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An interview with:

KANSAS COACH BILL SELF

PETER IRWIN: Coach Self, welcome. Your opening comments, sir.

COACH SELF: I know I can probably speak for everybody that we're all very excited to be here this morning. This early.

No, it's an exciting time. Of course, everybody's optimistic this time of year, and rightfully so. I really like our team. I think we have a chance to be a special group. We'll have to be very special because I think the league is the best since I've been in it, and I think it's the best it's going to be since the inception of the league.

We've had success in the league the last few years, and certainly it will be much more difficult to maintain that because of the quality of teams in the league.

PETER IRWIN: Okay. We'll take questions. When you ask a question, we'll get a microphone to you.

COACH SELF: I wonder if Mike Jones will ask the first question.

PETER IRWIN: He always does, Coach.

Q. Let's get this out of the way, Bill. How did the events of the recent past affect the image of your program and the chemistry of your team, if at all?

COACH SELF: I'm sorry, Mike. Would you elaborate on that. I don't know what you're talking about.

You know, for a short term, I do think it probably hit us from an image standpoint, you know, especially with the fight. But from a long-term standpoint, I don't think it's going to hurt us from an image standpoint.

I think it's one of those things that people deal with and move forward. As long as you don't

have major hits after it. You look around the country, and all programs have had something at some point in time.

Unfortunately, it was a distraction we had to deal with. Fortunately, it was a distraction we dealt with before the season started. In my mind, I can say, that was the off-season; now the season is a fresh start.

I'm not real happy with our guys for those events that took place. But if we were that undisciplined and irresponsible that selfish motives could get in the way of something so insignificant as that at that point in time, then we weren't obviously disciplined or responsible enough to win big.

So, if anything, I think we'll be more disciplined. We'll be more responsible. And if you have that combination along with good players, I think that can make for some fun.

I see it as being a positive over time, and certainly it was a negative in the short term.

Q. Coach, I know practice is just a week old. Can you talk about how your guys are developing and maybe if anybody has stood out or any -- a couple guys?

COACH SELF: Probably the guy that's been the most -- it's not really a surprise, but the most pleasant surprise, you know, from what I thought the day we were recruiting was Thomas Robinson. Thomas is a good player, and he'll impact his team immediately.

His motor is different than what we've had, so he's definitely raised the level of -- not the -- the level of effort may be the right word, from the twins. Thomas has changed practice more than anybody else.

Xavier is a guy that's going to be really good. He's kind of finding his way right now. As he gets more comfortable, he's a thinker now instead of a reactor. As he gets more comfortable, I really think the ceiling is so high for him. Those two have been the two most pleasant surprises.

Withey's been nicked up. He's hurt right now. He's going to be out a significant amount of

time with the bum knee. And Elijah Johnson's come along nicely. It's just going to take some time.

C.J. Henry has been in and out with injuries, but he's going to be a nice player too.

I'd say Thomas has been the most pleasant surprise we've had so far.

Q. Bill, when you look at the First Team Preseason All-Big 12 picks, how many of those guys do you put on an All-American list, maybe Player of the Year, National Player of the Year candidate?

COACH SELF: You know, if I recall correctly, I think there's six. Is that right? They all deserve to be on the first team. And I think you have six pros there, not just good college players. I think you have six pros.

I also think there's a couple others that may emerge to be in the top six players or seven players in our league that hadn't even been mentioned yet. So that tells you the depth -- the quality of players.

You know, I think Brackins is deserving of All-American mention without question. I think Damion James. I think he's terrific. I think he's very deserving. I think Willie Warren is as good as any guard in the country, especially a combination of strength and scoring and all those things.

And James Anderson, to me, is a guy that could get -- you know, could get 30 any night. Those four have gotten a lot of attention.

Then there's several newcomers, and you throw in R2, who I think Sherron is about as good a league guard, if not the best guard in the country. And I think Cole's the best big man.

So you could make a case that you could have guys fighting each other in the league not only for Player of the Year honors but for big-time national honors also, I agree.

Q. Bill, you think there's any kind of common denominator. There's been an influx of freshmen that make for the top ten in some lists. Just a bunch of guys. Any reason in particular why so many teams are getting so many good players?

COACH SELF: I think the staffs, the respective staffs all know what they're doing. The league's a good recruiting league too.

I also think you talk about our league, and primarily the state of Texas being the proximity of players, but schools are going outside their area also and bringing in some really good talent.

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But when Durant plays at UT, and then when Beasley plays at K-State, and Griffin plays at Oklahoma, how could young kids not be interested in going to a league which has produced, you know, the premier player in America the last three years. So that's kind of how I see it.

All those guys were the best players in the country the last three years. They may not have won all the awards, but they impacted the game more so than anybody else. So I think recent success.

You know, this may sound like we're patting ourselves on the back, but I think one thing that the Big 12 hadn't had happen prior to '08 was, as great a league as it was, they haven't been able to crown a champion. Maybe that and the combination of Durant and Beasley and Griffin and coaches that know what they're doing. Maybe that's all been a bonus because the league is going to continue to get good players.

Q. Bill, two years ago you lost some great players. Could you have imagined rebuilding this quickly?

COACH SELF: You know, recruiting is a weird deal in that sometimes you don't get what you deserve, and a lot of times you get what you don't deserve. I would have had no idea. I had no idea Cole would be what he's become.

I knew Sherron was a good player, but we went into last season thinking we had one good player, and Cole emerged to be outstanding, and then our young guys really developed as the season went on.

You know, the way we got Tyshawn Taylor was because of a coaching change. We didn't deserve that. That kind of fell in our lap.

So we've been fortunate in that regard.

You know, one thing about our guys, you know, they expect to have success, and they play at a place every day where there's pressure on them to perform. I think in a lot of ways that forces the development more rapidly with our young kids than maybe what it would be some other places just because they feel that every day that they wake up.

Q. Bill, there's been a pretty good coaching turnover the last, I guess, three or four seasons. Has the style of play in the Big 12 changed much in your time there?

COACH SELF: Yeah, it probably has. But

I think the league, if anything, it may be playing a little faster. I think having Mike at Missouri kind of helps create that image because they do play fast and really pressure.

And the thing about it is there's been a lot of turnover coaching-wise, and I think some people probably questioned whether or not the turnover -- we were losing such experienced guys, that the turnover would be able to measure up to those guys.

I think what people have shown already, in that these coaches in our league, they're getting it done. I mean, the programs, if they haven't been elevated, they're real close to being on the verge of being elevated in a short amount of time.

So I think there's been a lot of smart ADs, to be honest with you, that have made some hires that were very good and represented their university very well.

Q. Bill, from what you can tell around college basketball, how unique is Cole as a true post man?

COACH SELF: I think you have -- we've had some true post men in college, going back to Oden, although just one year, that was a true five.

But the game's getting smaller in that he knows who he is. We have a couple of true fives in our league that -- you know, Pittman obviously at Texas -- they're true fives. You don't have to pacify them in any way other than this is what your job is, this is what you do. At this time, all fives want to be fours, all fours want to be threes, all threes want to be twos, and these guys want to be fives.

I'd say it's unique. There's probably more out there than what's called attention to.

But as far as -- you know, Cole has a chance, in my opinion -- a lot depends on what kind of year he has, obviously. He could be the best true big man Kansas has had since Wilt. You start and think about the true big man. Danny wasn't a center and Raef wasn't a center. But you really look at it, that's a pretty big statement for 50-plus years that he could be the best true big guy.

I'd say not common, but certainly not totally unusual to have a guy like Cole that knows who he is. Most -- there's just not very many guys out there that do that. Most guys feel like they've got to be something else, and he doesn't feel that way at all.

Q. Back to Cole, you talked about he became something you didn't expect right away. Was it just the fact that he had -- he was able to have that playing time extensively last year.

COACH SELF: I don't think so. I think that, obviously, when you get playing time and experience, you've got a chance to get better.

You know, in recruiting, most guys -- I shouldn't say most guys, but the majority of guys that we deal with, and I'm sure the majority of guys that guys in this league deal with, they look at your roster, and they say how can I play immediately? It's a quick fix. I want to go somewhere that I can impact it right off the bat or have a chance to start.

The best thing for Cole was that didn't register with him. He went to a place that he wanted to be at first and foremost, and then style and playing time and all that was way secondary.

And the fact -- what got him better prepared more than anything was getting his butt beat every day by Sasha and Darnell and Shady. That prepared him.

Cole played eight minutes a game as a freshman, and four of the minutes don't count because they were mop-up minutes. So he probably averaged four minutes a game as a freshman and got better every day in practice and used practice as his vehicle for getting better.

And then at the end of the year, obviously, he had the one good game, and you can kind of see what it was -- what was getting ready to happen.

To me, I don't think it was last year's experience, I think it was him having the right attitude his freshman year when he went getting experience is what allowed him to be pretty good last year.

PETER IRWIN: Coach, thank you.

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