

July 28, 2010



An Interview With:

OKLAHOMA COACH BOB STOOPS

PETER IRWIN: We're about to be joined up at the head table by Coach Bob Stoops of Oklahoma.

Coach, welcome. Your thoughts about the upcoming season and about the summer or anything else.

COACH STOOPS: Good to be here again. Going on 12 years, I guess. As always, really excited to have the opportunity again this year to work with a great bunch of young men at the University of Oklahoma. As I always say, I've got a great administration, great school to work for and work with.

We're excited coming into the year. I really believe, going through a year ago, losing the number of seniors that we did, that we gained experience that you didn't want at the time. That will definitely give us -- make us a better and stronger team coming into this year. More experienced team maybe than we would have been.

And I really felt that through the winter and spring, winning the last couple of games of the year in a pretty good way, I thought showed maturity and gave our guys confidence of the way we built and improved through the year. And that really showed up in the winter and spring in the way we competed and the way we worked.

Hopefully, our guys are having a great summer. We'll find that out when we get back and start working with them.

But, again, we're very excited about the year and optimistic that we have a chance to be back and hopefully compete for championships again.

Q. Bob, because of injuries, obviously, DeMarco Murray has had kind of a star-crossed

career. Could you discuss how he's handled all that and what having him healthy for a full season could mean to this year.

COACH STOOPS: Yes. He's had some unfortunate luck with some odd, you know, different injuries. He's always been a great worker. He's always kept a positive attitude.

And I really believe coming into this year, with his experience, his ability to not only run but to catch the ball out of the backfield, we hope he -- we really anticipate him having a really big year for us.

We're hoping in the line of similar to a guy like Adrian Peterson, that kind of opportunity to run the ball or have his hands on the ball that number of times is what we're hoping for.

You know, so we'll see. He needs support. But I really believe our offensive line has a chance to be better than what people think. If that happens, DeMarco has a chance to have a really good year, and I believe he will.

Q. I got a two-part question for you, Coach. With all the conference realignment stuff, how important is it now for Texas and OU to maintain being not only one of the top rivalries in the country but being the marquee matchup in the Big 12 and maintaining that level of excellence to keep it that game?

COACH STOOPS: Well, definitely, over the last ten years with both of us, you know, being in the national picture as well, it's made -- and being in the same division, it's made that game a great attraction not only in this region but across the country.

So it matters to a degree. But I think also just strength of all the schools in our league makes a difference. So we have a strong product here in the Big 12, and I'm sure it will continue that way and only keep improving. So we'll just see, as we move forward, how it goes.

Q. Bob, when you talk about DeMarco and how much you use him, that kind of stuff, you're talking about the last two or three years,

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you've really rotated two and three guys at tailback. Are you going to do less of that? Is he going to be more of a workhorse, the way Adrian rarely came out of the game?

COACH STOOPS: Again, we'll just have to see. We'll see how DeMarco feels through the year. All guys are a little bit different, what they're able to handle. We'll be aware of that.

We do like our other running backs and have a good number of them that are really quality players. So we definitely have to be aware of his health and just how he's feeling through a game. You know, just kind of monitor it.

But we anticipate him -- I guess where I was going with it is having definitely more carries than he's had and more opportunities of not only carries but catching the ball as well.

Q. Coach, how was the wide receiving corps starting to look from obviously the winter and the spring? Have we seen a lot of improvement this year?

COACH STOOPS: In the spring, they made good improvement. We're not able to work with them all summer, so we'll see once we get back.

Everyone knows that Ryan Broyles, what a special player and competitor he is. The other guys need to pick it up and kind of try and play the way he does. You know, there's potential there.

I thought Kenny Stills, for a freshman right out of high school, was very impressive as a young guy, and hopefully he'll continue to come on and some of the other guys with him.

Q. Bob, do you have an update on Adrian Taylor, how he has progressed and how vital his health is to the interior picture?

COACH STOOPS: He's progressing well. The trainers anticipate him being cleared to practice as soon as we start. I will be very wise in watching and giving him a little at a time.

Adrian's played a long time. So I'm not interested in seeing him wear it out in practice. We'll feed it to him very slowly. For instance, two-a-days, I'll only let him practice once, or even one-a-days may only put him in certain segments of the practice to bring him along.

But he's progressing well, and they feel he's close to being -- he's not quite there yet, but he's close to being back 100 percent. And just watching him, talking to him, walking through the office, he's making good progress and feels good about it.

Q. Bob, what would you say your top two priorities are for your team to get where it needs to be? Where do you need to improve?

COACH STOOPS: I would say, you know, offensively, probably on both sides of the ball, making sure both lines of scrimmage are what we need them to be.

I said earlier I thought our offensive line was going to be much better than people anticipate. You add Eric Mensik and Gabe Ikard that were two tight ends, big tight ends that are now bigger tight ends, and they're around 290, along with the maturity of the other guys as they've gone through the year. Played last year without Donald Stephenson, who coming into the year was a guy that we felt was similar to Trent Williams in ability, and he's in the picture now.

So we have a chance to be better.

Defensively, same thing. Can the defensive front play like we're used to? I believe we can. We're not far from it. Jeremy Beal's here, is an amazing player and athlete. When you look at playing him up there with some of our inside guys, come on, we've got a chance to be pretty solid. I think both lines of scrimmage will be a big factor.

Q. Travis Lewis is extremely outgoing and talkative and demonstrative. What's it like having a guy like that as one of the leaders of your defense, one of the cornerstones as well?

COACH STOOPS: It's fun. One thing, Travis, as you said, he's entertaining. And he's a great competitor, though. It's one thing to be entertaining without being a great competitor. I'm not much for that. He's what you want and how he works and his toughness and attitude in playing and taking it seriously. But he also, when it's time for somebody to chuckle, he's quick to do it.

So he's fun. He's fun to coach, fun to be around, and fun in the locker room for the guys.

Q. Coach, have you been able to notice an appreciable difference in terms of emotional and mental outlook and coming off of last year and noticing a difference from going into last year as opposed to coming into this year?

COACH STOOPS: Sure, it's night and day. Coming into this season and even walking into spring ball, you can tell he's just in command. You can tell how confident he is and sure of what

he's doing. You know, through a whole season, he's a totally different guy had Sam not gotten hurt coming into this year. It's obvious to everyone.

So he's progressed well. He continues to mature and develop. He's a great worker. He's very similar to the guys we've had that have had success. Very grounded guy, confident, great worker, similar abilities in how he throws the ball, he processes. He's got the same kind of size.

So he's very similar to the guys -- and we've had a good number of them, like I said before, but we've won championships, six of them, with five different quarterbacks. That says a lot. And he's in that mold of all those guys.

Q. You mentioned some of that personnel on the offensive line. What did you see from those guys that's given you such encouragement about your offensive line?

COACH STOOPS: The way they worked through the winter and through all our conditioning and lifting and strength training through the winter conditioning periods. And then the way they competed in the spring.

We have a -- year in and year out have a fairly good defensive line, and I thought they were toe to toe with them all the time and competed with them well.

So the way they finished the year a year ago. I think all of that together gives us an opportunity to be optimistic.

Q. Coach, you obviously lost some very talented players to the NFL. How do you feel about the guys stepping into the holes left by those players, and is it safe to say your expectation level as a team hasn't diminished?

COACH STOOPS: I would say definitely hasn't diminished at all. The guys we have replacing them replaced them a year ago. So they gained a lot of experience a year ago, having done that.

Eric Mensik played tackle for Trent Williams, and Donald Stephenson, as I said, didn't play the entire year a year ago, is a guy we thought is similar ability to Trent Williams.

And like I said, Eric steps in against two ranked teams the last two games of the year having never played tackle and played great.

Landry, you saw him the whole year replace Sam. We could go on and on. These guys, I think, have benefited from that. We didn't like it as it was happening, but they're definitely -- I

believe will obviously be more experienced and better players having done it a year ago.

Q. Bob, I know how well grounded you are, but after all the things that happened last year, all the injuries and things, you've got to believe you used up all your bad luck?

COACH STOOPS: I sure hope so. I didn't go to Vegas last year after the season, I know that.

You know, even as an assistant, a player on some teams, it's never happened with the number of players it did and so many seniors ever that I've been around.

So it was tough to deal with. But, you know, don't cry over spilt milk. We didn't whine about it when it happened. It happened. You move on. You play with what you got.

I do remember, though, you go into the last Oklahoma State game and Stanford game with -- we had to move Stacy McGee, one of our D-linemen, just to practice that week because we didn't have anyone else. We had one guy to replace the whole line. That's where it got to with so many injuries.

But we're in a lot different situation now. You've got to believe that could never happen again.

PETER IRWIN: Coach, thank you.

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