

Canzano: Oregon coach Chip Kelly commands the stage

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Oregon coach Chip Kelly had some fun with the media Friday at the BCS press conference, especially with those not used to his sense of humor.

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. -- **BCS National Championship** media day concluded on Friday and the **University of Oregon football** team filed out of the JW Marriott Camelback Resort to find a pair of chartered luxury-liner buses, doors open, waiting for them in the turn-about.

It's here where **Chip Kelly** climbed aboard, and let loose.

"How about that circus?" he texted to me.

The previous hour was a theater of the absurd. Kelly sat on a raised platform, with a gold-jacketed member of the bowl committee beside him, fielding questions about his game preparation, the movies he shows his team and the books he reads, among other things.

As he barbed with reporters, the \$30,000 Waterford Crystal trophy was 20 yards to his left. At one point, Kelly, who was coaching Division I-AA football at New Hampshire just a few years ago, looked at a line of television cameras broadcasting his comments nationally and said, "Surreal."

Understand. A lot of the national media haven't had the opportunity to spar with Kelly face to face. So there were snickers from those who cover him regularly as Kelly barbed them, and dead-panned them, and answered a question from a national media member about his team's lack of height and weight with, "Well, we're here, aren't we?"

They are here. And it was a circus on Friday, with Kelly serving as ringmaster. Including the moment in which a reporter asked Kelly where he found out about a book he had his team read in the summer. Said Kelly: "Amazon.com. It's a website."

Yup, it felt absurd. I've covered both Jerry Tarkanian and Bob Knight at national events. I've seen

them draw crowds, and deep laughs. And I'm here to tell you that Kelly could hold his own with both of those big-hitters on the giant stage.

Kelly was asked by a national website reporter about the gurus and books and movies that he uses to motivate his team and the coach said, "We brought them all in. Everyone's here. Tony Dungy, Jon Gruden, Greg Bell. Mickey Ward is here. You name it, they're going to be here this week."

Kelly said it straight-faced.

The reporter scribbled the notes, nodding, then, as he started to walk away, Kelly mumbled, "Not really." The regulars giggled, and Kelly looked to them with a smile, and as the website reporter walked away, he said, "I thought he was serious."

The Ducks coach is serious, mind you. He's closed down his practices, and limited media access as much as permitted by the bowl organizers. The one-hour media session on Friday felt like a pleasant diversion for a coach who claims he doesn't like dealing with journalists, but does it so deftly, and sometimes, playfully, that you have to wonder.

Reporter: "Why don't you like to talk about yourself?"

Kelly: "Because I know about myself."

Reporter: "You don't talk about yourself in the third person?"

Kelly: "I never got caught up in that. And I hung out with a bunch of people and it's the environment we grew up in. If somebody started talking about themselves or I had a friend talking in the third person, he may get hit."

I've been around championship games -- Final Fours, the World Series, Super Bowls and other BCS title games. And on Friday, I watched Kelly's team, in particular the dozens of players who weren't asked a single question and sat quietly and respectfully in rows on a forgotten side of the room, observing.

They didn't joke. They didn't put their feet up on the chairs. They just watched, and listened, and when it was announced that the media session was ending, a line of them scrambled over to the championship trophy to take photographs with their cellular telephones.

Furthermore, when Auburn's players left the media session earlier in the day, they left a mess of cups and plastic water bottles behind. So it wasn't lost that the Ducks players picked up their cups and bottles, and straightened their chairs as they left.

Again, details matter. Remember, these are players who Kelly instructs, "Make your bed every day." And here they are, playing for ownership of college football's palace.

I've never seen a more focused team, even one playing for so much. Kelly answered 135 questions in his formal session – a few of them about football, even. Then, he did one-on-one interviews with national media, including ESPN's Erin Andrews, who Kelly high-fived when he saw her coming.

Then, he hit that chartered bus, and seemingly was free of it all. It's why his subsequent text message surprised me. He must have been on that bus, reflecting on the absurdity of it all, and how far the program has come to reach this moment.

Kelly told me that he thought about his father, who he credits for his value system, when he was conducting the interviews. It's a theme that he often brings up. Also, he remembered that former athletic director Pat Kilkenny told him, "Take the job seriously, not yourself."

I asked him, via text, how hard it was to keep a straight face with some of the questions. And Kelly dashed back via text, suggesting the answer he'd like to have back came when reporter asked him, "Were you always competitive?"

Wrote Kelly: "Should have answered, 'Honestly, no. Just picked it up.'"

And he'd have said so with a straight face.

-- **John Canzano**

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