

July 26, 2010



An Interview With:

## IOWA STATE COACH PAUL RHOADS

PETER IRWIN: We're now joined on the podium with Coach Paul Rhoads from Iowa State.

Coach, your opening comments, and then we'll take questions.

COACH RHOADS: Thank you. We're excited about the growth of our football program over such a short period of time. There's a word we refer to often in our program, and that's development. We've seen a lot of development take place over the last 18, 19 months: Bowl game preparation, all the extra work we got in, our winter workouts, spring practice. And that's continued on into the summer workout session.

With that in mind, we will be an improved football team in 2010, and we'll need to be. We face a very challenging schedule that some rate as the toughest in the country.

Offensively, we bring back an experienced football team with seven to eight returning starters. Defensively, what we lack in experience coming back, I think we make up with desire and hunger, and we'll have to if we're going to improve week to week, which we need to on that side of the ball.

Special team-wise, we return a kicker who I think is as good as there is in the league, and we'll probably take the field with a true freshman punter, not every coach's dream.

I have one personnel issue to share with you. Austin Albertus has graduated this summer, to help boost what is already the number one graduation rate in the Big 12 at Iowa State, and has elected to forego his senior year of eligibility and move into the workplace.

PETER IRWIN: We're going to take questions from the floor.

**Q. Paul, can you talk a little bit about what you expect from Darius Darks this year and how important he is to you.**

COACH RHOADS: First of all, we're counting on Darius to remain healthy. He missed a good bit of our first spring, and then he missed a good bit of training camp, and that lack of practice really put him behind last season. It was at least the middle of the year before he started hitting his stride.

He's had great work in the spring. He's providing leadership for a fairly young receiving corps. We count on him to be one of our top three receivers in a position group that needs to step up for us to improve upon our productivity.

**Q. Paul, talking to Austen a while ago, he believes that his familiarity with the system will translate into much more success. Could you see some of that in the spring? Would you also talk about your running back who his fight to success may be a little bit below the big picture.**

COACH RHOADS: Yes, I think Austen emerged through spring ball as our most improved player on our team. A lot of programs will give out an award for the most improved player. It usually goes to a freshman coming off a redshirt or somebody of that nature. He's been somewhat handicapped because he's been through three coaches, three position coaches and so forth, and he's just now getting a chance to settle in to an offense that he could call his own.

He needed to improve fundamentally on his mechanics at being a quarterback. He did that this spring. I think he has an excellent grasp of our offense, which will improve his decision making when he takes the field. And we'll need him to have that kind of improved success if we're going to as a football team.

I think Alexander Robinson is a guy that is underrated in this league. I wouldn't trade him for another back in this league. I think he ranks right up there with all of them. He runs it. He catches it. He blocks. He's intelligent. He's a leader. And I

think you'll continue to see that out of him with remaining healthy as we go through 2010.

**Q. How would you describe this off-season, especially compared to last year?**

COACH RHOADS: The off-season, as far as my description of it, is based on what the strength coach informs me and how we move forward. The kids are somewhat insulated on what takes place outside of their work, and we've had an outstanding off season.

We are markedly different as a football team in how we look, how we run, how we work, and I think that result will be seen on the football field here very shortly.

**Q. You mentioned your schedule. Is it too early to know what you want to do with your schedule in the future until you know for sure exactly the format the conference will take? Or what's your thoughts on the future schedule and the future setup of the conference?**

COACH RHOADS: Well, until they decide what direction we're going, how many games we're going to play in the league and so forth, it is too early to tell. The 2010 season, even though as much as I'd like to avoid that schedule and move on, I'm forced to play it and prepare for it.

**Q. Paul, can you comment on the status of David Sims for you guys right now.**

COACH RHOADS: There's nothing new to report. The investigation is ongoing, and hopefully there will be some light shed on the matter here within the next 24 to 48 hours.

**Q. Coach, Leonard Johnson, by his own admission, had a down year last year. What does he need to do to take the next step?**

COACH RHOADS: Sometimes Leonard can be a little bit harder on himself than he needs to be, which is a positive thing. We talk all the time about not being overly frustrated but never satisfied with what you accomplish. I think Leonard is a little bit more that way. He was not satisfied with how he played last year as a sophomore.

I've kidded him, and he's been quoted as saying, Coach has told me I need to throw away the crutches. He relies on other players and coaches too much at times. He's taken it upon himself in this off-season to thoroughly understand the defense, to gain a better appreciation for what

it takes to play cornerback and not just rely on your athleticism.

With that in mind, I think he can have a real big year in 2010. I don't know if that will qualify as a breakout year, but I think he can have a real big year for our football program.

**Q. Can you talk about just facing Kansas State in Arrowhead Stadium, what kind of experience that was looking back.**

COACH RHOADS: The opportunity for these young men to play in an NFL venue is a special case. I was at Pitt for eight years, and seven of those eight years we played at Heinz Field. The year before that, we played at Three Rivers. It became sort of common that that's what we were playing in.

But when other teams would come in, and you'd hear about that from their coaching staff, and the chance to take these kids to Arrowhead is a special experience. To take the field, one half of the stadium is cardinal and gold, the other side of the stadium is purple, that's a unique environment, almost bowl-like, to have a chance to play a football game.

**Q. You guys had some real ups and downs last year. What's your expectations going into this season right now?**

COACH RHOADS: Our expectations are continuous improvement. I know that sounds simple. A year ago, our objective was to improve. This program has a long way to go. You remember a year ago, we were coming off a ten-game losing streak. We didn't win a Big 12 football game. We had the longest road losing streak in the country. If we were going to put an end to some of those things, we had to improve. We wanted to improve what we did in the classroom. We wanted to improve how we tackled. We wanted to improve winning football games.

I think we did that. We've got so far to go, that we've tweaked it only in that small response. Continuous improvement is the objective of this football team. We'll be improved. I've stated that already. But the schedule, as I've stated, is very challenging.

Does that mean we can win more or less? I don't know. But I've got a roster that's going to prepare to win every game and play to win every game. That I can promise you.

**Q. How did you go about improving your defense? When you came in, that was one of your really weak points, weakest defense in the country. Your numbers have improved markedly. What exactly did you do?**

COACH RHOADS: I think Wally Burnham does a fantastic job with those kids, putting them in a position to be successful. If you don't allow people to get behind you, if you put people at every gap, you've got a chance.

There were three areas that I think we really markedly improved a year ago. One, tackling. The first time we put pads on that first spring, we had to shut practice down for about 15 minutes and go back to tackling 101, and we got their attention, and I think they've improved greatly as a tackling football team.

Number two, we had to keep points off the board. You can give up yards. We want to cut down on all those numbers and statistics and rush yardage and pass yardage and all that, but you can give up yards and not give up points and play good defense. We didn't give up a lot of points a year ago, and we turned the ball over with some consistency.

Those things got to remain, and then we've got to shore up our run defense. We've got to limit the yards that we give up in the passing game and so on and so forth. And we're going to have to do that week after week with improvement because we are a young group on that side of the ball.

**Q. You talk about the improvement. Sometimes there's carryover from the way things end either positively or negatively. Given the way the season ended, positive with the bowl trip, have you sensed a positive carryover, a mental carryover with your guys, understanding you get to a level of a bowl and win and carry that into the work they have to do to prepare to be improved?**

COACH RHOADS: Every direction that we turn, internally and externally, as far as everything associated with our football program.

I contend that being 6-6 and improved like we were and people being excited, had we lost that bowl game to Minnesota, it just -- we just sort of would have poofed into January. Winning the bowl game, capping the season, I think we launched ourself into January. I think that was evident in how the kids worked the entire off season. I think that's evident in how they

approached it in a team-like manner all summer long. I think that shows an excitement as we go out on the road and talk to our fans. Ticket sales, so on and so forth.

I think the bowl win was very much a large part of where we've gone in the last seven months.

PETER IRWIN: Any further questions for Coach? Best of luck to you.

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