

Sun Devil QB Sam Leavitt shines at Big 12 Media Days

Coach Dillingham on the media attention and heightened expectations for Leavitt: 'It doesn't matter what somebody says. You're probably not dreaming as big as he is dreaming'

By Scott Bordow, ASU News
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When the Big 12 Conference held its media days in 2024, Arizona State University quarterback Sam Leavitt was nowhere to be found.

Four players had joined head football coach Kenny Dillingham for [the trip to Las Vegas](#). Leavitt wasn't one of them.

Fast-forward one year.

At 2:45 p.m. on a Tuesday afternoon, inside the Dallas Cowboys training facility, Leavitt was one of just two student-athletes who took the 2025 main stage for a panel discussion on name, image and likeness.

Perhaps it's not fair to say Leavitt has gone from nobody to somebody in just 12 months, but his rise from an unknown redshirt freshman to a Heisman Trophy candidate and one of the faces of college football has been a dizzy and giddy ascent.

So much so that Doug Tammaro, ASU senior associate athletic director, said Leavitt is the most famous returning Sun Devil athlete in more than 30 years.

"We haven't had a quarterback do what he did in decades, and not only did we win a Big 12 championship team last year, but it was also a team that caught the attention of everyone," Tammaro said. "Sam was a big part of that. He's special. Everything about him says this is the guy leading your program."

If it seems hyperbole to flatter Leavitt with such praise, consider his qualifications:

He's playing the most highly visible position in sports.

Last year, he threw for 2,885 yards and 24 touchdowns, and also ran for 443 yards and five TDs in leading ASU — picked to finish last — to the Big 12 championship.

He nearly engineered an upset of Texas in a College Football Playoff quarterfinal game.

He's a preseason All-American and was named the Big 12 Preseason Offensive Player of the Year.

Oh, and he could be only the second ASU quarterback selected in the first round of the NFL draft. (Mark Malone was selected 28th in 1980.)

Leavitt's popularity was evident at media days. He did more than 25 interviews — ranging from national entities like TNT and CBS to KSL Sports Zone, a daily sports talk radio show based in Utah. At his breakout session late in the afternoon, more than 50 media members gathered in front of his table.

For Leavitt, the day was a perfunctory exercise. He doesn't hate dealing with the media. But it's not his favorite part of the job, either.

"I don't love doing a bunch of media stuff," he said. "I just really like to play the game. But I do like to share my story and be with my team and lift them up. So, definitely mixed emotions about it."

Leavitt does have a sense of humor that plays well in interview sessions, though.

A reporter asked him if he could name one good thing about the University of Arizona.

"You want me to name one good thing about Arizona?" Leavitt said.

"Yeah," the interviewer said.

"They live in a great state," Leavitt said.

"I was like, 'Wow, that's good,'" Tammaro said.

ASU has not been shy about promoting Leavitt and his Heisman Trophy candidacy. He has already been featured this offseason in Sports Illustrated, The Athletic and USA Today, and on ESPN anchor Matt Barrie's podcast.

No national media member has a better read on Leavitt's status than Barrie, who is a 2001 graduate of the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication, started at ASU in the wake of quarterback Jake Plummer leading the Sun Devils to the Rose Bowl and has followed the program closely for the last 20-plus years.

Barrie said ASU's Big 12 championship and subsequent thrilling, double-overtime loss to Texas put Leavitt in "a different stratosphere."

"You look at some of the great players that have come through ASU and gone on to do great things. Terrell Suggs (defensive end, 2000–2002) comes to mind. I'm a Jake Plummer guy because that was my era," Barrie said. "But in terms of this era and social media, and the amount of viewers the college football playoff got, Sam Leavitt is the face of ASU sports."

If there's anyone who can understand the thrill of being a Heisman Trophy candidate and the extra demands that come with such high regard, it's Plummer.

He finished third in the Heisman Trophy voting in 1996 and recalled that as ASU's 11-1 season wore on, he was constantly called into the sports information office to do interviews.

"And it wasn't just from local stations or Western outlets," Plummer said. "Now it's Midwest stations and East Coast stations that want to get the scoop, wondering, 'Who is this kid leading this team?'"

Plummer's advice to Leavitt: Enjoy it and have fun, but don't forget why you're being talked about.

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"I think he comes from a family that has raised a well-grounded kid achieving things he was confident he could achieve," said Plummer, who has gotten to know Leavitt well. "Now he's here, he has all the hype, and I don't think it's going to change him much."

"Don't change your formula," added ESPN commentator and former ASU quarterback Brock Osweiler. "The way you approach the game, the way you approach the media, the way you go about your day-to-day business, it works. So, just because you're in a bigger, brighter spotlight, don't change."

"Stay focused on the moment, day to day, and just keep doing what you've already been doing."

Or, as ASU wide receiver Jordyn Tyson put it, "He knows what's expected out of him, and he's going to do nothing but work every day so he can get there."

"Sam has such big dreams and goals that anything he reads isn't probably as big as those goals," Dillingham said. "I think that's what drives him. He wants to be the best. So it doesn't matter what somebody writes. It doesn't matter what somebody says. You're probably not dreaming as big as he is dreaming."

ASU's season begins Aug. 30 with a game against Northern Arizona University. All eyes will be on Leavitt.

"I think," Barrie said, "the sky's the limit for him."

This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).

Main image



Sun Devil quarterback Sam Leavitt is interviewed by Snapback Sports on July 8, the first day of the Big 12 Media Days, at the Dallas Cowboys training facility in Frisco, Texas. ASU, along with seven other teams from the 16-university athletic conference, sent their delegations — including head coaches and star players — to chat with media and conference officials about what to expect for the upcoming season. Photo by Charlie Leight/ASU News

Text image(s)



The Dallas Cowboys training facility in Frisco, Texas, is decorated for the first day of the Big 12 Media Days on July 8. Photo by Charlie Leight/ASU News



Sun Devil head coach Kenny Dillingham answers questions from media members on the first day of the Big 12 Media Days, July 8, at the Dallas Cowboys training facility in Frisco, Texas. Photo by Charlie Leight/ASU News

Gallery



Sam Leavitt talks during an interview with PHNX Sports on the first day of the Big 12 Media Days, July 8, at the Dallas Cowboys training facility in Frisco, Texas.



Leavitt greets a sports reporter at the Big 12 Media Days.



Media members surround Leavitt in Frisco, Texas.



Leavitt prepares for an interview with TNT Sports on the first day of the Big 12 Media Days.



Leavitt sits for an interview with CBS Sports on July 8.



Leavitt (right) and Olivia Miles (center), a basketball player for Texas Christian University, speak on a July 8 panel about name, image and likeness, sponsored by PayPal.



Leavitt answers reporters' questions on the first day of the Big 12 Media Days.