

Pac-12 Conference Football Media Days

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Chris Petersen Washington Huskies



CHRIS PETERSEN: Not sure how I got stuck following Mike Leach (smiling). Did he talk about the Holy Lands, Machu Picchu, marriage? This might be a tougher interview up here.

But we're excited to be here. We're excited to almost get this thing kicked off. I'm really proud to introduce the guys that we brought up here to represent our program.

When you talk about OKGs, our kind of guys in our program, these guys are exactly that. They are big-time players that are great teammates and awesome people.

Both are Southern California guys. Our center, who has been a four-year starter for us, Nick Harris, awesome guy to be around. Likewise another four-year starter, been in the mix for four years as a walk-on, he's truly a remarkable person and player, Myles Bryant.

I know some of you guys know them. If you don't, get to know them because they're awesome.

With that being said, fire away.

Q. How different has this off-season been, Jake, you're moving into a new era at Washington?

CHRIS PETERSEN: Yeah, you know, as weird as it sounds, it hasn't felt that different because maybe we haven't played games and those type of things. But you're so focused on just trying to develop guys in spring football, then the summertime is all about the weight room, the process has felt so much like it has in the past.

If anything, it's always bittersweet when you lose those guys, but it's also an exciting time because you can feel the competition at so many different positions.

Q. Myles and Nick were not being highly recruited by being from Southern California, how did it affect your decision to recruit them?

CHRIS PETERSEN: I thought it was interesting because when we chose to bring these two guys down, it was, Hey, who deserves to come down here? Who has played a lot of football for us? Who does

everything right? These two guys jumped out.

Then you kind of look back and you're like, Hey, this is their backyard. Then you talked about the recruiting process. That's why I struggle with so much of this stuff in terms of the labels that we put on guys coming out of high school, whether they're this many stars or lack of.

I mean, I always say this and I say this with pride, Nick Harris was recruited by us and one more FCS school, ended up starting as a freshman. Myles and Nick are from down here walked on for us. These are some of the best players in our league.

It's just so hard to know. That's why I'm proud to have these guys down here, because they've done it the right way, come from nowhere, so to speak. It's been an awesome process for me to watch or our coaches to watch. Nobody knows what these kids have gone through, the commitment they've truly made, to get themselves in this position.

Q. Do you remember Myles, when he got the offer, did he slow play it? That conversation on signing day when you offered him a chance to walk-on.

CHRIS PETERSEN: He was one of the guys that we felt really good about, that we felt like he fit our profile. I think at that time we had another couple guys that were the same. Sometimes recruiting goes very quickly and other times it drags out. I think at that time it went kind of quickly. We kind of told miles, Hey, this thing might go quick, and it did.

Again, to his credit, I mean, it's just amazing. He had other opportunities to go and get his education paid for. He just felt like he fit us and believed in himself: Doesn't matter, I'm going to come there and earn a scholarship.

I'm thinking, Hey, you sure? I don't know how this is going to turn out. I don't know when that could be, if at all.

Just how he was from the start, the level that he played at, the attention to detail, it was amazing. He earned it faster than most.

Q. With all the transfer portal talk, does your

playing career affect how you handle those conversations?

CHRIS PETERSEN: I'm old school, I really am. What I mean by that is I just believe that there's a lot of hard things that we need to kind of work through to get good things at the end of that process. I think sometimes the portal is good for kids to go in there if they want to.

I think how this thing is heading where guys to just transfer, start to get free agency, I don't think that's good. First and foremost, I don't think it's good for the kids. Everybody wants to talk about that. I've seen too many guys, including myself, have to work through hard things where maybe you tap out, or it's easier, I'm going to go somewhere elsewhere I think it's better. It's usually not.

I just really believe that. So that's just kind of my feeling on that.

Q. Do you remember when you were leaving, going to UC Davis, what was that recruitment like, without a portal?

CHRIS PETERSEN: I will tell you this. When I played at the JC, that was a really, really hard experience on me for what you guys are talking about. The competition was there. I think I'm getting overlooked. I think the coaches aren't paying attention. I've been through all that stuff.

But never once did I think about leaving there. It wasn't even like an option. I'm just going to grind this out and figure this out. It was one of the harder things I've been through in my life. I think it was one of the things that was actually most beneficial for me as well to help me when I went to Davis.

I almost went there out of high school. I did. But everybody thought I was a defensive player. I wanted to be a quarterback. So that's why I went to a JC, to see if I could do that. So the second time around, it was pretty easy, although I think they still thought I was going to go there and play defense. It just so happened that it worked out at the quarterback position.

Q. Now that year has passed, can you judge how Jonathan did in his first year at Oregon State, what kind of impressed you leaving your staff, starting his own program?

CHRIS PETERSEN: Yeah, that's hard for me to answer because I just know this: it's hard being new at any program. Sometimes the stage is set for you better to have success at certain places than others. When I went to Washington, the stage was set for me probably better than it was for him there.

I just know it's hard. It's hard the first couple years. It's a fight to get your way of doing things going. I know he's in the process of doing that. They're building. I know he's an offensive guy by nature. Their offense did a really nice job out of the gate. You can see him building on defense.

I think he's on the right track.

Q. Talk about your quarterback situation. Are you ready to name a starter today?

CHRIS PETERSEN: No, I mean, I think I'm excited about that. I mean, I know there's a lot of people ready to anoint certain guys at the quarterback position or at other positions. We're really not. I mean, this is going to be a really nice, awesome competition to go on in fall camp, see how this things shake down.

I'm so excited to get out there to watch this, because I know all those kids have put in tremendous work since spring ball. That was our mission. We told them, We need you to get in the best shape of your life, whole team, quarterbacks as well, and you need to get smarter, in terms of smarter as a football player in our offense and defense. I know guys have been around the office doing that. I'm really excited to see where they are when we get back.

Q. What about Colson Yankoff and Jacob Sirmon putting their names in the transfer portal?

CHRIS PETERSEN: Again, I think you got young guys, when you got competition in the group, and I get the quarterback position is harder than most because there's one of them. An offensive lineman, if I'm a guard, there's five positions you can move guys around so it does get a little sticky.

I think when you got young guys, you'd like them to hang in there and battle, grind things out. That's one of the principles we always talk about. Good things in your life are going to be things that you really have to fight for, go through hard things.

It takes time to build true, elite skill. I think you want guys to hang in there and make sure they give themselves an opportunity to do that before they think their time is up.

Q. Would you take two quarterbacks in the same recruiting class again?

CHRIS PETERSEN: I've done that before. You know what you're getting when you do that. You do. Technically Jake Browning and K.J. Carta-Samuels were in that same thing. They were both freshmen, redshirt. We'd been there before. We'd done it at Boise. It's probably not ideal. I think you'd like to have one quarterback in every class, if you're in an ideal

situation.

You're going to have holes because guys are going to either not be good enough, leave, whatever. So it's always a fluid process that you just got to keep massaging and trying to get it. Once you think you got it right, it's going to change quickly anyway. It's the nature we live in.

Q. Timeline for when you want to name a starter?

CHRIS PETERSEN: No, no. None of that matters to me even kind of. We feel like we got the guy, we'll name the guy, give him the first shot to go in there and play, see what that looks like.

Q. In your mind, when is that competition over? What do you need to see to think we have our starter?

CHRIS PETERSEN: The last time I remember with Jake, we were going to see how he played the first game. What did that look like? What did the second game look like? By about the fourth game, this guy is improving, getting there. K.J. was right there with him. I remember back in Boise, we had Kellen Moore. We had senior quarterbacks. Kellen Moore was a freshman. Give him a shot. It wasn't till like the fourth game, I think we were playing Oregon, I think he played well. Yes, I guess we got a quarterback.

Because we name a guy... It's always competition. You don't want a guy looking over a shoulder, all those type of things. That's the reality of it, is a guy is going to get a shot, we'll see what he's got. Move the team, looks like we're progressing, he's getting better, you go with him. If not, you give another guy a shot.

That's how we do it at all positions A fine line, like I say, not making a guy feel like if he makes a mistake he's going to get yanked. We're not going to do that to him.

Q. With Nick, what makes him ideal to play center in your offensive line? Played guard his first two years.

CHRIS PETERSEN: So we recruited him in as a center from the start. It was just kind of weird how it happened that we didn't have him there because I think Coleman, who we thought was -- Coleman Shelton was probably more of a guard, but we had him and he was playing at a high level. And I remember it like it was yesterday when Nick is a freshman and all of a sudden we're in about our second or third week of fall camp and Chris Dosser, who was a line coach then, didn't say a word. And we got the ones out there, and I didn't even notice it at practice and go back and put the tape on, our practice tape and go back, and I went to Ryan Stross's office, and he just smiled, and I said, I see exactly what you're seeing and I see why you're

doing this.

Like you talk to him and he's just got this air and this confidence about him and such a good positive way, and he's super athletic. And I always think those are really, really good combinations for really any position.

Q. You've had three or -- only one position with more than three position coaches, that's wide receiver. What's been the struggle at receiver that you just haven't been able to -- how would you evaluate the position?

CHRIS PETERSEN: Yeah, I think it hasn't been any one thing, but for whatever reason, that hasn't had the consistency that we'd like. Certainly with how we've had so much consistency over the years with our coaches. And I don't know, it's just -- it's been unfortunate for those kids in that room that we haven't had that one coach stay in there for a while.

But the good news is, you know, you can learn something from every coach, and change is part of life, and sometimes it works great and sometimes it doesn't. We're trying to train our kids from the start, it doesn't matter, we're not going to make excuses, it is what it is, you can learn a lot from this next guy and let's go.

With all that being said, I feel awesome about Junior Adams. I think he's an awesome fit in there. I loved him being part of our staff in terms of how he fits with that, but I think he fits really good with the kids.

Q. Was he an option for you after the 2015 season? Did he ever come up in your head?

CHRIS PETERSEN: Well, I've known junior for quite a long time but never have -- we've never been on the staff together. He was a guy that was on the radar, but he had a situation where he was going to be the OC as opposed to the receiver coach, so it was a situation that he had to run with and do that. So I think it's made him a better coach and all those type of things.

Everything in this business, when you get guys, has to do with timing, and the timing just wasn't right at that time.

Q. How important is it to have Junior as your first receivers coach that is also a former receiver? Bush was a former quarterback -- does that play any actual role? Because you're smiling a little bit.

CHRIS PETERSEN: I have a hard time with that because I'm an old receiver coach that didn't play receiver, and so it's hard for me to say that like, yeah, you need a guy that played that position. But I certainly think it helps. You know, the interaction I've seen with him and the kids and all that, and they all

know he played receiver back in the day, so it certainly doesn't hurt.

Q. Is there a transition to having Lou being co-OC and now Adams just being the wide receivers coach and getting rid of that co-OC tag?

CHRIS PETERSEN: I think it's all semantics. It really is. He's going to help Bush game plan and they're in it together, and it is what it is.

Q. You've been recruiting since (indiscernible) I feel like a lot of people are going out of state now.

CHRIS PETERSEN: Well, I think the world has gotten smaller in general but certainly in the recruiting world. It's not just here, it's everywhere. You've got kids all over the west going different places with the social media and the access to -- it just feels smaller, and I think it's probably not just the west. I think there's probably kids from the east coming west and all over the place. But this is a hotbed of college football or a hotbed of high school football that all the colleges are going to come here. It's just a lot of good players out west.

Q. Do you feel like it's a struggle with two local schools and how has that affected your recruiting?

CHRIS PETERSEN: I think that the two local schools are still going to get really good players out of here because I think there's that many good players down here, so I think they'll get their fair share of good players. But it'll be interesting to see how this thing all plays out in the long run because it's one thing to go somewhere and really -- just depending on the kid. It can be great to get out of their comfort zone and go to a different part of the country and they love it, but I think -- we'll see how it all plays out when it's all said and done, this new recruiting era where kids are going everywhere. I think there's no place like home sometimes, as well.

Q. What's been a common trait of the LA recruits you've landed?

CHRIS PETERSEN: Well, you know, I mean, I think the Pac-12's footprint is all up and down the coast here, from Washington all the way down to California and then a little bit east. I mean, that's the footprint we play in, so that's where most of the players are going to come from. Our coaches do a good job of really trying to find the guys that fit our culture, our schemes, and we love -- we love just staying in the west here. Like that's our footprint. We are in the west, a little bit in Texas, because we know those coaches and we know the leagues and we have a good feel, like we feel like we know what we're getting as opposed to somewhere where we're just not familiar with.

That takes a lot of time to catch up to speed, where my

entire life, being with Coach Aliotti, we've been out here. I know all these high schools and a lot of these coaches for a long time, and that makes it an easier recruiting process.

Q. How much does that phenomenon help drive some of the parity in the Pac-12 the last couple years and level the playing field between a lot of the programs?

CHRIS PETERSEN: Does what drive the parity?

Q. The fact that especially in Southern California, the recruiting has become a little bit more stratified and you have players going to more places now. How much does that correlate with what seems like the Pac-12 -- there's more parity between the programs now.

CHRIS PETERSEN: Yeah, it could, you know, with some of these guys going different places. I still think there's just enough good players here for us to win at a high level. I really do. You know, more players you have in your backyard, the better chance you have of getting them. That's why it's always going to be a good thing for the two Southern California schools. Like us in Washington, hopefully we get a good majority of the good players in Washington to stay home. But they're not going to all stay. Some kids are just looking for something different.

Q. You opened last season with Auburn and certainly more than held your own there. A lot of people consider their returning defensive line to be the best in the sport. From your recollection, what made Brown and Davidson and Coe, 5, 3 and 91, in particular, just so good?

CHRIS PETERSEN: Well, I think one thing, they were all good players together, so it wasn't really any one guy you were worried about, you had to block them all, and it's hard to keep all four of those guys blocked at one time. But they're athletic and physical players. They play hard, they're well-coached. That's a well-coached defense. I haven't paid attention, I didn't know they were all back, but that's a good crew to have all back.

Q. Is there any scheme in the league that you would compare what Kevin Steele does and runs and the level of aggression that he employs, anything in the league that's similar?

CHRIS PETERSEN: Yeah, it's different style of blitzes, but he's an aggressive play caller. But I think (indiscernible) it's the same thing. Everybody has got a complement of blitzes that come with you that they just ran this, you're okay, but the fact that they run this with this is now our problem. So everybody has got their little strategy. You can't do it all. You pick and choose, and he's got a nice package that they complement well.

quarterback has just become such a runner.

Q. How big a deal is establishing the run and stopping the run for your program?

CHRIS PETERSEN: Huge. I mean, we think -- that's one of the number one stats that we need to pay attention to in every game. You know, we might throw it more some games than we run it, but we still are going to back to what did just running the ball look like. We always think if you can run the ball, the game becomes so much easier. Everything else becomes easier. And if you can't, things get a little bit more complicated. We've just always felt like that's part of who we are.

Q. I would say that that's still largely true across college football, not necessarily the case as much in the NFL as it used to be. Why do you think the difference exists between college football and the NFL as far as the running emphasis?

CHRIS PETERSEN: Yeah, I don't know. You know, maybe the defensive lines and those guys that they get in the NFL, there's just no weaknesses there. They're all so big and physical that you've got to spread them out and play more of a space game, and it's -- your percentages of getting three yards are much higher throwing it in the NFL than they would trying to smash it in there on 3rd down. I haven't really studied that game as much, but that's what I would guess, but the physicality is just a little bit different.

Q. The Pac-12 obviously produces quarterbacks at a very high level, but was it more of a running league than you maybe thought when you came into it?

CHRIS PETERSEN: Not really.

Q. There's a lot of star running backs across this league.

CHRIS PETERSEN: Yeah, yeah. And I think that's the beauty of college football. I mean, some teams believe in running the ball more, and some teams don't. You've got the far extreme with Washington State. That's just not their deal, and they're super successful with their deal. So I think that's -- I think in the NFL there's just so much similarity from team to team to team, the styles are -- where here, I think the styles vary a lot more.

And I think it has a lot to do with so many guys in college are much more willing to run their quarterbacks on normal-down situations, where in the NFL they'll run them, but it's going to be really specific, around the goal line, maybe 3rd downs to pull the ball they're going to get down, where some of the quarterbacks in college they're going to run counter with the quarterback and you don't see that in the NFL. That's how we run the ball in college or whatever. The

Q. Can you recall a kid that you recruited who was maybe deciding between playing running back and linebacker or running back and defensive back and maybe decided to play defense because they thought they could have a longer shelf life?

CHRIS PETERSEN: For sure, Shaq Thompson, without question. Now, when we got there, he was always a defensive player, but he was always talking about playing offense. So we're like, yeah, okay. So we played him on offense, and he did darned good. And then we got in trouble injury-wise, so he was our starting running back for two games and was spectacular. And after those two games, he's like, Coach, when do I go back to defense? And I really think it was that -- that running back thing is no joke, the pounding those guys take. That's why I'd like for Myles Gaskin to play for us four years and miss two games, it is amazing.

Q. Is the College Football Playoff a goal for your program or is it just in the background?

CHRIS PETERSEN: Yeah, that's a good question. I think we have goals in terms of what we're trying to get done in our program, but I think once they're set, like that's not the focus. That really shouldn't be the focus because there's some of that that we really still don't control. We might not win by enough or lose a game we shouldn't and now all of a sudden it's in somebody else's hands, so that's not how we want to operate. I think it's like little kids not keeping score of a game. They still know the score, they still know what the objective is. We don't have to say we're trying to get to -- our kids know that. We don't have to talk about that. What do we need to talk about, it's really the process and how we play our best and how we raise our standard of excellence in all phases. Like that's what it's all about.

Q. Is there a concern that the Pac-12 hasn't been in the College Football Playoff recently?

CHRIS PETERSEN: I think the stuff is -- I think it's cyclical. I think five or six years ago, the Pac-12 could do no wrong and we were in the greatest position ever and we were going to do this and that, and five years later we don't even know how to play football anymore, and that's -- it's always somewhere in between. I know we've got good players out here and good coaches and programs.

I think it's all cyclical.

Q. Did you see the officiating report?

CHRIS PETERSEN: I think everybody had a lot more concerns than I did. I just know how it goes. No one is going to be perfect out there, and I know we had some

issues and stuff. I think what the report does to me, and I think for probably most of the coaches, is it makes you feel like they're doing everything in their power to get better at this whole process, and they get it straightened out and do the best we possibly can.

And I think that's what it's all about, is it's about owning up to, hey, what do we need to do to take the next step to make everybody feel better, including ourselves. So I think it's a real positive, and I think we're heading in the right direction.