

Pac-12 Conference Football Media Day

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Hollywood, California, USA

Oregon Ducks Mario Cristobal Press Conference



MARIO CRISTOBAL: Good morning, everybody. Certainly an honor and privilege today to be able to do this in person after what we all went through last season. Certainly I know everyone is enthused and excited. Feel like we're coming off our best off-season that we have had in our time at Oregon. Camp is around the corner. Getting excited to be here and looking forward to answering your questions.

Q. You said best off-season. Can you explain why that's been the case?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Well, I think the most important thing in the off-season is to find out what your team is all about in the form of presenting them with challenges, with adversity, finding ways to groom leadership.

After being apart from each other for an entire season, the brotherhood of our football team, the chemistry, the dynamic that has made us strong over the years has been investing time in each other, spending time with each other, investing time with each other, getting to know each other, working hard, then gaining respect for each other as people, as competitors and teammates has gone a long way.

We feel there's a very strong sense of urgency, detail and intensity in our players. They're ready to compete. They're ready for a very competitive, physical and intense camp.

Q. Quarterback position. When fall camp starts in a week, is Anthony Brown still with the ones?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Anthony will start with the ones. He has earned that. He's done a very good job from a performance standpoint, leadership performance, taking on Coach Moorhead's offensive scheme. At the same time the freshmen behind him have done an excellent job as well. It merits them getting an opportunity to compete for that position as well. We will make that happen.

I think it's an injustice to the game of football and to our program and culture not to provide opportunity. But that being said, when we start practice, Anthony will start off with the ones, and he has earned that.

Q. What did Anthony get from your perspective this summer out of working in Atlanta at the Manning Academy?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: I think technically and fundamentally the quarterback position never ceases, right? You're always looking for the next best thing to help you from a technical and fundamental standpoint.

I think now after having done, having experienced Coach Moorhead's coaching style, sitting in meetings with him, reviewing film, then experiencing spring ball in the off-season with our players, a lot of the stuff that he takes home with him, he can apply to those training sessions as well.

He's done that. There's always carryover when you do that. I think our players sense it, our team senses it. I think he's poised to have a really big season. We're excited for him.

Q. ACLs, what went into your assessment of Anthony given it was both knees, kind of fluke circumstances? What was your evaluation of the injury side of things?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: I think whenever you hear that word, it's a tough injury, the ACL. When you hear that someone's had two of them, it causes you concern initially.

I was fortunate enough to be in the presence of a brave one by the name of Frank Gore who had both ACLs done. I remember the doctor telling us as a staff, saying, You have better knees now, Frank has better knees now than he was born with.

In the case of Anthony, we feel that both procedures were extremely successful. They're way behind him. Those knees are strong. They've been durable in his time with us. We've trained him to make them even more durable. Very confident in his physicality and durability.



Q. Kayvon Thibodeaux, speak to his character not just on the field but off the field.

MARIO CRISTOBAL: I think that's the best part of him. I think any time you sign a player that has that five-star status, you want his work ethic, his demeanor, his leadership qualities to be that of a five-star as well. He has that.

I think it's his best quality. I think the way he pushes himself, the way he demands of himself is really his best trait. I think it carries over. A great example is in leadership for those coming up behind him, his current teammates to follow suit, to push each other as well.

There's nothing better than when your best players are your best leaders. You got to realize, he's now going to his third year. I know you guys see a mature, physical guy, made a lot of plays, explosive, great stuff there, a lot of highlights. In reality this is now his third year of playing college football. Last year was a very truncated season.

His best football is ahead of him. His best days of leadership, of performance, of all those things that come with this being a student-athlete, his best days are ahead of him.

The expectation is that we're going to challenge him because he has such a high ceiling. We got to get him there. We're going to challenge him as best as we possibly can to make sure he reaches his full potential.

Q. After winning the last two championship games, how do you like your program having that bullseye on its back? Something you take pride in, you welcome that challenge?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: I was asked that question earlier. I had a tough time digesting it in my simplicity, mindset. I never and we will never see ourselves as a program with a bullseye on us, a target on us. It's never been that way, never will be that way.

When we wake up in the morning, our feet hit the ground, we wake up with a hunger, drive, determination to make sure we're always a hunter in a humble way, driven way.

All the other stuff, the fluff and the predictions, it doesn't factor into our regimen, our structure, our DNA, our mentality.

I hope that makes sense.

Q. Running back, what do you see from that position

group?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Fully confident in them. They've shown it. I mean, guys don't get mentioned at all. Aaron and Cross have done a great job, too, stepping in there. They showed they're explosive football players that can help us win. What I've watched so far of Byron and Seven, those guys are going to help right away, have elite talent. They're physical, strong. You can push them. They already know that in our regimen they're going to get pushed, challenged hard and strong. They've responded really well to that.

Byron is a bigger guy now, 215 pounds just about, still growing. Seven is a lot bigger than you would think coming in so explosive and dynamic with the ball in his hands, not only out of the backfield but spread out as a wide receiver, special teams, those units also.

All in all we feel very good about our depth at that position.

Q. You've had a pretty good staff of analysts. You have Nick and Jimmy this off-season. Rare to have that kind of talent in that capacity. What does it mean to you, to the program, to add a guy who ran Tim's defense in Nick, and Jimmy, in analyst roles?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Appreciate you mentioning that. We're always looking to add brainpower, manpower, the ability to teach better, to create teaching progressions, off-field regimentation, off-season regimentation, film study, processes during the year. Anything an analyst is allowed to do, we want to increase that and make it better.

To have a guy that know Tim's system, has done it before, is of extreme value. As a coordinator you always want to be familiar with what he does to try to give him the best chance for success. Then you look at the Pete Jenkins, D-line coaching tree, Coach Rumbaugh is one of those guys that stands out as one of those premier guys.

Joe Salave'a we feel is the best in the country at what he does. To supplement our defensive staff and our special teams staff business guys like Coach Rumbaugh, makes us a stronger staff, a better staff, gives us a better chance to be more successful on defense and special teams.

Q. KT in the off-season, works out where he's worked out for years, but seeks out someone like Chuck who has worked with all the premier pass-rushers in the NFL, he takes it on himself.

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Just another indication that he understands that it takes what it takes. We're in a profession where you have to be committed to



improvement in every aspect of what you do and how you do it. If you're not, you are falling behind.

There is no staying the same. You're either getting better or someone's passing you up. That's just another example of a guy being proactive to perfect his craft, bring something else to the table that may be a difference in a game, a conference title or something of that nature.

It's awesome. I think if you look at our players, watch what they've done, you'll see a lot of guys are following suit, doing the same kind of thing.

Q. We were caulking about Kayvon about the NIL opportunities. Are you concerned at all there could be rift in the locker room between the have's and have not's when it comes to NIL, maybe in general across the sport?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Because it is an unprecedented situation and aspect, I think everyone is going to be wondering what it's going to be like.

I think it's also a great, I would say, preschool for real life. Life isn't fair, right? They're going to be in job situations, career opportunities where they may not be making as much as somebody else, might be working just as hard, being just as productive, but somehow it just doesn't go their way. This is a direct reflection of what the real world is like, as well.

What do you do? You make sure that's very clear, that that's understood, so that everything is still geared and steered towards performance in the classroom, on the field, becoming the right type of brotherhood, football program, team and family. If you allow that to get chipped away at, you're going to fracture a culture, fracture a team dynamic.

You have to be in tune with it. You have to be very real with it. I think that's the part that just stands true always, right? Just be real, be honest, be transparent. Then when things come up, just understand that we live in a world and we live and work in a profession of conflicts, adversity, and that comes with it.

It's just more practice.

Q. The return of your inside linebacker, Justin Flowe, can you talk about how excited you're to have him back?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Real excited for Justin. I think those that saw him perform in the spring game saw how explosive he is, the fact that he is a very physical player,

very talented player, goes from zero to 60 in a snap, very smart player. Guy that's worked really hard not only in the classroom but on the field, rehab as last year, as well. Expecting big things from him and the linebacking corps.

Q. June you were able to recruit. What was that experience like? How did it set you up for the season in recruiting, being able to focus more on the season instead of both?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: We never feel like we're where we need to be in recruiting. You always want to continue to elevate the level, caliber of athlete, competitor that you bring into the program.

To be able to get out there and watch some things live, it's always going to be the best form of evaluation. There's no film study in the world that can ever replicate being there live and watching someone perform. It could be in the form of not only a football game or practice, it could be in the form of a track and field event, a basketball game. Those things are critical.

It was good to get out in the month of June. I feel like we've gained a lot of momentum in recruiting. I feel like now we're so young, right? Our first class, first complete class, is now in their third year of college football, so we are very young. 75% of our team are made up of underclassmen.

You look at that, the fact they're doing as well as they're doing, it bodes well for the next two, three, four, five years of Oregon football. Makes us more motivated, excited. Guys are having success from all over the country. They're finding out if they're really serious about football, academics, a great life after football, that Oregon is the destination.

We have to keep our foot on the gas, keep working hard, keep presenting ourselves as genuinely as we always have.

Q. What have been your early impressions of the new commissioner?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Of who?

Q. The new commissioner.

MARIO CRISTOBAL: He really made a great impression on us yesterday. We had a chance to meet with him, sit down with him for a little bit.

Tremendously intelligent, great presence, confident, organized, detailed. He has a plan. Understands the

dynamic of what college football is and what's coming with it as well as what the conference needs to do to forge ourselves and push ourselves to continue to gain more prominence and become a prominent player in the whole league.

All in all we think he's going to make a tremendous difference and have a tremendous impact.

Q. What are you hoping to see from the new regime that might be different from the previous one?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Whether it be as a coach, coaching at a new place, something like this, I never talk about the old stuff because I think there's a lot of positive things that were done. You want to focus on that. Take the gift that was left behind and go forward, honor it by doing your best going forward.

All we look forward to is strong leadership that's going to be a difference maker, have an impact. That's what we're looking forward to.

Q. The back to recruiting, signing day in '19, I asked you about hitting Texas. Why was this cycle the year to make a strong push there?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: I think the results in Texas this year are the result of working at it for a couple years. You got to plant some seeds, continue working in cultivating an area. I think now we're recruiting hard. As you know, I can't comment on certain players or whatnot.

We're heavily invested in the state of Texas well as other parts of the country because we believe the football and coaching there is off the charts, it's awesome.

We always felt that when Oregon has been really good in previous years, that part of the country and other parts have been really instrumental in making that a reality. So we're heavily invested.

Q. The scholarship management component of recruiting in this year, because of the super seniors, how much did you have to have frank conversations with your 'juniors' who are true seniors about what their plans are? Do you enter assuming those 10 players move on? Is it assumptions versus conversations?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: No, you're always transparent. You have conversations and you're up front.

I don't think you put a cap on recruiting or a cap on numbers. I think any time you do you end up falling short.

As long as you have a detailed plan, it works itself out. We plan on signing a full class again. We're going to do that every single year.

With early departures, whatnot, sometimes a transfer portal, the numbers end up working out. We're going to stay very aggressive on the recruiting front and bringing in talent.

Q. Ty Thompson from Arizona, how does he look, where does he fit?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: He is off the charts, as talented as it gets, as driven, as motivated as it gets. Diligent, smart, competitor, relentless, physical. An absolute specimen.

When he's in there lifting, he looks like a linebacker more than a quarterback. Precision passer. Throws a deep ball well. The short game, the intermediate ball. Great touch on the long ball. Very accurate, decisive. Understands coverages and protections really well. Is a grinder in the film room.

We couldn't have asked for a better signee at quarterback. Ty has a monster future at the University of Oregon. He's in the mix as we head into fall camp.

Q. Where in the mix?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: That will take care of itself as we compete. But he is in there and he's in there strong.

Q. Buckner so far?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: To quote one of my old coaches, he's like a rolling ball of butcher knives, man. He just goes. Got great technique, great motor. Obviously his father was a great player and a great football coach. So he comes in advanced in terms of the use of his hands, his get-off, understanding offensive schemes, right? Alignments, splits, backfield sets, quarterback indicators. Grinder of a worker.

I think you saw, I don't know if you saw him in the weight room last week, squatted 500 plus pounds. Didn't really struggle to do so.

I know he was one of the players of the year in the state of Arizona. Big things expected from him as well. We are honored to have him in the program.

Q. Walden?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Walden is a stud. Arizona was a heavy hit for us last year, rightfully so. The football played

there is awesome.

Walden and Jeffers are together now. Walden is another guy that is just physical. You watch him play in high school. All he did was go after people. He is not passive in pass protection. He is aggressive. He looks like a run blocker in pass protection. He's heavy handed but light footed. Can slide his feet, anchor. Plays with great control. Can block low to high, creates a lot of movement at the line of scrimmage. He's talented enough to play defensive line. That's how athletic he is.

Absolutely thrilled to have him. He's weighing 302 pounds right now. He's really, really put on some mass, good kind of mass.

Q. In the modern recruiting landscape, especially nationally, how important have the big recruiting events like Saturday Night Live become to success in every recruiting class?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: I think any time you can get your top prospects on campus, it is critically important. SNL for us has been that at the end of the summer. If you look at a lot of guys on our current roster, a good chunk of them attended our events or other events on campus.

Oregon is a special place. You set foot on campus, you realize right away it's different. The investment in the student-athlete, the resources, are at a very different level, which screams of investment. It screams of commitment.

When they get to see that and plus they get to compete with other guys, some of the commitments that are on their way to Oregon, it's pretty powerful. They want to be at a place like that. They want to be on the same team with guys like them.

All in all, it's a great event. It's a great atmosphere. Certainly something that's really strong for us and powerful in recruiting.

Q. USC joined you in the top 10 in the recruiting rankings in the previous cycle. How much is the competition between the two programs pushing Oregon to be its best at recruiting?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: I just think it's like everything we do: we really focus on ourselves. We don't really get into who or what anybody else is doing. We know we have great teams in the conference that are going to recruit well and have historically recruited really well. But it all comes back to us. We have certain expectations for ourselves that we're not going to deviate from, we're not going to lower.

Every ounce of what we have, effort, passion, energy, is completely committed and just geared towards us doing what we do.

Q. All five starters back on the offensive line. A lot of talented younger players, too. What is the balancing act of getting those guys reps in practice?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Practice, practice, practice, practice. Those young players are extremely talented. They're going to be ready to play. They're going to be ready to compete.

The best thing, guys like Alex Forsyth does a great job of taking them under his wing and teaching them culture of how we do things. He know these young guys are going to factor into playing this year, they are that talented. They are that good. They are physically ready.

You saw Jackson Powers-Johnson, I mean, gosh, he's benching close to five. He's squatting well over five. His power clean is in the 330 range. Kingsley is in the same boat as him. Bram is in the same boat. Harper has been here, Jonathan Denis. All those guys have had outstanding summers and they're ready to play football, ready to go.

Stephens had an unbelievable summer. He's about 336 right now. I think Penei mad because Stephens ran faster than him on the GPS, so we had to send that to Penei. He knows somebody is finally faster than his big old butt.

It all starts with the guy on the stage, Alex Forsyth is a tremendous leader.

Q. Do you think you'll rotate like you did last year, six guys playing even snaps?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: I think we'll play a lot of guys. I think we will. The best thing is talk to Penei. Been playing left tackle. He gets drafted sixth overall. What does he do right away? Right tackle.

Versatility is important for the current situation, our football team, and for their career going forward. They have to be able to bounce around and be versatile and play different positions.

Q. Last year you mentioned the importance or lack of a full training camp, off-season training. Didn't use it as an excuse. Where is your team now going into fall camp compared to last year?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: We're ahead physically. Without



question we can go right into fall camp. Instead of picking up where we left off, we're picking up where we should be, right, after this six-day break they get. There is no pulling back on the reins.

We've had a great, great off-season both in terms of the winter program, spring football, Phase II of strength and conditioning, then the summer. We've had a chance to implement our systems and reinstall by player-led practices.

Our bodies have developed tremendously. Guys have put on the right kind of weight and lost the wrong kind of weight. It's where you want to be at this point in time in the calendar.

Q. What excites you about this team?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Boy, to me the fact -- like, I know a lot of people talk about some of these talented guys, the young guys and everything else.

What excites me the most is we're throwing some serious adversity and challenges at these guys. We're pushing them hard. The only response has been, Bring it. It's going to be that way because, they got -- they already know we're going to make camp as physically challenging as it can be in a smart way. We don't tread on the other side of that line.

But to be the team we want to be, we have to learn how to be a much better team when adversity strikes. It's going to strike every single team in this hotel, right? We got to be really good at it.

Q. Oregon has won the past two Pac-12 titles but hasn't got a sniff at a Playoff. What are you doing to keep your players motivated, that winning the Pac-12 title is not the ceiling for this program?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Yeah, we live and die by winning. We live and die. For us, this is life, that's our DNA. You mentioned the word 'sniff'. I don't know what that means in terms of how you used it.

In 2019 we were knocking at the door. We didn't get it done. We didn't finish it off. We have very big aspirations and goals for this program. We attack it on a daily basis without any outside factors at all being involved in it.

We want nothing but the absolute biggest and greatest accomplishments on the biggest stage under the brightest lights. We're honestly going to work at it till we get there.

Every single part of it is important. Every game,

conference championships, no matter what it is it's important. For us there are no little things, there are big things, and that's our focus.

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