

ARIZONA WILDCATS

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FOOTBALL

Weekly Press Conference Transcript

Arizona will play Arizona State on Saturday, November 25th

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...

“The first thing I talked to the team about yesterday was what went wrong on Saturday with Oregon. You have to give them a lot of credit, they played well and they had an outstanding crowd. We knew it was going to be a tough environment but we did make some uncharacteristic mistakes in the first half. We had a lot of penalties and did not execute well, yet we still had a chance in the second half. I thought their offensive line did a great job, but I don’t think we played well enough to beat a quality team on the road. There is a lot to work on this week. I thought the guys responded well last night, with the biggest game of the year coming up.”

On attitude from the defense...

“You can be competitive and intense without being silly. There were just so many penalties that there was no reason for. Our guys have to learn, from a competitive standpoint, the framework of the rules. It hasn’t been a problem, but we have done stuff that shouldn’t have happened. We will get it corrected. We didn’t do a good job and we lost gap integrity. It was different guys at different times. I know we were banged-up up front, but they controlled us from their offensive line standpoint.”

On injuries...

“We have been relatively lucky for most of the year. We would get a guy at a position injured but have three or four guys waiting. It is a concern for a few days, we have to figure out who will be back. We have to figure something out in a hurry.”

On what was learned from QB Khalil Tate struggling...

“Scheme wise, it was pretty much what we thought. We did not have a lot of missed-assignments, but we probably pressed a little bit. Sometimes, particularly the younger players, will try to make it all back in one play. It was a lesson learned, and a little frustrating. We did get more things going in the second half, but definitely stuff we can fix.”

On possible switching of linemen because of injuries on defense...

“That’s part of strategizing and definitely something to consider. Not somebody that is starting on the o-line, but maybe somebody deeper in our depth chart. We are down three or four starters, though. But, you have to have some size. You can’t have 200-pounders at this level. It will be a very short turn around to get somebody ready for Saturday, probably 10-12 snaps. We’ll be discussing it all day.”

On the redshirts:

“You don’t want to burn a whole year for one game. And the guys are injured, if we don’t get them back this week we should get them back for the bowl game. It just wouldn’t make sense.”

On the tradition of the rivalry...

"If you're a particular college coach, in any college sport, there's usually a big rival. It's been that way throughout my career coaching football. Whether it was West Virginia playing Pittsburgh, or when I was assistant coach at Clemson with South Carolina and certainly Michigan with Ohio State. There is an added importance to that game. It counts as one in the standings but to your fans, it's a game there's a passion about and the one your players hear most about during the year. There is more at stake from that standpoint. The process throughout the week is going to stay the same. For us, it's always at this time of year that there's usually other stuff at stake, like bowl status. There's a lot of intensity."

On winning the Territorial Cup last season...

"Last year was just so bad but it was good for our seniors. A good way to end it, but this year both teams are doing better but I expect it to be a great crowd."

On playing at Sun Devil Stadium...

"When I review tapes, they've made some really big plays. I thought the intensity was good. Last year it was improbable in most people's minds that we won, like where was that all year? Sometimes, we as coaches think the same thing. It's hard to predict rivalry games. I just asked the guys to have the best week of preparation, both in the film room and on the practice field. We have so many new guys that don't understand the intensity. The Pac-12 only allows travel teams up to 70 but you can take your whole team to this game, so they'll be there. So we'll take our whole team and they'll be on the sideline."

On alumni connections to this game...

"I like to have the lettermen out. I probably haven't done it as much. We try to keep an open door. I love having the former players out here anytime, not just this week. But this week is where they can probably portray the intensity of the game. I love to welcome our football lettermen out anytime they want to come watch us because I love having them around. There's been a lot of great players that went through here. More importantly, whether you're a football letterman or just a graduate of the university, the love that they have for this place is evident as soon as you talk to them."

On the Territorial Cup's importance on in-state recruiting...

"I think it's overrated from a recruiting standpoint and who wins the game. I don't think that it's affected anyone in six years from that standpoint, but I do think the ones that are in-state probably understand the rivalry. Someone who doesn't live here won't hear about it 365 days a year. From a recruiting standpoint, it hasn't had too much of an impact in my years here."

On the impact of the Territorial Cup game on recruits...

"I think they understand the rivalry, and I think whether you go there or come here, if you're an in-state guy, it's easier for you to understand what the seniors are talking about when they talk to you about it during the week. I don't know about the recruiting impact. The biggest difference from a recruiting standpoint now is with the December 20th signing period, as soon as this game is over, we're going to be recruiting next week. There's a certain urgency for a December 20th signing period, and I would think probably 70% of recruits are going to be signing here in about three or four weeks, so that changes things a little bit more."

On recruiting...

"We're still going to be out on the road. We're certainly going to balance bowl practices and bowl preparation, when we find out where we're going with that. Again, there's more of a sense of urgency with a December 20th signing period, in which you're going out and seeing the guys that are committed and the guys you're trying to get committed really quickly. It'll be busier for all of us, and then recruiting weekends start next weekend as well."

On relationship with ASU Head Coach Todd Graham...

"He has worked for me. I don't know if they allow that in the game program, but we've known each other for a long time, way before I was even hired at West Virginia. Just like any other coach, rarely do you ever even see the guy other than two times a year when we have Pac-12 coaches' meetings and then possibly at the coaches' convention. That's usually about the only time you see anybody, let alone your rival coach. Todd and I have always had a great relationship."

On takeaways from Khalil Tate's performance...

"I think probably like a lot of competitors when we got behind in the second half, maybe he pressed a little bit and even in the first half. Khalil's a really competitive guy and he's shown it. Sometimes he can make a play happen when maybe it's not happening, but I think sometimes it'll come back to get you too if you don't let the game come to you. I think that's part of the maturation of a guy that's a really good football player and is going to get a whole lot better, but there are still some learning experiences. I think this past game should serve as a huge learning experience for all of us, and particularly our young guys like Khalil."

On Tate's inability to break off long runs against Oregon...

"I think you've got to give them some credit. Part of it was the way they were playing us, and they tackled really well. Our offense is relying on the quarterback playing at a high level, and he's played at a really high level. He made some nice plays in this game too. We can help him out as coaches as we go along, and that's why we pointed out some things in this last game that he may have been able to do to help us out a little bit."

On the receivers...

"Part of it is obviously just getting open and catching the ball. Our receivers have been really good. We dropped a couple in this game that we normally wouldn't drop. When you're in a tight game environment like that, a big play miss can hurt you."

On the punting unit...

"That's the balance that is frustrating because those guys can do it, you see them do it in practice. I do think in the game it's become almost at the stage where you talk too much about it and it becomes more mental. They just have to trust their ability. We believe in them but it's frustrating because they're isolated and everybody can see when they don't kick it as well as they can. They have enough talent to do it, we still can perform better than what we have."

On field position in the Oregon game...

"It's always a huge factor. I know there's a lot of stats about where you start your drive and what percentage of points given from where you start. Defensively we've struggled at times, but they're really going to struggle when you give them the ball at the 50. We have to do a lot better job at that."

On the 2018 schedule...

"They send three or four models to see which one we like. We voice our opinion on something but I don't think it matters because they put in a lot of work in putting those schedules together and fitting everybody's wants and needs. I think we have eight or nine games without the open date first, that's going to be a tough stretch. But I think we have a great home schedule, and it will be a fun game to watch. There's a couple Fridays on there which you hate to take away from high school football but there will be some national TV exposure with that. It will be a fun schedule."

On the team responding from adversity against Oregon...

"Initially, not like we should have. I told them it's going to be a loud crowd, it's going to be intense and it might be a little chippy. Initially I didn't think we kept our poise as well as I would've liked. I think in the second half we did a better job of that but we didn't play well. I think initially we learned some things that we should be able to handle better next time."

Arizona will face Arizona State on Sat, Nov. 25. Slated for 2:30 p.m. MST, the game will be televised by Pac-12 Networks.

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