

Big Ten Football Media Days

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UCLA Bruins

Coach DeShaun Foster

Press Conference



DESHAUN FOSTER: Good afternoon, everyone. Before I begin, I would like to thank Commissioner Petitti and the entire Big Ten Conference on their ongoing support and leadership.

I also want to acknowledge the outstanding support from our administration at UCLA, particularly from our chancellor, Dr. Julio Frenk, and our athletic director, Martin Jarmond. To my staff and everyone in our program who has worked tirelessly both on and off the field to support the success of our student-athletes, their vision and dedication are unending and truly inspiring.

To my wife, my children, parents, and rest of my family, none of this would be possible without your support through this incredible journey. None of this.

Well, everyone, I'm back. Last year I stood up here and reminded everyone that UCLA is in L.A., which looking back might have been the most obvious geography lesson in Big Ten history. But you know what? Important things are worth stating clearly. We are in L.A., and we're proud to be in L.A.

This year we're ready to show the Big Ten what L.A. football looks like when it's firing on all cylinders. That moment speaking to you last year taught me a valuable lesson. Authenticity resonates more deeply than perfection.

Our players saw me being human, and it brought us closer together. We've been joking about it for about a year now. The players know that that same genuine approach is how we coach, recruit, and build this program.

Speaking of building, we've had an incredible year of progress, and I mean incredible. When I took on this job, I inherited a program with tremendous tradition and immense opportunity. We're not just committed to restoring UCLA football. We're committed to evolving in this new era of college athletics.

Our recruiting has been outstanding, and I mean

outstanding right now. We've brought in young men who understand what it means to be a Bruin, academically excellent, athletically gifted and committed to being bigger than themselves.

They're joining the community that will challenge them intellectually and develop them athletically and prepare them for success on and off the field. One thing that they get to do is compete in the Rose Bowl, and that's the most iconic venue. Everybody knows the Rose Bowl. We get to play there every week.

One thing I know that UCLA can do is open up doors for you. I know this personally. UCLA opened doors for me as a player and ultimately brought me back home as the head coach. That's the kind of lasting connection that UCLA creates.

Our players have embraced this vision. They've worked incredibly hard this offseason, not just in the weight room and on the field, but in the classroom and the community. They understand that being a Bruin means excellence in everything you do. Our program is built off three pillars: discipline, respect, and enthusiasm.

Now, these aren't just words on the wall. It's the framework in how we expect our players to conduct themselves on and off the field. Discipline and preparation and academics and how you represent the university. Respect for teammates, coaches, opponents in this game we all love. And enthusiasm, a genuine passion for competing, for learning, and for being part of something special.

Discipline, respect, and enthusiasm builds a culture that achieves lasting success. Today I'm fortunate to have three young men with me who are perfect examples of what it means to be Bruins in this new era. Garrett DiGiorgio, our senior right tackle. After four years of anchoring the offensive line and a chance to go to the NFL, Garrett chose to return because he believes in what we're building at UCLA.

JonJon Vaughns, our senior linebacker. After years splitting time between football and baseball, JonJon chose to dedicate himself fully to our team, a sacrifice that has



transformed his leadership.

Nico Iamaleava, our sophomore quarterback from Cali. He's an elite quarterback who chose to come back home and help build something special at UCLA.

This Big Ten journey has been magnificent for our program. We're thrilled to be a part of a conference that has produced national champions these last two years. That's the standard of excellence we aspire to reach.

Being surrounded by that level of success elevates everything we do. Our players are passionate about having an opportunity to compete against legendary programs and prove that West Coast football belongs on the biggest stage.

We're not just focused on winning games. We're committed to building something special and sustainable to honor UCLA's incredible tradition. We aim to be recognized as a program that develops both NFL-caliber talent and leaders in every field.

Entering year two I expect to see significant improvement. Not just in my team, but in myself as a head coach. Growth is part of the process, and we're all committed to being better than we were last season. I know there are questions about our progress, expectations, and how well we're performing in this conference. That's totally fair. We're here to earn respect, not demand it.

However, I can tell you this. My team is ready. They're confident. They're prepared, and they're hungry to show up and show out and redefine what UCLA football can be.

So, yes, we're still in L.A. We're proud to be Bruins, and we're ready to make it happen starting now. I'm happy to take any questions.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. What life lessons have you pulled on from your second year at UCLA and your second year in the pros to help you now in your second year as head coach? How do you plan to utilize the world-class speed of Oregon transfer Rodrick Pleasant, whether it's on offense or special teams? He plays corner, but you know.

DESHAUN FOSTER: Well, hopefully this season goes as well as my second year in the NFL. We went to the Super Bowl that year. We ended up losing to the Patriots. It was a great run, and we played really well. I'm looking for that type of success this year for our players, and I'll probably be mentioning that type of things to them over the next

season and how it goes.

But Rodrick Pleasant, great talent, fast kid. Has a lot of upside. So we're still trying to figure out exactly what we can do with him, but I'm excited to see him doing some special teams, returning kicks, and just finding ways to get the ball in his hands because he is a special talent.

Q. Martin Jarmond is one of the most respected young athletic directors in all of America, and he didn't inherit you. He picked you. Will you talk about working with him and his standard of excellence and what it's like to work in that environment with him?

DESHAUN FOSTER: I'm just fortunate to have an athletic director that's been at the highest level and been to schools that produce at the highest level. So, you know, the expectations that he has, they're very high. I just trust everything that he says, and I hold on to a lot of the words that he tells me.

We have a great relationship. I'm just fortunate that I have somebody that is in my corner and just supports me the way that he does.

Q. You're replacing four incredible players to the NFL Draft on the defensive end, particularly that front seven. Who were some players that you have seen evolve over the last few months that you are really excited about that could potentially fill that void?

DESHAUN FOSTER: I'm excited about JonJon Vaughns coming in. There's a few linebackers. JonJon Vaughns, Chisom, and also J9. Excited about them.

Up front I got Gary Smith coming back. Keanu is back also. These are guys that we lost to injury. Kanye Clark. There's a few guys that they started the season, but they weren't able to finish it. I'm pretty excited about them because going into their last year, this is going to be a special moment for them. So we're looking forward to it.

Q. I wanted to ask you just what are some of the characteristics that you saw in Nico that you felt would elevate your program as well as him being in the locker room to galvanize that entire locker room?

DESHAUN FOSTER: Just the arm strength is just something that you see just from watching him play at all, but he's just a talent. It's not anything that I saw him do last season. It's more of what I had seen him do all the way up. Him being a local quarterback, I had seen him play a few times, and he's played with a lot of players that are on our team, so there's a lot of familiarity there.



We're just excited to have a playoff quarterback, somebody that was able to lead his team to the playoffs. They might not have gotten the outcome that they wanted, but he still was able to play. He showed how tough he was in that game. Just being able to come back home and be comfortable and being in a familiar environment, I think the sky is the limit. We're excited about this.

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