

WVU Football Coach Dana Holgorsen 2015 Gold-Blue Spring Game

Opening statement

Glad that's over with. Just 15 practices into it in spring, and we're pretty anxious to wrap things up. I just told the team that the next month is when college football student-athletes need to get away from football a little bit and let their bodies heal, finish academics strong, go spend time with their family and be ready to go in June. We'll be away from these guys for about five weeks in May, and then we will reconvene in June and try to continue to get better. (We've) got a long way to go. A lot of good things happened this spring. A lot of things that we've recognized that we need to continue to get better at. We're a far cry from where I hope to be come September 1 when we start playing games. I was pleased with the amount of work that we got done and think we're going to be a pretty good football team come September.

On the plan for William Crest, Jr.

Keep playing ball. He's one of our better football players. A lot of this is what spring football is all about – the ability to experiment with different people at different things. I think we would all agree that he's a pretty good football player, so we're going to continue to do things and figure out what he does best, whether that's playing receiver, running back, quarterback, punt returner or kick returner.

On the depth at offensive line

I think we'll end up being deeper before it's all said and done. Who's going to be the best back up? I don't know. We used 12 guys, and I can assure you that not all of those guys will be game ready. You need to find eight. Stone Underwood is going to be a good backup center; a good second-team guy I think we can win with. Grant Lingafelter is going to be a good option at guard. If we're going to war with those eight, I feel good about it.

On where Wendell Smallwood will play

Having the versatility to be able to do both is important. He can do so many different things. He is without a doubt our most dynamic guy right now. He had a great spring. He's probably our fastest player and maybe our best running back. Being able to do different things is where our offense is going.

On the defense leading the offense

If it wasn't like that right now we'd be in trouble. They have a lot of experience. I can't give Tony Gibson enough credit. He deserves all the credit for where we're at. Getting us in a place defensively is something that we've obviously focused on around here for three or four years. We've got great defensive continuity with our coaching staff. We have 15, 16 guys that have started games. We're developing a lot of depth on that side of the ball. They are confident and they know what they're going. Things are looking pretty good right there.

On the play of Skyler Howard

He's probably the hardest worker we've got on this football team, so he's going to continue to get better. He does a great job taking care of the ball. He does a great job of putting the ball in play. He needs to be probably a little more consistent with his throws. From an operations perspective, getting on the same page as the guys around him is only going to help him get better and better.

On the depth at wide receiver

We were way more successful throwing the ball down field this spring than last spring, and last spring we had Kevin White and Mario Alford on the outside. That doesn't concern me. We're going to be able to get the ball downfield. We had Jordan (Thompson) down field a good bit as well – we didn't today but we have throughout the course of the spring. Skyler getting the ball down field is the least of my worries.

Running backs coach JaJuan Seider

On the depth this year

I think by the time the season comes around, we will be where we were last year. With (redshirt-sophomore wide receiver) Jacky (Marcellus), we can put (junior running back) Wendell Smallwood in the back a lot more. Even the stuff we do with (redshirt-freshman quarterback William) Crest can help.

On Marcellus

He was a high school running back. He's from an area that I'm very familiar with. The only thing he wants to do is play football. You can coach him hard. He doesn't take anything personally. It's enjoyable to coach a kid like that.

On redshirt-freshman running back Donte Thomas-Williams

He's starting to really grow up. He's starting to come along. I thought he had really taken a step forward. You have to have a go to at some point. We have to be ready for him.

On the running identity

It's always been about take what they give us. You will continue to see that trend. It's what the defense gives us. If you keep the safeties high, we will run the ball.

On keeping hands on the ball

It should always be a focal point. Today we had one fumble, and it shouldn't have happened, even if the referee blew the whistle. You hand the referee the ball. That's a big thing we emphasize when we're coaching. You give them the ball and get lined up quick. If you're in a situation where you get hit late, don't leave it up to the official. Don't leave it up to the booth. Keep ahold of it.

Junior wide receiver Daikiel Shorts

On William Crest, Jr.

He's a great athlete. He's adjusted very well. He's in it for something, and he's doing a great job. I haven't given him any pointers, but once we start up in the summer I will.

On junior quarterback Skyler Howard

He's a very confident kid. I think that helps him. He just wants to work more and more, and I think that helps him. This summer I know we will get after him and get everything right.

When we first started off spring ball, we got off kind of slow. We have to work on consistency, timing and being on the same page with the coaches and the quarterbacks. Those are the main things.

On the fans' view of progress

The more you're out there, the more you get used to things and how the defense is playing. They may have not been able to see that, but we will be fine.

Redshirt-senior linebacker Jared Barber**On sophomore linebackers Xavier Preston**

If you look at him, he looks like a senior already. He's a big kid, fast kid and plays physical. Toward the end of spring, he's really gotten it mentally down. He's definitely improved for sure.

On competing for the starting spots

It's good competition for everybody. I know Tony Gibson and Dana (Holgorsen) will put everyone where they do best.

On coming back from an injury

It was awesome. Most guys look at spring practices as a drag and not something to look forward to, but I look forward to it. I don't like having no football whatsoever. It was good for me to get back and knock the rust off before camp. It was good for me.

On the 'rust'

There's still some. I can tell with my eyes. I'll read certain things I don't need to. I'll get back this summer and get it down.

Sophomore linebacker Xavier Preston**On options out of high school**

I could tell you my offers, but honestly with the history of the program and some guys I knew who had been here, as soon as I got the offer I knew I would go to West Virginia.

On moving to defense

I was willing to learn. I wanted to try new things. Going to the next level that could happen again. When you play the game of football you have to be prepared for anything.

On defensive coordinator Tony Gibson

Coach Gibson is a hands-on coach. He likes things very physical. He coaches hard and makes you better every play. I really like them.

On being the best defensive player today

I heard that from coaches, but I just want to get better every day. I'm just playing the ball game. I put myself in better predicaments, and I'm learning a lot more.

Assistant Coach (Defensive Coordinator/Linebackers) Tony Gibson

On junior defensive lineman Larry Jefferson

Larry still needs to learn how to play a little bit better with our system, but we like him. He plays with great effort and is very athletic. We just have to keep teaching him and get him to learn the whole system.

On sophomore linebacker Xavier Preston

You could tell he was going to be an impact guy from day one. He played a little bit in the Alabama game in special packages and then we sat him a few games. We tried to get him back in the swing of it, but he had some injuries and different things like that. Coming into the winter workouts, we saw him coming in each week getting bigger, faster and stronger. He's our biggest linebacker by far. He is about 240 pounds and 6-foot-3.

On if anything has jumped out at him with the spring coming to an end

I think you have guys that learn the system and feel more confident with it. They are more comfortable and are taking over a lot of stuff. If they see other guys loafing and not doing an assignment, then the other guys know it. Guys with that much experience coming in and learning the full system in four years. I just think they are more comfortable with what we do and how we do it. The just keep plugging the next guy in, and they are really having fun doing it. I like where we are as a defense, and we just have to continue to keep getting better.

Senior safety KJ Dillon**On punt returning**

I actually wanted to do it last year, but we had Mario (Alford) in the back field. They told me if I feel like going back there and not dropping the ball, then go back there.

On the benefits of being under defensive coordinator Tony Gibson for the second year

It's the first time we get to do things twice. Last year, we put the defense in and we were learning it and getting better. This year, we don't have to learn anything. We just have to polish up on some things and get good at what we do. We just have to play defense and come out here and hit somebody. If we can do as good as we did last year, then that's awesome.

On naming an MVP for the defense this spring

Shane Commodore (redshirt-sophomore safety). He is straight out of West Virginia. Shane is just making plays. He played behind Karl (Joseph), so you know how hard that is. He is just going out there every day and silently making plays. He is just making it look good. I like it.

Junior quarterback Skyler Howard

On his thoughts on today's performance

It was pretty average. I didn't throw as many balls as I wanted to. There was two throws that I wanted back. That just comes with timing though. It's going to go down this summer.

On if it is difficult to get continuity going through a spring game

I was in there for a couple of consecutive series, so it was easy to get stuff going. I think offensive penalties killed us. We had those multiple times. We have to get more yards on first and second down. I think we talked about that a lot last time.

On William Crest ,Jr. as a receiver

He has a big body, and he's played quarterback. He has the football smarts, so he knows when you see a certain look he knows that he should expect the ball coming. We talk on and off after every series kind of like what me and Jordan Thompson (senior wide receiver) do. We get on the same page because we are both quarterbacks and we both think like quarterbacks.