

Big 12 Conference Football Media Days

Tuesday, July 19, 2016

Dana Holgorsen

West Virginia



THE MODERATOR: Joining us now at the dais is West Virginia Head Coach, Dana Holgorsen. Welcome, Coach. Your thoughts about the upcoming season?

DANA HOLGORSEN: Just like everybody else in the country, pretty excited about the upcoming season. Think we've had a fantastic summer. I think the one thing that stands out at this point in time with our football program that hasn't existed in the past is what our summer was like. We went through June and July, even a little bit of last week of May with over 100 guys in the program. A lot of new guys, 31 new guys that we were able to work with a little bit that's going to get us a little ahead for August.

At this point in time the guys have had a great summer. They're ready for a week off, coaches have had a couple of weeks off, so we're going back to work, getting them a little bit of vacation time and then August 1st rolls around, ready to get started.

Q. Recently Stedman Bailey has returned to West Virginia to be a student assistant coach. What's it like having him back there and what do you think he can bring to the coaching staff as well as the players?

DANA HOLGORSEN: Well, Stedman was a great receiver for me at West Virginia. Came out early, so he didn't have his degree. Went to the St. Louis Rams and had an unfortunate incident in Miami about a year ago, so he's not able to play right now. We worked pretty closely with the Rams to figure out what's in his best interest right now, since he's not cleared to play.

The best thing for him to do is focus on his future and the number one step for that is to get his undergraduate degree. He's going to be considered a student coach. He will come back and take a full class load which is different than a graduate assistant. A graduate assistant is going to take six to nine hours. He needs to take about 15 hours to get his degree in another year or so.

We will see how much he brings to the table. I'm anticipating him being able to take a couple of young receivers and showing them technique stuff and kinda doing what he did with the Rams a little bit, just get his feet wet with coaching. He's got high hopes for being

able to play again and that's going to be out of his control and out of my control, but in the meantime we want him to get his degree and hopefully make a difference on couple of these what I think are talented young receivers we have at West Virginia.

Q. Dana, what did you learn from your one season with Joe at Oklahoma State, and what type of offensive identity do you hope he brings to your program next year?

DANA HOLGORSEN: Arguably the best "O" line coach I've been around, and I've made that statement on more than one coach. He brings a wealth of knowledge. I've got a good "A" line coach in Ron Crook, who is still heading up the offensive line meetings. What Joe is going to bring to the table is he's got a wealth of knowledge when it comes to football in general. I feel like we need to get back to our roots just a little bit more, maintain the run game that we did last year that allowed us to have the about Big 12 leading rusher in Wendell Smallwood, and though he's moved on to the NFL, I feel like we've got three capable bodies to do the same stuff that Wendell did, and then we've got to improve in the pass game. Averaging 35 points a game, being a top-20 offense isn't good enough in this league. So we've got to move the ball a little bit more, score a little bit more points if we want to be in contention to win it.

Q. You just alluded to the passing game. Skyler Howard at moments was very good last year, but he was also very bad at moments. How has he looked this spring?

DANA HOLGORSEN: It is it's been a huge emphasis for us. Winning games and losing games, everybody points the finger at me. Being effective in the passing game everybody points the finger at him. That's what necessary am fair. So being able to have a more comfortable pocket, having a good rapport with the receivers that were all young guys and keep in mind, Skyler, that was really his first year of playing football for West Virginia as well. Those two things, I think, are going to make a huge difference.

So having Coach Wickline be able to widen that pocket a little bit, having the timing with him and all these receivers that we got, I think it's going to make a bunch of difference and if we can maintain the running game where we were at and improving that passing game a

little bit I feel like we'll be where we need to be.

Q. Defensively, Dana, a lot of guys have moved on to the NFL, Nick and Kari and Daryl, really good leaders, guys that played a lot of snaps for you a lot of years. Can they be replaced? Do you have something in the pipeline for that type of leadership that they provided?

DANA HOLGORSSEN: I was proud of that group of seniors. All those guys you're talking about, we had -- they're all fourth-year seniors and fifth-year seniors, so they've been in the program basically as long as I've been in the program. Those guys were outstanding developmental guys, guys like Terrell Chestnut, fifth-year senior had a wonderful year; guys like Kyle Rose, fifth-year senior, Kwiatkoski, fifth-year senior, Barber, fifth-year senior, Pettway, fifth-year senior, those -- K.J. Dillon, fourth-year senior, Karl Joseph, fourth-year senior. Those guys have played a lot of ball. We recruited those guys four and five years ago. We didn't quit recruiting four or five years ago, either.

We got some guys that played behind these guys and got a lot of experience on special teams. There's nine fifth-year seniors that are slated to start. Dravon is going to be a junior and Al Benton is going to be a senior, so that's a lot of experience, a lot of older guys played a lot of snaps and I got all the confidence in the world in Tony Gibson is to get those guys to learn how to play together. That's what that group last year had going for them. They played so many snaps together that they knew how to play together.

I feel like we got the bodies, and we got the players, we just gotta get those guys to learn how to play together.

Q. You had Wendell Smallwood last year, and it seemed it was really a difficult decision to pick an All-Big 12 pre-season running back this year. Do you think we are seeing a renaissance in this league that it's not just going to be known for passing?

DANA HOLGORSSEN: It started to trend that way a year ago with what we have done in the running game the last couple of years, with what Oklahoma did last year, you know, they struggled a little bit in the run game early but they could run the ball as good as anybody in the country toward the end of the year. Baylor did a good job of running the ball, even my man Kingsbury ran the ball more than he has in the past. Already.

So you've gotta be able to do that, you gotta be able to run the ball. I've talked a lot about improving the pass game, but by no means is that going to detour anything that we're trying to get accomplished in the run game. Wendell had a great year but everything starts up front.

We got Tyler Orlosky, here, fifth-year senior at center, Adam Pankey who has played over 2,000 snaps at guard, fifth-year senior, Tony Matteo, fifth-year senior, you know a couple of good young tackles, so I feel like we've got a pretty good "O" line. That's where it starts. Then we've got to find a back who hits that thing quick, and keep him healthy and keep him fresh and I think we will be just as effective in the run game next year as we were this past year.

Q. Are you a fan of the move to the Big 12 championship game and how do you feel like those teams that play in it should be determined?

DANA HOLGORSSEN: Yeah, I'm in favor of a championship game. There is no question. I've said this for a couple years, the thing I don't like about not having a championship game is having these games, these regular season games that first week of December. I think that hurts the teams that are playing from a recruiting perspective and it helps the teams that are playing if it's a situation where you're being considered for CFP or, you know, a top-tier Bowl game. I just don't like the format. I think you need to find the best two teams. I got all the confidence in the world with the Big 12 administration, Commissioner Bowlsby and to figure that out. I don't have the answer, and it really doesn't matter what I think anyway.

Q. Coach, there's been a lot of discussion about whether the Big 12 should expand. Obviously you guys are at a traveling disadvantage, do you think the Big 12 should expand and would you prefer someone to be closer to you guys?

DANA HOLGORSSEN: It certainly wouldn't hurt. I'm in favor of expansion. I'm on the side of my boss President Gee who is in favor of expansion as well. So, you know, who, that's not for me to say. There's a lot of things that go into it that I don't have the knowledge to be able to discuss.

I would like to see two teams added. I would like a good, round number of 12. I was in the Big 12 for a long time and we had 12. It makes those divisional breakups easier and it makes trying to get a championship together a little easier as well.

Q. You're five years in now at West Virginia. Big 12 is no stranger to you, but have you been surprised at how difficult it's been for you to get momentum going? I think you're 15-20, 15-21 in conference play. Is this what you expected, or did you want to be -- think you would be farther along?

DANA HOLGORSSEN: Well, I think we're right where we need to be, to be honest with you, we've showed improvement the last two years. Looking back on last year we won more games than we have in the previous three years in the Big 12.

Two points away from winning 10, so I think we're pretty competitive. I think the schedule sets up a little bit better this upcoming year. We got a lot of bodies, a lot of returning starters, a lot of guys that are familiar with what's going on. So I feel like we're right where we needed to be. Early on we flat out didn't have the depth to be able to compete. We had a couple of high-level players that won us some games, but we didn't have the depth. That's not an excuse anymore because the last couple of years we've had depth and we've been competitive. So I like where our team is at, and I feel like we're going to be every bit as competitive or more this upcoming year.

Q. Nine of the ten starting quarterbacks are back from last year. What do you think of this crop? Do you think it might be one of the better once you've seen since you've been in the league?

DANA HOLGORSSEN: This go-round, yes. This reminds me of some of the those 2006, 2007, 2008 years where we had a lot of older guys that were returning guys. Quarterback play has been great in this league for a long, long time. The last couple of years it's been a little bit more spotty, but seeing all these guys coming back with what they can do, I think is pretty good, with all the returning guys. I alluded to it earlier, you gotta score points because there's so many good quarterbacks and so much good skill and so much great offensive minds in this league that 35 points a game isn't going to get it done all the time.

We've addressed that and we know what we gotta do offensively and Skyler understands that and I think Skyler is in a really good place right now. We've gotta be able to do what we need to do each and every week from scoring points and moving the ball to be able to be competitive because the quarterback play and the offenses are so good in this league.

Q. Last year, you said developing left tackle is the priority for fall camp. What's the prior to this fall camp? Corner back? Defense? Something on offense you want to see?

DANA HOLGORSSEN: Tackle is still something that we're trying to develop. We got two good, young tackles, Yodny and McKivitz, those two guys are really good young tackles that we're trying to continue to develop. Timing within the passing game is important, got a lot of good, young receivers and it's going to be exciting to see which one of these guys breaks out and separates themselves much like Kevin White did two years ago.

Defensively without a doubt it's corner. We got a lot of options at corner and we got a lot of older guys, two junior college guys, a fifth year transfer, another fifth

year transfer from Miami, another junior college kid that's been on campus for two years and then four freshmen as well. So we got a lot of bodies there, but that's going to be Coach Adams main priority and Coach Gibson's priority to get those guys to be able to rely on those guys to be able to do what we want to do defensively.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thanks for your time. Good luck.

DANA HOLGORSSEN: Thank you.