

# **ARIZONA WILDCATS**

## **COMMUNICATION SERVICES**

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### **FOOTBALL**

## **Weekly Press Conference Transcript**

*Arizona will face Oregon on Saturday, November 18<sup>th</sup>*

**TUCSON, Ariz.** – University of Arizona football head coach Rich Rodriguez met with the local media on Monday. Below is a brief transcript.

#### **Head Coach Rich Rodriguez**

##### *Opening Statement...*

“I thought the first half was maybe as well as we’ve played all year as a group. It was the best half our defense has played for sure, I’m really proud of that. There were different schemes, shifts and motions. I thought the defensive staff did a really nice job of getting them ready. The second half, you’ve got to give them credit they moved the ball. We had a big enough lead offensively we were able to run the football and take some time off the clock as well. It was a great win for our seniors, I’m really proud of them and I was kind of excited to see them get carried off the field afterwards. It was pretty neat.”

##### *On reaction to current record...*

“I certainly thought if people could stay healthy, then we’d be better than last year, it’s hard to be much worse. We recognized early in camp that some of these young guys are going to be able to help us. The returning players looked like they were ready to go and proved themselves. Earlier in the season, we lost a couple games that we were right there, and could’ve played a little bit better and pulled those out. The attitude’s been terrific really since even before camp started in the summer. I thought we had a chance to be a better football team, but you don’t really know with the true freshmen how much of an impact they can have. Certainly, when you’re getting the kind of quarterback play we’ve gotten out of Khalil (Tate), that’s elevated it as well. We’ve stayed healthier, there’s no question. We’ve got a few guys banged up, but we’ve stayed healthier than we have the last couple years, and that’s helped too.”

##### *On doubts after last season...*

“I think when you lose, there’s always doubts. I’ve been doing this long enough to know that there are a lot of questions, and rightfully so. Obviously, from the record last year to this year, are we thinking is a turnaround or are we staying the course? Just trying to get better in all aspects, coaching, playing and all that. I think it’s more that. I think our recruiting class was probably a little underrated, and that’s helped. I’ve been proud of the way the staff and the players stayed the course, and just knew we had to get better, and we have. The fun part is to think about as these guys grow up in the system and grow up physically as well in the next couple years, we can be pretty special.”

##### *On why the rushing offense has been so successful...*

“Oregon State has obviously had a down year, but they’ve been playing pretty good football, and I was a little nervous about it because they were better than their record, and everybody’s expecting you to win which is kind of a new thought from last year. When your quarterback is as dynamic of a player as Khalil, that’s something, but it starts up front in the attitude that our guys have had in. Really in all three phases, the selfless attitudes. I saw somewhere where one program, I think Wisconsin, was giving their scout team guys a lot of credit, we do too. Our guys on the scout team don’t get to play on game days, they’re just giving us a look, and they’ve done a terrific job. Our graduate assistants have done a fabulous job getting the scout teams to give us the look, and we see a different look every week, we saw a different look last week. We’ve got some experience up front, and we’ve got enough dynamic players to make some pretty special things happen.”

#### *On Oregon's Braxton Burmeister...*

"We recruited him (Braxton Burmeister) for a long time, Rod Smith did a terrific job. We usually talk about our recruits, not the ones that are somewhere else, but we did recruit him. He was an outstanding high school player and is getting to play as a true freshman, and playing well. They may get Justin (Herbert) back, which would be a big boost to them. They were scoring a whole bunch of points and he's got more experience, but I think Braxton's played really well for them. For us it's no surprise, we know he's an outstanding player, that's why we recruited him. I like the quarterbacks we have too. Not just Khalil, Brandon (Dawkins) came in and I thought played well. We've got an outstanding group of freshmen quarterbacks on our roster. Recruiting is going well in that regard, so we feel pretty good in our quarterback spot the next few years."

#### *On players wanting to be the "next" Khalil Tate...*

"I hope so. Khalil has helped us recruiting because we told him we'd give him a shot at quarterback, and other schools said they wanted him because they haven't seen a diverse quarterback before. Luckily for me and this program is I have seen plenty of versatile quarterbacks, including Brandon Dawkins. To be able to show film from our past and prove it to future recruits is a benefit for us. Not only that, there have been an uptake in southern California guys because they know Khalil and see his success at Arizona. They want to play with him."

#### *On how has BJ Denker has helped Khalil become an effective starting quarterback...*

"He has helped everybody in that room because he has been through it. Rod Smith, the quarterback coach, does a fantastic job with our quarterbacks. We play off each other, good cop bad cop type. Rod has a great demeanor about him and he not only understands our system, but also understands the guys and how to best prepare them for their role on our team."

#### *On the freshmen class...*

"This freshmen class is the largest I've ever had. They certainly have made the biggest impact early on in their careers. When Scooby was a freshman, his freshmen class made a big impact as well. But, I do not know if I have ever had this many playmakers in one class. The nice part about it is they are all wired the same way. They really want to be good and get better. A year or two in the weight room including a full off-season will allow us to do a lot of neat stuff in all three phases."

#### *On RB JJ Taylor complementing Tate...*

"JJ is an open field guy. He makes you miss. Khalil is a powerful guy who runs away from you. Zach (Green) is a short-yardage, big-load running up the middle. All of our backs are unique in their own style. The one thing you will notice, if you watch closely, is they all do a great job blocking. Calvin Magee is the best running backs coach in the country. Our guys take a lot of pride in the way they block. Some of those big runs Khalil is getting are due to our backs blocking for him."

#### *On DE My-King Johnson's progress....*

"He's one of those guys that is doing a great job on the scout team. He's part of that freshman class that we're really excited about. They might not be playing on Saturdays, but we're seeing guys like My-King that are going to be really good players. Recruiting is going really well. We have to get ready for signing day in a about of month. We're excited about this upcoming class too."

#### *On conference football scheduling....*

"It always sounds like we're going to beat up each other up a little bit, and maybe not have a team make the playoffs because there is going to be a couple losses within the league. And that's exactly what's happened. Some people will say there's not a good enough Pac-12 team but maybe there is, there are just other teams that are really good that they are playing against within the league. I don't know how we would stack up against the number one and number two team in the country but I think whoever our champion is, if they're healthy, they can play just about anyone. But I don't think they'll make the playoffs. There is probably going to be teams with no losses or one loss, and that's who will make it."

#### *On how to fix the playoff situation....*

"I don't know if you can. The teams are going to get better in our league. It's going to be hard for anyone in any year to go undefeated in the Pac-12. We play nine league games and some leagues don't so it's a little harder in that regard. I don't know if it's going to change, I think a better number for the playoffs is six or eight, so every conference champion is in a game. If all the controversy and talk about college football keeps people interested, then that's not a bad thing. All the talk over the next few weeks is keeping college football in the conversation."

#### *On Khalil Tate's Interception...*

"Well we got tricked a little bit, he (Oregon State safety) made a great play, I think he was running with a guy in man and he wound up playing zone. Khalil thought he could lay it up because the guy was running off, and they did a great job of playing that one. He still had him open briefly, and maybe he could've got it there to him."

*On playing in the afternoon...*

"This one will be a four o'clock kick and that's as early as we've had so I'm shocked, and I head earlier today two-thirty (for the Territorial Cup game) so we're going to have to set our alarms to get up. It's going to be kind of neat, I'm fired up about it."

*On DL Marcus Griffin...*

"He has earned it, he has practiced really well, and we had a couple of guys banged up. I'm proud of him, he's another guy that has done everything we've asked him to do in the program. He's having his best year, and he's competing."

*On the rush defense...*

"We're not a very big team, and I was concerned from the start in August, I said we're not a real big team yet, particularly on the back end. So we have to be very active and get more guys involved. I was concerned about it last week because they had big backs, and I'm concerned with Oregon because of Royce Freeman. We've got to do a better job of getting more people to the ball, we can't have solo tackles all the time."

*On the atmosphere at Autzen Stadium...*

"They get great crowds, and they're right on top of you. There's always going to be weather issues this time of year up there. How do you simulate a wet ball and rain in Tucson? We're going to have to get our guys ready with that every day. We'll have some challenges and our young guys will have to respond."

*On preparing for the weather...*

"A few years ago getting ready for a Utah game, we turned on the sprinklers in the stadium. We turned them on halfway through practice just for the offensive side and most of the guys including myself say it's the wettest we've ever been in our entire lives, we were drenched. When it rained up there our guys were like this is nothing. We may have to turn on the sprinklers this week."

*On timetable for getting back to team's success level...*

"Just wanted to get three and nine out of the way. You couldn't wait to play again because you have so much to prove, and leaves such a bad taste when you go through a season like that. It's harder to recruit and all of that but to our staffs credit and our players credit they just kept working. So certainly you feel better now but there still two big regular season games left, there's a big bowl game coming up. We're not going to be able to play for a championship but were playing for our bowl status now and continue to try to have some fun this year."

Arizona will head to Eugene to face Oregon on Sat, Nov. 18. Slated for 5:00 p.m. MST, the game will be televised by Pac-12 Network.

For continued coverage of Arizona football,

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