

Pac-12 Conference Football Media Days

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Herm Edwards Arizona State Sun Devils



HERM EDWARDS: Good afternoon, folks. I'm supposed to give opening remarks, and I will say similar to what I said last year. The thing that I've noticed right away is the student-athletes that represent all these universities and what they've gone through the last day and a half of interviewing and whatever they've been asked to do, they represent all these universities in the Pac-12 in a unique way of being a student-athlete.

I have time to visit with some of these guys from different colleges, and they're very impressive young men. That's a tribute to their universities, their head coaches, and their ability to be a student-athlete.

With that being said, I'm fortunate to have two really great players on our football program in Eno Benjamin, the running back, and Cohl Cabral, one of our great offensive linemen.

With that being said, they are probably the guys you want to ask questions.

It's always offensive guys, especially linemen, no one ever wants to talk to those guys. I'll just give you a quick scenario on offensive linemen. As a group, they're the smartest guys on the football team, to you need to go over there and ask Cabral some questions, because right now he looks lonely over there. He actually won the bowling last night. He's a pretty good bowler.

Q. Talking about football, I just wanted to get your take on going to the Cronkite School, what kind of impact you felt --

HERM EDWARDS: Well, hopefully give some of my experiences to young people that want to get into this profession as a media person. I think it's a great profession. I think it's one of -- as anything else, you have to have knowledge, and the more knowledge you can present to young people, they can use it to be as worthy as they'd like to.

It's exciting for me because I was fortunate enough to work at a place that I learned a lot about what you folks do, and I understand you guys have a hard job, gathering information, long hours. Sometimes conversations turn in a direction no one likes, but that's

part of it.

And I think how you handle it and the respect of you and the person you're talking to is very important because I've always learned that you don't take what people say personal. You can't do that. And I think as a media person, you shouldn't write things that are personal. You have an opinion, you have to write your opinion, readers read your opinions, that's why you guys do what you do, and you're good at what you do.

But I think when it crosses that line by either party, it never turns out good.

Q. I notice you don't put too much stock in the preseason polls, but picked sixth last year, picked third this year. Do you see that as progress?

HERM EDWARDS: I don't know about that. That's always hard. That's always difficult for people to make polls. I don't get into polls, I just get into coaching the football team. I don't worry about all that stuff. I worry about what people said, I wouldn't leave my house. So I don't get into all that.

I coach the football team and coach the players. I've got a great staff, and I think going into year two, we've established some things that makes it a lot easier for me to coach. The fact that players know what to anticipate, coaches know what to anticipate. Your first year, players don't know who you are and the coaches really don't know who you are.

So I think it takes some time to earn their trust. That's what I asked them to do for me, let me earn your trust, and I think I've done that, and now we can continue to build a program.

It's one where I think any good program, there has to be consistency, but there also has to be depth in your roster, and that's what we have to do, and I think we've done a pretty good job this year in recruiting, and that's critical for any program is how you build it, and we're in the process of doing that.

Q. In what areas do you think that extra year of continuity will help in particular on the field?

HERM EDWARDS: Well, I think the communication part with player and coach and from head coach to coach, I think that's important and our vision and my

vision of how I would like things done.

I give players a say. I give coaches a say. I'm not a micromanager guy at all. But there's certain things that I think have to be done a certain way, and I think they understand that.

I think the players more than anything, as well as the coaches, they've kind of got to feel who I am. They know my hot buttons. They know what not to press, and that's important. I think that I've earned their respect.

But with that being said, there's still a lot of work to do. You guys that cover us, you're at practice all the time. We're going to be very young. But that was part of it. That's why I sit here today, is that we were going to build a program, and there's going to be a lot of young players. What's unique about that is that we were able to do that last year, and some guys were successful, and we want to continue to do that.

As the years go by, these guys become leaders, they become the foundation of the football team, and that first group of guys that played last year are really kind of the emphasis of the youth that we're moving to, and I think this year the guys will witness a lot of other young players.

Q. You spent a lot of your NFL career answering questions about quarterbacks. We're right back here again. What have you seen at least so far from some of the guys on the roster that stood out to you?

HERM EDWARDS: They're very competitive. High school players now are way more advanced than 15 years ago because of their ability at a young age to be involved in these 7-on-7 leagues and their ability to understand concepts, and that goes to the coaches that coach them. There's a lot of great high school coaches out here that do a great job.

So I think when you get them now as far as the passing goes and how to throw the ball and all those things, they're very comfortable doing that now. The speed of the game changes, obviously, the competition changes, and that's shocking to a lot of them because all of a sudden the back end of defenses run much faster and you can't outrun everybody in college football. Now, some guys have a unique talent where they can do that, but I just think that's what I've seen over the years that I've watched it.

Q. Can you talk about your linebacking group right now and how well they're working with Antonio, specific Merlin?

HERM EDWARDS: Yeah, Merlin has done a great job,

and Butler, and we brought in a couple young guys, as well.

Antonio, can't say enough about him. Not only is he the director of recruiting, but he's done a great job of coaching, as well. He's a passionate man, if you know Antonio, and his players really respect him. He's a guy with a wealth of knowledge.

I think when you've been a former NFL player and you have aspirations of trying to obviously play in that league, he grabs your attention. He has information that you want to receive in the fact that you would like to go there.

There's a reason that we have -- if you count Ray and Scottie Graham, there are 10 people in our organization have some type of NFL experience. Marvin Lewis was a big hire for us, as well.

That's the road we're traveling, and I think it's a good road to travel because most kids in today's world, they would like to have the opportunity to not only be a college athlete but have the opportunity to play on Sundays.

Q. Speaking about Marvin, what's been his role the first couple months on staff, and do you envision him maybe having a role on game day?

HERM EDWARDS: No, I mean, he's special advisor to Sun Devil football, so he has a full plate as far as reviewing what we do on both sides of the ball, reviewing how players and coaches in meetings go about doing their business, watching practice.

We meet every day, Marvin and myself. And we go way back. We have a 30-year history. So we have kind of the same ideas in how we implement that, some of the things he's kind of changed in his head coaching career in the National Football League has kind of added into some of our practice plans.

He's a great sounding board for me. It helps me, as well, when meetings start, when you have offense and defense and they split up, he can go in the offensive room, I can go in the defensive room. The next day, I go in the defensive room and he goes in the offensive room.

It's about knowledge, and I think he can help young coaches that aspire to be head coaches, coordinators. He has enough knowledge to help those guys with that, too.

He's a wealth of information, and I think we all look for information, and he's one that has a lot of it.

Q. Would he have any role on game day?

HERM EDWARDS: You know, I mean, eyes as far as you're watching the game, but really after the game is over, really looking at the tape, and before, scouting the teams that we're going to play. That's the critical part, gathering information, knowing their strengths or weaknesses, because it's all about reviewing your opponent before you play them.

Q. Herm, what's an example of something you had to teach or harp on in year one that you don't have to worry about in year two?

HERM EDWARDS: (Laughs.) I think the one thing that I think they've learned from me is that I'm pretty consistent in what I do every day, and there's a reason for that. I think we all search for consistency. Regardless if you like it or not, you know what to expect.

And I think for me, the biggest thing for them was on game day, how was I going to handle decisions on game day. And I think they watched me go about my work, how I handled it on game day, whether we won or lost, but how I made decisions. And hopefully put them in situations where they could win games.

I've earned that trust from them, so I think they got that part. They know that, hey, the way we practice, the way we do things gives us a chance to prepare to win. I think that they realize that now, the way we do things, because it's a lot different than maybe other colleges, how they practice and how they do things, and that was new to coaches and players.

It was like, we just do this? Yeah, that's all we're going to do, and we're going to do it this way. Not saying I'm trying to reinvent the wheel, because I'm not, but we do things a little bit different, which is okay.

Q. How is the player leadership developing as you try to set the culture?

HERM EDWARDS: It's been good. Last year we had more players involved. This year it's only six. They're chosen for a reason. They have a voice on that team, in that locker room, and they have a platform that they can directly come to me, things that concern them or things that they feel would be in the best interest of the football team.

I'm like any player or anybody else; everything I've learned I've actually learned from somebody else. So the more I can gain knowledge, the more efficient I'll be and the better coach I'll become. But the players especially.

Q. Will you reveal who the six are?

HERM EDWARDS: No, I never do.

Q. Do you have concerns about how your players interact with people on social media?

HERM EDWARDS: I told them this: Just don't embarrass your last name or the university because every time you press it, you're writing your resume. It doesn't go away. It travels with you for the rest of your life, and you can say I'm sorry, but it's out there. You can't take it back.

I just say -- I always tell them be careful because you represent two parties, and you don't want to put yourself in a position where people are questioning who you are.

One of our big deals is words and actions. Make sure they match up every day. I mean like every day. Not just when it's a good day, like every day. And it starts with me. It starts with me.

Q. I want to talk to you a little bit about the intangibles that you bring to the table --

HERM EDWARDS: I don't know about that. I don't know about intangibles.

Q. You're an inspirational guy --

HERM EDWARDS: I don't know about that, either. That's way overrated.

Q. I want to know what inspires you.

HERM EDWARDS: Life. Zest for life. I just have an attitude every day that can be your best friend or your worst enemy. And the great part about it, you get to choose that. It's a choice. And I think sometimes we get sidetracked because we start listening to outside people, and all of a sudden that becomes the attitude we're going to take that day.

I just try to end every day on a positive note. I've had some struggles in my life like anyone else. I'm not perfect by any stretch of the imagination. But when I lay my head to rest, I always ask myself this question: Did I do something or say something to help somebody? And if I've done that, I've done my day's work. That's important to me.

Q. I was at Mountain West yesterday and I talked to Coach Brennan from San Jose State. He said he talks to Coach Gilbert once in a while. Do you ever bounce things off your old teachers?

HERM EDWARDS: Well, yeah, Coach Vermeil calls me all the time now. That's like my second dad. I've known Coach Vermeil since I was 17 years old. He recruited me to UCLA. My father passed away after my first year in the league, and I needed a coach. I needed a guy with his sternness and his ability to coach. He reminded me a lot of my dad, that upbringing of work ethic and all that.

My high school coach, Dan Albert, I speak to him quite often, yes. So those are two men that really made a great impact on my life.

Coach Albert, my high school coach, first time I ever played tackle football. He came to a game last year, and I've always kept in contact with him. He's a man that I look at that really kind of helped me to become a football player, to be quite honest.

So those are two guys that I'm always talking to, yeah. They call me after games. Dick will give me a scouting report on the team we're going to play: Hey, I watched these guys last week, this is what they do. I say, Okay, Coach.

And they're both funny because Dick and Coach Albert, they ran the ball. They liked to run the ball. When we started having success running the ball, my coach, Coach Albert, the high school guy, said, that's it, you're running the ball, you're going to run games when you run the ball. And Dick was the same way. He said, You've got a running game. I said, Coach, I learned that from you guys. So it's kind of interesting.

Q. What's your motto this year going into the season?

HERM EDWARDS: My motto is the same. It's never changed. You know, it's about competition. Life is about competition every day. I mean, for you folks it's the same thing. And if you don't compete every day against yourself, you can't get better. So it's about competition.

And then preparation. You know, you have to prepare to do this. There's a preparation part of it that's not fun because there's no one in the stands and no one is cheering for you. It's easy Saturday night. That's the easy part. It's all this other stuff you've got to do.

You prepare more for a football game than any other sport because you actually practice and prepare more than you play. We only get 12 shots, and if you're lucky you go to a bowl game. All the preparation, all the spring ball, all this stuff, now it's going to be hot, 115, they've got to go practice, and are you willing to do that? And if you are, you become a better player; and if you do it as a whole, you become a better team. And that's what I'm all about, about preparation. That's critical.

Q. Do you think all the questions at quarterback unfairly overshadow all the experience you have coming back on that side of the ball?

HERM EDWARDS: Well, I think quarterback is that position now. We all know that. I mean, that's the marquee position in football. When you don't have, per

se, a starter named, that's the mystique of it all; who's the guy, right?

We'll figure it out. We've got time. We don't play for a while. It'll be fun, though, because all those kids did a great job of really competing in the spring, and you guys watched our spring. We were down some numbers, so we couldn't do exactly what we like to do, but going forward, as we get depth on our roster, you're really going to see spring a whole lot different.

You guys will be shocked how I try to do it next year. I'm going to try to do it early again, but the bowl games predict that. You're doing one thing, and the guys that have played, they're doing something else. So you help both groups because you rest one group but mentally and physically they can still run around without contact, and the guys who did not have a lot of contact, they can actually participate in that. That's how you develop those guys.

Now, I'm just thinking that out loud, but we'll see. I'll run that by Marvin and we'll sit down and figure some stuff out and see where it goes.

Q. I was talking to Cohl earlier, and he said you guys regularly, like when you're riding in the golf cart together, talk about establishing the run. How big of a deal is that in your program, establishing the run and stopping the run?

HERM EDWARDS: Well, that's the foundation of it all. I mean, really. I mean, it travels. Run game travels. Good defense travels. Just put it in a suitcase and go. You can't stop people from running the ball if they really want to run it.

Running is a will thing. You've got to want to do this. You have to be committed to it because running is ugly because it's not, oh, minus one, hmm. The first thing the coordinator wants to do is let's throw it. Um, not so fast.

Q. But you know from having been in the league for 15 years that that's changed in the NFL. It's much more of a passing league --

HERM EDWARDS: We say that.

Q. Guys don't get paid nearly as much.

HERM EDWARDS: We say that.

Q. Why that difference between the NFL and college as far as the importance of the running game?

HERM EDWARDS: I think any team that goes and gets in the playoffs, if you really look at them, they run the ball. I'm sorry to break your theory there, but they run the ball. And you know what else they do? They play

pretty good defense. And I know being in that league for 30 years, that hasn't changed. It ain't gonna change. At the end, all that throwing is really nice. It makes the fans all happy. But at the end, if you can't run it and the conditions change, you've got to go back and throw outside? Ooh, you've got problems.

And it just travels. It's a way of setting the -- when you run the ball, you control the clock. You can dictate how the game is played when you run it. And in college, the thing I've learned, it's about scoring. You can still score running the ball. It's kind of ironic, you know, that there's only two receivers that got drafted in the first round.

Q. One of them was from your school.

HERM EDWARDS: Hmm, I wonder why that is. I wonder why that was. He caught enough passes where people said, hmm, this guy is pretty good, man. He didn't have to catch 100 balls.

So I just think that that's my philosophy. I grew up that way. I was in systems like that. The successful teams that I played on, coached on. I was in the Marty Schottenheimer, Kansas City. We had two big, dynamic backs, Christian Okoye and Barry Word, and then we got Joe Montana. And everybody said, you got Joe Montana, we're really good. Yeah, we were great. You know who the running back was? Marcus Allen.

It kind of goes hand in hand. We say it, and I get it, some of these schools throw 90 passes and that's great, but I think at the end when the opponents are matched evenly, it's the team that can run the ball that's going to win. It just works out that way.

Q. What's your view on the officiating in the league last year and now the changes --

HERM EDWARDS: I think the transparency, and I think our league has done a fabulous job of really looking at it and saying we can improve, and that's critical. You can't put your head in the dirt and say, well, we can't improve because we can improve, and I think the officiating will.

And I think -- here's the thing with the officials, and I've said this. They never have a home game. Never have a home game. And if there's a call that's made and it's catastrophic, that's when there's a problem, because you know what you guys are writing about? You're not writing about the game, you're writing about that call.

We saw this in the National Football League. Saints. If you're a Ram fan, it wasn't -- okay, I get it. But you know what? If you didn't see it, you know that's pass interference, right? But the problem I have, when I was an analyst or a coach or a football guy, and it's no fault

to anyone, it just happens sometimes. And if you don't correct it right then, then it becomes the game. And you never want a call to be talked about for a whole week, and you lose the ability to talk about the game, because it takes away from the players. And that's what you don't want.

And these guys are in a tough position because all of a sudden the game of football has changed. It used to be played inside the hash marks, inside the numbers. Now it's a vertical game. You mentioned it. They throw it all over the lot. And things are happening so fast that a lot of these guys, because of the speed of the game, sometimes you might be out of position and if a guy isn't covering for you, you make a decision, and it's, whoa. And you don't like that because that's the talk after the game, and you're not talking about the players.

I always feel for the players because they're the ones that are doing all the work. The coaches are making decisions, right, and you don't ever want it to be on a call rather than about the game.

Q. Is it a benefit, though, that guys like you, Ray, Chip were in the NFL and can bring this experience to the conference office and say here's how they were transparent, here's how they educated the fans, we can do the same thing, because college has long been this ivory tower that here's our decision --

HERM EDWARDS: No, and I think you have to get it right. This is a game now that is -- a lot of things -- every game seems to be on television on some channel, so people see it. And you want to make sure you get it right. We do know this, and this is the dark side of it: People wager games. Okay, I'm not naïve. There's a lot going on. There's betting all of a sudden in sports, and most places now it's legal. It's how it evolves, right?

I'm just saying you want to try to get it right. You're not always going to get it right, but 95 percent of the time, we need to get it right, and there's going to be some errors, and when you know you can help correct them because there may be some things you can do, then you go do it. And that's what happens.