

# Pac-12 Conference Football Media Day

Tuesday, July 27, 2021  
Hollywood, California, USA

## Washington State Cougars Nick Rolovich

### Press Conference

**NICK ROLOVICH:** Good morning, everybody. Appreciate the opportunity to speak to you all. Like to begin by addressing where I believe our program is headed into the season.

High level of pride for the effort these players have put in, especially the last year. I think they deserve to be the focus today.

A couple MVPs I want to talk about. Coach Dwain Bradshaw, our strength coach, and what he's done to foster a competitive environment, a place where these young men feel like they are improving physically, mentally. Very responsible for the element of togetherness that is pretty evident when you're around this football team right now.

His staff, they've really done a nice job preparing these young guys to get to training camp and for the season.

I've done a leadership committee for a lot of places, a lot of years. Probably wasn't as necessary as it was this last year. The guys on that, the communication, they're taking the reins when there's not a whole lot of time for us to be together during the summer. They've really got some high goals. I think them kind of taking ownership of this team is also very evident.

Thirdly, I know the news came out with Renard Bell, his injury. We're going to miss him. He's still a valuable part of this program. He's got an incredible mentality as far as attacking the rehab process already. I already know that he's dialing in for a comeback when he gets healthy.

Hopefully your biggest takeaway from today will be the unwavering commitment from the players in our program. I'm glad you guys get to talk to a couple of them down there. Like a lot of our peers across the country, our kids have been through so much this year, the last 18 months. But I am impressed with their mental strength, with their focus, on health and safety, online school, and doing



everything they can to get better physically and as a team.

All coaches always say they're proud of their guys. But I don't know that I've been around a team that has had to endure so much but also yet remained focused on the goal at hand in an unselfish manner. They really understand leaning on each other and that they need each other to do what they want to do. That's a tribute to the quality of people we have in this program, including our student-athletes, coaches, staff, alumni that's helped build this thing to where it's at. And, again, the leadership council for what they've done to keep us on the rails.

And the support we've received from our department, our medical experts, the fan base in Cougar Nation is as passionate and as genuine as I could have ever imagined being around. So I appreciate that.

Ton of excitement for training camp, ton of excitement for Utah State, our first game. We got some good battles going on. We got guys who want to show what they're about, guys have been waiting a long time.

We've got a bunch of starters, about 18 starters returning this season. What I learned this year was how important spring ball was. To my detriment, I thought we could get through last year. It is what it was, right? But the value of spring ball was incredible when you look at the differences of last year at this time and then where we're at now.

That set us in with Coach Bradshaw into the off-season program in the summer, the player-run practices these guys took hold of. There's a want to in this room.

But spring ball is important to the development of individual skill sets, goal setting, and it was great to have with the newer coaching staff. I think it's going to have a big impact on how we attack and how well we do this season.

I love this group. There's high character. They work hard on and off the field. They are always committed to improving in various ways, whether it's within football or some of the other elements our athletic department has allowed them to develop as young people.



We got our two guys down there, Max and Jahad, guys that know what it means to be a Cougar, guys that have had production here for many years. Very familiar to Cougar fans. They deserve all the praise that they will be given. But I know that they also know that humility, they couldn't do what they're doing without their teammates. I'm sure you'll hear that from them as they get a chance to speak.

We're fortunate to have many others who have garnered pre-season award watches, position groups with high-level talent, a lot of returners. There's NFL Draft picks in our locker room. It's a nice combination, and we're excited to watch as they develop in training camp and go into the season.

I'm very confident in this team, these players will elevate not only Washington State football but also the Pac-12. This isn't a secret. A lot of people are in their super senior year. It's going to be a hell of a conference. There's going to be a lot of high-level players, high-level challenges, coaches with all types of different schemes. I think it's set up to be a real, real special year for the Pac-12.

Now I have prepared a few written remarks to briefly address my statement regarding my decision not to receive a vaccination up to this point.

The reasons for my individual choice will remain private. However, I want to make it clear I respect, I support all the work being done by the State of Washington, who as a state has one of the highest percentages of vaccinations in the country. Whitman County, which has -- I mean, what a job they had to do with college, a university in a small college town. I think that brought some unique challenges for them. And Washington State University in navigating us all through this unprecedented pandemic.

As I go forward, I plan on adhering to all policies that are implemented for the unvaccinated at the state, local, campus, conference level. I'm not against vaccinations. I wholeheartedly support those who choose to be vaccinated, including our players, staff, coaches.

In fact, I appreciate our athletic department. They had a challenge in front of them. Going to such great lengths to educate, keep the mental health of these guys in consideration all regarding the vaccine.

Washington State athletics hosted multiple educational sessions for our student-athletes, coaches, staff regarding the vaccinations, including a session solely for members of our football team and their parents. I think that's a big part of this.

As to our current football student-athlete vaccination rate,

our A.D. Pat Chun may have more specifics. Like some of you know, I've stayed off of some of these topics. As of today our team is roughly at 75% fully vaccinated or in the process of getting fully vaccinated. We will continue to educate the remaining players on the benefits of it.

I think we all know this virus is deadly, and these vaccines are free. I urge everyone to consider being vaccinated. I do. I appreciate all the members of the media who show an interest in Cougar football, Pac-12 football. I look forward to answering your questions as they come up today, so...

I think I will leave it there for questions.

**Q. You said your reasons for not getting the vaccination is going to be remain private, I respect that. However, how do you feel that message is received by your players who kind of look at you as a pillar, somebody to follow, but then you choose not to get vaccinated? How do you feel that is received by the players?**

NICK ROLOVICH: Well, I think they respect my statement. I'm going to kind of stay with what I've said at this point.

Again, going back to the leadership committee, what this locker room is about, was there a fear of distraction? Yeah. But I think this team has really stayed focused on the goal at hand.

**Q. About your communication to the players about the NIL, this new ruling. What is your communication to the players? How do you feel this is going to impact your team?**

NICK ROLOVICH: I have no problem with them making money. I told them that. I told them that the only thing I want them all to be careful of is if what they do or what they say, there has to be some respect for the locker room. There's medical stuff I think that they want to be careful about.

I don't have a problem with the rule. College athletics has always been evolving. This is probably a faster pace than most thought, but we've overcome things in the past. I just want them to keep the team the main thing. We go by a code of faith, family, academics, and football. I want them to always keep that kind of priority list as they move on.

I know there was a lot of excitement about it. I mean, don't test young people with creativity. These guys and the women on some of the other sports, combined with some of the technology today, I think there's a lot of opportunity for them.

That's our job as a staff, to keep the main thing the main thing. What they do on the side is what they do. I think it will be something we will continually have to monitor with our staff, our SID department. If things arise that cause us any issues within the team, we'll address it. I think we have very good lines of communication.

I just want to get to training camp and see what these guys can do on the field.

**Q. The new commissioner has said before that he favors a policy in which if a team can't play due to COVID, they would then forfeit that game. As it pertains to your decision not to get the vaccine, how do you square that decision with the possibility you might be putting your team more at risk of having to forfeit a game?**

NICK ROLOVICH: Like I said, I'm going to follow all policies that are laid out, kind of stand on the statement we have. This is an ongoing decision for me. I'm going to kind of stand by the stuff I've already said.

I appreciate the question, though.

**Q. What has been the message to you from the Washington State administration as it pertains to that decision?**

NICK ROLOVICH: I'm sorry?

**Q. What has the message been from the Washington State administration as it pertains to your decision to not get the vaccine?**

NICK ROLOVICH: I think communication was good. They respect my decision. I don't mean to cause any heartache to this university or this athletic department or this state.

I appreciate the support that we've gotten since I've gotten here. But we do have an open line of communication.

**Q. Can you tell us about your quarterback Jayden de Laura. He was suspended for the DUI but reinstated back in May. He missed spring practice. Can you tell us how his maturation process has come along since last year as a true freshman?**

NICK ROLOVICH: Sure. Got thrown into a crazy season. Did win the job last fall. I think Jayden will I think definitely say he knows he made a mistake. But when that happened, I said, Jayden, this mistake will not decide your career. How you approach after this mistake will probably determine a good portion of your career.

He got his head down, worked on his academics. I know it hurt him not to be in spring ball. It hurt us, right, not having a guy who has taken some game reps in the system being out there.

I just felt for the betterment of that young man and his future and his ability to help us in the future, you know, it was the right punishment to make sure he understood the severity of his decisions.

A little bit of it is the town we live in. It has a little bit, to me, when we were at Hawaii, living on an island, you really realize that you rely on each other in so many different ways. I think that's very similar to a small college town.

I'm excited to see what he can do in this competition as we enter fall camp. But I'm proud of him for fighting through. That's not easy with media scrutiny or social media or those things. He seems to be on the right track, not that he was off the tracks, he just made a bad decision. I'm sure it matured him. I'm sure of that.

And listen, we all make mistakes. I'm probably a prime example of that. As young people, as a college staff I think it's our job to help them with these lessons and make sure that they improve from it. When they become members of the community, we're big on them understanding or at least hearing that someday they most likely will be a father, a husband. They don't have a choice. They're going to have an impact on their community wherever they choose to live.

To reinforce that that should be a positive influence on your community or as a dad or as a husband, we try to hit on that a bunch. I mean, some of the things we've done in our program I think are very unique.

Coach John Richardson's financial program that we've kind of ramped up for spring ball I think taught a lot of life lessons, whether it be buying a house, whether it be choosing a car; preowned, new, lease, credit scores. I mean, I thought we as a staff equipped them with some knowledge that will help them outside of football.

**Q. As you mentioned earlier, the State of Washington is urging residents to get vaccinated. As the coach of Washington State, there's a lot of Washington State fans around the state, how concerned are you that your decision might discourage some of those fans since they look up to you from following the State's advice?**

NICK ROLOVICH: No, I hope everyone makes their own decision and listens to everybody they need to listen to.

That was not my intention at all.

**Q. Obviously you didn't have the luxury last year to do on-campus recruiting in your first year. You did get creative on social media and things like that. How would you describe the state of Washington State recruiting right now in year two?**

NICK ROLOVICH: It was a very unique year. I think what you need to appreciate, and I'm sure you do, and everyone, the young men of this class, whether it's here or at any school, really had to have some blind trust without being able to see it and feel the energy of places they were choosing to go to school.

For us, the Zooms, we were trying to do a 10-series first down to Pullman, not trying to keep them on a 2 1/2-hour Zoom, hit them with 30 minutes, allows us to keep continuous communication. If you did it every week, you're looking at two and a half months.

I will always be honest to recruits, to their families. This is their process. We want them to want to be here. Probably hurt us a lot because I think when you get to Pullman, when you get on campus and you feel that spirit, alumni of not just football, all alumnis know how special this place is to them, it either connects to you or it might not be what you're looking for, and that's okay. We're know we're a small college town, we're not a big city. We understand that. That is very attractive to people also.

I think it will be increasingly more attractive when we get a chance to get on the field and show how we play football. I think the way this team will play, I'm not saying wins or losses, I'm saying the togetherness, the unity, will be attractive to even more recruits.

**Q. You talked about the injury to Renard Bell. It means you return one starting receiver in Travell Harris. How do you feel about the overall depth of that group now and who do you see stepping into some of those roles?**

NICK ROLOVICH: Calvin. I see Calvin, the healthiest he's been since we've been here. Also had a tough year in multiple ways, but is focused and I think dialed in for a real successful senior campaign.

We got to get something out of CJ Moore. Brandon Gray. I think De'Zhaun Stribling did a nice job in spring as an early enrollee. Lincoln Victor brought incredible leadership. Joey Hobert has done some good things since we've been here.

It's definitely not something we wanted to see happen, but I

think we'll have some guys step up. And combine that with the running game and the offensive line, I think there's a lot of weapons still. We'll try to get as many people ready as we can, but I'm excited to see what they can do when we get out there.

**Q. I know that Jarrett Guarantano had a chance to work in Southern Cal with Jordan Palmer this summer. Talk about his development, continual learning of the playbook.**

NICK ROLOVICH: He's definitely a want-to guy. He's been through a lot. Been through a lot of offenses. I think was able to kind of translate some of it with what we do. I still think we're fairly unique and it needs reps.

But his effort level is high. I think he'll get better and better as we get going and he gets the reps. We got Cam coming in in his second year. I think he's much more comfortable than he was last year. I think you need three quarterbacks in a season like this. In a conference that's this challenging, I think you need to have at least three guys ready. Think we'll have more than that, so...

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you very much for your time.

NICK ROLOVICH: Appreciate it.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports