

NFL

Jacksonville hires Meyer as coach

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. — Urban Meyer has won everywhere he's coached. Small colleges. Big-time programs. He's been a difference maker at each stop during his storied career.

He's ready to try something new: the NFL.

Meyer agreed to become head coach of the Jacksonville Jaguars on Thursday, leaving the broadcast booth and returning to the sidelines after a two-year absence that followed another health scare.

The 56-year-old Meyer was team owner Shahid Khan's top target for weeks, maybe even months, and the deal was finalized after their third and final meeting in seven days.

Hiring the longtime college coach with three national championships signifies a new direction for a franchise that has lost 105 of 144 games since Khan took over in 2012.

"This is a great day for Jacksonville and Jaguars fans everywhere," Khan said in a statement.

Jacksonville was the most attractive opening. The Jaguars have 11 picks in the 2021 draft, including five in the top 65 and No. 1 overall, and are nearly \$100 million under the projected salary cap. Adding to the appeal: Khan, a billionaire businessman, has shown a penchant for patience and a willingness to spend big.

Meyer replaces Doug Marrone, who was fired after losing the final 15 games in 2020.

Meyer spent the last two years in an analyst role for Fox Sports, appearing weekly on the network's college football pregame show.

— Associated Press

Jets hire 49ers DC Saleh as coach

NEW YORK — The New York Jets reached an agreement in principle with San Francisco 49ers defensive coordinator Robert Saleh on Thursday night to hire him as their head coach.

Saleh replaces Adam Gase, who was fired by on Jan. 3 after going 9-23 in two seasons.

The 41-year-old Saleh emerged as the favorite for the Jets job when he was brought in for a second — and this time, in-person — interview Tuesday night, and those discussions extended into Wednesday. He was the first of the nine known candidates New York interviewed remotely to meet with chairman and CEO Christopher Johnson, team president Hymie El-hai and general manager Joe Douglas at its facility in Florham Park, New Jersey.

Saleh, recognized as an energetic leader who is well liked by his players, had been the 49ers' defensive coordinator under Kyle Shanahan since 2017, overseeing San Francisco's defense that ranked No. 2 overall on the way to the Super Bowl last season.

The 49ers ranked fifth in overall defense this season despite season-ending injuries to pass rushers Nick Bosa — the 2019 AP NFL Defensive Rookie of the Year — and Dee Ford, as well as defensive linemen Solomon Thomas and Ezekiel Ansah. While San Francisco missed the playoffs, Saleh's work with a banged-up and short-handed defense made him a popular candidate among the teams looking for a coach.

— Associated Press

COLLEGE FOOTBALL COMMENTARY

Pac-12 woes begin and end with a dollar sign

BY JOHN CANZANO

The Oregonian

I saw a report Thursday that the University of Texas sniped Alabama's special teams coordinator. Jeff Banks will join Steve Sarkisian's staff and will be paid \$1 million to coordinate the kickoffs, punts, returns and such.

The Pac-12's highest paid assistant?

Washington defensive coordinator Pete Kwiatkowski, who made \$1,000,008 last season. Next is Oregon offensive coordinator Joe Moorhead at \$900,000 a year. Same for Andy Ludwig, who calls the offense

at Utah for \$900,000 a year.

We all know the Pac-12 Conference has been lapped by its peers in major college football. Being left out of the College Football Playoff four straight seasons is a symptom, though. Not the cause. Because if we're being real — and this conference needs a reality check — the problems begin and end with dollars.

Six coordinators in the Big Ten made more than \$1 million in base salary this season. In the SEC, 15 offensive and defensive coordinators made \$1 million or more. And the offensive and defensive coordi-

nators at Clemson earned a respective \$2.4 million and \$1.6 million each this season.

We can talk facilities, because those matter. We can talk recruiting expenditures, because that counts. But before all that, doesn't the disparity in pay for assistant coaches underscore the financial disadvantage the Pac-12 finds itself operating at?

The conference's media rights earnings are paltry by comparison with Power Five Conference peers. That's well documented. But the trickle-down effect here is the real killer. The Pac-12's highest paid

assistant football coach ranks No. 26 nationally. Attracting and retaining top assistants is an ongoing issue.

Oregon defensive coordinator Andy Avalos left last week to become head coach at Boise State. It was a dream head-coaching job at his alma mater. So maybe it wasn't totally about money for Avalos, who made \$815,000 this year with the Ducks. But I couldn't help but look at the \$1.4 million he'll be paid in his first season in the Mountain West Conference and wonder what chance Oregon had to make leaving more difficult.

Also, where will they turn to replace him?

Avalos' salary in Eugene made him the 59th-highest paid assistant in college football.

We can talk about wanting USC, Oregon, Washington, Utah and ASU to emerge and make a run at the playoffs. But what nobody at Pac-12 headquarters wants to discuss is how difficult it will be to rise to the top while dragging this anchor of a conference along with it.

Every dollar counts for the Pac-12.

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NFL MEDIA

Expanding the audience

Wild-card playoff games show potential for alternate broadcasts

BY JOE REEDY • Associated Press

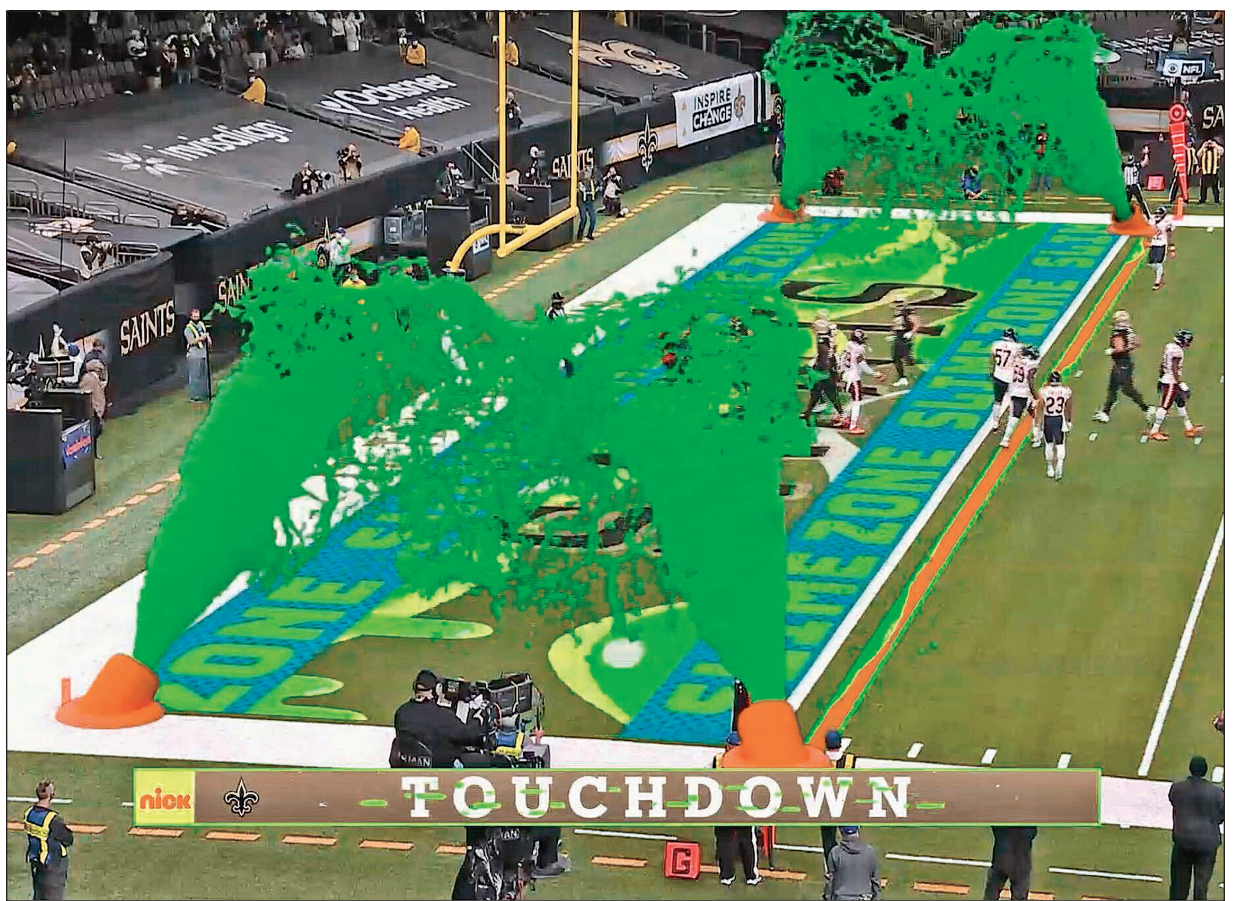
LOS ANGELES —

Brian Robbins directed "Varsity Blues" and was the producer of "Coach Carter," but both of those might have been eclipsed last Sunday with Nickelodeon's successful kids-oriented broadcast of an NFL playoff game.

Even a couple days after last Sunday's game, the president of Nickelodeon as well as everyone associated with the broadcast are still receiving accolades.

"I felt good going into the game about our ideas to make the day watchable for kids and families together. I felt good about the talent," Robbins, president of Nickelodeon, said. "The thing that surprised me was the enthusiasm from all over the planet about what a great thing it was. I think it was a breath of fresh air at the right time."

The New Orleans Saints' 21-9 victory over the Chicago Bears was the most-watched game of wild card weekend, averaging 30.65 million viewers. In an age when even discussions about favorite foods draw de-



CBS/Viacom via AP

Virtual slime cannons go off in the end zone after a touchdown during Nickelodeon's kid-focused broadcast of the wild-card game between the Chicago Bears and New Orleans Saints in New Orleans on Sunday. The positive reviews for the broadcast show the potential of alternate broadcasts of sporting events. The success of that broadcast has led to many wondering what other sports it could expand to and when we might see it again in the NFL.

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— Brian Robbins, president of Nickelodeon

bate, the two billion impressions on social media was overwhelmingly positive. Nickelodeon was Twitter's No. 1 trending topic during the game, and #NickWildCard and Spongebob were in the top 10.

The Nickelodeon presentation not only provided a template on doing alternate broadcasts. It is also likely to usher in more additional broadcasts to the same event.

CBS and Nickelodeon weren't the

only ones to use multiple networks during Sunday's playoff games. ESPN deployed its MegaCast treatment for an NFL postseason game for the first time and NBC used the Peacock streaming service that included a dedicated postgame show.

"I applaud everyone's creativity," CBS Sports chairman Sean McManus said. "We're all trying to reach and expand our audiences. You have to work hard to reach them and use as many platforms to accomplish that. There is a lot of competition whether it is news or sports."

See Audience / B4

TENNIS | AUSTRALIAN OPEN

Players make their way Down Under

BY DENNIS PASSA

Associated Press

Tennys Sandgren forced an early clarification of the COVID-19 rules as the first of 15 charter flights began flying Down Under to deliver players for the Australian Open.

The two-time Australian Open quarterfinalist was given a special clearance to board one of the flights from Los Angeles to Melbourne despite testing positive to COVID-19 in November and again on Monday.

The first of about 1,200 players, coaches, entourage and officials landed late Thursday. The players were met by airport staff and biosecurity officials wearing personal protective equipment including masks and face shields, before being taken to hotel quarantine.

Under tournament protocols agreed with Australian government authorities, all players had to return a negative test before boarding their flights to Australia and would be sub-

jected to further testing on arrival and daily during a 14-day period of quarantine.

The No. 50-ranked Sandgren received an exemption after Australian health officials assessed his case history.

The American player posted on social media to say he wasn't contagious and was allowed to join a delayed flight.

"My two tests were less than 8 weeks apart. I was sick in November, totally healthy now," Sandgren tweeted.

See Tennis / B4



Lee Jin-man/AP file

Tennys Sandgren reacts after losing a point to Roger Federer during their quarterfinal match at the 2020 Australian Open in Melbourne, Australia. Sandgren has reportedly been allowed on an Australia-bound flight despite testing positive for coronavirus in November.