

Big Ten Football Media Days

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Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Wisconsin Badgers

Coach Luke Fickell

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We'll begin with your opening statement, Coach.

LUKE FICKELL: I want to start by saying thank you. Thank you to everybody that's here today, for all that you guys do for obviously promoting our programs, obviously our conference, and to me, most importantly, our young men. Not just for today, obviously, but the next three days this has grown. There's a lot that you guys have invested as well.

Obviously, thank you for all that it is that you guys do.

Thank you to Commissioner Petitti for his leadership and his vision. Obviously taking our conference into this new world and this newfound college football and the landscape. I know for myself and for everybody within our conference we have the utmost confidence in what it is that he is doing and where he is taking us and his leadership and being in the forefront of what this is going to look like here as we continue to move forward in all of college athletics and in particular college football.

Then I want to say thank you to our A.D., Chris McIntosh, for his friendship and his partnership that's so critical to me as we continue to grow our program and continue to take the University of Wisconsin into this new landscape as well.

I know we're in great hands not just as a football program, but our entire athletic department. You've heard so much and you will continue to hear so much about obviously this ever-changing landscape and the things which all of us are not to say worried about, concerned about, but understand it's coming down the pipe here in another year. It's so critical to the leadership of our conference obviously, and the leadership within each one of our universities and programs is to me even more critical today than it ever has been.

For those guys to be the example for what it is that we got to continue to do within our own programs, I know that we're in great hands, and I appreciate them.

I'm excited to be here, to be here to talk to and to lead the University of Wisconsin in year two. I'm excited to not be the new guy, right? Not the new guy because it's year two, but not be the new guy because everybody is new. Even Coach Ferentz, who has been here for quite a while, is new to what I call this coast-to-coast Big Ten.

We're all newbies in some ways and to what this all entails and what this all is going to bring upon us as we continue to move forward.

For me I've been a Big Ten guy my entire life. I've been fortunate enough, obviously, to grow up in Big Ten country and to learn about the histories and the traditions and the rivalries since I was a young kid.

And then to have the great fortunes for myself to be able to actually play and then coach within the Big Ten for 20-some years and then only to learn more about the histories and the traditions and the rivalries of being a part of them firsthand.

But I can honestly tell you that I'm more excited today. I'm more excited about the things that are in front of us for the University of Wisconsin, for our football program, and for myself in particular about what these new history we can create, what these new traditions are that we can create with these new rivalries we are going to be creating with what I call this coast-to-coast Big Ten.

I think it's incredibly exciting to be a part of, and I know for some traditionalists, with all the things that I have always understood about the Big Ten, that we're not losing those things. We're only growing. We're only gaining. We're only starting to add to some new histories and traditions and rivalries that I think are going to make our sport that much better.

It's 39 days until we kick off. 39 days until Friday, August 30th, when we kick off in Camp Randall. That's really exciting.

There's more work to be done in the next 39 days for us and our team and our program than really over the last six



months, and I mean that because it's so unique as we start to close in on the opening kickoff. When you go to camp, there's so much that is created and so much that is developed within the chemistry and the culture of your program that it is incredibly critical in these next 39 days.

I can tell you this, that everybody within our program, me included, are incredibly excited about putting all of our work and all of our dedication and all of our commitment to the ultimate test, which is obviously August 30th, Friday night in Camp Randall. That's when we truly get to measure all the things that we've put in, all the time we've put in.

We get to really test ourselves where you are tested the most. For us and for me that is incredibly exciting.

I know this, that the 2024 Wisconsin Badger team is about a lot of things. We've got a lot of things to continue to develop in these next 39 days, but the number one most important thing and the thing that I'm going to stress and continue to talk about here today as well as when we get into camp is about leadership.

As I reflect a little bit on last year and all the things that you go through, not that it's just year one, but when you hit adversity, when you go through the ups and the downs and you really reflect upon it, the first thing for me that it comes back to is leadership, and our ability since January 1 to attack every aspect of the leadership within our program has been really critical and another one of those things that's going to be put to the test.

I know this... it starts with me. Obviously the leadership starts right there, but it also permeates throughout our entire program. It's probably the biggest reason why the three guys are with us today to represent our program and our university, are because of the leadership, because of their ability to step up and in particular to step up last year when we were going through a stretch of time that was very difficult.

It was the most adversity that I think obviously we had hit all year and maybe even that they had hit in a long time. For those guys to stand up, to stand tall, to really kind of take ownership in what it is that we needed to do to push, develop, and continue to grow the leadership within our own program in the midst of those times was really important. It gave us an opportunity to start that growth in the last couple of weeks of our season last year leading through bowl prep and then obviously even in a bowl game.

It really kind of fell on the shoulders of these guys. To be honest with you, that's what I'm proud of. I thank them for obviously their resiliency and their commitment to at that

time step up. Not wait until January 1. Not wait until we can create these little leadership groups and things. They were the guys that kind of were at the forefront of getting some things turned around in the midst of a tough stretch for us.

I'll introduce those guys. Starting off on the defensive side of the ball we have Hunter Wohler here from Muskego, Wisconsin. He's a four-year guy that's a senior for us this year. He's a returning starter at safety. He led our team in tackles last year, and I think he's maybe the third leading tackler returning in college football and expecting him to have an incredible year.

Jake Chaney, who is from Cape Coral, Florida, Lehigh High School, where he played for his father. He's our starting middle linebacker. Jake is I would say the emotion. He is the attitude of our defense and probably our entire team and program.

And then Jack Nelson. Jack is our starting left tackle. He's a fifth-year guy. He's a senior. Jack is a legacy. Jack is born and bred. He's from it Stoughton, Wisconsin, right down the street. His dad played at Wisconsin. Obviously Jack is a starting left tackle. His younger brother plays at Wisconsin. Jack is what epitomizes what it looks like and what it means to be a Badger.

Those three guys will represent us today, our program, our university. There's a lot of other guys that could represent us that have stepped up in this time for us. These guys obviously are the ones that will represent us today, but I think for us in particular moving forward I talked about its leadership. We've pinpointed some things that are really, really critical to the growth of our team and our program.

A lot of that falls, like I said, on the shoulders of me, but also on the shoulders of the leaders of our program. The challenge has been for them to understand in this leadership that we have to find the standards that give us an opportunity to grow.

There can be a million different standards that what you say is important to your program, but I know for us these guys embody the standards. They're the ones that understand that they're going to create what that standard looks like. They're going to be the ones that set the bar to what that standard is, and then they're ultimately going to be the ones that uphold what that standard is going to be.

These are the standards that we know and believe give us the best opportunity to continue to grow our program and put us in a position to play for a championship because that's the mentality, that's the objective, and that's what University of Wisconsin and our football program deserves.



I'll open it up for questions.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Coach, please.

Q. You guys added a very talented transfer portal quarterback in Tyler Van Dyke. How is he meshing with the offense throughout the offseason? Second part of the question, Hunter and Ricardo return to this defense kind of leading and spearheading that group. What do they mean to the locker room, and what do they mean to the other guys in the room on the defensive side?

LUKE FICKELL: Well, Tyler Van Dyke, I could say a lot of great things about Tyler. I think the greatest thing is Tyler has walked in and embraced everything with our program, understood what he was walking into year one, the ups and the downs, the things that we needed from him.

He's got a humility behind himself when he walked in the door that he was willing and understood that he was going to have to earn everything. He understood that it was going to be a battle. There weren't going to be keys that were just handed to him.

I think the greatest thing about Tyler is his ability to say, I need to refocus. I understand what his goals were individually. He knew that there were things that he needed to continue to grow to do, and he had experienced an incredible amount of adversity in his three years of starting down at Miami.

For me, if you said, What's the greatest thing that you liked when you were identifying Tyler Van Dyke, I would say all the adversity that he had been through, the ability for him to handle three different coordinators, the ability for him to go from the East Coast down to South Florida, win a starting position, have the ups and the downs, and be able to continue to stand tall and have the confidence to continue to play and to play at the level which he expects to play.

He's done a phenomenal job, and I expect him to continue to grow in his leadership role as we enter this next 39 days.

For Hunter, obviously, he's here today. He's the leading tackler on our team. He's third returning I think tackler in college football. There's a thing of being from Muskego. There's a thing of growing up a Badger fan, the thing that means some things a little bit different to Hunter and his pride in all the things that we do, not just as a team this year, not just as a team last year, but in the past, the present, and ultimately the future.

I think you have to have those kind of leaders within your program that understand that the future of what it is that he's leaving is every bit as important as the now, and he represents that.

Then Rico is a guy that doesn't, I don't think, get talked about enough. I let Rico speak for himself, but I know we have the utmost confidence in Rico. He is a guy that had seven picks last year, but for a guy that by nature as a field corner doesn't get as much action, he is one of the most productive guys that I've been around at playing that position in particular.

He went through an offseason shoulder surgery, which maybe gave us an opportunity to bring him back for another year when he had some options that he could have tried the next level, but he understands where he is and where he wants to be and where he fits in the big picture of things. We continue to make him a big part of what it is we want to do.

Thank you.

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