

Pac-12 Conference Football Media Days

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Q. How are you looking at the quarterback position heading into camp?

JUSTIN WILCOX: Obviously, the quarterback position, you always get that question this time of year. We have a returner in Ross Bowers, who did some good things last year and has grown a lot in the last year and half. Ross has done a nice job since the season ended working on his body, did a really nice job in spring. He's a much better player than he was a year ago right now, which is encouraging. So, it's going to be competitive though for him. We got a couple other guys, Brandon McIlwain a transfer who brings a little different element, and Chase Forrest, Chase Garbers,

So we're not ready to name a starter yet. Ross obviously has an advantage because he's got so many game reps, and he has improved, so I don't discount that at all, but it will be a competitive camp.

Q. You mentioned Ross's improvements, did you see a bump in all four of them during the spring?

JUSTIN WILCOX: Yeah, absolutely. I thought all those guys did a nice job working together, and Marques Tuiasosopo and Beau Baldwin created an environment for them where they're working on themselves. They don't need to be concerned about the other guy right now. They just keep working on themselves.

But I thought Ross, his grasp of the offense and how he functioned within the offense was, I mean, noticeable. I mean, which it needed to be as expected.

Q. I don't know how much you can specifically tell us about D Rob, how do you go about replacing that deep treat and explosive play he provides?

JUSTIN WILCOX: Yeah, we're excited. A lot of the production we have at receiver is back, and so we're excited about the guys on our team. We're also adding some younger guys, we're also adding some guys, tight end positions that we think are going to help us.

So we're always looking to develop and recruit more speed, and we need to do that. But we're excited about the guys that are coming back.

Q. Coming in you wanted to change the culture not only on the football field, but off the field as well

and it's a long process, how far along are you to implementing that and where you want this program to be?

JUSTIN WILCOX: I think we made great strides. We have really good guys on the team. You'll have a chance to talk to a couple of them today. They embody what we're all about in terms of the character, the toughness, both the guys here are great examples of guys that have earned it along the way, nothings ever been given to them.

I think our chemistry is as good as it's been since I've been there, which is important, the character of the team is getting stronger and stronger, which it needs to be. Those things make a huge difference. So we've got good guys who want to do it right, it's about creating habits and developing that character along the way. They've been very receptive to what we're asking of them.

Q. You've been at Oregon, USC and Washington, how is it different at Cal?

JUSTIN WILCOX: Well, I guess, in what ways?

Q. Coaching there with the administrations the ability to recruit academically?

JUSTIN WILCOX: Yeah, well, we've got the number one public school in the world in the Bay Area, and every school has challenges. I don't think there is a perfect place out there, and we're trying to make it the best place we can. We like where we're at, and we like the people we're recruiting and the guys on the team.

Now it's time to take that next step in the program.

Q. You've been through an early signing period now, do you like it?

I like it, yeah, we like it for us. I'm not sure. Probably get different answers from different coaches based on whatever their circumstances might be, but it's good for us because of our location. People can drive, visit in the earlier parts of the year, so spring and summer, we can drive to your campus, and we don't have to get on an airplane.

Q. Does it change the way you look at kids moving up the calendar?

JUSTIN WILCOX: Well, I think that changed years ago, the recruiting process has sped up in the last ten years or so. So that was already happening. I think we learned a lot in this past year with the early signing day, and it's going to be more of the norm that that's the signing day for most people, so, yeah.

Q. You are returning a lot of the key pieces in your secondary, what are you seeing from them at this point and what are you expecting from them this season?

JUSTIN WILCOX: Yeah, we got a lot of experience coming back in the secondary, some good players back there, and I think now for them each one of them taking the next step as a player some of those guys didn't have a ton of experience last year, but they've got talent. Now it's about the smallest details, the football intelligence, playing the game within the game.

Before the snap, you're kind of knowing what to expect as opposed to reacting when the ball is snapped. I think across the board in football, but especially at that position, that's where you take your game to the next level.

Q. There has been a lot of conversation with the Big 10 and the SEC especially with sports betting becoming legal sooner rather than later, coaches may be required to put out injury reports, how do you feel about that?

JUSTIN WILCOX: I think it's a really complex issue. There is a lot to be discussed there. I like what we do right now. There's also HIPAA law and privacy issues.

So I think it's pretty complicated. I know there's going to be a lot of discussion about it, but I'm in favor of what we're doing right now until we have a better model, but it is changing, no doubt.

Q. Does that change concern you in other ways?

JUSTIN WILCOX: Yeah, again, I think we're going to continue doing what we do right now. You know, the betting and all of that doesn't concern us. We're trying to win football games. If they change the rules on the injury report, we'll abide by them, but until that comes, we're just business as usual.

Q. With the new rule redshirting freshman allowed to play in four games, how does that impact your roster and are you looking at one position that would impact more?

JUSTIN WILCOX: Yeah, we're going to determine that during fall camp. We've had a lot of discussions about that and the best way to do it. You're not going to know exactly because things change daily on your depth chart and injuries and so forth.

So I think it's a good thing for everybody. I think it's good for the entire team. I think it's good for the players, and we've had a lot of discussions on how we're going to do that. Some of it will be determined, again, like I said, based on depth chart and injuries and how ready the guy is. Yeah, by position, it's just too hard to tell right now just because you guys know. Recruiting, you think one thing and then they get there, and they're going from high school to college and things change significantly, and you're never quite sure how they're going to react.

Q. I know players mentally and physically prepare for fall camp, how does the coaching staff prepare for fall camp?

JUSTIN WILCOX: Yeah, we put a lot of time in for the preparation for camp and cut up some teaching. We have a system that we have in place in terms of how we're going to introduce things and how we're going to teach them. So we've done that. Spent a lot of time on that in spring and summer, so absolutely.

And then it's preparing your mind for the season. So I know I was ready about two weeks ago to get going, and I know our players are itching and our coaches are itching. It's just that time.

Q. You mentioned the players you have with you today, Patrick's reading program and Jordan going to Mexico, how do you feel about how your players are using their platforms?

JUSTIN WILCOX: It's unbelievable. I wish more and more people would be telling their stories, and we should be talking to them. But they're special guys. Patrick, with the reading program, he's got 3500 kids on his reading program, and that was all his idea. This wasn't something that somebody thought of and went to Patrick and asked him to do. He thought of it.

The university, we've supported him. Our people have done a great job of helping get the word out there, as have you guys. It's a really neat deal. We're proud of him.

Pat, like we said, he's a special guy. We've got a lot of guys with great stories, but he's one of them that embodies what we're all about.

Jordan went down and did some work. Just selfless people; both have a high level of self-discipline and have earned everything they've got. Nothing has been given to those guys along the way. Really strong characters, so we're glad to have both of them.

Q. What are some areas you have seen progress over the past few years and how to you plan to keep that progress going?

JUSTIN WILCOX: Yeah, being more consistent, taking the ball away, eliminating the explosive plays. Those are the two biggest things for us. It's like a broken record. When you win the turnover battle, you win the game more times than not. So finding a way to create takeaways. It's practicing them, but it's also having confidence in your abilities and having free snap checks and all the different things that are involved with that, and then limiting the explosive plays.

That's how you -- you know, if you want to play good defense, you don't give up big plays. At times we were okay there and times we weren't. In the games we struggled, we gave up too many explosives.

It's kind of a vanilla answer, but it's the truth. And how you go about that is technique, it's football intelligence, it's habits and all those different things. Like the guys we have coming back, we've still got to continue to develop and recruit certain positions. But they've worked really hard at it, and we've expected them to continue and improve.

Q. You talked about tight ends, it seems like there is more importance on that position recently, what does that position bring to the team and what does it mean to have Ray back?

JUSTIN WILCOX: It's great having Ray back in that position in general. Like you said, we made it a priority once we got here a year and a half ago. We now have a number of guys that can play there, different body types. You kind of have the traditional tight ends, having Ray Hudson back who is a guy that can flex out and catch the ball, but also get in there and mix it up.

It just gives you a lot of versatility in terms of run and pass game and protections and a lot of different things. We want to be able to use those guys, and we're going to.

We've got some guys that can help us. We've got Malik McMorris, which is however you want to categorize him. He's kind of that fullback, H-type guy that can do some things for us. So we're going to continue to develop that position, but we like the guys we've got coming back too.

Q. Any take aways from your first year as the head coach and lessons learned?

JUSTIN WILCOX: How long do you have? I've got a notebook full. I think you're always learning along the way. If I've done this for 15 years, I'd hope I'd learn something. I think kind of each day there is something you're taking away. Whether it's scheduling or practice, nutrition. You're just constantly trying to grow your program and build on what you've established.

The good thing is we've got a lot of really good people, from coaches who we were able to keep most all. There is a lot of continuity there to our support staff. Knowing what we're about and who we're recruiting and how we're going to go about our daily operations, I think everybody's got a much better comfort level. Getting a lot of support from our new athletic director and administration, which is key.

So it's exciting where it's going. Like I said, I learn something new every day, and I hope I continue to do that.

Q. Is there anything that surprised you? Was it what you thought?

JUSTIN WILCOX: Not necessarily, I coached there once before, 2003, '04, and '05, for Jeff Tedford, so I had a knowledge base from those years. But things do change. But I don't think anything was surprising.

Q. I'm from Arizona and cover college football out there. What does Charlie Ragle bring to the table?

JUSTIN WILCOX: Juice, he's got juice. Charlie's got a ton of energy. He's a really good coach. Obviously a really successful high school coach in Arizona for a number of years. I've known him for a long, long time. He connects really well with our players. Connects well in recruiting. He's a great staff member, so we're thrilled to have him, and he's doing a heck of a job for us.

Q. Can you talk about game changers that influence close game. What do you think one game changer would be this season?

JUSTIN WILCOX: We talked again about turnover margin, explosive plays. Were you looking for a player?

Q. Anything. Any particular part of the team you think will provide that edge.

JUSTIN WILCOX: I think from a statistical standpoint, it's those things. Kind of from a team standpoint, it's the character of the team, the habits you create in the off-season.

You mentioned the close games, and we didn't finish them, you know? We had our chances, and we didn't. I think the margins there are in the off-season, it's the way you live your life and the habits you create, whether it's practice or meetings or nutrition, or just the way you operate.

That's where you make those plays up. Those are the toughest margins to make up, and that's what we've got to work on.

Q. Do you think you are going to have that edge

this season?

JUSTIN WILCOX: Absolutely. I think the character of our team is getting stronger and stronger. I think our habits have improved, and we're continuing to develop that as we go along, and it will never be as good as you want it.

But I know the guys have bought into what we're asking them to do. That's where, you know, that 3rd and 6 play in the third quarter that nobody really knows, but that's going to be the moment in the game. And that's when you've got to make it. There is a lot that goes into that.

Q. What is your take on early recruiting and if it's going in a good direction?

JUSTIN WILCOX: I think everybody's different. We'll probably get different answers from different coaches. We were a little more methodical about recruiting. We have our reasons for that. We offer people early, I don't know what you'd consider early, from time to time. But there are usually extenuating circumstances when we do that.

So I don't know if there is consensus on that answer from people, but it obviously has sped up. And the term offer, what does that mean, it probably depends on who you're asking.

Q. When you say what is offer how do you explain that to recruits?

JUSTIN WILCOX: When we offer a person a scholarship, they have a scholarship offer. There may be things tied to that, whether it's academics or whatnot, but we know enough at that point. That's how we do it. I'm not saying that's how everybody does it.

Q. What do you think of Coach Yas and what he brings to the game?

JUSTIN WILCOX: Yeah, an excellent coach. Really, I think a lot of Coach Yas and really grateful for his time with us. He's extremely smart, well-versed football coach, has conviction in what he does. He had an opportunity to go, come back and join Chip, so wish him nothing but the best. Really, again, just appreciate what he did for us and our players and our staff. We took a lot from him.

Q. Do you like that he stayed in the Conference?

JUSTIN WILCOX: I don't know how to answer that. I think he's a good guy, a good coach. So if it's better for him, absolutely, you know. I don't root against people. Now when we play them, we do everything that we can to win the game, but on a personal level, we appreciate what he did and he's a hell of a coach.

Q. He seems like an interesting personality and

grabs people's attention.

JUSTIN WILCOX: I think that's fair.

Q. How would you describe him? Kind of fiery?

JUSTIN WILCOX: He's a really good coach, and people do it in different ways.

He's a good person. Got a lot of knowledge, so, yeah.

Q. Patrick was saying that you recommended books to read this summer. How encouraging do you find your players?

JUSTIN WILCOX: Well, they're the ones that talk about it more than I do. To be honest, Patrick's the one that will come up and offer ideas to the coaches at the times. It's pretty cool.

Both those guys got a lot of depth. They're not the most talkative guys, but they have a lot of depth and strong character, so thoughtful. Both very thoughtful guys. So it's fun to converse with guys like that. I'm glad they're on our team. We have a lot of really good guys on our team, and I'm glad those two are here so you guys can get to know them and ask them questions. It's pretty neat to have people like that that you get to coach.

Q. What are you looking for Patrick to build on for his senior year

JUSTIN WILCOX: Building on what he did a year ago. Not many people even knew his name, I'm sure a year ago now and did a heck of a job. None of us were really surprised, to be honest, because of his work ethic and what he was doing in the off-season.

So Patrick did a fantastic job coming in and running the ball. There is a lot involved in that, too. The offensive line, and the quarterbacks and receivers and everybody else.

But just for him to continue doing what he's do being. We don't need him to be Superman. We need him to be the best Patrick he can be, and own his style of play, and that will be good.

Q. How would you describe Gerald Alexander?

JUSTIN WILCOX: I think the same kind of thing. Gerald's got juice. I coached Gerald at Boise State. Known him for a long time. He was an intense player. He's an intense coach. Very knowledgeable. He's a really good, young coach. And just like all of us, he's continuing to get better. The players respond to him, and he provides discipline for that room and some levity. But guys can talk to him, but they know the line and what the expectations are, and that's a sign of a good coach.

Q. He has a big social media presence, what does that bring to the team?

JUSTIN WILCOX: He does, I think it's important, because I know I don't. Yeah, he's one of those guys that's got personality, and I want all the coaches to be themselves. We don't want everybody to be the same.

I'm glad Gerald's on our staff. He brings a lot to our team. I could go on and on about the rest of the guys, because we've got a big-time coaching staff.

Q. What does Cameron Bennett bring to the offensive line?

JUSTIN WILCOX: Yeah, Cam did a nice job. He's still continuing to grow as a player. Steve Greatwood has done a fantastic job with him. We expect him to improve, and Cam's a guy that played last year, and he's played quite a bit of football. I still think he's got room to grow. We need him, and I think he's continuing to develop his body, he's getting stronger and more powerful, which is important at that position. So this will be a big camp for him.

Q. How do you feel about the depth of the tight end position?

JUSTIN WILCOX: It's better than it was. Better than it was. So more bodies and guys that can help us do some things. When you look at Ray coming back and what he can provide, and he and Bunting, who is a transfer, and Gavin Reinwald, and then you've got Malik, you know, who are doing some things for us in that H-back, fullback role.

So obviously having more options and guys that can do different things, that position a lot of times they don't look the same. So we'll use them accordingly. Whatever they do best, we'll find a way to use them doing that. I know Beau's excited to have that group as well.

Q. Have you got to see a lot out of McIlwain?

JUSTIN WILCOX: Summer workouts, and it's a pretty significant change for those guys coming from high school, a lot of them, the expectations on the workouts.

So he's going through that right now, and he's got a lot to learn. He's a talented guy. We're ready to get him out there in some team work to see what he can do.

But there is a process to it. You don't just step right in and know everything. You know how the workouts go. But glad he's with us, and he's got to learn.

Q. How was it working with Pete?

JUSTIN WILCOX: Yeah, Pete's great. I've known him a long time. We worked together for a number of years. First of all, he's a great guy, and we're friends. Heck of

a coach. Yeah, not surprised, I guess, that's the way to put it. Really humble.

Q. Going head-to-head what has he been able to do?

JUSTIN WILCOX: Oh, absolutely. Yeah, I mean, he's -- they're doing a great job. You know, you spend time during the year on your team, so unless you're preparing to play somebody, you don't really watch that much.

So I obviously think they've done a fantastic job, but we're really focused on us, you know? Spent a lot of time watching our tape and the team we're playing.

Thank you, appreciate it.