

Big Ten Football Media Days

Wednesday, July 23, 2025

Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

Northwestern Wildcats

Coach David Braun

Press Conference



DAVID BRAUN: Hello, everyone. I want to begin just with a couple thank yous. First off, to my family, Kristin, Lucas, Andrew, Blake. Incredible support back home.

I want to thank our staff back in Evanston because they're back in the full swing of things. Our coaches, our staff, our families on staff truly believe we have the best collection of people in all of college football. All you have to do is step into the Braun household for one of our official visits when we have all the families over. Incredible group of people. Thank you to all of them and all they do to operate our program at a high level.

I want to take a moment to thank Commissioner Petitti. His leadership over the last year, his communication, his transparency is something that allow all of us in my position as head coaches in the Big Ten to move forward in a dynamically changing landscape of college football.

I also want to take an opportunity to thank Mark Jackson. His partnership, his leadership running our athletic department since he's arrived in September, could not be more grateful, more thankful for having someone in the foxhole, a true partner and just a solutions-based individual that I know Northwestern athletics is in great hands for a very, very long time.

Our team cannot wait to get going next Wednesday. This is a special group that returned in January -- humble, hungry, frustrated after a 2024 campaign, but ultimately a group that chose to show up, get to work, and make incredible change as we approach the 2025 season.

It started with great leadership from the leaders on our team, hard conversations, a willingness to really evaluate everything that we do within our program and really set and establish new standards for how we operate. All of us in this room know good teams are well led from coaches. Great teams are well led from players and those in the locker room.

What we see going on with our team right now is a level of accountability, a level of ownership from the young men on

our team that I could not be more excited about.

A frustrating 2024 campaign ultimately provided an opportunity for all of us, starting with me, to evaluate everything. The timing around that is important. I've had many conversations with our staff over the last year. In chaos, there's opportunity. The reality of college football over the past year, it's been in a state of chaos, and there's a lot of opportunities to find. Opportunities for us to identify our non-negotiables as a program and then identify the changes that we need to make to not only find success in 2025 but build a foundation that will be sustainable for years to come to compete for Big Ten Championships.

I'm proud of the work that we've done. I'm proud of the direction we're going and could not be more excited about the 2025 season.

Speaking of excitement, there are endless reasons to be excited about Northwestern football right now. One more year at Northwestern stadium -- Northwestern field at Martin Stadium. On the lakefront, the most unique opportunity or venue in all of college football. We're excited to create a home-field advantage this year, win a bunch of games at home, excited to open up in week 2 against Western Illinois on the lakefront, and looking forward to 2025 on the lake.

New Ryan Field on the way in 2026. I can speak from firsthand opportunity, having a chance to be down on field level, get tours, the amount of energy from Ryan Sports in terms of the development, the design, every stone -- no stone unturned. It truly will be the best football venue in the country. It won't affect us in 2025. It's certainly affecting our recruiting in a positive manner. But so much to look forward to in 2026.

An incredible retention rate. It's easy for us as coaches to talk about the transfers we brought in, and we'll get to that, but I'm so proud of the job our staff did in retaining our football team. There's countless examples of it, but we had a bunch of young men that decided they wanted to stay at Northwestern and be a part of a special 2025 season.

Excited about the 15 transfers that we've been able to



bring in. Northwestern football will never be driven solely by transfer recruiting, but ultimately in the new landscape of college football, it's our job to evaluate where we need to improve as a team, where we need to improve as a roster, and find the right young men to come into our program.

What I can say boldly is the 15 young men that we have brought into our program as transfers not only are great football players, but they're incredible young men that are humble, excited to compete, and want to be great teammates and are team oriented.

The hiring of Christian Sarkisian, our general manager. Christian is going to play an incredible role in our roster management, managing our revenue share cap. His experience in the NFL, his ties to Northwestern could not be more excited about Christian being on board and being a critical, critical teammate in us navigating the new landscape of college football.

Then lastly, this has been an awesome off-season for the Cats. It started in January with humility and a ton of hunger, great winner block, incredible spring ball by far, the most challenging spring ball we've had at Northwestern in a long time -- very physical, live tackling, challenging our guys to prepare themselves for the arena and competing in the Big Ten. I feel like we have a team that's in a really good space heading into fall camp, starting here in a week.

The three young men we brought with us here today, really excited to have this group with us, starting off with Anto Saka. Anto truly will be one of the best defensive ends in the country next year, forever. Has the unique ability to rush the passer, has become a well-rounded defensive lineman, an every-down player. His leadership continues to grow. He'll have a pivotal impact on our defense this season.

Next, Joe Himon, running back. You go back and study our explosive plays over the last couple years, something that shows up is the ball is in Joe Himon's hands, whether it's on special teams or on the offensive side of the ball. So excited for Zach Lujan to be able to find different ways to utilize Joe this year, get the ball in his hands, and bring a truly explosive element to our backfield and our offense.

Lastly, Preston Stone, our transfer quarterback from SMU. My opportunity to get to know Preston through the recruiting process and since the day he arrived on campus. Yes, I've been impressed with his football knowledge, his processing, his accuracy, his leadership, but what I've been most excited about and most impressed with is his ability to quickly build relationships with his teammates. He is someone that our team truly rallies around, enjoys being around, and is a special leader, especially at that

quarterback position.

Giving a quick rundown on our team. So excited about the elevated play in the quarterback room coming out of spring ball. The elements that Preston has brought to the room, the development of Ryan Boe as a young quarterback in that room.

Jack Lausch is no longer with the program. What Jack did last year starting ten games in the Big Ten as a quarterback and then going on to play baseball at an extremely high level, Jack ultimately made a decision to solely focus on baseball moving forward. I'm excited for Jack to dive into that endeavor, which he currently is this summer. Jack has a bright, bright future in the game of baseball for a long, long time.

We will miss his leadership, miss having him as a part of the team, but excited and so impressed with everything that he achieved over the course of the last year.

There's true competitive depth in our offensive line room. The return of Caleb Tiernan at left tackle cannot be understated. Our running back room, Joe Himon, Cam Porter, Caleb Komolafe, truly a backfield that has an opportunity to be impactful not only in the run game, but also in the pass game.

Our tight end room, unproven, but it's deep. It's diverse in terms of the skill sets that exist. It's a room that will be utilized heavily throughout the season.

Our wide receiver room, all you have to do is look at the stat line. Griffin Wilde, transfer, wide receiver from South Dakota State. Very productive at the FCS level. Opportunity for him to prove it in the Big Ten.

The rest of that room in a lot of ways is unproven, but very talented and hungry and chip on their shoulder, excited about what that room is going to show, not only in the Big Ten, but the country, over the course of this year.

Then flipping over to the defensive side of the ball, I would argue we have one of the deepest defensive end groups in the league, Anto, Aidan Hubbard, Michael Kilbane, Richie Hargarty returning, the list goes on and on. Experienced D tackles in Carmine Bastone and Najee Story. Returning our starting linebacker in Mac Uihlein. Mac is someone who makes everyone around him better.

Safety room is a group that's really starting to thrive and excel. We have to find ways to get those guys on the field, but between Robert Fitzgerald, Damon Walters, and Garner Wallace, Garner Wallace is a name to keep an eye on. He blossomed late in his development at



Northwestern.

Then our cornerback room. The return of Ore after an injury last year. Josh Fussell really coming into his own. The addition of Fred Davis as a transfer. There's some true depth in that cornerback room we're excited for.

Q. You mentioned that Jack won't be with the team this fall. When did you know that was going to be the case that he'd be focused on baseball, and does that make Preston Stone your starter?

DAVID BRAUN: Preston Stone will be our starting quarterback in 2025. Jack worked throughout the course of May and June, and ultimately the decision that he made is something that I think everyone involved strongly supported and understand why Jack was making that decision.

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