start was not eligible to play for us last year. We're counting on him to be a productive tackler for us inside. Addison Gumbs was another player we had last year, was not eligible to play, plus he's coming off injury, really to help us rush the passer and be on the edge. So those two guys are kind of newer additions.

Then we've got a lot in the secondary coming back. David Morris is a guy that's been injured, played as a true freshman, injured all really last year, coming back healthy. And then Jordan Whittley and Simon Sandberg, defensive linemen junior college-wise that we think make us better up front already.

And then we have some younger guys that are back that need to be better. That's where I'm just confident that we will take a step if those guys keep working.

Q. When you look at the north, obviously Oregon and Washington are virtually tied in terms of the poll, and Washington State, what they did last year, even Cal with Wilcox, how competitive is it and how hard is it to move up the ladder?

JONATHAN SMITH: Yeah, it's tough, it really is. You're talking about some good programs, some good coaches that have done it for the last few years, because I do, I look at like the Ducks, starting with that quarterback coming back. Justin is a really good player. Any time you've got that type of quarterback, you've got a chance to be pretty good. What UW has done, they're reloading over there. Mike Leach at Washington State and that style of offense and really

the scheme defensively, they know how to get things done. So impressed with Justin. When he took that job over at Cal, defense looks totally different. And so that's why I'm optimistic on our end we can make things look different year two.

And then Stanford. So yeah. I've got a great amount of respect for them. Like the challenge, because it is a challenge.

Q. It's been a while since there has been such balance among the top teams. It was you and Stanford --

JONATHAN SMITH: I think it's good that it's competitive, that anyone can get up there and that we do get some balance. I think top to bottom, week in and week out in this league you've got to bring your A game or you're going to get beat. I don't care which two teams. I think it makes it exciting.

But we do, we've got some -- I do look at Utah. I think they were picked to win it. They got some good players. Kyle does an unbelievable job for a long time now. And I think each year is new. So I'm looking forward to it.

Q. What is your philosophy on coaching defense?

JONATHAN SMITH: No, I'm definitely not hands on. There are some big-picture items early on that I kind of liked defensively because I know what it was offensively. But I got great confidence in the group of coaches we've got over there and the way they work and the way they teach their guys, not just the scheme we're running.

So I'll give them some insights, though. I'll say, hey, we need to do this, I think that makes it hard on offense, some small tidbits, but I'm definitely hands off.

Q. What do you think about Jimmy Lake and what makes him so good?

JONATHAN SMITH: A lot. He's really detailed, and he makes -- he's detailed but makes it really simple on those guys so they can go play fast and let their talent take over. He gets them always working as a group. There's not a bunch of individuals in there worried about just themselves. They're always as a unit working together. He does a good job of that. And he's good schematically. He can break down on offense and see their tendencies and strengths and weaknesses and more or less attack them.

Q. Did that experience influence your coaching hires at Oregon State?

JONATHAN SMITH: Yeah, I did because I saw the work he did in the secondary. Yeah, I was looking for some of those attributes when we were hiring, which

we did. We feel awesome. Blue Adams, our DB coach, does a great job. He actually knows Jimmy really well. He was playing at Tampa Bay when Jimmy was coaching. So they use similar terminology, and feel good about him.