

Stanford University Football Media Conference

Saturday, September 23, 2023

Stanford, California, USA

Troy Taylor

Postgame Media Conference



Arizona - 21, Stanford - 20

Q. Just opening thoughts on this one, just general thoughts on this game.

TROY TAYLOR: Like I told the guys, great week of preparation. They competed really hard in all three phases. It was not perfect. We left some stuff on the table in all three phases, had our opportunities.

Really proud of how our guys played, though. This is a mentally tough group of guys that competes in every single thing they do. Really proud.

Now, having said, we've just got to play a little bit more clean. As you guys watched, we had opportunities to win that football game, and it didn't happen. I know our guys are heartbroken over it, but they'll respond. They'll be ready to go next week.

Q. Troy, what goes into the times when you make the switches at quarterback? Is that just a feel? Are there certain plays for certain QBs? What goes into that?

TROY TAYLOR: Some of it is that, and some of it is just how they're playing. They both did some good things, and they both did some things they could have done better.

Maybe a guy will emerge. They both have potential. They both need to be a little bit more consistent, but they were under some pressure as well.

It's a tough position, toughest position in sports. We've just got to be able to play a little bit better amidst the pressure and those type of things. We've got to make good decisions. We've got to make good throws.

Q. What went into the decision to start Sedrick Irvin, and how would you evaluate his game?

TROY TAYLOR: Sedrick has been a guy that's really physical. It's really important to him, tough. He's got some quickness to him. He's got some suddenness to him.

Yeah, we just thought we wanted to get an opportunity to see him. We've got some really good young guys, and you want to see them play. Now part of that is the inexperience in getting out there on the field. It's a challenge for young guys, but they've got to do it.

For us, we want to continue to grow this year, and we want to be a different team by the end of the season than the beginning of the season.

Q. Aidan Flintoft and Connor Weselman both punted today. What went into the decision to give those guys two punts each? Is that a position that may be up for grabs in the future?

TROY TAYLOR: Yeah, I think every position, no one has the position sewn up at all. It's a competitive group of guys. If you want to push for the position -- I tell our guys all the time, you don't have to accept your role, but you've got to attack your role.

If a guy's doing a great job in practice and has the opportunity -- those guys are both obviously talented, but it's about performing on the day of the game.

Q. If you look at the numbers, the last three weeks your defense has gotten progressively better, certainly today. One, do you agree with that, that the defense has gotten better? And two, if so, why?

TROY TAYLOR: We've gotten better as a football team since the beginning of the year. Now it's not going to always show on the scoreboard or whatnot, but our guys are working to improve and getting better. They're very inexperienced, but they are hungry, hungry to get better.

So to answer your question, defensively we have gotten better. There's no doubt about it. Now we've got to play a little bit better than we did tonight, but I do love to see the improvement.

Q. The schedule doesn't get any easier with Oregon coming up and a bunch of ranked teams ahead. How do you prevent this from snowballing?



TROY TAYLOR: There's no easy games on our schedule. This is an incredible conference. This is the best it's been in, I don't know, maybe 20 years. Really good quarterbacks, really good coaches, experienced teams.

You like those. As a competitor, you like those challenges. So we'll be ready to play next week. Obviously a top ten football team coming into town, and they're rolling. They're hitting on all cylinders. We'll be ready to go.

Q. Just talk about what you got from Tiger Bachmeier tonight. Had a drop in the end zone but made up for that with some really nice catches. Talk about what he gave you tonight.

TROY TAYLOR: Tiger is a really competitive kid. He gives you everything he's got. Smart football player. I'm sure he's broken hearted over that, but he did make a lot of plays with the ball in the air.

That's what our guys have got to do. On those 50-50 balls, we've got to come down with the ball. We're not necessarily going to run by somebody every time. So those balls that -- our quarterbacks did a really good job of giving those guys a chance.

I was telling them, you don't want to overthrow those balls. You eliminate opportunities for pass interference, and guys can come back and make the play. Quarterbacks did a good job of that, and our guys did a nice job of making plays on the ball.

Q. When Joshua Karty missed a field goal attempt, I kind of did a double take. Just hadn't seen it in a year and a half. How did you react?

TROY TAYLOR: He's human. They're long kicks. He struck them well. We expect a lot out of him, and I think he had a couple that got away from him.

They were struck pretty well. That guy's been incredible for us. We've got to do a better job of converting when we get down across the 50 and get in a little bit tighter than relying on him being able to hit 50-yard field goals.

Q. Can you take us through the decision when you're down four, to kick the field goal knowing you might not get it back, and then trying the onside after?

TROY TAYLOR: It was really -- I think it was after the illegal pass, right? So we got packed up to it was fourth and 14. That's a tough one to get, tough to protect. Not a ton of field space. So the percentages aren't super high.

I've got so much confidence in Josh. I feel like he makes the field goal, maybe we get a shot at the onside. If we get a stop, we'll get the ball back, and then he'll be kicking a field goal to win the game.

So I felt pretty good. I still feel pretty good about the decision. It just didn't work out. That's what we did.

Q. And on the decision to not go for the onside kick?

TROY TAYLOR: In our onside kick, they were positioned really well. They were offsides on the first one, and it looked like they were playing it really well. So we decided to back them up. It's one of those things you could go either way with it.

So we wanted to pin them inside hopefully the 10. I think we were pretty close to that. And then get a three and out, get great field position, maybe get ten yards and then kick a game winner.

Q. No rushing yards for E.J. Smith or Casey Filkins. Why weren't those guys more involved in the run game for this one? What could account for that?

TROY TAYLOR: Part of it is we wanted to see what Sedrick could do. I think Sedrick did some good things. We've got a lot of confidence in E.J. and Casey. We're going to need them all.

We wanted to give Sedrick an opportunity. He's earned it. He's done some really good things. We wanted to see him play. I think he responded and did pretty well.

Q. Thoughts on Ernest Cooper. I don't think he played last week, and then he and got some hurries and a sack or two this week. What went into the decision to not play him last week and play him this week?

TROY TAYLOR: I haven't talked to Coach April about that. To be perfectly honest, I'd have to ask Coach April.

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Ashton Daniels

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Q. Ashton, just kind of talk about, I think it's four games through if I'm counting correctly. Just talk about what it's like kind of switching back and forth between Justin. How is that dynamic working for both of you, do you think?

ASHTON DANIELS: I think it is working well. Coach Taylor obviously has some experience doing that (switching between quarterbacks) at Sacramento State and he knows what he is doing. And I think, overall, coming out tonight, we looked better as an offense. I think we operated fairly well in all the different aspects, the passing game, rushing but of course we have some things to work on.

Q. What did Coach Taylor tell you guys after the game?

ASHTON DANIELS: He said that overall we looked much better than we have in recent weeks. I think we did a great job. We had a lot of effort out there. We played with a lot of passion, but it's really just about cleaning up the small things. We had penalties. We had missed conversions on third downs and just, I think if we clean up the small things, it's going to push us towards the team we want to be.

Overall, it's a one-game season.

Q. You mentioned moving on to Oregon. It seems like a tougher opponent, at least on paper, than you had this week. How do you keep this from kind of steamrolling, this losing streak that you're on?

ASHTON DANIELS: Yeah, like I said, we have to flush it. We have 24 hours. You can be upset, all that stuff, but come Sunday, when we come in for meetings and we come in for lift, we know that we're going to flush what happened last week. We're going to forget about it because, like I said, we play one-game seasons.

We know that there's a big opportunity and a big task ahead. So, yeah, we're just going to focus on that.

Q. You guys have won a game already this year, but after losing to Sac State last week like you did, to have this be a one possession game, one point game, did it feel like there was progress that was made this week even though you guys didn't get the W?

ASHTON DANIELS: Yeah, 100 percent, there was progress. Our defense went out, and they played lights out. They gave us the opportunity to go down and score, and offensively I think we missed out on some of those opportunities, whether it be misreads, missed blocks, all of that stuff.

I think we can play better as an offense, and when we start clicking and getting rolling, I think it's going to be pretty hard to stop our offense. But, yeah, if we come out and play well and stick together on all three phases, then I think we're going to be hard to beat.

Q. I think some media people and some fans would say it must be tough to alternate at quarterback. How would you say that it's easier than people perceive it to be?

ASHTON DANIELS: I think, when you're in that mindset of you just want to go out there and you want to win and you want to do your job, it just makes it easier.

I know that Justin's going to go out there, and he's going to do his job, which leaves it up to me to go out there and do my job. If we're both clicking and we're both rolling, our offense is going to roll.

There's nothing to sulk about. I don't worry about all the missed plays or I'm not getting enough time. I don't worry about all that because I know that Coach Taylor has the right formula, and he's going to help us get the job done.

Q. It's not just the quarterback. He rotates punters. It seems like Sedrick got the start over E.J. and Casey. It seems like all the positions are rotating through. What's it like to be on a team where there's no set starters, it seems like?

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ASHTON DANIELS: It's kind of fluid every week. I think our guys understand that, and they don't complain about it, which you go some places and someone starts the week previous and they don't start this week, they get upset, and that causes division within the team.

I think our guys are very experienced and they're mature, and they know no matter what they're going to get the chance to go out there and they're going to have opportunities. I think our guys know that, and that's what helps us stick together no matter who's out there starting or not.

Q. Just want to get your thoughts on Tiger Bachmeier. He did have a drop in the end zone, but he made up for it with some really nice catches and plays. Talk about what you guys got from him and what you've seen from him so far since he's a true freshman.

ASHTON DANIELS: He's a young guy. Obviously he's going to have his mistakes, but you can see his maturity because of the way he goes out there and he bounces back. He drops one, and then he goes and makes an amazing play that leads us to go down and score a touchdown.

Just being that young and being able to flush something like that and still go out and play the way that he did is extremely impressive. It gives me, as well as Justin and our whole offensive staff, just hope and confidence that we know that we have a guy that we can rely on.

Q. What was it like having Sedrick back there too? How would you kind of evaluate his performance?

ASHTON DANIELS: Sedrick, he's an animal. He's going to go out there, and he's going to get the job done. He's got a huge heart for the game. He loves to win, and I know that he's going to go out there and do his job.

He's a young cat too, but I feel very comfortable giving him the ball because I know he's going to go make a play.

Q. On Sedrick, he had a helluva step on there for that 40-yard plus run. I'm not sure he had that kind of style. Is that what you've seen, that strength to push off guys like that?

ASHTON DANIELS: Yeah, ever since he came in, we've seen his strength and speed. Through the off-season, fall camp, we saw what he could do, and we knew that we had someone special. We were extremely lucky to get him.

He's going to continue to make plays in the future for this program, and I can't wait to see that.



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Coach Jedd Fisch

Noah Fafita

Jacob Manu

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JEDD FISCH: Challenged our offense all the way through. They had really good coverage scheme. Their corners played really well. It was a good, hard-fought battle. Very few possessions in the game. We only had three -- well, four possessions if you count the last one in the second half.

I thought we would have about six possessions in the second half and challenged the guys to have four out of six touchdowns. We wound up having two out of three touchdowns. We needed that in the second half, and then the fourth possession obviously we just ran out the clock.

You know, our defense did such a tremendous job against them in terms of holding them to field goals and forcing them to kick field goals and forcing them to convert third and longs if they were able to do that. I felt like there were a lot of tackles for loss. A lot of negative yardage there.

Hats off to our defense and our defensive plan there.

And then Noah Fafita came in in the fourth quarter. That's a tough situation. Came in, we're down 17-14. We got the ball. I don't know exactly the extent of Jayden's injuries so we don't have to ask that question. I don't know his or Mike Wiley's, the extent of the injuries. I do know both of them were out of the game right after the play occurred.

And then in terms of Noah, Noah went four for four. He made some great plays for us. Made a great play with his feet. I think the way Noah played, the way Jacob Manu played, once again, and the entirety of the team, that's not easy. Not easy to go on the road. It's not easy to win on the road in a Pac-12 game.

I told the team in the locker room, we won five out of the last seven games we played and we ended last season

2-1. Started this season 3-1. Now we get to go home and we need a great environment back in Tucson.

Q. Talk about how Noah came in and handled adversity.

JEDD FISCH: I think the control that he showed was the most important and impressive thing. It's very hard. We talked last night. I think we were talking about Tom Brady and listening to a podcast together, Noah, Jayden and myself. He was talking about kind of how long it took him to become the starter. Three years in college. He didn't become a starter until his fourth year.

And the opportunities that presented themselves throughout the way and his commitment to becoming a great quarterback in the system, and then the same thing happened to him in New England.

You never know. We talk about it all the time. You never know if there will be an injury and something that occurs and you have to be ready. I thought Noah handled himself beautifully in that situation, and no flinch.

Q. To go off that, Noah, what's going through your mind at the point Jayden goes out?

NOAH FAFITA: First thing was obviously concern. The relationship I've built with Jayden since I've been here has been nothing short of the spectacular, so soon as he went down and the grimaces he made, first thing was concern. Then kind of got to the point where it was all business.

A lot of coaches, a lot of my teammates come to me, offensive guys kind of to make sure I was good, I was comfortable. I just appreciate all the faith they had in me, my teammates and coaches.

Q. Jonah had such a great day today. Close to home. Can you talk about his performance and how important that was for the team?

JEDD FISCH: Yeah. Jonah hit 100 yards combined, 12 carries for 75 yards, four catches for 29 yards, so over 100. I asked him before the game how far was home, two-hour



drive to Stockton.

You know, he said it meant a lot to him, this game. Jonah, all he does is work. He's been unbelievable since he's been here. He doesn't get nearly maybe enough accolades sometimes because of how much he's kind of been the second guy behind Mike in so many different ways.

You look what the he's done, I mean, in the classroom, in the meeting room, in the football field. I mean, he's over 3.5 GPA coming from a situation where it's been a lot of new stuff for him.

And then you look a little how he played when he walked out on the field today. You're looking at a guy that had over 80 yards rushing and over 25 yards passing and was able to do a great job in blitz pick up. Really proud of Jonah.

Q. Defense, you mentioned it earlier, but had 11 tackle for loss for a total of, I believe, 42 yards. What does Arizona have to do to continue to have that sort of defensive dominance going forward?

JEDD FISCH: I think we're up to like 28 or 30 tackles for loss on the season, which is -- we're on pace for a really quite a mark. I think it has to do with the way these guys prepare and play. You listen to Jacob and our coaches, and all they do is talk about swarm the ball. If you swarm the ball, you're always running to the ball, that's how you're able to get tackles for losses.

I thought we had, I don't know how many total sacks we had, but certainly looked like we were all over the quarterback a lot of the game, and a lot of that comes down to you got your TFLs that way and then in the running game a lot of the perimeter runs look like our safeties and our linebackers chased down and caused some second and 16s, and 17s.

Q. Jacob, how would you describe the difference in environment from Mississippi State to today?

JACOB MANU: It was way different. We knew coming into this game that it was going to be like that, so we prepared all week without no music, no nothing during practice. We had to bring our own energy and we knew that.

Q. For the second road game, defense really stepped up. What do you like about the way you guys are feeling?

JACOB MANU: I mean, I love the defense. Coach

prepares us well throughout the week. We go hard so that way in the game it can be easy, and I feel like it's showing up.

Q. Noah, what does it mean to have veteran leaders like Jake Cowling on the offense to really help you coming into a situation like that and perform and bring the team back from behind?

NOAH FAFITA: That's huge. You could name a bunch of names on our offense that have that veteran leadership. Like I said, I just really appreciate it. We been talking about trust a lot this week and the opportunity that I was provided, and the ability for them to trust me in that moment, I really appreciate it. Especially the veterans from Cowling to Mike Wiley. He was hurt and he was the first one to come up to me and make sure I was good.

It takes a lot of pressure off me, makes my job easy, and I'm really appreciative.

Q. Did you have any butterflies coming in in the fourth quarter?

NOAH FAFITA: I think it was more excitement. I was excited. It was a great opportunity and I just give all glory to God.

Q. Jacob, you have known this guy for a while. What stands out about him as a quarterback?

JACOB MANU: I just feel like the way he carry himself. Like once I heard he was in, I knew he was going to do stuff and make plays. One thing about him he's always going to be prepared.

Q. Coach, this is the last Pac-12 matchup between you and Stanford, and obviously going to be a lot of last Pac-12 matchups. What are you going to miss most about being part of this conference?

JEDD FISCH: I mean, the conference is a phenomenal conference. If you look around there is great football going on. It's very clear. Looks to me that -- I don't know what happened in any of the games today. My mind has kind of been running crazy about that game. I would say they looked as if there was eight teams ranked going into this weekend, and Pac-12 is a great conference of football and we're going to do everything we can to keep it that way for the next eight weeks, and then have an unbelievable Pac-12 championship game, whatever that means, whoever is participating.

We're going to do everything we can to be that team.

Q. What is the status of Pulido, Bill Norton, Justin...

JEDD FISCH: Yeah, I don't have much on the injury front, to be honest. Kind of there is a little too many for my liking today, so, you know, I need to talk to our doctors, trainers, see how Raymond is, Martell Irby at the end of the game, see how Justin was, see how Mike is, see how Jay is.

And then I don't know if there was anybody else, but that was a physical game, which is what you expect when you play Stanford. You don't come to Stanford and not think you're going to have a physical football game. That's been about 20 years straight.

It hasn't changed.

Q. Then for Norton?

JEDD FISCH: Bill should be -- we're working through his shoulder. We held him back precautionary reasons this week. Got to practice to play, and right now we were making sure that we could get him healthy for the coming weeks.

Q. In the end of the fourth quarter there after the Stanford field goal to bring it up to 21-20, have you ever seen a formation like that for an onside kick? Looked like they were going to retry. But that onside formation, have you ever seen that?

JEDD FISCH: Yeah, they lined up in it. It's a bunt. It's bunt kick is what they call that where they just try to bunt it right up the middle and try to get you with a middle wedge. It's a pretty violent onside kick, to be honest with you, because you have nine guys within a seven-yard window just running straight ahead.

Very disappointed that we wound up -- they called us for offsides the second time, so first time I took a time out; second time Dalton Johnson recovered it and they said there was a toe on the line, so they wound up making it a rekick again. The third time they wound up kicking it deep, which is what I was expecting them to do the first time, so that's why we took the timeout.

So, yeah, it's a pretty physical onside kick when you lineup in that formation and our guys handled it well.

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