



**Pro Day Press Conference
Head Coach Luke Fickell and Desmond Ridder
Mar. 24, 2022**

LUKE FICKELL

On how much this day means to current players

“Well, I think that it is two-fold. It’s a reality. They all have that dream. I try to tell them all the time that I still have dreams. I still have a dream to do that. I wake up in the morning and go to work. It is not about a dream, it is about a passion. They can see it a little bit, but you must find out what the passion is. We also must continue to balance. It might not be everybody’s future. We want them to strive for that. There’s a lot of little things that are involved in it too. It’s a great thing, it increases the expectations, but we must have a little bit of balance there, so we don’t lose guys. They don’t recognize how quick it took Bryan Cook (former UC safety) to get where he is at. They don’t realize how long it has taken Joel Dublanko (former UC linebacker). He battled through three years of not playing a down, then playing in year five and year six. So, we will take this and try to remind them of all the different journeys.”

On what he tells the kids about impressing scouts

“We don’t tell them anything. I try to get them relaxed and tell them the work has really been done. Game footage shows who you are. This is just a combination of those things. Don’t over stress about it and don’t over worry about it. Just be who you are. I try to have them relax a little more about it. It can be stressful. Imagine the most intense interview you have ever been in for the biggest job you would ever want. Then you got thousands and thousands and thousands of people, fans, and cameras on how you answer every question. It’s the same thing to them. Try to remind them your work has been done, just relax and have a good time.”

On if hit’s bittersweet watching these players leave

“It is. I told you I went down to the senior bowl. I spent a couple minutes there before I realized, ‘wow this is what we have wanted.’ Then you drive or you fly away and think, ‘that is what we created, now we got a lot of work to do.’ Same thing, we are going to be out here happy, talking to all these guys, selling our guys and being really excited about our guys. Then they are going to walk away, and we are going to go up to that office and think we have a lot of work to do. That’s the joys of it.”

On having Tennessee Titans Head Coach Mike Vrabel talk to the team after practice

“We have not had many guys talk to the team. I don’t like to try and set things up. For him and me, we grew up together, so I wouldn’t have to tell him to say anything. It’s kind of a similar voice. These guys all know these guys are around here all day. I wanted nothing more than to remind them that these guys are not just here because of Desmond Ridder (former UC quarterback), Ahmad Gardner (former UC cornerback) and Coby Bryant (former UC cornerback). They are here because of what they have created too. He kind of emphasized that, walked up there and talked about culture and talked about what an advantage it is to have a culture. There are things that travel, he said. Effort and fundamentals. It wasn’t anything about these guys out here or about the season that we had. It was spot on in reminding them there is a lot of talent out here and football is played between those lines. It’s just another opportunity.”

On the intensity of the spring practices so far

“We don’t lack intensity. That is what I love about our kids. When the ball goes down in the spring, we play a lot more. That is what those guys do. We find ways to be able to play the game of football among the intensity of us. The older guys that we have had will show you because they played a lot of ball, they can be at that high intensity level and still be able to play. Right now, we are a little younger. You still have that high intensity, but how can we stay fundamentally sound right now?”

DESMOND RIDDER

On the process of Pro Day

“For the whole process, I’m pleased by how everything’s going, how I approach the game, approach this whole offseason. I think I’ve done a great job of preparing for the place where I’m at right now and the place I want to be. As for today, Pro Day, some people say it went really well, but for myself, I felt like I could have done better. A couple throws I wish could have had back, but I keep going on to the next thing.”

On how him being a father has helped with his maturity

“Yeah, of course, you’re always going to be sort of mature when you have a child at a younger age, so they know that you’re taking care of a child and you probably take care of some grown men. So, going in the meetings, I talk about how selfless she makes me. She makes me work hard every single day. I wake up and I have a purpose. You know, a lot of people wake up and don’t have a purpose. This is one pretty cute purpose right here. She makes me get up and be my best every single day.”

On if the pressure is different with all the scouts around

"No, there's no pressure out here. We're all here playing football on air with receivers that I've thrown with for the past four or five years. So, for me, I was just coming out here playing football. We've gone over the script two or three times before with them. It was just more eyes, but I've done it at the combine, done it at the Senior Bowl. So, it was a little more comfortable just feeling at home."

On how his arm feels after the Pro Day

"I feel after a day like this, oh, it feels good. I threw about 40 to 60 balls and a couple deep balls, but other than that, you use your hips, your lower body to kind of take some arm off."

On how important teams view measurables

"Yeah, we talked about it out there in California with Jordan Palmer being on me 24/7. You know, as soon as you stepped into here today, you've got to be on. You don't know who's a scout who's not. So, just keep getting better each and every single event that there is, whether that was when I was at the Senior Bowl, in the combine and Pro Day, just getting better at every single thing. Get better every single day to show teams that you know you can improve."

On if he thinks last year left a big impression on NFL teams

"I think it makes a huge impression. But then last night, we were out to dinner, and there's a lot of the guys around us. I've had a coach come up to me today and say, 'you can tell why you guys won a lot of games.' The maturity that was at the table last night, just the voices that are around this team, around this program. It's just a testament of the hard work, the brotherhood that we've created, and just all the hard work that we've put in."

On what coach Brady has done for him and his teammates over the years

"Coach Brady (Collins, Director of Football Sports Performance), obviously over the four years and all of our trainers that we've worked with, over the over the past three months. But definitely a testament to coach Brady, on getting our bodies in the right physical shape to be able to go out here and perform at the best of our abilities. And then obviously, like I said, the trainers that we've been with for the past three months, just kind of fine tuning our skills and getting ready to be what we need to be."

On how crazy it was seeing UC's Pro day this big

"Whether it's a pro day or whether we're in Nippert Stadium, my first season here, you could have counted the people in Nippert Stadium at the end of the game. Then you probably could have counted on two hands the amount of scouts over here the previous pro days. So, to be able to come out here and have all these eyes out here, have all you guys' cameras, NFL

Network... it just means a lot to us. All the hard work that we put in, not only for myself, but every single guy out here. Not only for us, but the guys coming in the years to come to see what they have to look forward to. And hopefully we keep this on a national stage for years to come."

On how the Pro Day give him a chance to appreciate all the work he's done over the years

"Ah, no. Coach Fick (Luke Fickell, head football coach) hasn't taken me out to dinner. Yes, I don't know how appreciative he is of all we've done. No, I'm just kidding. But no, it was weird going back to practice the other day. Coach Fick brought it up right before practice started, and he blew his whistle and I started taking off to run, and then I would catch myself trying to lead from the back. Ben (Bryant, UC quarterback) and Evan (Prater, UC quarterback) are in, I do a little coaching, this and that. But I'm just so grateful to be able to spend my four and a half, five years here in Cincinnati. The brotherhood that I've created here is something that'll live with me for the rest of my life."

On UC's quarterback battle

"Both (Prater and Bryant) are in touch with me, both of them call me. They're both really good friends, real good buddies. They're good buddies when they're here. They were good buddies when I left and they're good buddies when Ben comes back, so it's great to see them to be able to compete to be able to make each other better. Like with any competition, it's healthy competition. It's not only going to make them better, but it's going to make the entire team better."