

November 30, 2007



An Interview With:

MISSOURI COACH GARY PINKEL

PETER IRWIN: Coach, we'd like to welcome to you the Big 12 Championship game, and any comments you'd like to make after your great season.

COACH GARY PINKEL: Good afternoon. It was July, I'm not sure, 18th, whatever it was, we came down for media day I brought three players: Chase Coffman, Martin Rucker and Lorenzo Williams. And when we were done with the media day, we were coming back to the airport here, I asked our driver to take us over to the Dome here.

And he did. And we walked in, the Dallas Cowboys were practicing at the time. Looked around a little bit and I remember them looking at me saying, Coach, this is where we've gotta be. We gotta get here. I said, Yeah, it would be awesome. Got back in the car and went back.

We're excited about being here. We worked very hard. We're playing a great Oklahoma football team, who has been in this environment a lot. But we had a great week of preparation, and I expect that that our players will play well.

PETER IRWIN: Questions.

Q. Wonder if you can update us on Chase Coffman's condition if he'll play tomorrow night?

COACH GARY PINKEL: Questionable. Got a little work on Wednesday and Thursday and it will be a game-day decision. Our medical staff along with Chase will make that decision. We'll find out right before the game.

Q. Gary, you've had basically two quarterbacks over the last six years, Bob Stoops has won four Big 12 titles in the last seven years with four different quarterbacks

and tomorrow night trying to go five for five. Can you talk about how difficult it is or maybe it's not difficult to keep retooling with a new quarterback on an annual or every-year basis?

COACH GARY PINKEL: Bob's done a great job recruiting quarterbacks, number one. We all know that football is the greatest team sport that there is.

You have 320-pound players and 180-pound players playing on the same field, different fundamentals. You all have to make it work as a team except one position as the quarterback. In order to win at a high level you have to have a great quarterback. He has to play at a high level. Bob knows that, that's why they've had great success. We've been fortunate to have Brad Smith and now Chase Daniel. So it's -- certainly increase your chances for success if you have an impact player there.

Q. So much has been made of the experience that Stoops has, big-game Bob, all that, and a lot has made of the experience you don't have in the Big 12, making it to that game. How do you address those situations or do they matter?

COACH GARY PINKEL: Doesn't matter now. The only way you'll get it is to be thrown in the fire. But our football team, after we lost to Oklahoma, went five straight games to make that Kansas game for the championship. One was at Kansas State, which we had hadn't won at forever and Colorado we hadn't won at forever. We handled the pressure we did that. Then we went and played a game against a real good Kansas team.

So I think we've been through some experiences on these big games. And certainly I think that one thing about our football team, I think it's business-as-usual type team. It wasn't any different this week than it's been all year. In terms of being able to set all the stuff aside and just focus on trying to play our best game. And I think with the leadership that we have that hopefully we can do that.

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Q. Gary, would you mind just in general discussing the impact that Auston English has had with the defense this year?

COACH GARY PINKEL: He's just a great player. He's an impact player. Those guys change football games. And without question one of the best -- not only in our league, but in the country.

Q. Coach, you had a lot of success recruiting here in Texas the past couple of years. Talk about how playing in a high-profile game tomorrow night. Will fit in that plan?

COACH GARY PINKEL: The question has been about the success we've had recruiting in Texas and being down here in this high-profile game. Yeah, Missouri is our number one priority recruiting. And we get into Oklahoma. And then certainly Texas is number two.

And we recruit hard. I think we have four and a half coaches down here sometimes more depending on the numbers, the players we're recruiting.

But it's been hugely important for our football program. And I think it's nothing but -- it's just a plus that we're playing this game down here and it will have an impact certainly in the Texas recruiting.

Q. Coach, Tony Temple didn't play in the first game. What's he going to bring to your game plan offensively that you didn't have in the first game?

COACH GARY PINKEL: We'll find out. It's nice having Tony back. I thought the other players did a good job when we played last game. But time will tell. It's nice to have him back healthy. He's certainly a good player. We'll wait and see.

Q. Coach, you said business as usual preparing for a game, but in your opinion is this a different Oklahoma team than the one you saw in mid-October and is this a different Missouri team that they saw that same night?

COACH GARY PINKEL: I think we're both about the same. Obviously what you do is you go back, we both played half a season, we have to go back and look at that, evaluate that. Then you form game plans like both schools do. Whether you do it a year later or six weeks later. I think both teams are very similar. We'll probably do some different things.

Q. Coach, you mentioned this week being business as usual, but when it comes to the BCS, if you basically don't win this game there's a good chance you won't be in the BCS Bowl. Is that hard to fathom the fact that you gotta win this game to be where you want to be?

COACH GARY PINKEL: You know what, we're putting everything we have in this championship game. And all that stuff will sort itself out later on.

Q. Coach, you talk about the preparation for this game. A national title could be on the line and so many things. How have you kept your guys' focus? Last week when you prepared for Kansas you guys were not dealing with school. You had the week off. And this week you were back in classes, trying to make it seem normal. But you can't help but know that being No. 1 everything you've ever dreamed for is just a game away.

COACH GARY PINKEL: Well, I still think it's back to what we've been doing. And I think our players understand that if you don't remove all the stuff there's no way in the world you can prepare to play your best game.

I trust that our players are doing that. What you do, you watch how you practice, you watch the intensity and the speed of the practice. You watch the focus of the practice. I had my seniors that have done a great job of leadership. And I'll be very surprised if we don't play well. I mean, I certainly -- we won't know until tomorrow. But you better learn to sort it and separate it and prepare or you won't play your best game.

I think our players understand that.

Q. Some of your players earlier in the week talked about this being a second chance. But not letting it be about revenge. Can you talk a little bit about what you've done to curb that sort of natural revenge mentality?

COACH GARY PINKEL: Well, I think some things were blown out of proportion. Our last game, Oklahoma won because they did the things in the fourth quarter to win.

And that's how you win games, and that's what they did. And we didn't. So you give them credit. They deserve to win because they did the right things, and I think what you do, I don't think

it's really any revenge in any way there. We understand we're playing a great football team. And I think, again, that's what we must do is kind of focus on just each player playing his best and hopefully we can do that.

Q. Beyond this season, when you start next season, the season after that, what will be your personal expectations for your program now?

COACH GARY PINKEL: I'd like to finish this season before I go to the next season, next season, next season after that.

We will always have high standards and high goals. Time will tell. I think when we get back and reflect with however this ends up this season, you know, we'll sit down and reflect and certainly talk about the goals that we have and the direction we want to go. But hopefully we'll continue to win at a high level.

Q. When you guys came out for the Kansas game, there was a lot of intensity. There was a lot of preparation for it. It seemed like you guys were a little rattled there. Just the overall atmosphere of it all. How do you stop that from happening with the inexperience factor this weekend?

COACH GARY PINKEL: I didn't know we were rattled. So I hadn't heard that one.

I thought our players really came out and played well. I think on offense we struggled a little bit, then Tony Temple started running. I thought our defense was playing well. I think our kids -- certainly they're going to be anxious. Certainly it's -- I'm not trying to devalue this great experience and time will tell how we actually deal with it. But hopefully we can come out here and sort it all out and play our best.

Q. You're really good at talking to your players and letting them visualize their goals. You talked about what they wanted to do and what they had to do to get this far. You mentioned July 18th. You had them look at the field. Well, there's that trophy sitting there. We all took tight shots of it. Have you been thinking about that and where you might put that if you get that?

COACH GARY PINKEL: We don't have a football one back at Missouri; we have a basketball one. I think in August what I did, I came in our first team meeting and I brought that in and I -- the exact type trophy it was. Then we hung one up

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and for the first time this year. We hung it up in the locker room, the picture of it. And never won it at Missouri before, but I just think you had to create a vision. Really not much focus on it, but a vision. And it's nice that we're here and have a chance at it.

Q. Gary, on the visit here after media days, can you expand on that a little? You've got three fairly talkative guys, Coach we need to be here. What did you do to respond?

COACH GARY PINKEL: I don't recall the details. I know you would ask the details, too. I don't recall who said what. Just one of them said, We gotta be here. They just agreed. They were talking about it for a moment. I'm not trying to make it bigger than it was. But certainly I remember it.

Q. Do you remember what you said?

COACH GARY PINKEL: I said, Yes, it would be a good idea. (Laughter).

Q. Coach, there's a lot of talk that Chase's performance this weekend will help determine what happens with him in the Heisman trophy. Can you address that, what you expect to see from him and how he's handling that?

COACH GARY PINKEL: I think Chase is -- he's a really mature competitor. He loves these environments. I mean, there's no question about it. Because he's a great competitor. He knows he's playing against a great defensive football team and he recognizes that.

But honestly I think he sorts all that. I don't think that he carries that on the field with him at all. I think he's handling those things well. And, you know, it's all based on performance. And any kind of an award like that should be. And I think he recognizes that.

But this isn't about him winning an award; it's about us trying to win a championship.

Q. Have you done anything, are you worried at all about all the attention your team has gotten, not just from the local press, but ESPN, national press. You're number one in the country, Heisman stuff. Does that concern you at all, done anything to make sure that the guys keep their feet on the ground?

COACH GARY PINKEL: Responsibly I

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have to be concerned about that, and that's why I just try to communicate with my staff and with my seniors, what's going on with the team, are we okay. And really everything has been pretty much business as usual on our part. On our preparation, practices. As I mentioned before, the intensity, the focus we have, the meetings, and to say that it doesn't have an effect on them at all, I can't say that.

But I certainly know this has not been going on for one week, it's been going on for the last three, four weeks for us. And hopefully we can deal with it.

Q. Coach, are you an Ohio native?

COACH GARY PINKEL: Yes, I grew up in Akron.

Q. I read, What's the deal with the Ohio coaches? Talking about really doing a great job getting your teams in big post season games, Bob Stoops being one of those. What's it about you in Ohio?

COACH GARY PINKEL: I know everybody in the state of Ohio wants me to lose this game. I can guarantee you that. I grew up in Akron and they said -- I was talking about I have a lot of high school buddies there and Kent State, which is just north of Akron, about 30 minutes, and so I have -- I think I'll be very disappointed if all my Ohio friends who are Buckeyes don't root for the Missouri Tigers.

Q. Coach, you go back to that first game against Oklahoma and after the loss this team has had to win each week out, how impressed have you been with your team's ability to rise to the occasion and to meet the occasion?

COACH GARY PINKEL: Well, that's one of the things we had done before. We didn't do that. We didn't win in November consistently at all. And so I was very proud of our team. It was how we prepared. I think what you do you figure it out it's all about preparation. It's all about what you put in it. It's all about being able to focus and play your best game. And it's all about removing all the stuff out there.

And hopefully that experience helps us. Time will tell, but it will help us in this experience round.

Q. Concerning Tony Temple again, now that he's back and he's playing, you've had

several wins in a row, how does he help take pressure off of Chase?

COACH GARY PINKEL: Tony does a good job -- Jimmy Jackson is playing Derrick Washington, quite a few tailbacks. No question that Tony, in our offense, we kind of throw the ball to open up running lanes. That's kind of what we do. We're going to throw the football, with our receiving core and our tight ends and quarterback. But the running game is so important. And obviously having a Tony Temple back there has helped us this season and he's had some injury issues.

But I think he can do a lot with the ball. So hopefully that will be a plus for us. Time will tell.

Q. Two biggest wins of the year so far came in neutral field games where the crowd was virtually fifty/fifty. Can that help you tomorrow night when it's going to be a similar situation, and why do you think you've done so well in that kind of setup?

COACH GARY PINKEL: The Illinois game and St. Louis, start of the season and last week's game, I don't know. Again, I think it's just -- I've been asked that a couple of times this week. I hope it's a huge help for us. But we really don't talk about that with our football team.

Hopefully it will be a plus.

Q. Was this the first year you hung that picture in your locker room and, if so, why didn't you do it before?

COACH GARY PINKEL: I just a lot of times through our players you want to focus one game at a time and we always talk about the championship, national championship. Everything. That was always something in our first meetings we have always done that. Without going through a lot of detail, I called it our pyramid objectives thing that I've done since I got to Missouri.

But I just thought that this year the seniors come in February talking to me about trying to win at a higher level, wanting to win a championship and we decided to just kind of expand that a little bit. Maybe I should have done it before, is that what you're trying to tell me (smiling).

Q. Coach Stoops has said that he wishes it was a more fair playing field around the country as far as every conference playing a title game or everybody not playing a title

game. In your case, if you didn't have this game, if you played at a different conference, you might already be in the national title game. Just your thoughts on the fairness of this game and conferences playing championships?

COACH GARY PINKEL: We know we do have the game, though. It's not like we just changed the rules a few weeks ago. I think everybody looks at that. It's in their favor, not in their favor. You have a championship game in the Big 12 and some other conferences and some others you don't. I think sometimes you probably help yourself, too. So everybody kind of looks at it as an advantage or disadvantage to them. I look at it as that's the way it is. I don't really give it much thought. That's just the opinion that I have.

Q. What do you think about Sam Bradford, Oklahoma's quarterback, who statistically matches up almost with Chase and leads in passing efficiency and all that, is he as good as he was the first time, has he gotten better? Your opinions on him?

COACH GARY PINKEL: He's a great player. I think a player to play that young at that level, his accuracy, his presence in the pocket. His ability to make decisions. Interception rate is very low.

He's just really, really an outstanding player. And especially for being so young. So I think he's probably a lot better than he is when he played us, because with experience, with every game you get you become a better football player. So a very good impression.

Q. Was the success that Jeremy Maclin has had for you -- in the past people said, Missouri can't keep the guys at home, the home guys at home. With his success, do you think that's going to turn some guys where maybe they can't come in Big 10, Big 12 schools and maybe raid your state of players, the success he's had?

COACH GARY PINKEL: Hopefully -- I think we've done a pretty good job overall. We need to do better. But I don't know exact -- 10 or 11 starters on offense are from Missouri. And certainly I think maybe 15, 14 or 15 total. I really don't look -- didn't look at it right now. But certainly Jeremy Maclin with his -- what a great player he is. The impact he has and the media attention that he draws, I think that would be a real plus for us. And that you can go to Missouri, go an hour and a half

away and great facilities and they win and have success, and hopefully it will be a plus.

Q. When you have a game like this tomorrow night at 7:00, how do you keep the guys now that they're here focused? What's the game plan for them so that they don't toss and turn all night long and psych themselves out before they even get to the field? And for the coach, do you sleep the night before when you've got all day tomorrow to think about it?

COACH GARY PINKEL: We can probably stick with players I think, than me. Honestly, this is like an in-season game for us. Everything is consistently, exactly what we do, we've been doing for the last 12 weeks. I think that's real important. It's absolutely identical. I think our players will be fine.

Myself, I generally sleep pretty good the night before a game. I don't sleep the rest of the week. I'm so fatigued that I probably pass out, I sleep probably the night before. Probably the best night I do sleep. Probably, again, because I'm so tired.

Q. I want to go back to that artwork on the wall again in the locker room.

COACH GARY PINKEL: It's a picture. Artwork is too elaborate.

Q. Trading Spaces --

COACH GARY PINKEL: About this big and about this (demonstrating). It's not a mural here. It's like this. (Laughter).

Q. How much of a decision -- how much went into it being the fact that you were picked to be the preseason, Big 12 --

COACH GARY PINKEL: Had nothing to do with it. Nothing to do with it.

Q. If you win this game there's a lot to be tied into this, what would happen, a BCS bid and possible national championship bid, and then you take home the trophy, which part of that are you talking about?

COACH GARY PINKEL: We're not talking about anything, except the opportunity to win the championship. That's where our total focus is.

Obviously I know that what's out there. Our players do. But certainly I think without question our focus is on what this can do for us

and that's where it should be.

Q. With Chase having played in the Alamodome in high school, does that have any impact on the team?

COACH GARY PINKEL: I hope it does. He told me he played here, enjoyed playing here. But certainly it's familiar with him. But he's -- I don't really think it matters where he plays. Obviously I think he's excited about it because he's been here, and he knows it's a great stadium.

But I think that he's the kind of guy that will try to play his best wherever he's at.

Q. Do you have an opinion on the Big 12 coaches picked a team and they left Rucker off first team? Do you have an opinion on that?

COACH GARY PINKEL: No, I don't, Mike. Thank you very much.

PETER IRWIN: Thank you very much, Coach.

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