

December 1, 2006



A Pregame Interview With:

BILL CALLAHAN

MODERATOR: We'd like to welcome Coach Callahan to the podium. Congratulations on winning the Big 12 north. Great season. If you'd like to make some opening comments and then take questions.

COACH CALLAHAN: It's great to be here in Kansas City. The University of Nebraska is awfully excited about the opportunity to be in the Big 12 Championship against Oklahoma. Our players certainly deserve that opportunity. It will be a challenging game. But I'm glad the weather held up nicely for us. This is northern weather at its best.

And, again, we're really appreciative of the opportunity to be part of this great conference game and can't wait to get going.

Q. Coach, you mentioned the weather. Can you just talk about the snow and the cold and kind of what that does to a game plan. Coach Stoops mentioned maybe it's something you have to do even as the game progressed.

COACH CALLAHAN: That question was asked by our media pool yesterday after practice, and really there's nothing that I see in the forecast that would change anything that we've prepared coming in here.

I think the field conditions will be excellent. From what I understand talking with Carl, I think the field is in great shape. We'll do the best we can. I don't think there will be a wind factor. I think it's just cold. And this time of year I think everybody expected it to be cold on December 2nd.

So I know the history of what the weather can be in the Midwest. It can change in the next

five minutes. I don't foresee anything happening. That's what our weathermen tell us. But we'll see. I don't think we'll change a thing.

Our kids have practiced in this type of weather. Yesterday we got an opportunity to get outside. So I don't think it will be a huge factor for either team.

Q. Coach, you've had to play against Adrian Peterson. I guess you've seen film on Oklahoma the last couple of weeks and what they are without him. The numbers will suggest they're better. Would you rather face one or the other?

COACH CALLAHAN: They're both excellent. And you know, as we prepared for them, there are no weakness on their defensive side of the ball and none on their offensive side. I think Coach Stoops and his staff, they've done an excellent job managing their players, managing their system.

They've coached unbelievably well to get into this particular game. And they deserve a lot of credit for that.

But, you know, as I look at them, they're a team that's very efficient. They're functional. They've got a lot of athleticism. A lot of speed. I look at the down and distance summaries, the breakdowns, and they're comfortable being in any down and distance, on offense, defense.

When you have a team like that, that's comfortable playing in those type -- any situation that they get themselves into, that speaks to their coaching staff. It speaks to their team confidence.

Q. The point of winning the game to get Nebraska back, the step, getting back to the national prominence that really the fans have come to expect over the years.

COACH CALLAHAN: Well, the expectations at Nebraska are very high, and we embrace that standard. It's what makes us go day in, day out.

We're close. I don't think we're there yet. I

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still think we have a lot of work to do yet.

This is a key game. No question about that. To measure ourselves to see where we're at in terms of our progress and our improvement and consistency.

So every chance and every opportunity we get, we're going to try to capitalize on it, try to maximize on this particular effort on the big stage in the big game.

So we'll see. Sometimes you can't tell. You don't know how this game will end up. And you don't know what you'll draw from the game afterwards. So it's hard for me to sit here and say exactly, you know, what that game will mean until it's finalized and until we can really critique it, see exactly where we're at.

Q. Coach, during the media days, you took your guys over to Arrowhead and toured them around and got some pictures. What do you remember about that day and what do you remember telling your guys? You guys were in Arrowhead in July.

COACH CALLAHAN: I thought it was important, Shawn, for our team to come down, our captains, our leaders, to visit Arrowhead and to see exactly what the scenario, what the atmosphere and climate was in terms of playing in a championship game. Really try to build a mind set and create the mind set of a championship team and the championship game.

What we wanted to do as a staff was to give them that portrayal so that when they came here, they experienced what it would feel like to be in that stadium.

They got an opportunity to look at the locker room setup, chance to go through the press boxes, get out on the field itself, and we thank the Chiefs for that, Carl Peterson and Herm Edwards for allowing us to do that. But it was a great opportunity for the kids to really visualize what it would be like to finalize our goals and complete their goals in order to get here.

That was the goal from day one was to get into this game and win it. It's certainly a great sense of accomplishment on our players' part, to accomplish that task and accomplish that mission. We've vowed each other to be here and we certainly are, and again, we're excited.

Q. Coach, you took the Oakland Raiders to the Super Bowl a few years ago. Was there anything you've taken from that

experience that you can kind of pass on to your players, try to pass on to your players this week, not only playing in a big game like this but dealing with all the hype that goes with it?

COACH CALLAHAN: I think that there will be more fans cheering for us being here at Arrowhead, which there hadn't been when I've been here before.

I think our players are excited about the big game atmosphere, having been in the coliseum and playing in Michigan and having an experience of playing big-time programs, on a big stage. I think they're very comfortable and confident in that.

I know they're elated to be in this situation and our preparation has been excellent. And I don't really think that will matter. I think it will be a very confident group that you see coming out because of the backing and the support that we have from our fans, which will be -- which will be fantastic, which will be one of the reasons why you play in the north and why this game has been brought north.

Q. Coach, right or wrong, there's been a lot of spirited stuff between Oklahoma and Nebraska over the last several years involving you directly and the roughneck incident of one of the players in Norman. Has this been an extra emotional battle between your staff and the Oklahoma staff and the programs because of some of the things that have happened?

COACH CALLAHAN: No, not at all. Not at all. Our staffs get along very well. In fact, there's a lot of communication, a lot of internal communication during the course of the season between both staffs.

So, no, not anything whatsoever.

Q. Coach, speaking of the fans, it sounds like there could be 60,000 Husker fans coming into Arrowhead stadium. How big of an advantage do you think that will be for you?

COACH CALLAHAN: It's only an advantage if we can score and get ahead and allow our crowd to get into it. That's the important thing is to get our people into it early on and early and keep it going.

But it is an advantage, there's no question about it. If we can capitalize on opportunities and get on the board and make plays and do the things that will excite our fans. But what tremendous support we have from our fans and, you know, it's

a great place to coach at, because of the support that you get.

And you know, to be in this championship game, with that type of backing, just gives our players a boost. Your players have talked about and have related they have the backing that they do. Again, we've gotta do something about that to make our fans jump up and down.

Q. Coach, can you talk about the health of your team, particularly at the running back position.

COACH CALLAHAN: This year we've utilized four backs, and, you know, we made that statement at the beginning of the year, that we would go into the season and utilize that position by committee.

A lot of the kids have emerged, have roles. They're unselfish players, they're hard workers, and they play for one another, which is a great thing. It's a tribute to their selflessness.

But Brandon Jackson has played extremely well. He's probably our most complete back to date, everything that he does. Running the ball, catching it, blocking, he's very versatile in a lot of different roles.

Marlon Lucky has been extremely valuable to our football team, just based on his contribution in the special teams area. His ability to go out and catch the ball and also have the effectiveness as a runner.

We've got a young guy by the name of Kenny Johnson, junior college transfer from here in Kansas, has done an excellent job, and we'll probably see a little more playing time tomorrow night. And we have a young sophomore running back by the name of Cody Glenn, a big power back that we featured between the tackles. So all these guys bring something different to the table. They're excellent performers.

They compete like crazy, and we're just fortunate to have them. But these guys are responsible for really uplifting our running program this year.

Q. Bill, obviously the gadget plays, the trick plays that you use are borne out of something you see on film. But can you just talk about what they do for your team and maybe what kind of attitude they show from your team.

COACH CALLAHAN: Well, first off, our staff's really confident in our players' ability to

execute whatever we put in the plan. So it shows from that aspect, you know, a lot of belief and, you know, just one of those opportunities exist to pull the trigger and dial the call to make those things happen.

So that's where it starts. And secondly they are a lot of fun. We have a lot of kids that can do a lot of different things. Mo Purify, for the gifted receiver that he is, can also throw the football about 60 yards. And our backs can throw the ball. They all have different skills.

We have a little bit of a tryout in training camp to see who could do what. We build on it throughout the year.

In order for those plays to get called, the right opportunity has to exist. The right opportunity during the course of the game, the position, the game, in terms of the clock, in terms of the quarter, the field position, are you plus 50, minus 50, and then the inherent risk involved if you don't make it. That's all taken into account.

And, by God, you want to make the right call and make it happen. But if it doesn't work, you've got to face those consequences, and you're automatically or possibly on a shorter field and your defense has to go out and defend a missed call or a missed opportunity.

So that's all taken into account. Not only is it important that you execute it and do well, but if you don't, your defense has got to have the backing of your team if you don't execute those particular plays.

Q. After you had those two midseason loss -- middle-of-the-conference-season losses, did your team have to step back and take stock and regroup for that push down the stretch?

COACH CALLAHAN: Well, we played a heck of a game against Texas. And unfortunately, we just didn't close out. And the next week we went down to Stillwater and played a talented football team in Oakland State. We just didn't do well. To their credit, they played well. It just shows you across this league and across the conference, there are good coaches, good players. Anybody is capable now of beating anybody. I think that was proven this year more times than not.

And it's a situation where you've got to be prepared and you've got to step up to the plate. But our players never lost their focus in terms of what they needed to get accomplished. We stubbed our toe against a good Oklahoma State

team, and we refocused pretty quickly to get into the position we are in today.

Q. Bill, one follow-up to the gadget plays. Are those ever done or how much of a factor in doing those is to give the next opponent something else to think about and worry about?

COACH CALLAHAN: I think it's another element that they've got to prepare for in terms of the full agenda. And you know, you have a core package of plays that you present week in and week out to an opponent that they see on film. When you complement those particular plays with a gadget play, it just reinforces the balance that you have in a particular set, the formation or down and distance tendency.

What we try to do is balance the board in terms of our formations, so that you can't overplay us one way or the other. But it still comes down to execution.

We don't rely on it greatly. It's just again goes back to having that opportunity and having the right situation calling.

Q. Bill, how concerned are you with the footing tomorrow? It's going to be a wet track.

COACH CALLAHAN: We'll see. We're going to go out early. We'll arrive about two and a half hours before kick, and the players usually have an opportunity to go out and warm up and check their footing and their footwear to see exactly what they need to wear for the game. It's something that we've done in the National Football League when I was there. We always arrived a lot earlier to just check out the surface to see exactly what the footing would be.

So we'll see. I don't know. I don't know if it will be damp, moist, frozen. I have no idea until we actually get on it and the players get acclimated to it.

Q. What are their choices of shoes for something like that?

COACH CALLAHAN: Well, there's a multi-cleat that they can wear or an option of wearing a seven-studded cleat. A lot of players will opt for the seven-studded cleat just because it will dig a little bit better and little bit firmer on the different track, but -- if it is indeed moist or a little bit soft in that regard.

But a lot of the linemen still prefer, whether it's a hard track or a soft track, to go ahead and

wear a molded cleat. That's been our linemen's history. A lot of kids don't like to change that footwear the day of the game and start experimenting.

So we try to get that done as soon as possible when we arrive.

Q. Bill, are you -- were you aware in your coaching here how traditional this is, Oklahoma and Nebraska, playing for championships, or would you prefer to start (inaudible) history that this team starts with the championship game tomorrow?

COACH CALLAHAN: I think it's a great tradition. I'm a traditionalist at heart. Had an opportunity to watch those classic matchups as a kid growing up in Chicago. So, no, I have a great appreciation and an affinity for this particular matchup, this classic.

So, again, I'm respectful of that. Respectful of what Oklahoma means to their state and what Nebraska means for our own people. So this is a great college game. It's going to be great for our fans, great for college football in general.

Q. Coach, I know where your focus is right now, but being around Arrowhead, has Arrowhead -- has it forced any NFL memories or specific memories about playing in this stadium at all?

COACH CALLAHAN: Not really. There's more familiarity. I'm comfortable being here. I know the surroundings. Again, like I said, it's been here a few times now. But it doesn't conjure up any memories of the past, none whatsoever.

Q. Nothing good or bad?

COACH CALLAHAN: Pardon me?

Q. No specific funny stories or bad stories?

COACH CALLAHAN: Oh, I've got stories. But I don't think I can talk about them in here.

Q. Coach, I saw you had a chance to chat with one of the coaches before you came in. Anything you want to share about what you talked about?

COACH CALLAHAN: Carl and Herm came in, wished us well, visited privately on a couple of things. Good to see those guys. We wish them well as they're coming down the stretch

run. The AFC West is a tough division. Having been in and coached in it, I know what they're stacked up against. Carl is a good man and Herm is a great coach. We wish them the best of luck as they conclude their year.

Q. Coach, when we see Zac, he's a pretty calm guy, but how do you think he'll handle this playing against Oklahoma again in his hometown team, the team that his dad played for?

COACH CALLAHAN: Zac has tremendous focus, and he can tune things out very easily. That's a credit to his concentration level. He's a wonderful young man. He's a brilliant, brilliant kid when it comes to just commanding and leading and vocalizing what we need to get accomplished.

So I don't see any problems or any hangups relative to any feelings that may be in his system. He's a true competitor. He's very humble about his experience at Nebraska and very thankful for the opportunity to play here and, by God, I wish we had him for another three, four years because he's a tremendous competitor. Great leader, an outstanding performer.

Q. Bill, as you continue the rebuilding process, Nebraska hasn't been in this game in a while to avoid the mentality of happy to be here. How much does it help you that you're able to dangle the BCS trip in front of your team as motivation going into this?

COACH CALLAHAN: We came here to win. And we came to Nebraska to win championships and our players have a championship mind set. To their credit they've worked extremely hard. They've done some tremendous things as a team throughout the year in terms of getting together and staying tight knit and staying close and complementing each other through the off season and in season. And that's a function of team unity. If you don't have that you're not going to go very far.

So I have to credit our players, our senior leadership, our captainship for doing a fine job of keeping everybody focused, keeping the entire team together, really no internal external problems. No off field incidents to speak of.

So we're really proud of that that the focus that this team has had getting to this point has been exemplary.

So we hope to continue that.

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Q. Coach, if this game comes down to the field goal kickers, last net of the ball game can you talk about Jordan con Don's range and maybe what you would be feeling comfortable with?

COACH CALLAHAN: Sure. I think he's very comfortable based on the conditions. We'll go out in the pregame and see exactly where his cut-offs are exactly. We'll determine that normally about an hour before the game. We'll include the wind factors as well. So it all depends if there's a Strong wind, middle wind, no wind.

He's got a very sturdy, steady, Strong leg. And I don't perceive any problem if we needed him to kick one from wherever. You know, 30, 40, 50 yards that he's capable of doing that.

We've stretched him quite a bit during the last few weeks in terms of his range. So we're very confident that if he did have that opportunity if the game did come down to that moment or that situation, that we'd feel good about it.

Q. Coach, can you appreciate what Oklahoma's player Paul Thompson has been and a guy that didn't even play quarterback a year ago, what are your thoughts on him and what he's done and how he is as a QB?

COACH CALLAHAN: I think he's been incredible. He really is, you know he basically represents what their system's all about. And that's being efficient. It's being effective. That's making the right decision. And protecting the football. I think he's done tremendous in that regard.

And you know the misnomer, when people talk about Paul is that he's guarded and he's secured by a running game, he's protected by that element of their play.

But he's an outstanding thrower. He's become more accurate in time, with more confidence and more options. He does a terrific job of making the right decision, which is what quarterbacking is all about.

And if a play is not there he can still create. He can make plays. He's been effective moving the chains. Seem like this team is really, really rallied around this kid. And we think the world of him. He's a great competitor and he's going to be challenging, just when you think they're going to run it one more time they'll come off the play action or he'll be in the gun and he can make the right

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decision to keep the chains moving.

Q. What about their defense, your thoughts on Oklahoma's defense in general how they played at the end of the year?

COACH CALLAHAN: Well, I stated earlier that they're really comfortable in any down distance you put them in. Interesting enough, they're a four-man line and ability to transition into a three-man line, three-man system, when you get into more wide receiver groupings if you get into three-wides, four-wide sets. They can go right back into their 30 package and they can bring the entirely different array of blitzes and pressures and things of that nature.

They've got a lot of flexibility. And that's attributed to their staff. They've done some great coaching. They're well coordinated. They've got excellent philosophies in terms of what they're trying to get accomplished. So that's where I see the real challenge is how we handle those transitional defenses, when they come out of their four-man line to the three-man line and of course picking up all the pressures that come off of that.

So there's a lot of volume when you make that transition, as we see it. There's a lot of different things they're capable of doing. So that's a real strength as we see it.

Q. Bill, you said earlier you're not quite where you want to be as a program. What's missing? What do you need to add?

COACH CALLAHAN: You can never have enough good players. We're always looking, always searching. This is still a relatively young football team. We're in a point where we want to become more oriented, more orientated towards high school recruiting. As we make the transition through the next few years that will kind of help the progress so we can build our depth and develop our younger football players so they can plug in and not be in a situation where you have to have a guy for just two years.

Very similar to talking about Zac Taylor as I just mentioned. I wish we had him for another three years, because he's an outstanding competitor. And we put a lot of time into his progress. Put a lot of time into the development of Zac Taylor and quarterbacking in general.

When you lose a guy like that, you've got to take the next step and bring the next guy in. So hopefully you know, in the next few years that will

even out as we begin to acquire more high school football players on our roster.

MODERATOR: Coach, we wish you the best of luck tomorrow. Thank you.

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