

Pac-12 Conference Football Media Days

Wednesday, July 24 2019

Mike Leach Washington State Cougars



MIKE LEACH: All right. Any questions?

Q. How much did you prep for media day?

MIKE LEACH: I didn't do any. Got to do too much, you're making it up. No, showed up, got to town. Then, of course, the other thing with regard to your team and the players and whatnot, you're kind of living it every day. You pretty well know.

Q. How are the transfers that are coming in looking?

MIKE LEACH: That's kind of a moving target right now. I think people are adjusting to it a little more and more.

So far it hasn't hurt us. If we're not careful, that portal can become a free-for-all. If somebody can just transfer for whatever reason anywhere and be eligible, then at some point we're going to end up taking scholarships from somebody that doesn't have a good year and giving them to some walk-on that does, I would imagine.

You want some structure to this thing. I do think the portal has diminished some of that. It hasn't hurt us. I mean, in our case, guys that we've lost on the portal are either guys far enough down the depth chart that they want on the field and play, or else they're people that we were better off without anyway.

But I don't know, I think people are still kind of getting used to it, to be honest with you.

Q. Speaking of transfers, talk about what you've seen from Gage Gubrud.

MIKE LEACH: Dedicated, hard-working player. Smart. Student of the game. He looked good in spring. But we had a lot of guys look good in spring. It will be very competitive for that position.

Q. Prior to coming to Washington State, did he catch your eye at Eastern Washington?

MIKE LEACH: I always thought he was good at Eastern Washington. No, he's a really good player, has kind of a presence and maturity to him. He's had a lot of success, too, as a player.

Q. Talk about the process of bringing Deon McIntosh in this summer.

MIKE LEACH: I'm not sure if I'm allowed to talk about him or not. I am?

Q. I'm not sure.

MIKE LEACH: Well, anyway, guy that is recently on campus that we haven't practiced yet. I'm not sure NCAA-wise whether or not I'm allowed to talk about him. I'd like to.

Q. Larry Scott said the officiating was fundamentally sound. However, in the reporting, I noticed it mentioned they're going to try to avoid incidents like the one in the Washington State-USC game. Do you have any comment on that?

MIKE LEACH: I can't really comment on the officiating unless I want to invest a little more than I plan to, at least at this point.

But I think in the end everybody wants the same thing, they want it to be as good as we can possibly get it.

Q. How is Leviska Shenault's game?

MIKE LEACH: First of all, he's really good. It's vague enough it doesn't mean much. Really a smooth player. In other words, just like no wasted steps. He's a guy that has no wasted steps.

Again, he's both quick and fast, and there's a difference. Quick is really the ability to separate or make somebody miss, in my mind. Then fast is just outright out-run somebody. He's got both of those things.

He's got some power to him, too. He's kind of got some thickness where he's stronger than a lot of the people trying to tackle him.

Q. What do you anticipate your greatest improvement for this year?

MIKE LEACH: Well, the one I always hoped for is just playing together better as a team. We have a lot of guys back. But if everybody's committed to improving, to being a better team, and we do improve from last year, we have enough guys back we could be better than last year without question.

We need everybody to be committed to improving. I mean, I realize everybody thinks we're going to get our head kicked in as usual. I don't expect that to be the

case any more than it was last year at this time when speculation was similar.

Yeah, that's the great thing about us, is every season everybody thinks we're going to get our head kicked in, then we don't. So everybody gets to be stunned and surprised, so it's fun for everybody.

Q. Talk about your offensive struggles against Washington?

MIKE LEACH: I think everybody has. Their defense, they have quality defense that goes a long ways back, clear back to Boise. I mean, it goes as far back as Justin Wilcox, and it may go before him. I suspect it does. Then I'm not sure who his influences were. But it's a good, sound defense.

The other thing is the Huskies have really good-quality players. They're a challenge for anybody.

Q. Is the matchup not a good fit for the offense?

MIKE LEACH: You know, I think a lot of the credit just goes to the Huskies and their ability to play well. They have a good unit. They have good players. They're well-coached. They do a good job.

The other thing, we just got to keep improving. You can check it, but I think we've won more games than anybody the last three years, so... We got to keep doing that.

Q. Have you had a chance to walk down Hollywood Boulevard before?

MIKE LEACH: I have before. It's kind of cool. I'll tell you, if you haven't eaten at Musso & Franks, go eat there. First of all, they have every menu item you could ever possibly conceive of. Then the other thing, it has this old-school, old Hollywood type of grill atmosphere, vibe. I like going in there if I have time.

But, yeah, it's cool. I haven't done it for a while. I don't know if everything is all kept up, but it's always been pretty captivating, looking at the buildings, especially the ones you know are old and key landmarks, that type of thing.

Q. Graham Harrell, what made him a good fit?

MIKE LEACH: Starting out in high school, he threw it a lot in high school. When Graham left high school, he was I believe at least for a while the all-time leading passer in history in the state of Texas. His dad is great student of the game. He threw it well in his high school there, and his dad was his coach. He started out throwing it.

I also think it's one of those things that as they're sitting at the dinner table passing the potatoes and the

vegetables, whatnot, there's probably some football being passed back and forth, too.

He came to us as a pretty good student of the game, and a sharp guy. Then he was a guy that could watch film fairly quickly and pull quite a lot off of it. But he really did a good job. He was a great player for us, great guy to work with.

Q. When it comes to quarterback transitioning into running, is there a mental aspect of the offense that they most commonly struggle with?

MIKE LEACH: No, I don't know. Really it's one thing to know what somebody does on every play, but it's another to react to it where it's almost kind of a muscle memory thing where you've done it over and over. Some of it's not just this route or whatever, but it's the idiosyncrasies of your receiver, your running back might have, just the timing of who's where when.

But the biggest thing is rep it over and over.

Q. What steps are taken to establish a culture of winning at WSU?

MIKE LEACH: First of all, I think you got to do a good job of selling and illustrating your vision so they have a sense of it. It's one thing to describe it, and it's another thing to see it. There's a point to where, I mean, anybody can tell anybody anything. To be perfectly honest, you tell somebody something, it starts out as a suggestion. In order to be any good, it better be a heck of a lot more than a suggestion.

In other words, this is how we are, this is how you do it. Okay, so then the other thing, if you haven't had success, sometimes it's pretty tough to trust the process till you do have success. Then you need to build on little increments of success as you go. Once you a build on those increments of success as you go, then more confidence and more belief in what's being done I think takes place with the team.

After a year or two, then you get guys that have heard the message, done it, believe in it for a period of time. Some of your efforts are duplicated because the older guys tell the young guys. They're around each other more than they are us coaches.

What's being reinforced over everything from video games to the back of the line in drills, that type of thing, is critical to building knowledge and belief in what you're doing.

So you try to accelerate that process as fast as you can. But I think that's part of why it takes a while. When the players are really onboard, really believe in what you're doing, then the process you're able to perpetuate some of your efforts through other people

that have learned the previous years and things.

Q. In your experience, how long does it take a team to transition?

MIKE LEACH: I don't know. I've never found it takes very long. Do you get better at it? Yeah. Do you get better at it? You get better at it.

I've never felt like it takes a crazy length of time. I mean, a lot of it's commitment. You got to be committed to doing it.

Q. Is it a West Coast thing to still run an air raid offense?

MIKE LEACH: I think there's several branches. It's funny, you get these offenses. It always seems like the run-and-shoot was the most aggressive with it. It was like a religion. Some of these people act like these offenses are religions. It's not the true run-and-shoot, you didn't do it like the true run-and-shoot. Did they get a first down? Did they score? Who cares.

They did the same thing with the west coast offense. Well, that's not the west coast offense. Like there are some purists, Cardinal somebody or other said you have to block this way instead of that, you have to play fake it first or something. Obviously that's ridiculous.

Some things called the west coast offense nowadays has Bill Walsh rolling over in his grave, I promise you. Sometimes people like to throw out terms to impress their friends.

As far as the air raid, I've always visualized the air raid, and I gave it the name when Bob Lamb came walking through with that siren. But, I mean, just spread it out, attack the whole field, get it in everybody's hands. There's a lot of ways to do that. You can even effectively do it on the ground. Chip Kelly's style is some of that.

You need to have some core beliefs on what you're going to do and how you're going to do it, otherwise you're just a mishmash of concepts. You don't have an offense, you just have a pile of plays.

An offense is something that one aspect of it complements another, so you have an arsenal of solutions to a variety of problems that can be caused for you, rather than just guessing and calling plays.

So I do think you need to have a core of beliefs on what you're going to be good at. But, you know, we're constantly searching and discovering things that we think are improving as we're experimenting. Sometimes we're wrong. They look good on the board, it didn't turn out to be as good as you'd hoped.

It's to the point, and I've been doing it for enough years, that usually they're not wholesale new plays as much as maybe adjust this technique or this route. I've always thought it evolves and changes. I think that's an important aspect of any offense.

So I'm not real dogmatic about this is the air raid and this isn't. It's funny, though, I have overheard people at clinics or something walk up or just overhear, somebody says, Well, that's not the true air raid.

What are you talking about? There's no true air raid. At least not the way I see it, not the way I've been involved with it. Not a true air raid? You're just trying to move the ball, that type of thing. I don't think there's a true anything.

Q. Max Borghi, how has he been in the offense and what do you expect going forward?

MIKE LEACH: He's been really good. Max came into our place with a lot of confidence, like he belonged there and could play. Then the other thing is everybody knew he could rush the football. He was able to block and protect remarkably well for a true freshman last year, which is critical.

The other thing, for a guy that only caught about four balls his senior year, he's got really good hands. I thought that would be a work in progress, working on his hands. From day one, we didn't have to work on it. We're going to run the drills so he stays sharp, but he could always catch.

Q. What is the one thing you think is missing that's preventing you or blocking you from taking the next big step to win the league, for example?

MIKE LEACH: The next big step to what?

Q. To win the league. What's the one thing, if you could put your finger on it?

MIKE LEACH: I think we keep improving. I think, like I say, we've won more games than anybody else the last three years. We've just got to keep doing the same things we're doing, just do them better, keep improving.

I think also our talent base has risen some. It's funny because on one hand somebody wants to say, Well, clear up there, anoint all these guys that have national recruiting advantages. Well, of course, they get the best recruits. Then all of a sudden somebody wins and then they're geniuses. Which is it? Are they smarter? Do they have more recruiting advantages?

As we start to mitigate that, get better and better people, develop the ones we have, you have to keep working to close that gap.

Q. Your insurgency and warfare class, you had the Miami game you had them review. The Apple Cup you didn't have them review. Did you have any thought to watch the Apple Cup?

MIKE LEACH: Just kind of depends the points we're trying to illustrate. Forget the fact that you can't show a whole game. You only have a few minutes. So certain things are going to illustrate some point of attacking space or that type of thing. You couldn't even show an entire series. We had to select plays from this game, that game or the other.

Q. When you look at the Cardinals, do you think you could work in the NFL?

MIKE LEACH: I've never had any doubt that I could coach in the NFL. I've always rooted for Kliff. I hope he does really well. I think his offense will do well. Of course, some of those NFL teams, things are decided by a committee. I'm not sure everything that goes into it there at Arizona.

But Kliff will do a really good job running the offense there. I hope they do well.

Q. Do you want to go to the NFL?

MIKE LEACH: I'd look at it, but the biggest thing is with any program, whether it's college, you want a teamwork effort at the top. As a coach, you always want to make the decisions that are going to most impact things on the field.

The biggest thing is you look at stability and leadership, I think.

Q. Do you believe if a kid decides to declare early for the draft, forego their senior year, he goes undrafted, should he have the option to come back to school?

MIKE LEACH: I didn't hear you.

Q. A kid that declares early for the draft, should he be able to come back if he goes undrafted?

MIKE LEACH: No, because I don't think -- we don't just sit around here and try to build NFL teams. I think the important thing is to build your college team.

I mean, either a guy is playing college or he's playing in the NFL, make up your mind. That's what I think.

Q. Graham reached out to you for any advice?

MIKE LEACH: We talk off and on. I guess from time to time. I mean, we end up talking about a bunch of other things, so I don't always remember why he called, to be perfectly honest. But we'll call and text, yeah.

Q. How is Gunner Cruz acclimating to never having been in snow before, trying to get with the program

early?

MIKE LEACH: When he came up there in the winter, it was the dead of winter, we have our kind of grass drill stuff outside, that type of thing. I tell you what, he bounced around, rolled around in the snow right there with everybody else. He didn't have any problem.

The other thing that was really, really remarkable for a guy that's about 17 years old and as big as him, you're thinking, Well, there's going to be some adjustment or something like that. Some of these guys have been in off-season for four or five years. He just come straight out of high school. He distinguished himself every single day out there. It was really impressive to see a kid that big, that young do that well.