

Pac-12 Conference Football Media Days

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David Shaw Stanford Cardinal



DAVID SHAW: Good morning, everybody. Excited about where we are. I think talking about this year, you start with how we finished last year. Most injuries we've had, including to we believe the top running back in America, had a lot of things we had to battle, but our guys never stopped fighting. After losing four out of five games in the middle of the year, we had great leadership, great effort, exhibited high character and came back and finished the year on four straight wins, which says a lot about our team, says a lot about our coaches, says a lot about our mentality.

So this year we've got a lot of guys coming back. Really excited about the guys we have coming back. We've got a bunch of guys on a bunch of different watch lists -- one of our top quarterbacks in America, tight ends, corner, offensive lineman, kicker, et cetera. Got great leadership on our outside linebacker positions.

So I think we have a lot of guys coming back with high expectations. At the same time we've got a lot of guys that are young, a lot of guys on our team that haven't played big roles that we need to step up and play big roles. And with some young guys coming in, they're going to battle for playing time, as well.

I think from the very beginning, early in the year, great way to start the year against Northwestern. A tough, physical team that was in the Big Ten Championship game. We're going to know about ourselves right off the bat. I think our guys have had a great summer, and now we're headed towards a great training camp to prepare ourselves for a very difficult schedule and challenge that I believe we'll be up to.

With us we brought our quarterback K.J. Costello and fifth-year senior outside linebacker Casey Toohill. We'll go with questions when you're ready.

Q. You were pretty shorthanded there in spring. Going into fall camp, are there any notable guys not ready to go at the start?

DAVID SHAW: I think we'll be pretty close to full speed. Maybe a couple of guys, maybe the first few days, but for the most part I think we're looking good as far as our guys that had postseason surgeries. I think we were very conservative with a lot of our guys that

maybe could have been in that second session that we just didn't want to risk it being shorthanded the whole year. We handled being shorthanded in spring. A lot of guys got a lot of reps, though, in spring that needed it. But I think going into training camp, I think we'll be pretty close to full go.

Q. Walker and Curtis are okay?

DAVID SHAW: Yeah, Walker I think is getting a full clearance very soon, if not doesn't have it some time this year. Pretty much everything he's doing right now. Curtis has been pretty much full go in everything that we've done. Excited about where those guys are as well as the health of our whole football team.

Q. You've seen a lot of quarterbacks. How good is K.J.?

DAVID SHAW: The ceiling for K.J. is very high. I think last year he played at a high level. In spurts he looked as good as anybody in America playing a position quarterback. Now it's about taking that next step, and not just about making more great plays but making fewer bad plays and really fine tuning his efforts every single week to be consistently great, and not great sometimes and good sometimes but consistently great. I think he's prepared for that. I think he's trained for it. Opportunity to leave, but I think he knew himself, there's another 10, 15 percent that he can really reach by coming back and hopefully leading this team to a great season and leading himself to a great season, as well.

Q. How hard is it to take that next step?

DAVID SHAW: You know, a lot of people say the last step that you take at this position in his career is the hardest because it's not about making huge gains. There are a ton of tiny gains, and challenged him to go back and look at all the interceptions from last year. Interceptions are going to happen, but how do we avoid those, reduce that number? How do you go, I had a great year in the upper 60 percent, so how do we get from 65 percent to 70 percent completion. That's huge. That's a few more completions each game over incompletions. Ball placement, timing, accuracy, checkdowns, all those things. And at the same time being a better running football team to take some pressure off the passing game. Have some more 2nd and mediums where we can run it or throw and continue to up the efficiency of our entire offense.

Q. Injuries happen to everybody, but I'm curious from your point of view, how do you evaluate a training staff and a strength and conditioning staff given that everyone is going to have to deal with injuries? How do you evaluate those guys over the course of a season?

DAVID SHAW: Well, I think it's continual during the course of a year, what are we doing, can we do some things better. At the end of the year, looking at holistically what did we do last year differently, and to a certain degree, last year it was just football. They were legitimate football injuries. Sprained ankles. Bruised shoulders. Some of those things are unavoidable. A couple of knee injuries. We still didn't have a lot of soft tissue things where you look at and say, okay, we have so many hamstrings, we need to change this.

They were legitimate football injuries. I think being one of the healthiest teams in America for probably a decade, it was kind of our turn. We just had a lot of things happen to us.

I'm going to throw into preparation for this year making sure that we are on top of all of our guys' issues. Make sure guys understand when something is bothering you, let us know right off the bat; don't let us know after three weeks where it's been bugging you where now maybe you miss a game or we have to do something, intervention, more so than we could have three weeks ago when it first started bothering you.

Asking our guys to take better care of themselves, how can we give them the best care that we can, reduce the number of injuries; but then also, when guys do get injured, getting them back as soon, as prudent, to get them back healthy on the field.

So I think we've looked at a lot of different things. Have a new head athletic trainer very excited about, both head for the entire athletic department but also for football. We all have gotten on the same page with our strength staff and our strength staff rehab experts. I think we're building a nice tight circle that our players can come every day and depend on.

Q. From your national television experiences, what's the perception of the Pac-12 do you get from talking to other people from around the country?

DAVID SHAW: I think it varies. The people who know football and that watch football, they know how competitive this conference is. There are not a lot of conferences out there that can legitimately look up and say more than half their conference has a chance to win the conference. And those teams in the, quote/unquote, middle of our conference, any of them can beat anybody at the top of the conference.

I think you look at a team like Cal that proves that every single week where no one picks them to be at the top, but everybody in the conference knows Cal has made a steady progression. They've gotten better and better every single year, and they are a dangerous football team that you could look up and they could be fighting for the Pac-12 Championship.

The people that know football know how deep and how difficult this conference is. The people that only want to look in two spots, in the SEC and the Big Ten footprint, you can't win them over anyway because they're not paying attention to the scope of college football.

So I think the people that know the sport and understand the sport, there's a lot of good football teams out here. And when you just look at the north between Stanford and Washington and Washington State and Oregon, what they've been able to do, and a resurgent Cal team; and you look at the south and what Utah has been able to do and all the guys they have coming back. USC has retooled and rebuilt. I trust Chip Kelly and what they're going to do down there at UCLA. You saw what Herm Edwards was able to do and surprised everybody at Arizona State. There's a lot of talent at Arizona a lot of people aren't talking about. People have forgotten about this monster named Tate that's still down there that, when he's healthy, he's as good as anybody in college football. You look at the scope of our conference, it is scary every single week.

So the people that understand it understand how deep and how good this conference is.

Q. Do you think the College Football Playoff doesn't represent the playoff effectively?

DAVID SHAW: Yeah, it's been tough. I think the committee every year has gotten it right, understandably. I think our conference is a tough conference to win. I think our conference -- and I've said this for years. I think the fact that we play nine conference games and a tough out-of-conference schedule means that what happened to us in 2015 is going to happen, which is you're going on a hellacious run and you -- after four conference games you get that Oregon game and you just can't quite finish it.

And then the same thing happened with Washington, they're on a great run, and they get Stanford on a short week on a Friday night and we find a way to edge them out and win the game. Those things happen in our conference and don't necessarily happen in other conferences because they don't play four conference games in a row because they have eight conference games. So they'll play three conference games in a

row, the non-conference game, or three conference games in a row and a bye. So those schedules sometimes are more manageable.

Our schedules are tough, and it's hard week in and week out to know that you're going to play sometimes, like USC did a couple years ago, seven straight conference games without a bye. That was brutal, absolutely brutal. But it's our challenge, and we've accepted our challenge.

But at the same time winning our conference and getting to that playoff is the challenge that we all have to look at very seriously and try to undertake.

Q. You got a lot of position battles. It's a little more open than it's been in years, safety, inside linebacker, running back, I think. Can you talk about just how you see those playing out over the course of training camp and when you kind of want to know who you guys are going to be there?

DAVID SHAW: Yeah, it's kind of different, as you imagine, but like I said earlier, there's some positions that are locked down that we feel great about, right, and some of them are some of the best in America at quarterback, at tight end, at left tackle, at corner, at kicker. And we feel really good about some of our other spots, too.

But the offensive line, who's going to fit where and start and hopefully be consistent there. We're excited about our running back position, how many guys we're going to play, who's going to be ready to play. That competition is going to be fierce throughout the year, nickel, safety. I'd love for some of our guys -- we've got to get out there and practice. I love where Obi Eboh is at, at our other corner position. We've got some other corner (indiscernible) some of those guys coming back that have been dinged up but now are ready to start challenging for playing time.

We've got a lot of battles all over the place, and it's one of the things I'm excited about for training camp. But we've got to create an environment where our top players can play at their best while we're getting other guys ready to play so when we get to the Northwestern game, we're ready to play across a really good, physical football team.

Q. Where do you see Foster starting out this year?

DAVID SHAW: I've always seen Foster as a tackle. I think he's done some back and forth, so right now he's going to battle at that right tackle position, and if he plays as well as he's capable of playing, he should be able to lock that down. And we've had some other guys that will battle. But where he goes, where Hamilton goes, those are a couple big answers we'll

need to figure out over the next few weeks.

Q. There are high school freshmen eliciting offers, 50 eighth graders. Is that good for college football, and is it particularly rewarding or challenging because you have to wait --

DAVID SHAW: The short answer is no, it is not good for college football. There's a reason why, starting with softball has started curtailing recruiting, because there are sixth graders getting offered. That's not healthy for anybody. What sixth grader knows what they want to major in in college? They don't even know what college is. They haven't even got to high school yet. That's unhealthy.

I think offering eighth graders and ninth graders is not healthy for anybody. Forget about our circumstances where we want to know where they're at academically before we offer them a scholarship anyway. I think we need to allow high school kids to be in high school. I think they need to focus on being the best students and athletes they can be.

The recruiting machine in college football right now I think is very misleading. That's the reason why we have so many guys that transfer. They don't know who they are, and they're picking colleges for the wrong reasons, and they get to the college and they get to their first bump in the road, they're third string as a freshman and say I shouldn't be third string, I'm going someplace else, instead of saying, hey, I chose this college. This is where I want to go to school and play football. So if I'm not starting, that's on me to work my way up on the ladder as I'm going to the school I wanted to go to.

So we've taken the academics out of recruiting, which I think is wrong. And obviously easy for the Stanford football coach to say that, but the guys that don't transfer don't transfer when they get their bump in the road because of where they want to be because they've gone through a recruiting process that involves school and community as well as football to choose the right place to go to school.

Q. Arizona is involved in the rules making process with the targeting rule changes and everything this last off-season. Everything is being heralded as positive changes. In your process, when you were going through the discussion, how much did you review the play stands process, and how many came back that, yeah, that wouldn't have been targeting under this new guide and how many of them would have been upheld --

DAVID SHAW: I don't know the percentage off the top of my head, but it was a significant percentage. It wasn't a high percentage, but it was a significant

percentage. The idea for replay in every sport now is to get it right, and taking out letting things stand was a huge focal point of ours to say, if we're not sure on replay, then it can't be a foul.

And there's going to be some conjecture. There's still going to be some plays that could have gone one way or the other. But we want to say, you know what, before we kick a kid out of the game, before we cost that young man playing time, this is still college football, these guys aren't professionals, we only have 12 guaranteed games, we need to make sure that we get the call right.

So we kind of got it on both sides to say we're going to make sure we get it right so if on replay we don't see all the elements of targeting, then it can't be targeting. And on the other side is once we confirm it, it was confirmed this is targeting and we're rejecting someone, okay, great, now let's have the back end and say now if we get that third targeting, we've secured that we're going to get it right. And now we've got one, now we've got two; on that third one, this kid's got a problem. He gets a third one, now we're going to eject him for longer.

So that backside of saying, we're not trying to be soft on him, we're trying to get the call right, but once we get it right, you can't have three in a season. If you have three in a season, you're going to miss a significant portion and cost yourself and cost your team some playing time.

Without backing off of it, we wanted to make sure that we made a hard-and-fast rule but also try to get every single call right.

Q. With the blind-side rule change, how much of that -- is there any concern that you have that that is really fundamentally changing for some players, especially offensive linemen on cut-backs, really everything that they've ever been taught instinctually and that you could argue you could be putting those players -- the rule could be putting those players in jeopardy if they are unable to block in that manner?

DAVID SHAW: Absolutely, and those that cannot adhere to the rules can't play. Don't care. If you can't make the rules -- if you can't change and adjust to the rules and make this game as safe as possible -- most guys understand, there is a brotherhood for anybody who plays football, and I use the word brotherhood loosely because there are a lot of young ladies that are playing football, as well, growing up. But there's a commonality that you feel, and there's a respect, I believe, that needs to happen.

If the ball is going that way and I'm coming to block you and you're not looking, I need to respect you as a human being and as a football player, say I'm going to block you, but I'm not going to try to injure you.

So we've talked about having targeting as a potential for those peel-back blocks, as well, for kickoff returns, punt returns, interception returns, et cetera. I can come and block you without injuring you. I can come shield you. I can come use my hands and put my hands on you.

The biggest thing in those blocks is all I have to do is interrupt your stride. All I have to do is nudge you and kick you off stride so you can't catch up to the guy who has the ball. So it's about teaching the guys that there are plenty of opportunities for contact in football. Every play there's going to be contact, physical contact, but let's take those hellacious hits out of the game, let's take those potential career-ending hits out of the game, let's take those concussion hits out of the football game, where it can still be fast, it can still be physical, but more guys are staying healthy.

Q. Your schedule currently has nine games, but there's really more like 10 games. How would you feel if the conference went back to eight games where you had no more than four road games and four home games? I realize that that probably would impact your recruiting in California, but I would like your thoughts on that.

DAVID SHAW: I've been consistent here. I'm a proponent for universally having the same schedule and practices. So if that means the SEC and other conferences go to nine conference games like us, great. If those don't change and we go back to eight, then I say great. Once we started this playoff, we've had this conversation so many times, we need to have some uniformity. It's the only way that makes sense.

Earlier I brought up USC not going to the College Football Playoff after winning our conference, and Alabama not winning their conference and going to the playoff. Alabama was good enough and the committee picked them for all the right reasons to go, but when you compare their schedules, the schedules didn't compare. USC played nine conference games and Notre Dame and didn't have a bye. That was a very, very tough and difficult schedule that they navigate and did a great job navigating, win the Pac-12 Championship but didn't get a chance to go to the playoff.

But you couldn't really compare the schedules. You could look and say, okay, this team is better, this team could go. But we're trying to get to a point where we can truly evaluate the schedules and look at teams

uniformly, and we haven't been able to do that. At some point I do believe we need to have more schedule uniformity.

Q. With that being the case, do you get a sense when you talk to the coaches that there is possible expansion coming with the playoff?

DAVID SHAW: Once again, I'll be consistent with myself, and I've said to everybody, Mr. Hancock included, over the years, there's no way we stay at four. From the day that we announced that there's going to be a four-team playoff, I said, that's awesome, that's great, that's what we need, until we get to eight. You've got to start someplace, we started at four, because what happens, you have five power conferences -- the Power Five conferences and four spots and some independents. There's always going to be a Group of Five team that comes up. It's too restrictive. You're not guaranteed that you're getting the four best teams.

I think we've done the best job we can every single year. I think the right four teams have gone every single year. The committee has been awesome. But every single year there's one, two and sometimes three teams that raise their hand and have a legitimate case to be included in the playoff, and the only way I think you truly get it right is to have eight teams at the end of the year battle for that National Championship.

Q. Have you talked with Larry and the presidents that you know of about that?

DAVID SHAW: For me, I'm not pushing it. I don't have the power to push it. All I've been saying is I've been around long enough to know it's going to happen. We started with 64 teams and we went to 65, then we went to 68, then went to 69. We can go from four to eight. Don't talk about time, don't talk about any of those things. It doesn't matter. We can make it work and have an eight-team playoff that I think truly -- in some years I think we've had probably seven and maybe that eighth one maybe or maybe not deserves to be in it, but we would rather have that than exclude teams that belong in that playoff.

I believe in an eight-team playoff at some point in time is going to happen, and I think it's going to be the best thing for college football.

Q. Staying on the schedule changing, pros and cons of always playing your first conference game of the year?

DAVID SHAW: Personally, I love it. I think it's a rivalry. It's funny, you ask our team who our biggest rival is, and some will say Cal and some will say USC and some will say Oregon and some will say Washington and some will say Notre Dame. But USC is one of those games I think that they -- the USC fan base loves

the rivalry, we love the rivalry. When we were becoming the Pac-12 North and South and deciding how we were going to schedule, and the four of us -- Stanford, Cal, USC and UCLA -- said, you know what, we think it would be great to continue to play each other.

Some people have fallen off of that, but for me personally, I think it's been a positive for both teams. I think they're big games. I think we've been using each other to measure ourselves against early in each year. I think our games have been exciting every year.

Q. Being the second game of the year, what challenges does USC and the air-raid offense present to you considering their skill?

DAVID SHAW: You know what, there are different versions of the air-raid, so it'll be interesting to see their version that they bring to the table in the Pac-12. It'll be different than what Mike Leach does up at Washington State. I know they have the talent and they have guys that they get the ball to. That's what's going to be really interesting and a challenge for us.

I really like our secondary, but that's going to be a heck of a match-up early in the year between their passing game and our passing defense game.

Q. You've seen Utah's evolution in the league. What does it say that they're picked to win the conference this year?

DAVID SHAW: I think it's well deserved. I think it's great they're not on the schedule for us this year. They've got a lot of guys coming back. I think they've been an unbelievable, stout defense. That front seven is difficult. They've got length and athleticism in the secondary. And then bringing a new offensive coordinator who I can't say that I know very well, but I've watched him over the years because he's been with one of my good friends, Derek Mason, at Vanderbilt. I think that style of offense is going to fit very well with Kyle's philosophy and the personnel that they have. So I think that's going to be a great combination. I think they're going to be a tough team to beat all year.

Q. Have you been able to look at the officiating report?

DAVID SHAW: Yes, I thought it was very well done. I think it was very honest and real, and even to the point of some of the things that we already do well and reaffirming that we do those things well and also looking into some areas that we can improve and challenging our leadership to make those improvements, to continue to work with the coaches, have a great relationship, working relationship with our coaches, and at the same time have accountability to

our public and our fan bases and to be as consistent as they can be and dependable week in and week out.

Q. The running back is still the centerpiece in a lot of college offenses. That's less and less the case in the NFL. Why do you think there's a difference between the two levels as far as running backs?

DAVID SHAW: So that's a great question. I think the era of quarterbacks in the NFL has been going on for a while, and I think it's gotten even more so. And you look at the rules changes and the pass interference rules and the benefits of throwing the ball more than running the ball. I was with the Baltimore Ravens, and we had Jamal Lewis, and he rushed for 2,000 yards and it was awesome, and the next year he was on injured reserve.

So you're looking at having great running backs and not running them into the ground, knowing these guys take a toll, these meta-humans that are playing on the NFL level, they're not like you and I. To run the ball consistently in the NFL is a tough thing, so you want to have multiple running backs.

So I think it's not devalued the running back position, but lets you know that you need to have multiple running backs. But it's almost more advantageous to throw the ball more, especially if you've got a top-level quarterback and some receivers, more yards, more defensive pass interference calls, more opportunities to score.

Q. Given how hard it is for running backs to get that (indiscernible) would you ever discourage a kid from playing running back that wanted to play football long-term if he was debating between running back and corner or running back and safety or something?

DAVID SHAW: I would never. I would always try to encourage a guy to play the position that he plays the best. I remember recruiting Jabrill Peppers, who I thought was a phenom. I still think he's a phenom. Great athlete and could have been one of those guys that was going to be an All-American at running back.

And talking to him, he was wise beyond his years at 17, high school, and he said, Coach, I want to play this game for a long time. I think I can play longer playing defensive back than I can playing running back. He said, I think I can play running back, but I really want to play on the defensive side. So of course we tried to get him to Stanford. Of course it didn't work.

But yeah, so some of those guys, if they have the ability to play both, some of these guys are looking towards that position. But you've got a guy like Christian McCaffrey, just a freak-show athlete, could

have been an All-American corner, All-American nickel, All-American safety, anything could have been All-American, but he was one of those guys, he loves to have the ball in his hands. He loves to run the ball. That's his mental and emotional makeup. Yes, he can run up a receiver and catch the ball, but he also likes to run that ball between the tackles.

So the mentality they have combined with their physical traits should lead them toward the position that's best for them.

Q. How big of an emphasis has it been for you and your team this season to reestablish the traditional Stanford dominant running game?

DAVID SHAW: We've covered it a few times. The focal point of our offense for years has been the guys up front. There's a reason why when you walk into our locker room, the first two things you see on the left is a picture of the offensive line, on the right is a picture of the front seven. Our guys know this is where football begins and this is where we need to be here. We want to win conference championships and go to a playoff and win a National Championship, it has to start there, physically, mentally, emotionally. That's where football begins.

So for us we have to run the ball better. We have to protect the passer better. We had some injuries last year, but hopefully a lot of guys have recuperated and they're ready to play their best football up front for us.

Q. Any surprises coming out of the officiating study?

DAVID SHAW: I wouldn't say anything surprised me. I was very pleased how thorough it was and how specific it was in areas for improvement. Challenges that I know Larry Scott, our leadership is up to, making our officiating crews respectable, not just here but nationally, that we're getting great officiating, that we have proper lines of communication, that we are influencing games in the proper way, in the right way, that combination of what we do on the field and how our fans feel about the games that are played I think has done -- that report is going to do a good job of bridging that gap.