2009 Brut Sun Bowl Coach Press Conference

Contributed by Sun Bowl Web Admin
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Stanford head coach Jim Harbaugh

"I just want to thank everyone first from the Sun Bowl. It's been better than advertised being down here this week. I've heard from everybody how great the hospitality is, how great the people are and it's been better than what was expected. It's been real genuine hospitality and nice down to earth good people and we appreciate that. We've been treated like kings and queens down here and our kids have been treated like princes and princesses the entire week. It's nice to be treated that way and on behalf of Stanford football we want to thank everybody in El Paso and in the Sun Bowl. effort."

I think good things are going to happen. I think it's going to be a heck of a football game. It's going to be a great challenge for the men of Stanford. I believe the strong team will survive and win this football game and as a coach I am excited to watch it go down."

Did Andrew Luck get his pins taken out yet?

"Yes, Andrew got his pins out and he is progressing nicely. We've been hopeful up until this point. We're going to give ourselves another 24 hours to make that decision."

Has Luck thrown yet?

"No, he has not thrown a ball yet."

If he can't go who will replace him as a backup?

"Robbie Picazo."

How important is this bowl game to your Stanford football program?

"This is the most important game of the year. There is an old cliché, ‘You're always as good as your last game', so we're going to live with this one the next nine or 10 months. There's going to be a lot of recruits watching this game. There are a lot of people who will be watching Stanford football for the first time. We want to represent who we are."

Talk about your running game against their defense?

"Like every football game that is played a lot of it will be decided up front. I have a feeling this defense is ready to play, ready to play its best football of the season. The special team's match up is going to be as critical. Holding on to the football, protecting it, all goal line/short-yardage situations and everything that comes up in a football game will determine who the winner is."

You've coached Tavita (Pritchard) for three years, have you coached him the same in the past or is there any difference in preparation?

"The great thing about coaching Tavita the past three years is the constant, steady improvement. I think back to the first spring that we were with him and the progress he made, starting that first game at Southern California and then the next 18, 19 games he started in. It's always a constant improvement with the youngster. Even though he hasn't taken a lot of snaps this year he had improved his play as a quarterback and that's shown in the preparation for this game."

What's the impact of Toby Gerhart on your program as a football player?

"I call him ‘John the Baptist'. He is the shinning star, the shimmer and shine of Stanford football. I got that feeling when he was the recipient of the Heisman trophy presentation in New York as he was sitting up there with Tim Tebow of Florida, arguably one of the greatest college football players of all time. There was Alabama, I was thinking Bear Bryant, there's Texas, I was thinking Earl Campbell, Colt McCoy with all the wins he's had down there and then Nebraska with Ndamukong Suh was there and then there was Toby Gerhart from Stanford. Out in the wilderness, paving the way for future youngsters that will come play for this program and singling out what Stanford football is all about and kind of bringing it back to its legendary place in college football. At times he had taken this team on his back and done everything he can possibly do for us all season to help his football team."

Looking at your defense and their offense, what are the match ups you like?

"The concern is we have to defense the pass and the run. They are a very balanced team and execute very well in both

of those phases. It puts tremendous pressure on the football team to play their assignment and play within the framework of the defense. They got two of three backs that can really hurt you. They offer a real change up when they're in the lineup and a quarterback that has the ability to put the ball in any spot on the field, dangerous play makers at the wide receivers positions. It's a real challenge for us to play our assignment, play within the framework of the defense but play aggressively and make plays when they present themselves."

Are you confidant Gerhart can run against Oklahoma?

"This is the best defense we will play all year. This is a real sound, well-coached defense. There's not going to be a lot of opportunity to out scheme this unit. We're going to have to play up to our highest level to have a chance to win this game. It can't all be about Toby. We're going to have to able to throw the ball effectively and get the ball down field and take some pressure off that faze of our game but it's going to have to be a real collective effort."

Oklahoma head coach Bob Stoops

Opening statement, El Paso hospitality.

"I would echo a lot of what Jim (Harbaugh) said just about all of the people here in El Paso have just been fabulous and great to us, and have really provided a great week for us to enjoy El Paso. Ruben Batista, the head coach at Austin High School where we practiced every day, everybody over there has just been wonderful. What a great setup and facility to work in and I appreciate all of their help through the week.

Now you're just anxious to play and I sense that definitely. (We're) looking forward to the challenge of it. The schemes they use, they make you really work to figure out where you need to be. They have what I believe is the best return man that I have seen in my 11 years at Oklahoma in (Chris) Owusu, No. 81, their great receiver who is an incredible kickoff return man. It'll be challenging in every part of the game, we recognize that, but I sense our players have really had an excellent week of work and our anxious to play and hopefully meet that challenge."

Talk about the mental challenge of this difficult season and the mental attitude going into the bowl game.

"The mental attitude is we're excited to play a great team in Stanford. We have been through a lot of adversity through the year when it comes to injuries but in the end you take it from game to game. Our last game was pretty good and this game will decided a lot. And as Jim (Harbaugh) said it lasts a long time, being that you don't have another one to play for quite awhile. I know our older guys, really the whole team, is anxious about it and excited to play."

How do you feel Trent Williams has progress, moving from left tackle to center.

"He's doing a nice job. He's a talented, strong player. If anyone can handle well it would be him. He has looked good in there, so hopefully they'll be able to play well in there (the game)."

What makes Toby Gerhart special?

"What I see is a great athlete. (He's) a guy that has great physical skills. He's a talented individual."

With all of the injuries to your team, have you ever had a season like this?

"Have we had a season like this? No way. That doesn't much matter. It's as everybody like to say, ‘It is what it is' and I'm proud of the fact that our players have kept a really positive attitude through the whole year and have kept fighting back. We've handled it in some games better than others, obviously. Overall our players, come Monday (and) Tuesday, they were always ready to work again, always looking at the bright side or looking for the positives and accepting coaching. I'm proud of the assistant coaches as well, they kept their head up, kept working through it and trying to be positive with the players and bring along some younger, inexperienced players that haven't played much. We gained some significant experience this year with a lot of young players due to the injuries we've had. That should benefit us next year."

Talk about kickoff coverage against Stanford and Owusu

"I'm sure we'll try and spread the ball around, but I've seen those teams that do squib it and kick it here, kick it there and still end up with the ball at the 40 or 45-yard line. So I don't know what they gained, if they gained a great advantage. They may have saved a touchdown but they sure have poor field position. So we'll have to kick it deep some, definitely, and challenge our guys to be in good position."

Talk about the impact of Tress Way.

"Tress Way, our punter, in our last game had five punts of over 50 yards which I believe was a record; one at 73 yards. Yesterday (Tuesday) he was in an incredible rhythm. He was hitting them, 60 yards plus consistently. I think it's a lot like a golfer, you get in a rhythm and hopefully he can get in that kind of rhythm as he did at Oklahoma State or he did yesterday and hit it smooth. He definitely changes field position and that's a major advantage when he can do it that way, and we can cover it."

Your offense against their defense, what are some matchups you like and are concerned with?

"I think it just gets down to everything concerns you. It gets down to being able to keep your balance. To be able to run the football will be a factor in the game and protect the quarterback. Those are always, to me, the major issues. I feel we're at our best when we're able to have that balance and protect the quarterback, protect the quarterback."

Landry Jones versus playing at home and away; El Paso pretty close to where he grew up (Artesia, N.M.) Is this a home game for him?

"Yeah, I'd like to think it is but in the end ... I want to say it in a polite and nice way but, it's kind of a silly analogy. Landy (Jones) didn't go on the road by himself and play. He's only as good as his supporting cast like any other quarterback is. If you have guys that drop the football away from home and you don't protect them away from home or you can't run the football away from home, why does it have to be Landry? I'd say offensively, we've overall, haven't played our best away from home. Hopefully, you know, in this game we can answer that challenge and play better as an offensive team.

Do you think Landry is ready for his first bowl game?

"I do. Landry's had a lot of experience through this year and had a lot of good work leading up to it. So I do feel he's excited and ready to play."