

**December 1, 2006**



A Pregame Interview With:

## **BOB STOOPS**

COACH STOOPS: It's great to be here with this opportunity. We're of course excited about the opportunity playing another rival, a long-time rival in Nebraska. We think through all the great and long Big 8 years. So many times Nebraska and Oklahoma at the end of the year decided the championship. So it's exciting to be in this position again.

Really appreciate the efforts of our team, our players, the way their attitude, the way they've worked through the entire season.

The assistant coaches as well have done an amazing job working with these young guys throughout the whole year in the way we've developed as a team. I think that's been our strength, the fact that we were a team, and the sum of all of our parts have been much greater than any one person, any one individual, for sure, including me.

So it's been a great team to work with throughout the year, and excited about it again, just the opportunity. We've got -- winning the Big 12 South gives us the opportunity to win the Big 12 Championship. I've told a lot of people through the week everybody wants to compliment you and congratulate you, and our feeling has been, well, we really don't have what we're after yet.

So the Big 12 Championship is what's most important. So this game has that importance. Our team has approached the week that way.

And so compliments to Nebraska Coach Callahan and his team. They have an excellent football team and it's worked the same way in a great way throughout the year to put themselves in this position. They have a strong and good football team coming in.

**Q. Coach, the fact that you guys have been here much more than Nebraska, how much an advantage is it? You guys have been here and done that just in terms of the hoopla that surrounds a game like this.**

COACH STOOPS: I don't know that that has anything to do with anything. We've been here, but, you know, in a lot of ways we have a very young football team and many of the guys that we're playing with haven't been here.

So some of them, some of the older players. We have as a staff, of course, but as a team we played in Arrowhead last year against KU, too.

But in the end, I don't put a whole lot of stock in any of that. In the end, you still have to earn your way each year. And so maybe you're right. Hopefully there is an advantage there. But I don't know how much of one.

**Q. Coach, you've been here before, won championships here, one Big 12 Championship. Given what the team has been through this year, with moving around people you've had to do and the controversy, of course, what you call it in Oregon. Would this be sweeter than some of the rest, even though it's not a national title on the line?**

COACH STOOPS: I have to say you're splitting hairs. They're all special, sweet as you had said. And so anytime you're winning a championship, it feels great. So I don't know how to really put one in front of another. So hopefully I'll have a chance to compare.

**Q. Bob, did you have any mantra or anything for this team that you -- any kind of mission statement that --**

COACH STOOPS: You know, that's not much my style, having a mantra or having one particular saying or -- guys cover us all the time down there know, I just don't work really much that way, kind of on any one slogan to get us through

the year.

So we do our best really just from week-to-week to kind of self-evaluate where we are, what we need to do, and work through the year that way.

And so I think maybe one thing that's been consistent throughout the years with us and has been with this team is we really preach a lot about improving as we go through the year, that we should be a better football team as you work towards the second half of the year than you were early. And for the most part we've been able to do that.

**Q. Bob, I wonder, we had some unprecedented snow and weather in Oklahoma. Wonder if you could shed any light on any kind of travel troubles you guys had or if the equipment truck is here.**

COACH STOOPS: The equipment truck left at 9:30 this morning. I'm sure they'll have the equipment set up plenty ahead of time. You know, so we don't have any -- we haven't had any problems, just the equipment truck left later than it was supposed to, but I'm sure they'll be here in plenty of time to get the stuff in there ready to go.

**Q. Did you guys have a delay, though?**

COACH STOOPS: No.

They haven't left yet so hopefully not yet we haven't had any delays.

**Q. They're still back home?**

COACH STOOPS: That was the schedule. We were doing all our stuff at home, like we always do.

**Q. Bob, did the personality of your team change at all when Adrian went out the last six games?**

COACH STOOPS: It really hasn't. I've had some people reminded me -- I didn't realize this -- in last week's press conference, it was asked: Do you realize we have rushed the ball for 30 more yards a game, more yards a game since he was gone?

And my comment was: That's great, our personality really hasn't changed, but could you imagine if he was back there?

I hope they weren't assuming that we're even better without him, because that isn't the case.

But, you know, the guys that have stepped in for him are good football players and play in a great way. Allen Patrick has been special. Chris Brown. Jacob Gutierrez. They've been really solid, and the players in front of them I think were underappreciated maybe. The holes they were making, tight ends and the line and the fullbacks and the way they were blocking and the spaces they were creating, maybe I think a lot of people just thought that was Adrian Peterson. But there's a lot of guys helping him. And that's been true the last six weeks.

**Q. You guys played Nebraska in the last two years, and I wonder if you could comment on how they've improved to get to the point where they could play for a conference championship and what you saw a couple of years ago.**

COACH STOOPS: It's obvious, the improvement, I think across the board. Number one, I think Zac Taylor, the quarterback, is an excellent football player, and said that for the last week or so, one of the best players, offensive players in the league and winning. Very deserving of the Offensive Player of the Year Award.

So his efficiency this year has been excellent, and I think in their ability to run the football has been a difference as well.

And then defensively, they've been solid, but again, probably maybe overall, just more consistent this year.

**Q. Bob, you mentioned that all these Big 12 Championships are special, but the fact that this is one of the classic rivalries in college football, does it make it a little more special for you and the players that it's Nebraska/Oklahoma?**

COACH STOOPS: Again, you know, regardless of who it is, if you're winning, it's special. So regardless of who you're playing.

**Q. Bob, when you guys had played the Iowa State game, Adrian went out, did you know at that time that your guys would, you know, get on a 6-7 game winning streak, or did you say this will be interesting to sit back and see how they would respond?**

COACH STOOPS: How do you know that? I'm not nearly --

**Q. Were you confident?**

COACH STOOPS: I felt we would -- I felt all along that the way we were playing offensively was strong in the way the line was playing and the way that the tight ends and fullbacks, the spaces we were creating, the way we were running the football, the way we were working off of that with Paul.

So when he went out, we had confidence in these other guys that we would be able to continue in the same mode. And I think the most credit, Kevin Wilson, our offensive coordinator, being able to adapt to all those situations, not only to Adrian going out, but we lose one of our best linemen in Brannndon Braxton, and we lose our next tailback and on and on. We lose Manuel Johnson, one of the starting receivers as well.

And he's been able to still play to our strengths, realize what the guys are capable of doing, and really work in a good way to give them solid and good opportunities to have success on the field, and we've been able to do that.

**Q. Coach, when you look at what Zach's done for Nebraska, does it remind you a little bit of the way Josh Heupel came in and did kind of the same kind of thing for you guys to jump-start you guys when he first got to OU?**

COACH STOOPS: Sure, there are those similarities, I would say. Timing may be a little bit different. You know, Josh came with us immediately in the first two years, but sure, I'm sure there's a lot of parallels there, definitely.

**Q. Coach, the playing division is okay with you? They just took ten inches of snow off the field. It's going to be wet, cold, the whole nine yards. Is that okay with you?**

COACH STOOPS: Absolutely. I can't wait.

**Q. Could you expand on that a little bit? Is it a matter who has the advantage in that regard?**

COACH STOOPS: Well, I mean, again, we're both playing on the same field. So you manage it, play it the best you can and work through it.

**Q. Wonder if you could just discuss a little bit what -- Paul Thompson's on the team this year and the kind of journey he's been**

**through with your program. He had his red shirt pulled partially back in --**

COACH STOOPS: Paul has been the ultimate team player. It's always been about the team. He's been through some ups and downs, definitely. But he's worked his way through all of them, has always been a great worker in everything that he's done. And he's been a great example for a lot of young players, perseverance, and also of not waiting for something to be handed to you, to keep working and you'll find your way, find your opportunities.

And even last year, as he was not the starter anymore, you know, moving to wide receiver made an impact. And so again, because of his attitude, the way he worked, we felt the need to do that, even though he's our backup quarterback. Maybe the best thing for us would have been just to keep him there. We felt this guy has worked too well, too hard for us, has done too much, given up so much. But just because of the work ethic and the attitude, we need to play him and find a way for him to play more. So we put him at wide receiver.

Anyhow, he's a great example for all those young players. And right now, for us, he's been a -- just such a calming and strong influence in the huddle, at practice, and everything that he does, because we do have a very young football team, in particular offensively, and here's a guy that really has a lot of maturity that all the players look to.

**Q. Bob, now that he's gone, can you say it was Chuck Long's fault that you didn't recruit Zac Taylor?**

COACH STOOPS: Yeah, it's Chuck's fault.

(Laughter)

Q. Do you recall that whole why -- you considered him, right?

COACH STOOPS: Sure. I'm not going to get into that whole process. And in the end he's done a great job. I'm happy for him. He's been a great competitor, great quarterback for Nebraska. And, you know, so --

**Q. Don't you have your quarterback coach recommend who you --**

COACH STOOPS: Sure. Our quarterback coach always has the first and foremost say on what we're going to do, and I definitely get involved. But in the end, our offensive coaches,

really, altogether look at what direction and what we're looking for.

**Q. Bob, did you get more involved with the defense this year after the slow start and what --**

COACH STOOPS: No. Well, I've been involved with the defense since the day we've been here, and -- to some degree. And I also sit in and pay attention in our offensive meetings and try and -- I sure can offer more to a defensive meeting, but I also can sit with the offense and say this is what they like to do. If we were doing this, this is where I would feel vulnerable. This is what I feel we can take advantage of.

But defensively, I have always been involved to some degree since day one. And in the same way this year.

**Q. Not to beat a dead horse on the Zac Taylor thing, is there any part of you that, in watching Zac win the Big 12 Offensive Player of the Year, is there any part of you that's bothered to see a kid from northern Oklahoma, not being at UO, that won an award?**

COACH STOOPS: Yes and no. I mean, no, I'm happy to see any guy from our area do well like that. I'm happy for him.

People don't always realize -- I realized this when I spoke to Wes Welker after the last game when we played him in the senior year. I said, Wes, we blew it, we should have had you here. He goes, You know what, Coach? That's not true. He goes, This is the perfect system. For what we're doing, this has been the best for me.

And I said, You know, on second thought, Wes, you're probably right. And at the time, we had Mark Clayton and Brandon Jones. We had all these guys. It wasn't like we were hurting at receiver. And for what he was looking for, that was the best for him.

And that's always stuck with me that, you know, everybody has, for different reasons, they find their way. And he's found a great place there in the way they're playing and what he's doing. That's been great for him.

So in the end, why second-guess it? I'm sure he wouldn't. And we don't.

And so in the end, I'm excited for him just, again, being a local guy and the spot of having played there, that he's found so much success. It would be awful little of me to not him want to. And

in the end, as a team, he's going to go out there and teams are what ultimately win and lose.

But personally for his personal success, I'm glad for him.

**Q. Bob, can you talk about sum of everything being better than just the parts of your team. Are the parts of this team that much different than your other Oklahoma teams?**

COACH STOOPS: Well, I said that the sum of all of our parts are greater than any one individual, is what I've been saying a lot. And it's very true with that, with the way we've been as a team.

Our parts, overall, are solid. They're good. Are they different from some of our other years? Well, probably in maturity and experiencewise. We're gaining it as we're going.

We have a lot of awfully young football players playing in a really good way for us.

So I don't know. I have a hard time comparing it to other years and which parts you're talking about. But we've got some strong and really good players that are really developing coming up.

**Q. Coach this branches off a previous question. But I guess I was just curious. Supposed to be 26 degrees, I think, at kick-off time. Does your game plan change at all given the fact that if you were, like, in San Antonio or Houston playing in a dome, in terms of like the run/pass ratio, does this type of chilly weather, what does that do to your game plan, if anything?**

COACH STOOPS: It's something that definitely will change both teams' game plans and what you expect and what you're able to do. Some of it, when you get out there, you'll see how you're managing it, how much you can go with whatever parts that you might go with in a dome or in better conditions. And that's part of some factors early or through the game that you've got to get a feel for what you're able to do consistently or successfully. And so you can't deny that that's part of it.

And so it does change to some degree, I would think, both teams' game plan, too, to some degree.

**Q. It appears that most of the fans at tomorrow night's game will be comprised of**



**Husker fans. Do you feel that will give Nebraska an advantage?**

COACH STOOPS: Well, you know, in the end they haven't played here. This is a neutral field. They have a few more thousand fans than we do. I'm sure we'll have our share that will be making noise as well.

In the end, if you're playing real well, fans have a hard time making a lot of noise. And we've been on the road four of our last five games. So really nothing new for us.

And in the end, again, all that matters is what's happening on the field. We're pretty oblivious to what's happening in the stands. So I don't see where that will be -- should be a factor.

**Q. Bob, how antsy is Adrian getting to want to play again? Has he been bending your ear about suiting up?**

COACH STOOPS: He's anxious. He really is. And he's been working hard and he's been out there running and he's been in the weight room. And also he's excited and anxious to play again.

So it's just having some patience and letting it heal, having some time to let it heal some more.

**Q. Coach, could you please talk about their running game matchup, Nebraska against your defense, your thoughts on that.**

COACH STOOPS: They've done a really strong and good job the entire year of creating seams, moving people around, trying to get defenses out of position. Running the zone plays and letting their backs -- they've done an excellent job in finding that space. If you're not adjusted properly and/or if you're too flat or not attacking the line of scrimmage too much, they've done a great job on disposing it and hurting with the running game.

It's definitely a strong and big part of the game this year that we have focused on the entire week, and hopefully we'll be able to, you know, to understand our positioning, be physical and come downhill when we have to cancel seams and tackle.

**Q. What kind of strategy do you think you need to have heading into this game to kind of go home with the Big 12 trophy?**

COACH STOOPS: Our strategy is pretty similar each and every week. Again, the guys that

cover us could probably spit it out for you right now. And you know, offensively we need to be balanced, take care of the football. Defensively, we've got to be great against the run. We've got to eliminate big plays and try and bother and make the quarterback uncomfortable. Pretty much the same for us each and every week.

Special teams is always a factor. We've got to be good on special teams.

**Q. Through the season were there any players you can single out that stepped up as vocal leaders, off-field leaders, helping the team making focus on-field?**

COACH STOOPS: I have a hard time focusing in on one or two guys. Our captains have been outstanding. Rufus Alexander, C.J. Ah You on defense. Offensively Paul Thompson and Chris Messner. Those guys for sure have been really strong and good and the other older guys, though, there's few of them, they're really good players and have had great character in the way they've brought the whole team along.

So but what's been fun through this year is we see younger players, guys that are sophomores and playing a lot that are finding their way and have something to say and they're starting to step into stronger roles as well.

So that's what's fun sometimes when you're working with a real young team is having success and you start to see that.

**Q. Bob, speaking of the leaders and your approach, I assume, if I'm not mistaken, you talk about winning the Big 12 Championship as being important and trying to get better every day and all that. After you lose to Texas, a lot of people would believe the tie breakers and everything would be hard to play for that. Did your players and yourself, can you take us through? Did you change the mentality at all and all of a sudden it flashed back in as an opportunity or did you guys keep dreaming of the Big 12 Championship all the way through?**

COACH STOOPS: I think it's fair to say through the middle of the year, when they hadn't lost for a while, that you see that maybe diminishing and all.

But I think what I appealed to and we did as a team, you know, as the team is it's pride and are we improving each week. Here are the

challenges.

If that isn't to be, you know, our situation is still, by the end of the year, each win improves our opportunity, whether it be bowlwise or a position in the nation and having pride in that. And our players, whether that was the only goal, I think it proved that it was more just about pride and improving through the year, taking pride in each game and truly taking it one at a time, totally investing ourselves in that week and that game. And let's not look down the road.

Who knows what will happen? That we knew all along that it was a possibility, and it happened. But we've talked about what if that possibility comes and we haven't put ourselves in position? You know, that would be wrong of us not to have done everything we can. So fortunately just week-to-week, our guys did a really good job and took them truly one at a time and got better as the year went.

And to win 4 of the last 5 on the road, they took that as a challenge and took a lot of pride to be able to play through that.

**Q. Then when you finally got a chance before the Oklahoma State game to being back to the Big 12 Championship participant if you won, you see a new bright look in their eyes or did they have the same mentality they took at the middle of the year?**

COACH STOOPS: I saw it as we showed up for meetings. I could tell, you know, there's a buzz. Everybody is talking about it. But I was -- and I, myself, even, you know, I remember when it happened Friday afternoon. I was excited for the feeling again. I felt that feeling of the stakes are high again. We gotta win this game.

And it's exciting. I liked it. It was fun to be in that position again. And I talked to the players about it in our meetings that, listen, don't focus on that game, on what might be, because I know that's what everybody is talking about. Then you're going to be distracted from what do we have to do. So this was only half of the game. We gotta do our part now to earn our way in. So focus on that.

And I could see them settling down and realizing, right, we can't sit here and talk, think to next week, think to what might be. All that matters right now is we have to do our job and win.

And so we talked about that, that just don't lose focus of what we have to do to put ourselves to be in the position to be there and win this

football game. And they felt as I did, that it's exciting that you have those stakes again.

MODERATOR: Coach, we'll see you tomorrow evening.

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