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An Interview With:

OKLAHOMA STATE COACH TRAVIS FORD

PETER IRWIN: At this time we'd like to welcome Travis Ford from Oklahoma State. Welcome. If you'd like to make an opening statement and then we'll take questions from the floor.

COACH FORD: Excited to be here. Excited to be part of the Big 12 and anxious to get started. We've been going about five days and guys are working hard.

PETER IRWIN: Questions.

Q. For a long time people have said that the Big 12 needed to have a national championship won. You've been in other leagues that have had national championships. Can you just talk about what benefits the Big 12 could see from the fact that Kansas won a championship last year?

COACH FORD: I don't know if there's any question it's a huge benefit. That's something that even myself being new to the Big 12, that's something we have sold in recruiting.

When we go into recruits' homes, we sell the Big 12 as an elite basketball conference. We obviously get into the national championship that Kansas won and the success that the league has had lately. So there's no question that it just validates the strength of this league.

And we've definitely probably talked about as much about Kansas as ourselves a lot of times in our recruiting. But no question, it helps the whole league.

Q. Talk about, again, taking over the legacy of the Sutton family, what that's meant to you, what you'll take into the program and a dramatically different looking style of play for OSU?

COACH FORD: No question it means a lot to me. I've said it on several occasions that I probably would never have wanted to come to Oklahoma State if it hadn't been for what Coach Iba and Coach Sutton have done for Oklahoma State basketball. They've made it what it is today. They've built an incredible tradition at Oklahoma State. The record speaks for itself.

What I'm trying to do is try to build on that tradition. But Sean has been great to me and has really helped me through the process of taking over this program and Coach Sutton is somebody who I knew when I was playing high school basketball in Kentucky when he was coaching at Kentucky. Got the to know him a little bit through there.

But it means a lot because Oklahoma State I believe is one of the premiere basketball programs in the country, and they are a big reason for that and a big part of that.

Q. How about the style of coaching?

COACH FORD: It is different. People like to talk about it a lot when I got the job, how different the style of basketball is going to be. But I've really realized it and I think the players have really realized it the last five days how different it is.

It's funny, any time you take over a job when you take over and you come in, you work with the players the first couple of days, you can see how they were taught one thing and you might believe another thing and not necessarily right or wrong, but they've formed so many different habits, they've got a great, obviously, background and fundamentals. They're very good at it. Their approach is just a little bit different.

But one thing I've seen that these guys really understand how to practice, how hard you have to practice. But it really sets in once you get on the court with these guys and you're not talking about it anymore, it's actually putting into play how different this style of basketball really is.

Q. When you look at your guys that

you've got and plus the guys you're bringing in, how long do you think it's going to take to change any kind of mentality, just the difference of style, is that something that's going to happen in this season, mid-season, do you know?

COACH FORD: You know, we're hoping that hopefully by conference play we're starting to understand it better. Right now we're really struggling with it. There's no question that our guys, not that they can't do it, it's just a different concept. You run into different areas. So, again, we're five days in, and we're really far behind.

We're still with the very basic of trying to introduce our offense and defenses and things like that. We're a pretty thin basketball team, very thin basketball team right now. We only have 10 scholarship players that are even practicing right now.

So things are going very, very slow. As the season continues, as you mentioned, as we recruit players that fit this system a little bit, they'll catch on.

But their attitudes have been absolutely tremendous. This all started back in the summertime when we asked our players that they're going to have to be dedicated and be in the best shape of their life in order to play our style of basketball. They bought into that, on their own voluntarily they came in, worked with our strength and conditioning coach and did conditioning this summer.

Once school started, we started preseason conditioning program, I'll be honest, I've made it harder than I've ever made it just to set an example of what we're going to do. And these guys never questioned. They never asked why. They did it.

And they are in great shape. You'll see Byron Eaton today. Byron reported June 1, first day of summer school, he reported June 1 at 246 pounds. As of yesterday he was 210 pounds. These players have made the effort physically to get in shape to play our style. Now they've just got to understand the Xs and Os of it. That's going to take time.

I hope they fully understand by conference play, that may be a little soon, but the time we get to our first real game, we probably won't have 50 percent of the things we need to have in. That's how slow it seems like it's going right now.

Q. With the guards being what you have most of, and you're most experienced



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there, would you be comfortable using, say, four guards and one big guy, or you want to have two big guys for the sake of court balance or have you thought that far ahead?

COACH FORD: Oh, we've talked about it every day after practice as a staff. We talk about lineups, because we're trying to figure out how to get our best players on the court. And right now it probably will be a four-guard lineup a lot of times.

I would easily see Byron Eaton, Terrel, James Anderson, Obi, Thomas, throw Marshall in there as well. I'll tell you right now Nick Sidorakis is playing great and we've talked about figuring out how to play five of them at times. We really have. The strength of our team, there's no question, is our guard play. And there's been surprises I think with Nick Sidorakis, who I think is playing great basketball right now, little Keiton Page is coming along. I don't know how well he'll go.

We've been playing a lot of different lineups. Just yesterday in practice we experimented a lot with a lot of different lineups, having guys play positions that they haven't played before. It might be Terrel Harris at a No. 4 spot. For us it's not that big a deal really.

We'll have to figure out how to rebound out of those lineups and defend bigger people out of those lineups, and we'll come up with some different ways to camouflage it.

But right now what I'm trying to do, I keep telling my coaches I need to figure out how to get my best players on the floor. And we're going to try to figure out how to get nine good players to put on the court. Whoever they are -- we're not really concerned about it right now until we go out and recruit and get the players we need -- we're just going to figure out the best nine, figure out how to play them and in that case scenario, last four days we think it's going to be a lot of 3s taken, that's for sure, a lot.

Q. Can you comment on Terrel Harris and what, getting him back acclimated back to basketball after being reinstated?

COACH FORD: Terrel has probably been our most consistent player to this date. He's been playing terrific basketball. He was the best at preseason conditioning, won every single drill we did. It wasn't even close.

He seems to be very focused and very motivated. From what I understand, more than he ever has in his career. I think he's very

appreciative of kind of this second chance that he received and he's trying to make the most of it.

We just hope he continues with the progress he's got right now. But as far as the leadership ability and as far as basketball play, Terrel, with Byron a very close second, have been our two best. Obviously your two seniors. So that's what you want. But Terrel is playing great basketball right now.

His head seems to be in the right place. Again, he seems to be very, very focused on what he needs to do to be successful. So we hope he continues with that progress.

Q. You mentioned Byron's weight. What do you want his target weight to be?

COACH FORD: About 210. He's where it's at. For me, his weight is where it needs to be. He could even probably be 215, because Byron is big anyway.

Now it shifts more to conditioning. We had to get his weight down for him to be able to be in great condition. Now, if he can be at 215 and play for 35, 38 minutes, which we're going to need him to do then he can play at 215. But 210 right now seems to be a pretty good weight for him. He's spent so much time trying to lose the weight through us putting him on a nutrition plan, putting him on a very specialized workout plan that you can probably talk to him that he probably didn't like that motivated him to lose some weight.

Now he's shifting more towards getting his body in great condition. His cardio part of his workout. So now we just need to get him to play as hard as he can for a long extended amount of time. And that's one thing I've seen with Byron in practice, Byron likes to pick and choose at times when he plays hard.

I don't know if it necessarily has anything to do with shape right now more than it has to do with the mentality he's developed in the past as far as his weight, his not being in great shape so he would play hard for maybe four or five minutes then choose to rest, because he wasn't in great shape.

Now we've got to get him out of those habits and get him to understand he can only play one way and that's hard all the time. There cannot be any rest. Only during timeouts.

And that's a process for him. And that's something I'm staying on top of him every day in practice, the moment I see him not pushing the ball he wants to take one or two steps as far as walking and then push it, that's not how we play.



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It's from the moment he touches the ball, it's at level five. And he likes to play at level three sometimes.

Q. Recruiting, of course, is always full time. Your impressions of a new era recruiting people, Oklahoma high school basketball talent?

COACH FORD: Obviously, this senior class is very strong. I think like many states it runs in cycles from coming from Kentucky and born and raised in Kentucky and seeing -- knowing that background very well, very similar to Kentucky, that it runs in cycles.

What I've seen -- I've gone and spoke at many coaching clinics at Oklahoma and had a lot of coaches come to my practices already. We've got a coaching clinic coming up this weekend already have 200 high school coaches signed up for it, already presigned.

What I've really noticed is that the high school coaches are very, very good, they're very involved with their players and they want to get better and they're anxious to learn. And I think that has a lot to do with a lot of times the talent level and how much talent is in the state is how well they're coached.

So I've been very impressed with the coaches in this state. But you look at this year, it's probably the best senior class Oklahoma's had in probably a while. But the junior class and the sophomore classes, there's some players, probably not quite as strong as the senior class, though.

PETER IRWIN: Thank you, Coach.
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