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## **TRANSCRIPT: ESPN's Kirk Herbstreit Previews 2022-23 College Football Season and ABC *Saturday Night Football*'s No. 5 Notre Dame at No. 2 Ohio State Blockbuster Opening Game**

- **ESPN's Emmy Award-winning analyst returns for 27th season on *College GameDay* and 17th in the booth on ABC *Saturday Night Football***

On Tuesday, Emmy Award-winning ESPN college football analyst **Kirk Herbstreit** previewed the 2022-23 college football season and ABC *Saturday Night Football*'s blockbuster opening game – No. 5 Notre Dame at No. 2 Ohio State week 1 – on a media conference call.

Herbstreit will call the Fighting Irish-Buckeyes game in Columbus, Ohio on Saturday (7:30 p.m. ET, ABC) with **Chris Fowler** and reporter **Holly Rowe**. Earlier in the day, Herbstreit will be part of *College GameDay Built by The Home Depot*'s first three-hour on-campus show of the season (9 a.m. – noon, ESPN & ESPNU) as college football's premier pregame show travels to Ohio State for a record 21st time.

Herbstreit's comments from the conference call, which have been edited slightly for brevity (Note: key topics are highlighted):

**Herbstreit:** Great to be with you guys. I know we've done a bunch of these quite a few times leading into the season, and maybe at the end of the season getting ready for some of the bowl games. Obviously, you have been writing about a lot of what's been happening off the field. I'm just a guy that loves the game, and I'm excited that we had football last Saturday and football Thursday night and football Saturday, and I just can't wait to get back to talking about players doing what they love to do, and what we love to watch them do. I'm excited to get started this week. We're going to be in Pittsburgh for the Backyard Brawl on Thursday night for a preview show to kind of celebrate that rivalry and the start of the season, and then we're off to Columbus for Notre Dame-Ohio State, and I couldn't be any more excited and thrilled to get going. I'm happy to answer whatever you'd like to talk about.

On **Marcus Freeman preparing for Ohio State** – how he's looking back at Oklahoma State film to see what Jim Knowles does defensively. How valuable could that be for Notre Dame and what do you expect the Ohio State defense to look like this season?

**Herbstreit:** I think it's ironic that, what are the odds? Same as Dan Lanning. He leaves Georgia, wins a National Championship and goes out to Oregon, and they open up with Georgia. And here's Jim Knowles right. They ended up playing Notre Dame in a bowl game, even though, as you said, he wasn't physically there, he did help with the prep of the game plan, and it was the same scheme, even though it was somebody else calling it, so I think it helps quite a bit if you're Notre Dame. And they had a lot of success. I think they threw for over 500 yards in that game. So, yeah, I think it's something that they'll use especially week 1. Obviously, if this were week 4, you might still look at it, but you would at least have some game film to be able to digest three weeks before you got ready for that game. But this being the first game, of course you're going to go back to the game that you played against that school. Even though he wasn't calling the defense, it was his scheme just to see how matchups work out, and as far as the scheme, and I've done a bunch of Oklahoma State games since Jim Knowles has been in Stillwater, and I'm obviously very familiar with what Ohio State has been, and I think with Jeff Hafley, when he came in they were what I would call a single-high defense being either Cover 1, which is man-to-man, man-free, or Cover 3. It was very simple and if you have Jeffrey Okudah and Damon Arnette as your corners, you can run that defense and be pretty effective, and if you don't have them at corner, you're going to give up some big plays. If you go back to the Oregon game last year, if you go back to the Alabama game the year before in the National Championship, you can tell that there are some concerns coming into this year. So now you go from a very simplified scheme for a quarterback or a coordinator. Looking at Ohio State, you know what they're going to be in to now.

Jim Knowles, you have no idea, pre-snap to post-snap what his defense will be. It is a defense that is built around keeping you guessing, and you will not be able to lock in and have an idea of what they are in. They're going to disguise, and especially on third down, they're going to get after the quarterback. So that's his calling card. That's what he's known to do. And now he's got some serious players at his disposal to be able to dial this defense up, so I'm excited to see the difference in where they've been in the last couple of years, and where they are this year.

**How do you perceive the chess match between Jim Knowles and Tommy Reese on Saturday, and what are the challenges for Tyler Buchner making his first start at quarterback for Notre Dame?**

**Herbstreit:** Going back to the previous question, I do think the fact that Tommy Reese, whether Jim Knowles was there or not, the scheme itself he does have some experience in facing it. They had a lot of success that day, being able to put up a lot of points, even though they came up a little bit short. They still had a big day offensively and it is new personnel. I mean, it's a lot of new faces, but I think that will at least give him a little bit of a better feel as opposed to not playing that game and then going into it and trying to go back and look at Oklahoma State film. Clearly you weren't playing against Notre Dame, so I think it definitely helps him.

I'm excited to see Buchner. He's a guy that last year was kind of the change of pace guy to Jack Coan. You know Jack was more of your traditional drop-back and read the defense and make throws, and Buchner would come in and we all know his skillset and what he can do. And now he's won the job, and it's his offense. This is an opportunity for Tommy Rees to show America and Notre Dame fans, you know it's not just 'this is our system. This is who we are.' Great offensive coordinators like Tommy, they adjust their scheme to their personnel and to their strengths, and so you go from having more of a traditional drop-back guy to now having a guy that can really put pressure on a defense with his legs and his arm, and I think you'll see a very different approach.

So, tough environment. Let's be honest: a night game with this much hype. Week 1 with Ohio State, having expectations of having a big year. Their fans are going to be excited, and not that Notre Dame isn't used to that, but for Tyler himself – and I know they put crowd noise in at practice, this will test him, especially on third down. His communication, and I would say honestly, the offensive line, and the job that they can do collectively of trying to stay on the same page, not jump with a false start, that there's going to be a lot on them trying to figure out and navigate a new defensive scheme, and then deal with at times not being able to hear the guy next to you or hear the snap count. So that's a challenge for any team but let alone when you're breaking in some new guys, and especially a quarterback.

**What's your impression of Jim Harbaugh's decision with the Michigan quarterbacks to alternate starts between Cade McNamara and J.J. McCarthy?**

**Herbstreit:** It's a different approach. You know a lot of times, you'll see if it's that close, you'll see the first game where, hey, we're going to give the returning starter the first three series. Then, we're going to bring in J.J. and give him two or three series, and then kind of go from there. I think it's interesting, a guy that played quarterback, I think he understands the importance of rhythm, and instead of going quarter by quarter, or a series by series, or in Steve Spurrier's case play by play, he's going game by game, and I think, you know, hey, if I throw a pick, I'm still going back out there, and as a guy who played quarterback, I can really appreciate that that's the opportunity that's being provided to me. Whereas if it's every other series, there's a little bit of a tendency to kind of make sure you don't make a mistake, or you're looking over your shoulder. I love that he's gonna give him a game. That's more of a 'I get it' kind of a thought. Kind of like Stetson Bennett at Georgia. I feel bad, you know Cade McNamara seemed to be the guy and a big part of the glue of that team last year, and their run that they had. Is he ever one day going to go to the Combine and Indy and wow everybody with what he has to offer? I don't necessarily think that's maybe his future. But is he a guy that knows how to run that system and avoids mistakes and is kind of like old reliable back there. He was last year. But we all know J.J. McCarthy was highly-touted, and we saw him play last year, and I think his skillset is a runner-thrower and with Cade it's more of a thrower, and so there's probably a tendency to think, we know Cade what he can do, and we love him. We love his experience and his leadership, but J.J. might be able to take us to another level and open up the playbook that much more because of what he can do. So, let's give them both a game and kind of see

how things go, and we'll go from there. So, I understand it. But if you're Cade, you're probably a little disappointed that the younger guys getting that opportunity after the year he had last year.

**What sort of atmosphere do you expect outside of Acrisure Stadium for the West Virginia-Pitt Backyard Brawl, and what intrigues you as Pitt looks to defend the ACC title?**

**Herbstreit:** You've got to remember, I called a bunch of these games back in the day when Pitt and West Virginia would go at it over Thanksgiving and Mike Tirico and I would call the games. We had a great time. I kind of always knew it was a rivalry, but I don't think I ever knew that it was as intense as it really is until you get there in person to kind of see it. Now you tell me, I've been told that West Virginia is bringing up a ton of fans. Somebody told me it's 75 percent. That's what I heard. ... But anyway, you're gonna have a great contingent there. West Virginia, they love their football and Pitt, you know 11-3 last year. How many people outside of the ACC or outside of Pittsburgh would say, 'Hey, what do you think of Pitt football? What a year they had last year!'

I don't think a lot of people would say, 'Oh, yeah, they were 11-3 – did a heck of a job.' And I think that's exactly what Pat Narduzzi likes – the disrespect, and he likes the chip on the shoulder. That's their DNA. And so, I think they have enough coming back despite losing their two most high-profile players from last year. I still think they have enough coming back and with Kedon Slovis coming in, I think there's reason to be optimistic and excited to see this brand in this version of Pitt football. So, you know they're going to be aggressive. They've got a lot of playmakers on defense. It's a great way to start the season and build some energy. I mean, you look at who they start with. You know you have a rivalry game. You got Tennessee. You're going to hit the ground running as far as opportunities to prove to people who you are. So this is great for them, and if they can get through this this game, I think it's going to create a lot of buzz and a lot of excitement, and especially with Slovis. How ironic is Kedon Slovis going up against J.T. Daniels. They're both on the same roster and playing at USC with their background. So there's a lot to like about the build-up and hype of this game.

**Whenever the post-Lee Corso era arrives at *College GameDay*, what does CGD need to do to replace that? Does the mascot head tradition need to live on?**

**Herbstreit:** I've thought long and hard about the headgear. I feel like that's a Lee Corso thing. And I think, depending on who you talk to, you might get varying opinions. I've sat next to him. This will be my 27th year, and I can't imagine when Lee decides to step down another person putting on the headgear. I most definitely will not ever put on a headgear. Whoever that person is, I can't imagine them feeling comfortable being asked to put on a headgear.

You know, if you have a celebrity guest picker to kind of pay respect, or maybe, as a tribute, maybe they put on a headgear. That might be kind of something that might be fun, just to kind of recognize what that has meant to college football for so many years now. But I find myself in a position, last week Lee was put in a really, I think we were all – any time you do these shows like we're doing right now, and we all watch TV back in 2020 when it became normal to watch these kind of shows, and I can just tell you in doing them, the delays and the things that go on are challenging for anybody, let alone you're 87 years old, so I think Lee will get back into his comfort zone of being on the desk, starting Thursday night in Pitt, and then Columbus on Saturday, and go from there. And as far as when Lee is off the show, and who would be somebody, I have no idea. I know that part of what has made our show what it is, it's him and his personality and his fun, and it's not always him breaking down Cover 2 and inverted safeties, and drawing up an offensive play. It's, as he says to me, 'Sweetheart, we're in the entertainment business, and football is our vehicle,' and nobody, I think, gets their arms around that better than Lee Corso. So, I think, what has made our show is we're not just four people all being analysts and all giving you XO XO XO. I feel like with Charles (Barkley) – because I've talked to Charles about this. He's kind of a big personality on their show, and I think that chair needs to be somebody that's fun, and somebody that has a lot of personality. And so I have no idea who that might be, but I'm enjoying every minute I can get with Lee.

**What have you seen from Notre Dame quarterback Tyler Buchner in that niche role, and the fact that he only had one year of high school football, can you get a sense of what his ceiling is going to be like, or do we need to kind of see some more games in the new role this year?**

**Herbstreit:** Well, No. 1, I had no idea that he had only played one year of high school football. That's amazing. Because I really feel that at that position, especially now that I'm calling these NFL games, I really am big on this. I think repetitions at that position, whether it's high school football, college football, whatever it is, it's all about the game slowing down for quarterbacks, and the one way it can do that is when you get out there and you play, and you go through some really tough times, and you get through it, and you come back the next game. You just kind of keep piling up that foundation of work, and so he's a talented player, but he's going to be a very different player by the middle of the season, or the end of the season, because of what exactly I'm describing. And Tommy Reese played the position not that long ago. He's very familiar with what I'm describing, and he's going to try to put his young quarterback in a position to not have to deal with a lot of those 3rd and 8s and 3rd and 10s, and they need to stay on schedule and avoid those obvious passing situations, or it can be a tough day for their offensive line and for Tyler Buchner. So, biggest thing that I would say is important for them is early downplay action and staying on schedule to try to catch the Ohio State defense. Throwing on your terms as an offense, as opposed to waiting until they know what's coming. I haven't seen enough of him to be able to give you a really strong answer on who he is, and who he can potentially be. I like quarterbacks who are mobile, personally, like a guy that can sit in a pocket and make every throw. But when things aren't there, I like a guy that can use his feet. I like a guy that can run a little zone read and keep a defense honest in that way. So, he's got a lot of the skillset that I personally love to see, and I think can be very effective in the college game, but I need to see more of him before I can really tell you what his ceiling might be.

**How will Oklahoma's Brent Venables handle the transition from longtime assistant/coordinator to now head coach for the first time?**

**Herbstreit:** Honestly, I think a lot of us have been thinking that this might have happened three years or four years or five years ago because of all the success that he's had but he's loved his time at Clemson. And I think he waited for just the perfect opportunity. What better place than to go back to Norman? I think he's going to do great. I think the biggest thing that he's done is he's hired a great staff. He hired a great strength coach and brought Schmidty [Jerry Schmidt] back. He hired a great offensive coordinator Jeff Leiby and Jeff Leiby brings an offense in that they know how to attack. They know how to put a lot of points on the board.

I want to see him as a head coach though. That head coach that's on the sidelines. I kind of kid him about this dude's reckless on the sideline, man. I mean, he is all over the place. We always show him. I always ask the director when I do his games to kind of show the 'get-back guy', trying to hold him back because he's lost his mind during games. He is a crazy person and name how many head coaches fall into that category. Bob used to have moments, but even he as he went on, kind of started to settle down. Mark Stoops had some moments here and there, but I don't know. I don't know. That's my biggest... He's going to do great as a decision maker, probably use some analytics. I think his team's going to be... They're going to play with a bit of an attitude. I really feel that OU feels disrespected with how that whole transition from Lincoln Riley leaving, whether it's right or not the way it was reported and the way I think OU felt. And then Caleb Williams leaves, it's almost like see you OU.

And then here comes Brent Venables into town and I think he inherits a team that's like, "Let's go." And by the way, they brought in a quarterback, if you're not familiar with him, you will be by week 1, 2 or 3, because he is going to be putting up insane numbers in this system. So, if I'm an OU guy, I'm buying stock. I think this is going to be a fun year. And I just can't... My biggest question for Brent Venables is does he have a get-back guy or is he going to be able to chill out on the sidelines as a head coach? Because I'll have to see that to believe it. I don't think he has it in him to chill out on the sidelines. So can't wait to see that, but on the field, man, I think they're going to be great. I think they're going to score a lot and I think they're going to be tough to score on.

**Are you buying stock or shorting Texas A&M in year five under Jimbo Fisher? When do we see that talent they've accumulated start to translate on a consistent basis in the SEC?**

**Herbstreit:** I think they've been close. I mean, obviously they've had moments. The Alabama game stands out for everybody where everybody got excited about what they could do. I think the frustrating thing is you get to year four, year five, you start to want to see that more consistently. Right? I think that's the thing that has been probably most irritating to Texas A&M fans, at least that I've spoken with is you

can beat Alabama, but you lose to Arkansas and Mississippi State weeks before that. And just to be able to see this team, I think play the way they're capable of playing, that's what I think I want to see this year. It's five years now, five recruiting classes, a lot of great moments, a lot of exciting times and some really tough moments. And I think anytime you're there, it sounds like Haynes King is healthy and is won the starting quarterback job so I'm really...

When I was on the field last year, we called the Old Miss game late in the year that they ended up losing but one of the things I love about my job is I go down in the field before and there's nobody better to talk to on the field before game than Jimbo (Fisher). And we're down there and their quarterbacks Zach Calzada was doing pretty well and then of course I always ask him, what about this Haynes King guy? Oh, I mean, hey you kidding me? Haynes King. He's like, "He's fast guy." I mean, he just starts going about it. This guy, that guy, that guy. And I just remember him, his eyes, getting real big when he talked about Haynes King. So that's why when Max Johnson transferred, my eyes got real big like maybe he didn't get to talk about Haynes King. Because when I hear Haynes King's a baller but I can't wait to see Haynes King.

Another guy that can run and throw, but Jimbo knows how to work with quarterbacks. He's got a tailback this year, an A chain that is electric as anybody in the country. I think their offensive line has a chance to be really good. But to me, can this team be consistent, not get up for Alabama and then lose their edge against Mississippi or whoever they might be playing. The hardest thing about surviving that division is every single week it's a faceless opponent and you've got to bring your fastball. And if you take your foot off that accelerator, you're going to get beat. And that's what I want to see from A&M this year. Well, I think we may be down there on the 17th when they play Miami. So we may get a chance to see them in person, which would be great.

**What's your assessment of Florida State in Mike Norvell's third year, and do you have a read at all on their game Sunday against LSU?**

**Herbstreit:** None at all. They're one of those teams that I feel like there's just been so much turnover there that it's hard to get a feel. I think that is a program since, I think you can go back to 2014 the year that they played Oregon in the semifinals, and they competed there early and then ended up losing that game. It's almost like if you remember that sack, I think it ended up being a fumble, on Jameis Winston. It's almost like that play was symbolic of that one of Florida State going down and then if you remember Lamar Jackson in Louisville in the next year I believe had a big game. It just seems like they've never quite recovered and they've had so much going on with their coaches that at least now with Mike there, you at least have a third year and at least there is some continuity.

I think that helps with these players. But, hey man, unless you're there every day at practice and you have a feel for what's going on, this team is as wide open as pretty much anybody that you have high expectations for. Miami I would kind of throw into that category too. Can't wait to see what Miami is and who they are with Mario Cristobal, but it remains to be seen who they potentially are going to be by the time we get into the season. The Noles have struggled. I mean, it's pretty obvious. I'm looking at it right now. Their last winning season was back in '17 and their last real winning season was 2016 when they won 10 games. And so that is a long time for such a proud fan base and now here we are at year three.

I will say this. I do feel what Mike Norvell inherited was an absolute dumpster fire as far as culture. And I feel like he's been able to weed out the guys that don't want to do things his way. And at least what's remaining are guys that want to go out and play his way and compete within his culture and that alone should help them. And now we'll find out we saw them against Duquesne, but to me, their first real game will be LSU on Sunday because I think LSU, if I had to pick one team of all the teams in the country that I think could be a sneaky surprise team that no one's really expecting much from, I think it could be LSU and they open up with Florida State. To me, one of the more intriguing games of the entire weekend from Thursday to Sunday is that LSU, Florida State game.

**How excited should BYU and Utah fans be for this year, considering that a lot of their wins last year just came against a down Pac-12?**

**Herbstreit:** Well, there's a perception and unfortunately it's kind of a... I'm a Pac-12 fan. I mean I love

when the Pac-12's good and they've just been an afterthought in recent years and I'm hoping their new commissioner, and just some new hires, I'm hoping that they get this thing going in a different direction. BYU is... People tend to put them in the group of five, but they're just an independent. I think they've got some games on their schedule that I think will be a little bit of a different field this year.

I mean, you got Baylor. Anytime you go to Oregon on the road, it's going to help you out. Notre Dame's a high-profile game. You got Arkansas. So there's some games there that I think if they're able to win, I think it can create a little bit more of a buzz than what was done last year, because you're right. When you're BYU and you're playing who they played a year ago or the year before and you win a lot of games, you're in the Independence Bowl and I'm sure BYU fans don't want to be there. They want to be considered for New Year's Six.

And I think this schedule can help them, but there's the margin of error when you're BYU, because of that schedule is very small. And so you hate to say it's all about the post season. It's all about what bowl game you get into because you want to enjoy the process and enjoy the ride. But the reality to answer your question is this is going to be a very experienced, talented team. And there's... What is there 18 or 19 starters back? They should be a force. And when they get those high-profile games, they got to hit a home run. That's just the reality of the situation.

Utah I feel like... I think their game against Ohio State, even though they lost it, there was such a big audience that saw that game. I really feel that they gained a lot of respect. I know from people I talked to that maybe aren't Pac-12 fans or familiar with that conference, Ohio, a lot of Ohio State people, they walked away from that thinking, "Damn. I mean, Utah can play." And what I wanted to say is Kyle Wittingham, by the way, is a defensive coach. You wouldn't have known that watching the third and fourth quarter, but they weren't healthy in the back end. And if you were impressed with Utah and what they could do last year, you should watch them over the years and who they are.

Again, Kyle should hire me as this PR guy. I mean, I love him. I love their program. I love Cam Rising. I am all about Utah. I'm excited to see them play Florida this year, to travel into the SEC. We don't always see the Pac-12 going to the SEC in September and I can't... Of all these games I'm calling Ohio State-Notre Dame, but I'm intrigued about that game and is Cam Rising as good as I think he is?

And then also they lost... Devin Lloyd was such an extension of Kyle out on that field. He was such a leader, reminded me a lot of Nakobe Dean at Georgia. You don't just replace those kind of guys with the next talented player. You're taking the heart and soul out of a defense when you take Nakobe Dean of Georgia and Devin Lloyd out of Utah. So I'm sure the guy that's stepping in has a lot of talent, but I hope he's got the leadership and the experience because that's what you'll miss. But great game, great opportunity for them and if they win that game, that's how you schedule those games and you win those games. And that's how America starts to say, "Hey look at Utah." And like I said, the Rose Bowl last year helped them for sure.

**Why does Columbus have such a special connection with College GameDay as the show makes its 21<sup>st</sup> visit to Ohio State this weekend?**

**Herbstreit:** Couple things. No. 1, when I was a student, I used to get the Lantern [student newspaper] in the old days. We used to walk through the oval reading the Lanterns. So congrats on that opportunity there. That's great experience. No. 2, don't forget that the headgear originated there at Ohio State with Lee Corso, putting, asking my wife, Allison, who's a former cheerleader, to ask a cheerleading coach if he could put the headgear on. And she said no, because she was very protective and Lee being relentless the way he is came back on Thursday. "Can you ask again?" And the answer was still no.

So then he asked if I could ask the athletic director and I didn't have any idea what it was going to turn into. But then I asked the athletic director and he talked to somebody. It was a very big deal to get Brutus' head. And then they green-lighted it literally Saturday morning, and this was only when the show was like an hour long. And he put the Brutus head on and that was the beginning of him doing that every single year. I think it was 1996. It was my first year on the show. So don't forget that as well. So not only have

we been there more than any other school, but Lee Corso and Brutus have a great relationship. He always says, "You never forget your first." That's what he says about Brutus.

The relationship... We love going to Columbus. We've had some of our best crowds of all time there when we've done some Ohio State, Michigan games. I mean the '06 Ohio State-Michigan game, when it was No. 1 against No. 2 and Bo died the day before on a Friday, that's one of my most memorable *GameDays* I ever did. The scene there for a noon kick. We were right outside of St. John's Arena with the rotunda there in the background. Sea of humanity for that show and it was people hanging from trees behind the set. It was awesome. And so Ohio State been very fortunate with Jim Tressel and Urban Meyer and now Ryan Day.

We typically go to games where the teams are highly ranked and Ohio State's had a lot of teams that have been highly ranked and they play teams that come in and so that's... Alabama and Ohio State, I don't know it off, Bear [researcher Chris Fallica] knows it, I don't know off the top of my head. I'm guessing those would be one and two because those teams win and we are drawn in to those games. So we always are excited to come in. The '02 national championship team will be there. We're going to have some of them swing by. We're working on Tress [Jim Tressel] and others. Hopefully they'll swing by. And so, yeah, we're appreciative and excited and love the passion of the Ohio State fan base.

**What are your expectations of [Quinn Ewers at Texas](#) now that he's a starter, and how far away do you think Texas is from being SEC ready?**

**Herbstreit:** Well, Lee Corso, I think picked him to win the Big 12 this year. He thinks they're ready to go right now. I have great admiration for Sark. I'm a believer. I'll just tell you that right now. I love his offense. I love when he gets a quarterback that understands the scheme. I think it's very NFL friendly on how he attacks defenses and I think that gives him a big advantage on how he uses formations, how he uses pre-snap motions. The best display of that I think was 2020 with what he did with Mac Jones and how it became such a nightmare for defenses to try to stay up with that.

So Quinn's in really good hands. I think they are a match made in heaven based on at least what you hear about Quinn and his ability to throw the football. You got a great tailback. There's going to be skill this year out of receiver. So I think it's heading in a very good direction. I think with Sark, anytime you have a lot of turnover with a program that has so much history and in the last 10 or 12 years from the time Mack Brown stepped down to where we are now, there's been a lot of turmoil. There hasn't been that solid foundation to be able to build upon. And so it doesn't happen overnight as you know. I mean to do it right, it takes time. There's growing pains to be able to really get one class after another, after another to really buy in to what he's trying to teach. And he's bringing that Tuscaloosa blueprint to Austin and it doesn't just happen. You don't snap your finger or have one team meeting and a voila. Everybody gets it.

Last year, you lived it. The players and coaches especially lived it. We had their Oklahoma game where it looked like they had it won and you're thinking, "Holy cow, this is, you talk about something to make this team take off." And then as we all know, they couldn't finish it. And that became the beginning and it seems like, you tell me, it was like four weeks in a row where they had the lead late and couldn't quite get it done. And that almost became a theme for the 2021 season. So they're playing well enough to put themselves in games to win, they don't have the discipline and the mental toughness to finish it off.

Now that was last year. I would guess an entire offseason with the strength coach. I don't know if they have t-shirts or their mantra this year is 'finish,' but I'm guessing there might be something about finish this year and I like where they're going. I really like where they're heading. I don't know if they're ready yet to win the Big 12 or be ready for the SEC, but I love the guy who's in charge and I love the direction that they're going and let's just keep an eye on them. Week 2 will be here before we know it and that's when you really find out – you get a really good test to find out where you are.

**What are your overall thoughts of [Lincoln Riley and USC](#) – the enormous hype before he has even coached a game there and the great transfer class they have?**

**Herbstreit:** I think they are the team that embodies the '22 college football world that we live in probably more than anybody. You bring in a high-profile coach, that was somewhat of a surprise. I don't know how

you guys felt. When I heard Lincoln Riley to SC. What? I can't believe he's leaving Norman. So they had a splash hire and then here comes Caleb Williams, here comes Jordan Addison, here comes Travis Dye the running back. I mean, they have, I don't know how many transfer portals, but they got to be near the top as far as guys are going to make an impact this year and none bigger than Caleb Williams.

I mean, all eyes are on Caleb Williams and Lincoln Riley leaving Norman and going to all places USC. And I actually have them week 2 when they go to Palo Alto against Stanford and it'd be great to see him in person. It'd be great to find out how when you bring in so many different guys, almost like an all-star team, and now you got to gel together. Remember, it's still a team sport. You still have to win as a team and get through adversity as a team, but they're incredibly intriguing. They got a very, very obviously qualified head coach who knows how to put a lot of points on the board. He knows how to get quarterbacks to play their best.

If you look at Jalen Hurts and Kyler Murray and Baker Mayfield, and now he's got Caleb Williams. So there's a lot of history that shows he knows what to do and how to get it going. My question is that if there is adversity, if there are a couple tough weeks, how does a team that has so many guys that have been from so many different teams? Are they in it for each other, which is all coaches preach or are they in it for themselves? And I'm not saying that they are, but it's only fair to question that as you bring all these guys from all over the place. Football's a game of adversity and challenges and you got to get through it together. So, can he pull in together and help them get through some tough times that are bound to be ahead for him.

**Where does the Backyard Brawl rivalry stand nationally now that it's not played annually, and what are your thoughts on West Virginia coach Neil Brown now in year four?**

**Herbstreit:** Well, I think on a national level, anytime a big rivalry that has so much admiration and respect and it's a rivalry game that people in that region look forward to watching and going to, anytime it can get on national TV, if you're asking about a national perception of it, anytime a game like that can get on national TV, it's always great. Helps the exposure of it. People that aren't familiar with it, watch it and go, "Geez. I mean, this is something and I'm with..." I love rivalries and my biggest fear with all these realignments and who knows the world that we're headed towards is maintaining games like this. I love this. I love what it does. I mean, this is what the game's about.

I got juices flowing just to get into Pittsburgh. I know I'm going to Ohio State, Notre Dame, but I want to watch this game. I want to pay admiration and respect to this game because I love seeing those uniforms since I was a kid, seeing those uniforms on the field together. And so I can just tell you how I feel about it. And I lived in Ohio, so I grew up with admiration for it. I thought it was nasty. I thought it was hard hitting. You could tell that the fans clearly, like most rivalries, it means a lot. And so I'm excited to see it.

Neil Brown, I think he's now in his fourth year. I don't think this thing has gone the way he has liked to see it go, keep in mind. His second year was Covid so his world like every coach got turned upside down. So I still feel like he's building this up. Now he's got a new quarterback. He got a new offensive coordinator. I mean, there's a lot to be excited about and you know, get a real big test to see if some of these changes have helped pay dividends here in week 1. But Neil Brown is a guy that's young. But I think because of the system that he runs, I think people believe in it, players believe in. They want to play for him because they think it's going to put points on the board, but they're going to have to become a complete team to be able to win in the Big 12 that's for sure.

**What's your approach to discussing NIL either on a broadcast or on *GameDay*?**

**Herbstreit:** Yeah, I don't know. I guess because it's still... This year, it feels like is the first year that it's really upon us. And if a player has a... I don't know, think about it. I'm doing NFL games on Thursdays. And if Russell Wilson, who's a high-profile guy, or Justin Herbert or Pat Mahomes... I have Mahomes and Herbert week 1 when we call our first game. Dude, it wouldn't even come across my mind. There's Patrick Mahomes pushes that Coors Light. It just doesn't even... It's not even a thought on my mind.

Now I know it's new to college football. I just don't know how it's relevant to the game. On *GameDay*, that's different. It's a studio show. It's a show about opinions. It's a show about discussion. It's a very

different set of circumstances in a studio setting. I just don't see it ever... I don't know how it ever come up in a game unless you're having fun with something that somebody's attached their name to. But in a studio, whether it's transfer portal or NIL or realignment or what's happening with everything in the sport that can come up from time to time, especially if there's fresh news that fits into one of those categories. But I don't think you really go out of your way to necessarily bring it up in a game telecast if that makes sense.

**Herbstreit:** I just want to say everybody have a great opening week. I'm so glad it's here. I'm so glad that I'm not saying Covid's behind us because I know it's all around us, but I'm just saying 2020s football season is definitely different. As we get... 21 was a lot of fun. 22, we're going to games, people are tailgating. And let's just hope we have an entire season of that. And you guys have a lot of great games and safe travels and hopefully I'll see you guys along the way this year.

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