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An Interview With:

TEXAS A&M COACH MIKE SHERMAN

PETER IRWIN: We're now joined by Coach Sherman from Texas A&M University. Coach, welcome. Your thoughts about your team and the summer practices.

COACH SHERMAN: Thank you. It's a pleasure to be here today and a part of this great conference.

One thing I can tell you about our team, we're very proud of our football team. They have worked extremely hard. They've been challenged and have accepted the challenge and so far have risen above my expectations as far as their commitment.

They've had a great winter program, summer, and now -- also in the springtime. So I'm excited about them and what they're bringing to the table.

We still have a lot of work to do. We have to do it on the field on game day, which we didn't do near enough times last season. At this point and how I can evaluate our guys, I'm very proud of them.

PETER IRWIN: We'll take questions for Coach.

Q. Coach Sherman, with your pedigree, the play last season was a major disappointment. What have you seen this off-season from the group to instill some confidence in you?

COACH SHERMAN: I think it all starts, more than anything, when you have transition, it's always tough. Last season was no exception to that.

You know, right or wrong, we come in with our coach or how we do things and are pretty demanding about doing it a certain way. It's awful

tough on a group of seniors maybe that you didn't recruit. So we had some transitional issues.

But as far as this upcoming season is concerned, I feel like we've had a very profitable off-season. Are we where we need to be? Probably not in the mind of Aggies everywhere, but at this point we're working to get there.

I feel like last season, during the season, which was very difficult, was very trying, and a lot of adversity every single week, I thought it brought the team closer together.

And I believe when we met in January and discussed the upcoming season and what it would take to compete in the Big 12 South, they embraced that challenge, and they've done what I've asked them to do.

It hasn't been perfect, hasn't always been clean. Not exactly how you like it. But they've given the effort that I needed out of them.

I thought last year I was very critical of them just being competitive at practice on a daily basis. I felt like this off-season was extremely competitive, as has been the spring and summer.

And now with the influx of our freshman class -- there was about 45 of them, of which 15 were walk-ons -- I feel like the level of play on a daily basis of how they compete against one another will eventually compete against people in the Big 12 has been elevated.

What remains to be seen is how it plays out in the Big 12. At this point, I'm pleased with what they've done so far. We still have a lot of work to do.

Q. Mike, as an offensive line coach, can you just talk about how difficult it was last year to try to patch something together up there with what you were dealing with in terms of numbers.

COACH SHERMAN: Last season, in a lot of facets, was difficult. A lot of the areas.

I thought two of the most glaring deficiencies we had at different times was linebacker and offensive line. You know, we had some guys playing linebacker, God bless them,

that they hadn't played, necessarily played linebacker in high school, but we're trying to coach them up and get them ready to play.

On the offensive line, we just lacked the depth that we needed to get through a season. You know, the guys that we played with, they gave us everything they had. I have no question about their effort, their toughness. They gave us everything they had.

At times it was good enough, and other times it wasn't. They played with injuries like you couldn't believe and practiced with injuries.

So that was hard, but I understood as well. I knew where we were and what we needed to improve. You know, we were at that time in the throes of recruiting linemen and linebackers to come in and help subsidize that group, a stimulus package of our own, so to speak. I think that group will help us both on the offensive line and linebackers.

Q. Coach, can you talk about your expectations for Ryan Tannehill in fall practice? Is there any way he can make up for the time he lost taking live snaps and contact in the spring?

COACH SHERMAN: We've got to remember, as far as time lost, as far as a receiver goes, he jumped in there as receiver after competing at quarterback for about two weeks last season and picked up extremely fast.

So Ryan is a fast picker-upper, so to speak. He wastes no time. He's a very intelligent young man, very athletic young man.

I envision him -- he's gone through the summer working with our receivers. He and Jerrod throwing every day. They're working with those young kids on their own getting them ready to play. I think Ryan is a quick study. I think he will compete and give this challenge every he has.

So I think we'll see his very best. He understands that it's somewhat of a challenge in regard to Jerrod Johnson having gone through last season as well as the spring under his belt. He really has to throw a knockout punch to be the guy.

We're in a position, as it were, last year, where you have to have a number one and a number two, and to get through this season. It's evident last year it was Steve McGee's injury in the first ball game. We played without a backup the entire season.

So the presence of Ryan Tannehill on our team, whether as a starter or backup, is huge for us.

Q. You mentioned not getting the results you wanted on the game field last year and how tough that was. What do you feel like the biggest problem was? Was it the talent level? Was it just toughness or lack of execution?

COACH SHERMAN: Well, I think, you know, you have to put it on me, the transition part of it. You know, coming in and putting in a whole new offense and defense, getting people -- you know, I think our success in any transition, whether it's in football or business, is getting the right people in the right seat doing the right thing.

I wouldn't say we were successful at that because our record certainly didn't prove that to be the case. But I think it's a matter of just teaching a culture that you want in your program, laying a foundation that you want in your program, and understanding there's going to be casualties along the way, because of what you believe in, particularly in that first year.

I also have to say that I think transition is hard in college football when a new coach comes in and you have a senior class that realizes this is their last go-round. There's going to be some issues there.

So I think that was a struggle that we had at different times. And put no discredit on them. I think it's tough. It was tough on them. It was tough on me.

Areas that we have to get better at, I think, from a football standpoint in particular, I think, number one, we have to get better at running the football. I'm a firm believer that in order to throw it, you've got to be able to run. We have to be able to run the football a heck of a lot better than we did last year. We really struggled in that aspect of our game.

I felt at times we threw the ball okay, and we made a lot of progress throwing the football. I think Jeff Fuller and Ryan Tannehill for receivers had some pretty decent numbers. It all comes back to being able to control the game and being able to run the ball. We didn't do that effectively.

On the other side of the ledger, defensively, I don't think we stopped the run very well. When you can't do that, you can't get people at third down and seven and ten, I think it makes life hard.

I know a lot of people in this conference throw the football, but it was the running game that

concerned me as much as anything.

Q. Coach, can you talk about how playing in the Big 12 South, how that affects the transition and the rebuilding process for a football team?

COACH SHERMAN: I'm probably asked that question as much as any question, about coming into the Big 12 South. Did you know it was going to be this tough?

I spend more time thinking about our team. I've always been this way. You can take care of business at home before you worry about other people's business.

I'm more focused on getting us to be, no matter what conference we're in, no matter what division we're in, to get us to be the best team we can be regardless of what's around us or what we're faced with. We want to be the very best we can be, whether we're playing in the top conference in football, which I believe we are, or not.

And so I'm more focused on us. And Big 12 South, in the Big 12 we have to answer to on a weekly basis. But we have to answer to ourselves first. So my focus is on getting us to be the very best football team.

Q. Coach, despite some of the problems last year, there were successes, especially with the younger players in the skill positions. What do you think of those players' progression from last year and going into the coming years?

COACH SHERMAN: Well, a lot of guys that we played with last year were forced into service probably before they were really ready.

So, to their credit, I thought they handled it pretty well. I always worry about players having success. An example would be like Jeff Fuller. You know, Jeff came in in the spring, really struggled in spring football a year ago, and then all of a sudden he comes out in the fall and really starts putting things together. I thought he had a pretty good freshman year.

But the pressure is on the sophomore year. A lot of times kids will sit back and rest on their laurels with the success that they've had, thinking that's enough.

Jeff Fuller has just scratched the surface as a receiver in this conference. There's a lot of great receivers in this conference and in this division. And just scratched the surface. There's

so many things he can do so much better, and he will be so much better.

He's taken this off-season as a mission to be the very best. Whether he's there this year or next year or the year after, I don't know, but he's on a mission to be as good as he can be. And I envision him to make a lot of progress. He's one example.

Tony Jerod-Eddie is a young man who played defensive tackle for us and showed extreme maturity for us early on. And has handled that success. When you have success personally, when your team doesn't in football, I don't know if it pumps you up like it may somewhere else. You can see he still has a lot to do.

Eddie Brown, Cyrus Gray. We've had a number of kids that played last year that are still anxious to be a winning football team, to get our team on track. In order for us to do that, they have to get better.

I see a lot of progress in the off-season with these young men.

Q. Coach, what's the biggest improvement you've seen in your kids from this point last year up till now?

COACH SHERMAN: I think the biggest improvement I've seen is in the most important room on campus in my mind, is our locker room. I see a greater chemistry, a brotherhood, so to speak, a unity of being on a mission all together.

These guys have really bonded real well with the addition of the freshmen in summer school and them coming into campus and working with our guys. They've embraced them as well.

I asked our guys that were coming back, I said, listen, I'm going to bring these freshmen in here. We can't be messing around with them now. They've got to learn what we're doing and how we're doing it. I can't coach them in the summertime. I'm not allowed to.

What has to happen, you guys have to bring them in the fold. I told the freshmen, you guys come in here. No matter what you did in high school, it doesn't matter anything anymore. You've got to keep your mouth shut and listen to what you've got to do.

So the two groups have blended real well. To answer your question, I would say the chemistry on our team has improved dramatically.

Equal to that is a competitiveness I think we have, which I thought we lacked last year.

Sometimes, no matter what line of work you're in, if someone's not breathing down your neck, you may not work into the midnight hour writing your story. But if you know you're competing against somebody else, you know you're going to work just a little bit harder.

It's no different in football. When you have someone that's going to take your job away from you on a regular basis every single week, you're going to elevate your playing a little better, if not a lot. I think that's happened this spring and this summer with what we're bringing in on campus.

Q. You talked about the transition from a lot of different perspectives. From a personal perspective, how difficult was it to get through last season, and how much easier do you feel like your job is now?

COACH SHERMAN: Easier wouldn't be a term I would use necessarily. Expectations at A&M are extremely high. And that's why I wanted to go there.

You know, transition last year and the disappointment was strong. I'll never forget it. And I'll tell you a story -- I've shared this with Aggies at different functions.

At the end of the season we lost to Texas. I'm home, and I was doing some work in my study, in my journal, writing up what happened at the game and that weekend. I was very quiet the entire weekend, my kids and everybody else -- I have five kids -- were watching the ball game and this, that, and the other on television. I was very quiet, by myself.

My little 9-year-old daughter comes in and sits on my lap. She looks up at me, and she says, Daddy? I said, yes, Selena, what's up? You're expecting your daughter to -- your little daughter to say those three words you want to hear, which is, you know, I love you. She says, Daddy, get over it.

And she got up off my seat and went back and watched television. It was a long weekend. But out of the mouths of babes you get great advice.

And you've got to move on. You've got to get over it. You've got to move on.

I've got to admit I was very disappointed about last season and high expectations whenever you come in. However unrealistic at times they may be, they're still expectations.

But, I've got to admit, I was never discouraged about last season. Recruiting has gone extremely well last season and then the upcoming year, I think we're moving ahead. I have

a great coaching staff who I believe in. I really love our players right now. I'm really proud of how they've embraced this challenge.

How we handle this challenge remains to be seen. It's a very difficult road we're on right now. But we'll be better this year than we were a year ago, I promise you that.

And hopefully once in a while you get a break here and there, who knows what might happen. But every day we go out, we want to be a little better than the day before. I think they've worked towards that. I'm very encouraged by our guys.

PETER IRWIN: Coach, thank you very much for your comments.

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