

Big Ten Football Media Days

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Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

Maryland Terrapins

Michael Locksley

Press Conference



MICHAEL LOCKSLEY: It's great to be here in Vegas for Big Ten Media Day. First of all, I want to thank Commissioner Petitti and the entire Big Ten staff for putting on such a first-class event here in Las Vegas.

I also want to give a special shout-out. I think my boss is back there, my new boss, Jim Smith, our new athletic director, who is here with me today. If you got a lot of questions, you can ask Jim. He's back there to take those on for you.

He's really hit the ground running. I can say this: Jim has hit the ground running, is already working hand-in-hand with our program and myself to help us elevate every part of this program and what we do here at Maryland.

Elevate is a big word around our program. It's a word I've been using since December 1st when, as I like to say, the church doors opened up.

A year ago we didn't meet our standard. We didn't meet the expectations that we created for ourselves, but there's still a lot of positive momentum about our Maryland football program. We won bowl games, three of the last four seasons. We saw six players selected in the 2025 NFL Draft. The fourth most in the Big Ten. 11th most nationally, which to me is a testament to the staff and the development of our players.

We're continuing to elevate that talent. We've embarked on recruiting the best two high school recruiting classes that we've seen in the history of Maryland football, and half of those guys that we signed were able to enroll and early participate in our winter and spring programs, which gives us an opportunity to see those guys as early as possible.

We're also investing heavily in all the different parts of our program: Our player development, our sports performance, all those areas you'll see. You'll see upgrades at SECU Stadium, affectionately known as The Shell.

Lastly, I'm really excited about the three young men that I

brought here with me. When you look at the guys that we brought to Vegas with us, it's very similar to what this landscape of college football looks like.

The first kid, Jalen Huskey, is a kid that transferred into our program a year ago, and we asked him to switch positions midseason. He went from starting at corner to moving to the free safety position due to injuries, and he's worked really hard and eventually became one of our most productive players in our program and now has taken on a leadership role. He actually just got back from Selma where he did the Pettus Bridge walk. We like to thank Commissioner Petitti and all those people that made that trip possible for our guys to go down and experience.

The next player, Isaiah Wright, another transfer that we expected a year ago to help us. He tore his Achilles during summer training and was unable to help us, but when you look at the impact that Isaiah has had in our program, even though he withstood an injury during the season, you'll understand that leadership doesn't have a timestamp on it. Leadership can happen in a day. It can happen. We often define leadership with having a positive impact on others, and even though he dealt with the blow of not being able to play a year ago, when I looked at the impact that Isaiah Wright had on our program, even as an injured first-year transfer player, I knew that he was the right kind of guy for our program.

Last but not least, Daniel Wingate, a player that I'm really excited about. Daniel was a guy that probably wasn't as heavily recruited as his skill set has shown us to be. He was a guy last year as a true sophomore that I saw take on a huge leadership role, not just on the football field, but in our locker room, and has been a very productive player, a DMV kid that made the decision to stay home and has been key for us in us trying to build this program and put it back on track.

When you think about our team, here's what I'll tell you. This for me is kind of a year of what I like to call vulnerability. One of the greatest characteristics you can have as a leader is the ability to be vulnerable.

I'll tell you, a year ago Coach Locks lost his locker room.

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For me to stand in front of a group of media and tell you that I lost my locker room, and it wasn't because I wasn't a good coach, it wasn't because they weren't good players because we were better than a four-win team. What we had to do was we had haves and have-nots for the first time in our locker room, and the landscape of college football taught me a valuable lesson.

That valuable lesson is it's important for me, even in the midst of this change, to continue to educate our players on the importance of what playing for something bigger than yourself is all about, and I can tell you that if I've got to put my desk in the locker room this year, I will. I expect our team to show up, play hard, and probably one of the most exciting things is if you ask me what kind of team we have, I don't know yet. That's a good thing. That's a good thing because as a coach, sometimes we feel like we have to have that answer.

Well, I've got fall camp. I've got about 25 practices in July and August to figure it out and feel very confident with the changes and the elevation of our program that we'll put a product on the field that we can all be really excited about.

So with that, I thank you, and I open it up to any questions you may have.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. I wanted to ask you, you alluded to as far as losing your locker room at one point, but obviously you still got it back. What is the difference? When do you know the difference is between being a coach and being a teacher with you having to manage so many different permits within the locker room with yourself and your coaching staff?

MICHAEL LOCKSLEY: Great question. To be honest, there is no difference between being a coach and being a teacher in my opinion.

I've always tried, and this is why losing the locker room a year ago for me was really personal, because it's bigger than football, and it has been for me. I would have never dreamt as a kid that grew up on the south side of Washington D.C. having an opportunity to coach at the place as a kid I grew up rooting for and worshipping. I loved everything about Maryland. I still do. I enjoy the job I have.

But I can tell you, last year was tough on me as a coach because for the first time those really strong relationships were questioned because I had to decide whether to pay a freshman coming in or take care of a veteran player that helped me go to three bowl games and have success and

do something that hadn't been done in 130 years in the history of Maryland football.

It was hard to do both, and so what I've decided now is if you come to Maryland and you look outside of the our locker room, there's a sign. That sign reads, "You can leave your Louis belts, your car keys, and your financial statements outside of this locker room," because when you enter those doors, we'll all pay the same price for success or failure.

That's really important for me. That's what last year was about for me, but that's also why I'm excited about this year because I don't know what kind of team I have just yet, but I know that they're really talented. It's a matter of them playing for something bigger than themselves, which we're in the process of developing that type of culture.

Q. I wanted to ask you about your thoughts on playoff expansion and whether or not there's a situation in your mind that would be the ideal playoff scenario in terms of numbers and expansion.

MICHAEL LOCKSLEY: Curt Cignetti, I was back there. I heard Curt. Man, he had this whole thing mapped out. Whatever Curt said, I agree with, because Curt has that thing figured out.

No, that's Tony's job. I want to stay within my lane. I have some thoughts. Obviously I've spent time in a lot of leagues... ACC, SEC, Big Ten. I got a lot of faith in Tony and the administration, including my president, who I think is leading the athletic part of the Big Ten, that they'll figure out the right mix. I think it should be handled on the field. It should be handled based on your body of work. I don't think it should be as much on the committee.

But I'll let the powers that be. I'm more focused on building a brotherhood in that locker room in Terpsville to figure out how to win the first game. I'll let all the other stuff be taken care of by the people above my pay grade.

Q. Obviously you lost a lot of great players to the draft, essentially everyone you brought to media day last year. When you look at that quarterback room, obviously bringing Justyn Martin from UCLA, how do you -- as you say, you're trying to redefine the character of the team, but how do you also hold the quarterbacks to the incredibly high standard that you're used to having?

MICHAEL LOCKSLEY: That's a great point there. We've had some quarterbacks that have come through. I had the fortune of having Taulia Tagovailoa for four years, four seasons there, and he left here as the Big Ten all-time



leading passer. But when you look at the quarterback locker room or the quarterback room today as it stands, really, really excited about it. A lot because I don't necessarily know what I have.

I equate that quarterback room a lot to -- and I just was telling Tony in the back -- a lot like when you have a baby in the crib, and you throw the snake in the crib with the baby. The baby doesn't know that a snake is bad, and that's kind of what those quarterbacks when the new guy in Justyn that's never played in the system, Malik, who has been much talked about, and then you throw in Khristian Martin, who a lot of you guys are surprised by what you saw Khristian do in the spring game, but I wasn't. He's a guy that a year ago traveled with us as a true freshman every game, and I thought he had the right tools.

Pep Hamilton, who I brought in as my OC, one of my closest friends in this business, has done a tremendous job in preparing these guys. I'm really looking forward to getting into fall camp, having an opportunity to really see these guys and how they perform and who gives us the best chance to score points. I think they all three are very similar in their skill set. All three have great size, big arms to be able to take advantage of all parts of the field, while also being really athletic enough to make plays with their feet if need be.

To me the great thing about the Terps this year in my opinion is the fact that we're young, and we don't know what we don't know. I've had a lot of fun with teams like that, and I'm looking forward to this one.

Q. After a meddling November stretch left Maryland teetering last season, you still rank among the top 55 coaches nationally and boast recruiting momentum. How do you reconcile that strong offseason profile with the urgency to close out games, and what's the corrective plan entering 2025?

MICHAEL LOCKSLEY: Man, that's like five questions in one. I'll try to start with the back end.

How do I plan on rectifying the win-loss situation? I won't lose my locker room this year. I've been fortunate enough with the new landscape now and instead of having to raise money, we have revenue share, which allows me to kind of close the gap between the haves and have-nots.

Much like new players, I have a new boss that understands the business of sport. I'm excited because I only asked for one, maybe two things, Jim. I said, just put us in the middle. Don't have me at 16, 17, 18 and ask me to win a Big Ten championship. I know that Jim is committed to giving me an opportunity, giving us an opportunity in this

league.

I can tell you that when things have been kind of equal for us, we did things that hadn't happened at Maryland in 130 years. I'm looking forward to working with Jim to find ways to create the ability to keep and maintain these players that we've been able to bring in.

When it comes to the football piece of it, I told you, elevation is the word. You can't elevate without separating. I can tell you that we've made some tough decisions in the offseason. We've lost some great players that have played pivotal roles in building the Maryland football program and the foundation of it, but to win championships it needs to be elevated.

I know Jim comes from a championship pedigree, much like I did when I came in from Alabama, and I know that he is putting together a staff that is going to understand that to help make my job a little bit easier to where I can focus on that locker room, which is a strength of mine. I'm looking forward to being back in there with my players, knowing that they understand that we're going to do everything we can to take care of our players the right way.

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