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An Interview With:

MISSOURI COACH GARY PINKEL

PETER IRWIN: We're now joined by Coach Gary Pinkel from Missouri. Coach, welcome. Your comments about the summer and the upcoming season.

COACH PINKEL: First of all, I'm sorry I'm late. I apologize for that. We got into Dallas and the airport, and they kind of kept us up there for about 10, 15 minutes. So I apologize for the late arrival.

We're here again. Every time I walk in here, it's certainly, from my standpoint, the focus begins, and the season is right around the corner.

It's an exciting time. I'm really looking forward to work with our football team, as we get into August 5th. Our strength and conditioning coach said it's the hardest workout since we came here. That's a pretty big statement and a pretty profound statement. Because I think our kids really worked really, really hard, and I think there's been a bar set, a high standard set. I'm pleased with the work ethic.

The process is what I've always focused on as a head football coach. Every day waking up and making sure all your players, all your staff, everybody is doing all the right things on that day and then go to bed, wake up, and do it again.

I've been pleased with the work ethic of our football team. I've been pleased with leadership as we lost a lot of good leaders the last couple of years. Leadership is so important, but I think we're really doing well there. Not only the seniors, some of the guys we have here today, but also with a lot of the younger players who have leadership qualities. We have several that fall into that category.

Anyway, excited about being here. I'm excited about getting the season going.

PETER IRWIN: Coach, thank you for your comments. We'll take questions.

Q. Tell us a little bit about what's going on at quarterback and how difficult will it be to maintain what you've built without Chase Daniel and Jeremy Maclin.

COACH PINKEL: Any time you lose a quarterback, I think, if it's a quarterback of quality, then there's always -- it's always a concern. I've been doing this for a long, long time. I'm a Division I football coach for 32 years.

Certainly when we had Brad Smith here, the transition year, Chase Daniel comes in, what's going to happen with Mizzou losing such a high-quality quarterback? We're in that position right now.

At the conclusion of spring football, Blaine Gabbert was far and away the best quarterback at that particular time. We had two freshmen that came in, Ashton and Blaine. Ashton Glaser and Blaine Dalton came in early, which allowed them really to get spring football in, learn our system and the process, and they did really well. I expect them to be significantly better, naturally after going through it, as we go into two-a-days.

Every job is open and are always open in every position on our football team. Right now Blaine Gabbert is clearly number one. We'll see how that goes. I think that's normal. Any time you have a transition quarterback, everybody sits back and goes, wow, what's going to happen? When you lose a high level guy like that. Hopefully, we can replace him with a high-level guy.

Jeremy Maclin, I don't know if you can replace Jeremy Maclin. He's obviously a first-round pick, played only two years of college football. He was injured his other year.

We've got a lot of good athletes. I think we recruited well. It's the fastest football team we've ever had since we've been here. I'm excited.

Q. Obviously, you guys are breaking in two new coordinators this year. I wonder if you could talk about the challenges with Dave Yost coming in.

COACH PINKEL: Dave Christensen left

and went to Wyoming. David Yost, our quarterback coach, moved up to his position. And Matt Eberflus went to coach the Cleveland Browns. Great opportunity he had right there. And Dave Steckel, who was on our staff, moved up to that spot.

I've kind of got the Bill Belichick approach to staff: I try to train people within my organization so that when there is some transition, that you can move people within your organization up to different positions.

And that has been -- that's the only two coaches I've lost -- I'm going to say the last ten years, since I've been certainly here at Missouri, and this is the start of my ninth year. I expect the transition to go fairly smooth.

Obviously, each coach will bring their personality to it a little bit. But we have a defensive philosophy and an offensive philosophy, and I expect -- they're two real, real good coaches, and I expect them to do an excellent job.

Q. Coach, you lost some known commodities on your team. Talk about the leadership. Tim Griffin just talked about losing the coordinators. Talk about the leadership that's coming back to your team and who's leading in the locker room right now.

COACH PINKEL: I think that's a real good question. I think that, you know, you have a chemistry of a team. Every team's chemistry is a little bit different. Sometimes it's significantly different. Year one, year two, and sometimes it isn't.

We lost 40 seniors the last two years. So we have a real young football team. Now, these guys in the first -- three most recent classes we've had, they've won 30 games. They averaged 10 wins a year. So certainly, you know, I think there's a lot of positives, things that you gain from being in a winning organization. But the dynamics change. There's no question about it.

So we recognize that. We work on leadership with our seniors. I work all the time with our seniors. We also have a leadership group that we call. We have like 23 other players from different classes, a lot of different classes, that we've identified as potential leaders, and we work on leadership skills and the fundamentals of leadership with them also, and teaching our players, all our players, what a team player is all about.

I think Sean Weatherspoon without question, Jasper Texas is going to be -- I think if

he's not the best linebacker in the country, show me someone who's better. I think he has great leadership skills, also a great student. Great person, all those things.

Kurtis Gregory. Two from Blackburn, Missouri. I know you know where Blackburn, Missouri, is, about an hour west of Columbia. He's an offensive guard, high-level player. He's played well. And Jaron Baston is from Blue Springs, Missouri, right outside of Kansas City. Those three guys are seniors. We'll vote for captains. The team votes for captains right when they return. We'll do that on August 5th.

So we have other seniors, like four seniors to captain.

We also have leaders in the junior class and sophomore class. That's something that you always work on. You don't ever just wake up and say hopefully leadership is going well. We have a plan in place to help develop our leadership. So some players are going to have to step up.

Q. The numbers on returning starters on your defense appear to be a little misleading because a lot of the guys that you're going to start have played. Can you discuss that defense, how important it is to the support of a fairly young offense.

COACH PINKEL: Well, first of all, I'm not really into young. I'm not into inexperienced. It really doesn't matter. I think there's an expectation level that I have and the football team has and the program has. Those players, the responsibility goes with it. The responsibility as coaches and as players to have a good football team.

I'd say that's a very good observation. Most are -- every player that's come into our starting defense, all of them have played significantly. May not have started a lot, but played significantly. I think that would be good. Then offensively, I think that, when you lose Chase Coffman, lose Jeremy Maclin, lose Chase Daniel, I think everybody, including you, they look and say, well, what's going to happen now? That's recruiting. We didn't wake up one day and say all of a sudden, gosh, these guys are gone.

I'm glad we had high level players like that. I think we've got a lot of good young players on the offensive side of our football team too. Obviously, our offense, quarterbacks have got to play well. We know that. But also Derrick Washington and the running game, some other things we can do on

offense, I think.

We will not do the same things with Blaine Gabbert at quarterback as we did with Chase Daniel his senior year. We'll do the same thing as we did with Chase Daniel his sophomore year. We'll take that kind of approach. Defense has their responsibilities. Offense has theirs.

We're getting Danario Alexander back. If Danario had been healthy, he would be one of the top receivers in the league, one of the top receivers in the nation. He's doing well, and we're getting him back. He'll be important to receivers.

Q. Followup on Derrick Washington. Do you have an expectation of number of carries for him? Is it as many as 20 a game?

COACH PINKEL: Well, I'm not going to tell you the number because you'll report to me every week. I'm not going to do that. You know, we really want -- the great thing about Derrick, too, is he's got great hands. You can get the ball in his hands a lot of different ways. I don't think there's any question about it. We're going to do what we do offensively. We attack and throw the ball vertically down the field. That's what we do, and we're going to continue to do that.

But without question, we'll run the football a lot more, without question. That's where a guy like Derrick really -- De'Vion, too, who I think is probably the best one-two punch we've had at the running back position since we've been here. That's going to be -- it will be significant.

Q. I think you addressed some of this in Mike's question. But there's a bit of a changed expectation for your team going into this season in the polls. From sitting here last year, and you were preseason top ten. I wonder if in your mind and the minds of players there's a changed expectation for your team in the program.

COACH PINKEL: I don't. We've had the same goal since we've been here. I think to our players, you know -- I use this comment, this statement. This year is an appropriate time to do it. I think we've reestablished the winning tradition at Missouri. We have a great tradition a year before I got there, but I think we've reestablished it. We haven't won a Big 12 championship. There's a lot of things we have not done. But with that comes responsibility.

The responsibility from my standpoint is I don't think our fans, the Missouri fans, or I don't think any of our fans or alums or anybody, I think

there's an expectation level. So that's what the responsibility's about. And it starts with me, and it starts with our coaches. And it flows down through to our players.

I don't think any of our fans really care about how young they are or how inexperienced we are or who we lost. They expect to see a good football team. And so that's my job to try to get that done.

Q. Coach, how do you see the landscape of the Big 12 North now with Coach Donovan back in the conference and Coach Rhoads at Iowa State? Think they're going to get things going in Kansas?

COACH PINKEL: I think great progress. Great progress in Nebraska also. This is a great league with great coaches. Coach Snyder, I wish he'd stayed in retirement. I've got great request for him. And certainly it's always a challenge. This league top to bottom is always a challenge. I know I've said this often, I'm certainly very proud to be part of the Big 12. It's not the best league year in and year out, then it's certainly one or two.

It will be a challenge each and every week, but that's also the exciting part about what we do.

PETER IRWIN: Coach, thank you for your comments.

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