

Stanford University Football Media Conference

Saturday, September 16, 2023
Stanford, California, USA

Troy Taylor

Postgame Media Conference



Sacramento State - 30, Stanford - 23

COACH TAYLOR: Congratulations to Sacramento State and their staff and players. They made a lot of plays and made more than we did. And they won the game.

Q. Thoughts on your first experience at home at Stanford Stadium?

COACH TAYLOR: Definitely it's nice to be home. It's a great venue. Thought we came out, played really fast. And not able to sustain it like I would have liked to. But the environment was good.

Q. How did it feel to play against your former team today?

COACH TAYLOR: It's very familiar faces and good coaches, obviously, really good players. So once the game starts, honestly, you're just competing.

Q. What did you say to each other?

COACH TAYLOR: I just said congratulations, yeah, and good luck the rest of the season.

Q. What's the road ahead for this team?

COACH TAYLOR: Obviously we've got a ton of improvements to make, and we have a long year to do it. So it's just back to work and just continue to chip away and continue to build. Obviously disappointing when you lose any game, but we've got another one next week that we will respond back and be ready to play.

Q. Thoughts on how Sacramento State played today?

COACH TAYLOR: Yeah, really talented players. Really good coaching staff. They did a great job. They were ready to play and they did some nice things schematically and obviously the guys are really competitive. They did a great job.

Q. (Question off microphone)

COACH TAYLOR: My Stanford team? Oh, I mean, I'm a Stanford Cardinal now. So really just focusing on our team.

Obviously wished them luck moving forward. Just really focused on our guys and their mentality and being able to respond and come back next week ready to play.

Q. How did you feel about your two quarterbacks today?

COACH TAYLOR: We'll see. I felt comfortable with both of them coming out of camp playing. They can definitely play better.

We've got to do a better job of protecting them, for sure. The second half, the pressure really started to affect us in some crucial moments. It's not all the quarterback, for sure; it's everything, including us putting in position to be successful. So I've got confidence in both those guys.

Q. Simi as a freshman starting on the offensive line, what sort of impact has he made so far?

COACH TAYLOR: Simi is a really talented kid. Great kid. Works really hard. Obviously with the young team that we have, he has an opportunity to come in and play immediately and he's done that, and his future is very bright.

Q. You got good mileage out of your running backs today, thoughts on how they looked?

COACH TAYLOR: I think our running backs, listen, they play hard. They're pretty versatile in terms of being receivers and runners and protection. So we have to utilize them all, for sure.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

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Tristan Sinclair

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Q. Tristan, how does it feel to be back home?

TRISTAN SINCLAIR: Coming to the game was exciting. I think being back home was fun. We got to practice a lot in the stadium this offseason. It felt natural, and we were coming back home. I was excited for it.

Q. Defensively, what did you see out there today, different looks?

TRISTAN SINCLAIR: I think defensively we've just got to play better. We've got to do our job. And we struggled to do that. We didn't execute always. It only takes one guy to slip up to have those big plays. We've got to play better.

Q. It seemed like this game was a lot of big momentum plays, interception here, interception on each side. How much, whoever made that last play, make the big difference? How much was it like whoever made the last big play kind of making the difference in this game between the interceptions, it was a game of big play. Seemed like they just made the last one there?

TRISTAN SINCLAIR: It's always tough. We've got to anchor down at the end, and they made the last big one. But we let up too many early on. We've got to buckle down better at the beginning.

Q. (Question off microphone)

TRISTAN SINCLAIR: Yeah, obviously I've been through teams where we've had bad seasons, tough losses and three-win seasons the past couple of years. I think this new staff has done a really good job just talking about that and everything we do, the way we practice is next mentality.

Someone makes a big play, next play, next play, next play. That's something they've instilled in us early. But then something that we've been saying is "No BCD," which is no

blame, complain or defend. I mean, I can truly say that the guys that are in the locker room believe that and that's the way we're rolling. We're just on to the next one.

Q. What are some of the things you've seen?

TRISTAN SINCLAIR: I think some of the strengths, definitely guys have started to play a little bit faster.

Obviously the result wasn't what we wanted. We made some mistakes that shouldn't be mistakes. But I think guys are bit by bit starting to learn defense and play a little faster. I think that's been an improvement over the next few games.

Can you repeat the question?

Q. First few games in, what are some of the things that you feel like this team can do better moving forward?

TRISTAN SINCLAIR: I think that honing in on just the little things, little details. We were playing good tonight. I think that a lot of our mistakes were small, like little one-guy, and it takes all 11.

I think there's an improvement going on. We've got to just focus on how we can play with all 11 perfectly. That's something that Coach talked about. When all 11 played perfect, those clips are great to watch. Everyone is swimming to the ball, everyone's covering it up. QB scramble and we're pulling them up.

But one guy doesn't do his job and there's a little slippage there and then two guys don't do their job, a little bit more slippage there. It's just playing with all 11.

Q. Just talk about the performance of their quarterback, Kaiden Bennett, what makes him so difficult to contain?

TRISTAN SINCLAIR: He was fast. We'll give it to him. A fast, shifty guy. He was hard to bring down. He made plays outside the pocket.

Q. If you're looking for any silver linings, you can look

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at the fact that part of the reason this team is as good as it is, Sacramento State, is because of -- I mean a huge reason why it's as good as it is because of Troy Taylor; he turned around that program very quickly. Do you believe he can turn you guys around in relatively short order, and why do you believe that?

TRISTAN SINCLAIR: Coach Taylor, he's a winner. He's done it everywhere he's been. He did it at a high school. He was at Utah and then Sac State, turned that program around. They were 1-11 and then they went undefeated that next year, whatever it was.

We believe in him, unwavering belief in him. It's hard -- winning college football games is really hard. I think it takes time. I believe in him fully.

Q. You guys bouncing back from this, another home game against Arizona next week. What's going to be the key to putting this behind you and being able to come back next week and get a W against the Wildcats?

TRISTAN SINCLAIR: It just starts tonight recovering. And then tomorrow we'll get back in there and get our bodies right, look over the film, and then just get back to it, honestly.

Like practice, we've been getting better at practicing harder and harder every week. I think we've just got to keep going.

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Coach Andy Thompson

Kaiden Bennett

Caleb Nelson

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Sacramento State 30, Stanford 23

Q. Kaiden, you guys knew you could compete. You guys were pretty excited. What does that tell you about your program and how excited are you?

KAIDEN BENNETT: Man, I'm just excited. I'm excited for these guys. I see happiness on their face, the excitement. I think we just all went out there, and at the end of the day see what we got. We end up with the W, and that's like -- that's like the goal we were going in with, just want to get the W.

Q. Talk us about that final touchdown pass. You certainly kept your knee up.

KAIDEN BENNETT: Yeah, I kind of seen -- I was looking for the progression and then I seen a lot of everything to be real. Just at that moment trying to make the best play for the team. I seen Marcus Fulcher right there. He's doing what he is supposed to do on his part and he's where he needs to be on that play. I looked up and I seen him, so good job by him.

KAIDEN BENNETT: Man, I knew once he broke that first tackle he was out. Kind of had that juice. I kind of seen a couple of his takedowns before, and I just kind of knew once he had broke that first tackle he had the juice to go. He makes a lot of people miss, so I got kind of excited.

ANDY THOMPSON: Slippery.

Q. After that last score, you said into the cameras, I am him. What does that mean?

KAIDEN BENNETT: A lot of juice on the field. A lot of juice on the field. You know, I just was feeling good. That's all it is.

ANDY THOMPSON: He's worked really hard.

KAIDEN BENNETT: Yeah, when you work really hard for something and it comes to fruition you're kind of excited.

ANDY THOMPSON: You're excited.

Q. Coach, talk about Kaiden. I mean, you saw him last year. He was a backup, and now to see him lead this team.

ANDY THOMPSON: Yeah, it's awesome. I think you guys saw it too. I don't think I have to explain much. He was very motivated to come out and lead his team. That is what great quarterbacks do.

Gosh, does he have a big heart. He's not real big but his heart is huge. Just excited to see all the hard work pay off.

Q. How excited was the locker room?

KAIDEN BENNETT: You can hear them right now.

ANDY THOMPSON: They're excited.

Q. Kaiden, does it feel like this is kind of a new era a little bit, new coach, new starting quarterback, you're going against your old coach, you got the win. It kind of has that poetry to it, don't you think?

KAIDEN BENNETT: Yeah, if you want to write it like that, I think everybody in the locker room kind of knew what we had in the locker room, so, you know, we just -- it's brotherhood throughout. So coaches bring it every day and the players being where they are, they show it every day.

Q. For both players, being in an FCS program, you guys didn't get the Power 5 offers you wanted to. You're able to show your talent is good enough to compete with these guys. What does that mean to both of you?

CALEB NELSON: It's football at the end of the day. Put on the same pads, jersey, everything. We just came out



there and just played. It's just in a bigger stage. Just came out and just balled. Nothing much to it. You're playing football at the end of the day.

KAIDEN BENNETT: Yeah, come out and play no matter who is on that field. We lace our cleats up and go.

ANDY THOMPSON: These guys like playing anywhere. They were the same way when we went to Louisiana. They really enjoyed playing together, and it's awesome that we got this opportunity.

For Sac State, you know, it's cool we got to come over here. I think we collected a little bit of money too and got a win, so these guys work their tails off. They're awesome student-athletes.

So to see them be able to do both is a great thing, and they should be very proud of how they played against a really good opponent.

Q. Andy, how important it was it to, I don't want to say necessarily bring it in at the end, but to make sure there was a respect given to Coach Taylor and to the guys that were on the staff that were across the field?

ANDY THOMPSON: I think everybody here has a lot of respect for Coach Taylor. He was a leader. I wouldn't be at Sac State unless he hired me, so I'm very humble that I got the opportunity.

But these guys been working too. They were excited to get a win, and I'm not going to steal anybody's joy, especially guys that work as hard as they do. I mean, the summer, wintertime, early mornings, so I want them to have joy tonight.

And then we'll get back to work tomorrow, and we talked about that in the locker room. This is just the start.

Q. Coach, what does this say for the state of this program?

ANDY THOMPSON: I think we're just continuing to win, right? I think we've won a few in a row now, right? Something like 20.

Q. 22.

ANDY THOMPSON: I really do. We are all humble. It's hard to win football games. We didn't really think of it that way. We think of ourselves as a group we try to earn everything we are getting, and we want to make sure that Sac State is a place to be in Northern California.

We had a chance to have a lot of people see that tonight, and hopefully everybody back in Sacramento is ready to come out it the games because this is a great group of guys and they're going to continue to work.

Q. How do you let this game not be bigger than what it is to make sure they focus each week to keep winning?

ANDY THOMPSON: You want to comment on that or you want me?

Q. How do you make sure this game doesn't get too big in itself, let it be just this game?

KAIDEN BENNETT: It's just the week of preparation. I think once we sit down like Sunday, sit down tomorrow, and we'll start digging into the next week, and from there, we'll figure out whatever we need to figure out for that team.

You just focus on who you have that week. You can't go past that. You can only play that one week at a time. Don't let anything get too big -- too small. Every game is big for us. We lace up the same.

Q. Kaiden, Coach Taylor was a big part of your development. Playing against a guy that had such a big influence on your playing career, what does that mean to you?

KAIDEN BENNETT: Man, I got a lot of respect for Coach T too, and what he's been able to do for my career and stuff, just me as a person. I give him a lot of love and respect for that.

I always will. I wish him the best for his moving on. Whatever goes on, I wish him the best for sure.

Q. What's the message tonight for the team?

KAIDEN BENNETT: Message tonight? Man, just stick in there. That's just be united. Team, teamwork, team chemistry, you know, just being united.

Q. Andy, it sure seemed like after I believe one of the interceptions early on, you guys bounced back, you're down 14-3, you score, make it 14-10. At that point it's clear to see, okay, there is resilience within this group.

ANDY THOMPSON: Love that word.

Q. Did it feel like that where it's like, okay, if they can be 11 points down in the hole and score back, this team can walk away and win on the road?



ANDY THOMPSON: Yeah, I think they were very resilient tonight. Stanford came out and had a nice plan against some of the things we were doing and had to make some adjustments. The guys on the field just kept with it and they were very resilient.

I think the other word I would say is they were mindful. They didn't let one play beat them the next play. If you're a real competitor, you got to be able to do that. You got to stay in the moment, trust your training, trust all the work you put in, and that it's going to get better.

We try to positive. We talk about attitude all the time. Got to be positive. Can't get down. It was close. 14-3, looked like they were going to go and score. Had a nice interception. Kaiden goes down with the offense and they score, so, yes.

Q. Down 23-20 were Kris and Bobby on fourth down yelling in your ear, like we can go for it, we can make it? Whose decision was it to kick?

ANDY THOMPSON: Yeah, that's why they pay me to do that, you know, and I was very confident in our kicker. He just made another one. Wanted to give ourselves a chance. At the end we had a couple timeouts and, you know, Zach made me look really smart because he made the kick and then we went out and got a stop.

Our coaches do a great job. Coach Fresques called a great game. He's done an outstanding job. He's a Hornet. This means a lot to him and a lot of alumni that he is tight with, he's going to be getting a lot of calls. So we're excited. Very proud of all the coaches.

Q. Bobby and Kris, you all grabbed each other after the game and Bobby -- that's love right there, the two of you. What does it mean for the three of you to have a moment like that together this season?

ANDY THOMPSON: Yeah, it's part of sports. It's beautiful, man. I don't want to get too sentimental here, but it was great. A lot of hard work and they were excited and I was excited. That's what we do in our program. You can easily tell how I'm feeling. I get upset sometimes and when I'm happy and they see it, too.

Just expressing how much this means to us and our school.

Q. Andy, beginning of the game they really showed some physicality. They ran 12 out of 13 plays in the opening drive. By the end of the game you were crushing them on the defensive end. What changed

for you and what does that say about the mindset of your defense?

ANDY THOMPSON: Yeah, I'll give Coach Taylor a lot of credit. They came out in a formation they hadn't run a lot of, and we had to adjust and they had some matchups they were doing. Again, our coaches got our guys coached up on the sideline, Coach Cherokee, Coach Cooper, Coach Paulson working with our guys on the sideline, and we made some good adjustments.

The kids made nice adjustments tackling, and they had a good plan and we were able to settle down and play football.

Q. Caleb, you had that inspection in the end zone. You were on the field. What was the mindset after that interception?

CALEB NELSON: Keep playing. I mean, next-play mentality. We knew offense was going to do their thing. We're going to come on the field and we're going to get a stop and get the ball back to the offense. That's how we played this whole game, and just wanted to get the ball back to the offense and get off the field.

You know it's going to be a chess match. We won match, so it's just like that.

Q. KB, they had you rolling out a lot and you were excellent on the run tonight. Is that where you feel most comfortable, is when you're using your legs?

KAIDEN BENNETT: Yeah, I feel comfortable everywhere really. If they call on me to use my legs, don't really matter to me at the end of the day.

Q. Coach, the outside kick, first one in Stanford history since 2001. Were you prepared for that in the second quarterback you have quarter?

ANDY THOMPSON: Really nice kick. That's a really hard kick to do. Kicking it sideways 90 degrees. It was a great play by them. We'll take a look at why they did that. We got to be ready to go, but I thought that was a great play by them, not necessarily a bad play by us.

I thought there was a lot plays that way. They did a lot of good things. Sometimes that happens and you got to go out there and play defense and get them stopped.

Q. What do you have to do to make sure the turnovers that were made tonight don't continue?

ANDY THOMPSON: I'll have to look at the video on that,



because I can't give you a play-by-play on what happened on those plays. I do know he made a lot of great plays, and sometimes when you're being aggressive interceptions happen. I was proud of how he bounced back from it. Again, he was resilient and able to lead us down and get a touchdown.

