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An Interview With:

OKLAHOMA STATE COACH KURT BUDKE

PETER IRWIN: We'd like to welcome Kurt Budke from Oklahoma State University. You all know Kurt. Kurt, welcome to the Big 12 Media Days. Opening comment, and we'll take questions.

COACH BUDKE: Great to be back. Hard to believe we're here already. Seems like I just saw y'all just a little bit ago.

But the girls are excited to be practicing. I think every team gets to a point where they're tired of scrimmaging without the coaches in there and tired of beating on each other and they're ready to start focusing.

And obviously on our campus right now, with our football team doing what they're doing, the excitement on the campus, I think every team on the campus wants to be practicing and wants to be playing.

And that's us. We lost two big pieces to the puzzle last year in Danielle Green and Maria Cordero, two seniors that graduated that were a big part of our team, our Sweet 16 run last year. Big part of our chemistry.

We do have some questions. People ask me how do I feel about being picked sixth in the league. I said being picked sixth in the number one league in the country isn't all that bad, especially when we don't have everybody back. So I think that's fair. We still are the best league top to bottom in this country and nothing is going to change with that.

We're excited. We have some good players back. We have one of the best players in the conference back in Andrea Riley, who, trust me, didn't get worse over the summer. She's still a pretty good player. Taylor Hardeman and Shaunte' Smith are with me here today, two great stories because two kids who went from 0-16 to

Sweet 16 and both playing extremely well right now.

Practice is going real well and we're excited to get going with some games.

PETER IRWIN: Questions.

Q. Women's basketball, Geno and Pat Summitt have sort of been superstar coaches. But seems like more and more you coaches are becoming celebrities and the face of your sport. Is that a good thing or a bad thing?

COACH BUDKE: I just want to stay a celebrity with my family. And that's all that really matters to me. I'll let Geno and Pat and other people carry that for us.

You know, there is more attention to our sport right now, there's no question. Television's had a lot to do with that.

You know, it is nice going around my first year in Stillwater, go to the store, nobody knows who you were, and now you go to the store and people are suggesting plays to you. It is a little bit different now.

It's good for our sport. Our sport is continuing to grow.

Q. Talk about Andrea Riley, her impact on this program for you?

COACH BUDKE: What was the last part of that?

Q. The impact she's had on your program?

COACH BUDKE: Obviously Andrea is a program-changer. There's not a lot of those people out there. We were lucky to get her. We didn't think we were going to get her. She called us on the night before signing day and told us she changed her mind and wanted to come with us.

So obviously that was a pretty good call that night. She is just someone that's continuing to grow every year that she's been with the program. She has shown more maturity, again, by far this year than she did her freshman and sophomore year.

She's being more of a leader. She's working harder every day. She's someone that, again, she didn't get worse over the summer. This kid is going to have a special year again.

She had a special year last year, and they all got a taste of it again last year of getting to the Sweet 16. And we felt obviously LSU was a great team. LSU probably should have won the national championship last year. So when you get beat by somebody like that, then you really think, okay, we probably did go as far as we could have went.

But we sure would have liked to play that game in Oklahoma City, too. But Andrea, obviously, is one of the top 10 players in this country, maybe one of the top 5 players in this country.

Q. What are you going to need out of Andrea leadership-wise?

COACH BUDKE: I think just continuing to grow with her maturity. We had some moments last year. You all know this, that she let her emotions get involved just a little bit too much. She's a heck of a competitor, and that's one thing we definitely do love about her. But as a leader she's got to get that under control better than she has in the past.

She's shown that already this year in our preseason workouts and our summer workouts. She's shown that kind of leadership way more than she has in the past. So I expect that to carry over on the floor in big games, too.

Q. You alluded to the fact that even though you guys were picked sixth this league is pretty tough. Can you talk more about that and what do you think it's going to come down to this year?

COACH BUDKE: I think this is one year also -- I think OU was picked first, right? I don't think anybody in here is totally convinced they're going to win. I think that's how equal it is. I think there's probably -- how do you pick A&M fifth? They've got two of the top players in this conference back, won the Big 12 conference or tournament last year.

I think there's easily five or six teams that can be in the mix this year, and there is nobody -- I guess you gotta pick someone 11 and 12. But I promise you, there's nobody that wants to go play 11 and 12 on their home floor either.

So it's just -- we won all eight games in the first round last year and I don't expect anything different this year. I think it's a great conference.



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Q. Following up on that question, last year the league was considered probably the top league in the country. This year everybody's got at least three starters back. Is it safe to say maybe this league has even gotten better than last year?

COACH BUDKE: I think that is safe to say. Again, I go back to what I said a second ago. You pick Texas A&M fifth, there's no way. I mean this league, top to bottom, is as strong -- is stronger than any conference in the nation, and I do think we are better. I think if you look at those teams that were picked at the top, they basically have everybody back off the teams they had last year.

So they should have been picked as the favorites. It's exciting. And that's what we tell recruits as we go across the country. Come play in a league where you don't have a night off. Come play in a league where you get better every night. That's what the Big 12 is.

Q. Last year you guys really ratcheted up the Bedlam rivalry with the quality of those two games, the crowd support. Can you talk about this year with the tournament in Oklahoma City, a regional in Oklahoma City and you guys in Oklahoma, just how -- what the rivalry is like and how important that is as a step forward for women's basketball in this state?

COACH BUDKE: Well, we had to finally do our part in the rivalry, in the Bedlam. We had to do our part. Oklahoma has been there. They've been on top. And we had to carry our end of it.

And we did it last year and our fans did it last year. Our fans were challenged to show up to that game and as we saw that that was one of the most electric atmospheres I've ever been a part of, and you'll have people that have been going to Gallagher Iba for 30 or 40 years say that was the most exciting night they've ever been at at Oklahoma State University.

So now that we're carrying our end we expect that rivalry to be sold out at both ends for years to come.

Q. You arrived at OSU a couple years ago. You guys coming off of some bad years. You really had to struggle to get anybody to pay attention to you guys to come in for

recruiting. How different is it now when you guys go out on the recruiting trail, national TV appearances that you've had and the success that you've had?

COACH BUDKE: Well, obviously TV does change everything. When they get to watching the in state tournament and Sweet 16 whether you win or lose you're there. We're one of the two teams in the Big 12 still playing at the Sweet 16 level.

So it doesn't finish the deal. But it does get you in more doors. People do know as you go across the country, okay, we did see you on TV. We did see you play in the Big 12 championship and the tournament.

So it gets you in there but it doesn't finish it. But at least you're there.

Q. Talk about losing Maria and Danielle and what you guys are going to have to do to replace them.

COACH BUDKE: I thought one of our biggest things last year was our chemistry. And when you've got a sophomore averaging 20-plus a game you've got other people that have to accept their roles. It's hard sometimes on seniors to accept the roles when a sophomore is averaging 20.

And I thought Danielle and Maria were very key in that. They just went -- it was their night to get their 10 or 20, they did it. When it wasn't their night they got their numbers, they played defense. They had great attitudes, and that's going to be a huge key to this team again this year. Can we get the chemistry level back to where it was, can we have some young kids.

You know, when you establish a program now, at some point in time the young kids have to come up when it's their turn. A Kristin Hernandez has to step up, new girls like a Tegan Cunningham, Kelsey Hatcher have to step in and play right away.

We need a Megan Byford. Megan Byford came on big at the end last year, had her best games by far when we got to NCAA tournament time. Megan has got to step in and Shyvon Spears has to step in. That's where your program is either getting better or not. Can your young kids come up and play when it's their time. They paid their dues and set on the bench and it's their time to play.

PETER IRWIN: Thank you, Coach.

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