

October 23, 2008



An Interview With:

KANSAS STATE COACH FRANK MARTIN

PETER IRWIN: Coach, welcome. Coach Frank Martin from Kansas State. Your opening comments.

COACH MARTIN: Thank you. Obviously when Mike Beasley doesn't play for you, you end up being the first person up at 8 a.m., and everyone's half asleep because no one's got anything to ask you anymore.

So I don't have the opportunity to speak to most folks that cover us on a regular basis. I just want to say thank you for last year.

I was real pleased. I thought as a whole, the media was extremely fair in how they treated us and just the way they covered us. And I was really appreciative of that. But our team is fun. We've made unbelievable strides from this time last year to now. Last year we had nine first-year players that seven of which were freshmen, two of which enrolled on Dec. 26. Six of those freshmen played major minutes for us during the course of the year. And that's never easy to do. This year we've got nine guys coming back.

That core of guys that understands how we want to play, that understands how we have to practice every day, that understands everything that a 17-year-old does not understand before he goes through a process, that path is a lot clearer now. It's a lot better understanding. Our approach is tremendously better.

Also, the other part of that equation, with me being a first-year coach, it wasn't so much what I could and couldn't do, but the other part of that equation, which is the important part, is that I had never coached those nine first-year players before and they have never played for me. So now we both understand each other better.

Players understand what I want. Our staff understands what I want. And I understand what they can do as players a heck of a lot better than I

did at this time last year. So it's a lot easier for us as a staff to put them in situations that they can be a little bit more successful on the court.

We're excited. We really like our team. It's a fun, fun group to coach. And I can tell after six days of practice I'm even more excited about our team than I was when we pulled them back in August.

PETER IRWIN: Questions.

Q. Can you talk about how not having Michael, not having Walker, helps or hinders these young guys you just talked about in their development, in the way they have to step their games up?

COACH MARTIN: The part that everyone forgets is just because Mike and Bill had such tremendous seasons for us last year, and the fact that they both got on to become professionals, which I knew both of them would, we didn't go into last year thinking that Mike and Bill were going to be in college for three or four years.

We prepared assuming that they were going to leave after the year. That's the assumption we had from day one. So we prepared our team. We forced a lot of guys to play a lot of minutes. That's why a guy like Darren Kent, a guy like Jacob Pullen, a guy like Fred Brown, a guy like Ron Anderson -- we went through some bumps and bruises sometimes because we have to play just a lot of youth.

There was a time we were playing in the NCAA game, we had five freshmen on the court at the same time. That's not easy to do, especially that kind of a game. Part of the reason that we are that much better of a basketball team right now is because of that experience and the understanding that those kids have that we worked pretty darn hard last year yet it wasn't quite good enough, so they've understood that we've got to be a little bit better this year.

Q. Your impressions of the Big 12 after going through the season, looking at this year, and of course you sunk the Oklahoma teams

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last season, your first year?

COACH MARTIN: I've said it since I got here. After my first go-through of the Big 12, you know, any time you have a conference where your feature coaches and Bill Self and Rick Barnes, those guys have proven that they've won league titles and been to NCAA tournaments coaching at all the other leagues. And they're here and they've shown how good they are by the way of their programs are performing, not over a year but over X number of years.

And then you couple the fact of the incredible venues that we have in the Big 12. It's the most underappreciated basketball conference in the country. Top to bottom, there's not a better league in the country. And Kansas winning it last year was something that this league deserved, because we had had more Final Four teams over the last 10 years than any other conference in the country. We had the best winning percentage against other BCS conference schools than any other conference in the country.

Yet my three -- two years and change here, for whatever reason, we're just never recognized nationally as one of the premiere basketball conferences in this country. And I think as time continues to go and this coming season now you're starting to see a lot of coaches that are in their -- two years ago we had a lot of turnaround in the league.

Now you're starting to see a lot of coaches going into their third year. Programs are starting to take their personality, their direction, the players really understand what those coaches want and vice versa. And I think top to bottom, you know, what makes it impossible to win in this league are the venues, not only that are well-coached, good basketball teams, but the venues that you've got to go play in. It makes it extremely difficult.

Q. You talk about the improvement of those kids, those new kids, second-year kids with Michael gone and Bill gone who are going to be the go-to guys and can you talk about Jacob Pullen and what more you expect of him?

COACH MARTIN: Even last year, the people don't know about Mike Beasley, two years ago, when he was a junior in high school, he was an after-thought on the offensive end. He shot the ball whenever he grabbed a rebound. That's how he played.

The other guys on his high school team at Oak Hill Academy, those are the guys who shot

every ball. Mike was never the go-to guy on offense. This is something that's fairly evolving with Mike over the summer before his senior year that kind of dealt with it as a senior in high school and finally accepted it last year.

But who is going to be the go-to guy? That's up to the players to determine that. We as coaches have to make that read. It's what players are willing to take on that responsibility. I know we've got guys that are willing and able, but yet we've got to go out in the game and perform that way and we've got to have players.

It's a lot easier to do it in practice than it is in front of 13,000 people. And we'll start finding that out when we start playing. But I've got all the confidence in the world in our nucleus of guys that we're going to have more than one guy be willing to step up to that challenge. And Jacob has been great.

What makes him great is how he accepts coaching. He wants to be a good player. He doesn't walk around thinking he's a good player. He wants to be a good player. He has a lot of Mike Beasley when it comes to that. He's like a sponge. He wants you to coach and he wants you to push him and give him direction. Then he goes out and works. Last year he was a pudgy 17-year-old freshman. Now he's starting to become a Big 12 athlete.

And that's a credit to him to how hard he's worked.

Q. Do you like the way your schedule lays out a little bit? You obviously have a little bit of testing games but seems like you're able to ease into the schedule a little bit. Do you like the way that sets up for you with the guys who have to develop and accept different roles?

COACH MARTIN: Yeah, I mean, it's not as hard a schedule as we had last year. Yet, you know, I think it's three games in. Some guys know their schedules day to day as far as game schedules go. I don't pay attention to that. I look at it as a non-conference slate and conference and post-season. That's the way I look at it and approach it.

But it might look as an easy schedule to some folks on paper. Cleveland State's picked to win their league. We have to play at Cleveland State. They returned their whole team. Oakland is picked to win their league. They returned their whole basketball team. We have to play at

Cleveland State, at Oregon, Kentucky on the neutral site, West Virginia or Iowa on a neutral site. That's a hard, challenging schedule early in the year for not just a young basketball team but any basketball team.

It's one that our guys are excited about. We want to take on those challenges and that's only going to make us a better basketball team, which you better become one and you better be hardened if you have any chance whatsoever to compete in the Big 12.

Q. When you look at the coaches poll this year there's four different teams getting first place votes. Is there a favorite in your mind, or is this maybe as wide open as maybe it's been in the Big 12 in a while?

COACH MARTIN: I don't know how you -- Jeff Capel has done an unbelievable job. For him to take over Oklahoma under the circumstances which he did and for him to have kept that thing together to have dealt with all the injuries he dealt with last year and continue to find ways to win games, he's just, from afar, done an unbelievable job. They've done an unbelievable job in recruiting and attracting some big-time players there.

So on paper they probably look like the favorite. With that said, it's hard to vote against either Rick Barnes or Bill Self. They've proven over years and years and years that their teams are always going to be right there at the final, at the end of the line. So we'll see. I think the league's extremely balanced this year. I think top to bottom it's going to be a hard-fought year for all of us.

Q. Last year expectations were incredibly high for such a young team. How did that affect some of those young players and how do you assess expectations this season?

COACH MARTIN: I don't think that -- we never allowed the outside expectations to really affect us. We go in there every day and we demand that our guys compete at a certain level. And I think the only expectations that were, I don't want to say difficult, but were something we have to deal with, was the normal expectation of a high school senior making the transition to a college freshman thinking that it's going to be a lot easier than what it really is.

And that's the one hurdle from an expectation standpoint that we have to make sure we clear. And we cleared that, and we got better

for it and we've been able to move forward after we as a whole understood that.

As far as this year goes, what matters to us is our expectations, what we speak about as a basketball team, the goals that we set. That's where we try to keep our focus on and what we're going to shoot for. And when I got here a little over two years ago, the first things that we talked about that team the Cartier Martin, Lance Harris and that group of guys, was compete for the Big 12 championship. We're not going to change our sights. That's where it's going to stay at and we're going to work and do everything in our power to try and achieve that goal.

Q. We're going to assume that any coach would love to have two NBA first-rounders on his team. But might it be even enjoyable as a coaching experience to work with five guys who have comparable talents and don't have that megastar that you had last year?

COACH MARTIN: Give me five of those guys. Give me five of those guys. It's a heck of a lot easier to win with five NBA guys than five not-NBA guys. If you don't have pros on your team, your chances of beating Texas and Kansas are out the window. Two years ago we played about as hard as any team I've ever been a part of could play. We had no chance to beat Kansas.

And that's because we didn't have -- Bill does such a great job of just not recruiting but coaching them to play as hard as they can, that if you don't have guys that are talented as they are, you can match their intensity level, you're not going to beat them.

And it's just one of those things that I don't know from our team if we're going to have any pros. Heck, everyone in this room, other than me, was saying Bill Walker wasn't a pro and he's proven to be a pro.

And it's just one of those things that I'd much rather coach pros. To win in this league, you better have a couple of those guys. If you don't have them, your chances of competing for the league championship probably aren't going to be there.

PETER IRWIN: Thank you, Coach.
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