

NFL

NY Giants rookies Thibodeaux, Neal penciled in as starters

Thibodeaux is a former Ducks star

BY TOM CANAVAN
Associated Press

EAST RUTHERFORD, N.J. — Kayvon Thibodeaux and Evan Neal were acquaintances when the New York Giants drafted them with the fifth and seventh picks overall in the NFL Draft in late April.

It seems now they're linked in more ways than one: They are teammates and friends, two big men who've gone up against each other every day of training camp. And as the first week came to a close Saturday, the rookies also have been penciled in as starters and much is expected.

A linebacker and edge rusher from Oregon, Thibodeaux is going to line up on both sides in coordinator Wink Martindale's keep-them-guessing defense. Neal, who came out of Alabama and was the second of New York's first-round choices, has been at right tackle since organized team activities in the spring.

"They have articulated that they're counting on us, but I'm counting on myself to make the plays and live up to the goals I have for myself," Thibodeaux said. "It's been a great journey so far, and I know that they believe in us. And they've given us all the tools to continue to elevate. So, now it's just up to us to make it happen."

Neal and Thibodeaux occasionally had been matched up against each other in summer camps when they were in high school. Alabama and Oregon never met on the field in their college careers.

"It's just so ironic that we ended up on the same NFL team," Neal said. "I'm just excited to go against him every day, get each other better. I believe that iron sharpens iron."

The Giants got the extra first round pick after making a trade with the Chicago Bears in the 2021 draft to drop down from 12th pick overall to No. 20.

After five straight losing seasons, the Giants need Thibodeaux and Neal to perform well as rookies if things are going to start turning around under coach Brian Daboll. New York posted a 4-13 record in 2021.

Both have picked up the playbook quickly: Thibodeaux has shown ability to get to the passer and Neal has blocked well.

"He beats me some reps, I get him some reps. That's what it's all about, that's the name of the game — getting better," Neal said.

However, the workouts have been in shorts and jerseys. Things change next week when the pads are put on.

Thibodeaux has gone from being a big, talkative personality in the early days after the draft to more businesslike since camp opened.

"You got to know how to compartmentalize," Thibodeaux said. "There's a time and place for everything. So, when we are on the field it's all business, and now it's training camp. We're getting ready for a long journey."

Neal said the two don't share notes off the field for fear of giving the other an advantage.

"We've just been putting our head down and we've been working," Neal said.

The Giants will take that kind of attitude.

PAC-12 FOOTBALL

Lanning, Riley, DeBoer new coaches in spotlight

BY JOE REEDY

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Coaching changes in the Pac-12 are a given, but it is rare when it happens to three of the most recognizable programs in the conference.

Such is the case with Southern California, Oregon, and Washington, which have new coaches on the sideline this season. The schools have won five of the last six conference titles.

"It's interesting and unique. That's what makes it fun," Washington offensive lineman Jaxson Kirkland said during the conference's media day on Friday, July 29. "Now we have a whole bunch of different teams and schemes coming around. It will be cool to see everyone getting after each other."

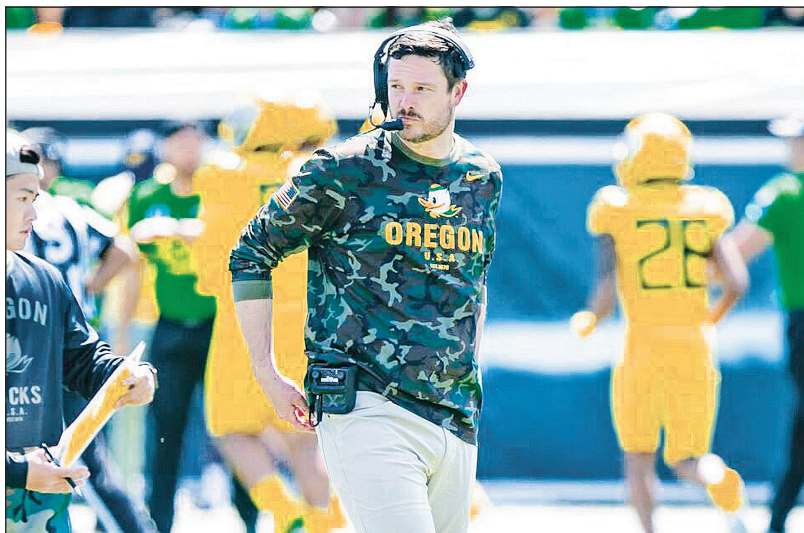
USC made waves last December when it convinced Lincoln Riley to leave Oklahoma. After Mario Cristobal left Oregon for Miami, the Ducks tabbed Dan Lanning, the defensive coordinator at Georgia.

The most significant upheaval has been at Washington, where Kalen DeBoer is the Huskies' third coach in four seasons. DeBoer was at Fresno State.

The coaching changes haven't changed preseason expectations. The media picked Utah to defend its conference title, with Oregon second, USC third and Washington sixth.

Riley faces the most pressure to produce immediately after leading the Sooners to a 55-10 record in five seasons and two appearances in the College Football Playoff. Pressure is routine for Riley, who was 33 when he succeeded Bob Stoops at Oklahoma.

USC was picked by the media to win the Pac-12 South last year, but went 4-8 and fired Clay Helton two games into the season.



Head coach Dan Lanning as the Oregon Ducks hold their annual spring football game at Autzen Stadium in Eugene, Oregon on Saturday, April 23, 2022.

"I know our players are certainly excited to be on a national stage early and get to play an elite opponent in Georgia. That being said, we're really focused on right now."

— Dan Lanning, Oregon head football coach

"If there's no pressure, then you probably don't have the same opportunities others do. You've got to see the opportunity. If you do it well, anything is possible," Riley said. "This is one of those programs and one of those cities. If you do it well, the sky's the limit."

"You don't come to USC or Los Angeles to do things small."

With a huge assist from the transfer portal, Riley was able to rebuild the Trojans for a conference title run this season. Quarterback Caleb Williams also came from Oklahoma, while running back Travis Dye transferred from Oregon and Biletnikoff Award-winning wide receiver Jordan Addison from Pittsburgh.

Williams said he hadn't noticed much change since Riley moved to the West Coast.

"I think he might wear some flip-flops more often, but other than that, he hasn't really changed much. He stays him, and that's what you love about coach," Williams said.

This is the first head coaching job for Lanning, who was on Georgia's staff the last four seasons. He admitted that it has been a bit of a whirlwind getting up to speed.

"Certainly, a lot of pieces go into

Bill Russell, NBA star and civil rights pioneer, dies at 88

BY JIMMY GOLEN

Associated Press

BOSTON — Bill Russell redefined how basketball is played, and then he changed the way sports are viewed in a racially divided country.

The most prolific winner in NBA history, Russell marched with Martin Luther King Jr., stood with Muhammad Ali and received the Presidential Medal of Freedom from President Barack Obama. The centerpiece of the Boston Celtics dynasty that won 11 championships in 13 years, Russell earned his last two NBA titles as a player-coach — the first Black coach in any major U.S. sport.

Russell died Sunday, July 31 at the age of 88, with his wife, Jeannine, at his side, his family said in a statement posted on social media. No cause of death was immediately available; Russell, who had been living in the Seattle area, was not well enough to present the NBA Finals MVP trophy in June due to a long illness.

"We hope each of us can find a new way to act or speak up with Bill's uncompromising, dignified and always constructive commitment to principle," the family said. "That would be one last, and lasting, win for our beloved #6."

A Hall of Famer, five-time Most Valuable Player and 12-time All-Star, Russell in 1980 was voted the greatest player in the NBA history by basketball writers. He remains the sport's most decorated champion — he also won two college titles and an Olympic gold medal — and an archetype of selflessness who won with defense and rebounding while others racked up gaudy scoring totals.

Often, that meant Wilt Chamberlain, the only worthy rival of Russell's era and his prime competition for rebounds, MVP trophies and



Member of the Boston Celtics' 1966 Championship team Bill Russell is honored at halftime of a game between the Boston Celtics and the Miami Heat at TD Garden on April 13, 2016, in Boston.

"To be the greatest champion in your sport, to revolutionize the way the game is played, and to be a societal leader all at once seems unthinkable. But that is who Bill Russell was."

— Boston Celtics statement on Sunday

barroom arguments about who was better. Chamberlain, who died in 1999 at 63, had twice as many points, four MVP trophies of his own and is the only person in league history to grab more rebounds than Russell — 23,924 to 21,620.

But Russell dominated in the only stat he cared about: 11 championships to two.

"Bill Russell was the greatest champion in all of team sports," NBA Commissioner Adam Silver said. More importantly, he added: "Bill stood for something much bigger than sports: the values of equality, respect and inclusion that he stamped into the DNA of our league."

far higher — both as a player and as a person. Perhaps more than anyone else, Bill knew what it took to win and what it took to lead."

A Louisiana native, Russell also left a lasting mark as a Black athlete in a city — and country — where race is often a flash point. He was at the March on Washington in 1963, when King gave his "I Have a Dream" speech, and he backed Ali when the boxer was pilloried for refusing induction into the military draft.

In 2011, Obama awarded Russell the Medal of Freedom alongside Congressman John Lewis, billionaire investor Warren Buffett, then-German Chancellor Angela Merkel and baseball great Stan Musial.

"To be the greatest champion in your sport, to revolutionize the way the game is played, and to be a societal leader all at once seems unthinkable," the Celtics said on Sunday. "But that is who Bill

Russell was."

Russell said that when he was growing up in the segregated South and later California his parents instilled in him the calm confidence that allowed him to brush off racist taunts.

"Years later, people asked me what I had to go through," Russell said in 2008. "Unfortunately, or fortunately, I've never been through anything. From my first moment of being alive was the notion that my mother and father loved me."

It was Russell's mother who would tell him to disregard comments from those who might see him playing in the yard.

"Whatever they say, good or bad, they don't know you," he recalled her saying. "They're wrestling with their own demons."

But it was Jackie Robinson who gave Russell a road map for dealing with racism in his sport: "Jackie was a hero to us. He always conducted himself as a man. He showed me the way to be a man in professional sports."

The feeling was mutual, Russell learned, when Robinson's widow, Rachel, called and asked him to be a pallbearer at her husband's funeral in 1972.

"She hung the phone up and I asked myself, 'How do you get to be a hero to Jackie Robinson?'" Russell said. "I was so flattered."

William Felton Russell was born on Feb. 12, 1934, in Monroe, Louisiana. He was a child when his family moved to the West Coast, and he went to high school in Oakland, California, and then the University of San Francisco. He led the Dons to NCAA championships in 1955 and 1956 and won a gold medal in 1956 at the Melbourne Olympics in Australia.

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