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An interview with:

KANSAS STATE COACH FRANK MARTIN

PETER IRWIN: We're now join by Coach Frank Martin from Kansas State.

Coach, welcome. Your thoughts on the upcoming season.

COACH MARTIN: Thank you. Just another exciting Big 12 year.

I think it goes unsaid just how competitive this league is year in and year out. Coaches, players, the venues that you play in.

I don't think people understand just how good the league is sometimes. When you look at some guys that could have been gone to go make some money and make big money, and yet they choose to stay in the league, that's a credit to those coaches and those relationships they've got with those kids and those universities that they choose to stay and represent that school rather than take advantage of going to make money.

It's a credit to the league and just how much fun it is.

It's not fun when it's late January and you get your brains beat in, but it's tremendous basketball. If you've got any hope at being any good, you've got to be excited about being in such a great conference as this.

Q. Frank, when you had Michael Beasley, obviously you had a phenomenal talent, but you had a lot of young players around him. This year it seems you have a better balance of youth and experience. How do you feel this team is prepared kind of comparatively to that team that got all that publicity that year with Michael?

COACH MARTIN: You know, two years ago basically everything came out of my mouth,

people thought here's this ignorant guy that doesn't know what he's talking about. That's all right. I still express myself, and I'll continue to be consistent with what I said two years ago.

There's a reason why IBM doesn't go out and hire 18-year-olds to run their company. And we had nine first-year guys. Seven of them were freshmen. And the upperclassmen that we had were playing for the second or third head coach in so many years.

And then as coaches, it was the first time that I got to implement my views, my thoughts with players. We don't get to see them in the summer. You don't really know what they're going to do day in and day out until you actually live with them.

Well, here we are a couple years later, now we've got a core of guys that have been together. Our staff's been together. They understand -- freshmen come in, and they all think they're going to take the league by storm. They don't comprehend how hard it is.

I tell our guys all the time -- I've told them since they got on campus, whether it was four years ago, three years ago, whenever -- if winning is easy, who loses? I think a lot of times young kids lose perspective of that, that everyone wants to win, and everyone's willing to sacrifice to win.

We've got some things in place now. Because of that, when you watch us practice now, you can identify who the freshmen are because they're just at a different speed, different body type, different energy level than those upperclassmen, and that's a credit to those upperclassmen that they've worked so hard and they've invested themselves in attempting to succeed.

Because of that, then we're excited our freshmen have a chance.

Q. Frank, consider your finishes of the last couple of seasons, the class you brought in with guys like Judge and McGruder in it. Can you allow yourself to take a breath and say, okay, this is my program now?

COACH MARTIN: That's for others to say.

I'm going to -- no one's going to put more pressure on me than I put on myself every year to better represent Kansas State University.

I approach my job the same way today that I did in 1985 when I was a junior varsity high school basketball coach. That doesn't change. I have a responsibility and a duty to the academic institution I work for, and I have a responsibility and a duty to those parents that trust me with their children to make them better men and better players.

And that's the way I approach my job. I truly feel that that year three is when your personality as a coach kind of starts to really permeate and become representative through your team.

Look at Missouri last year. All the coaches three years ago, everyone said this league was down. It wasn't down. We had six first year coaches. We were just in a little bit of transition. Well, you're starting to see those coaches and their teams, their personalities and their kind of play and their recruiting efforts that they've made evolve. And I think that's kind of the -- hopefully, the natural thing that will take place with us. That's for other people to determine, I guess.

Q. Rodney McGruder, highly touted along with the other freshmen, how long do you think it will take them to make an impact for your team this season?

COACH MARTIN: I don't mean to give you kind of a silly answer. I've got no idea. It's going to be a lot harder for him and Wally Judge and Nick Russell and Jordan Henriquez and Martavious Irving, our five freshmen, because we have guys in place that are older now. We don't have little kids anymore.

There's a difference there with the approach of the upperclassmen as to what they used to be two years ago.

Now, with that said, for his age, his being a freshman, never been through Big 12 or high major college basketball, has an unbelievable work ethic. Has a sense of toughness about him that excites us. And then the other part of that is you can have all that, and if you're not going to embrace leadership on a winning team or coaching, you're going to kind of level off and not improve.

But he embraces it. He loves to listen to those upperclassmen and loves to be coached and challenged. Because of that, he's going to make an impact on our team.

Now, when? I don't have a feel for that right now.

Q. What's the next step for Clemente and Pullen?

COACH MARTIN: Last year they both -- they grew tremendously as players. The part that I was the proudest of those two guys was the way that they made their drive, their personalities just kind of grow on the basketball team. I don't think there's a better indication of when we started Big 12 play and we were 0-4, those two guys which were the spirit of our team, that spirit that they have to succeed, that drive to embrace the responsibility that comes with winning and losing, they were willing to take the chance.

And because of that, it gave us a chance. When the season ended, we went out to San Diego State and didn't play well the second half and got beat. Well, they didn't go home and cry to mom, and they didn't come in and feel sorry for themselves. They went right back in that gym, and they've both made themselves stronger because of the commitment they've made in the weight room. They've made themselves better athletes.

And lastly, they lived in that gym. That's what you have to do to become a better player.

Q. Frank, what kind of progress has Curtis Kelly made since he transferred into the program? What type of player will he bring to the roster?

COACH MARTIN: Curt -- when I saw Curt play in high school, I thought he was a pro. He's one of those kids that I just thought that he was going to be a pro.

Now, he went to UConn, and the main reason why I chose to take him as a transfer was because in his recruiting process never once did he lead me to believe that Jim Calhoun or UConn had anything to do with his lack of success there. He accepted that responsibility. So that kind of told me who he is as a person. That he's not the one trying to pass the blame for his lack of success there.

And since he's been on our campus, he's been phenomenal. He's worked his tail off. He's in line to get his degree in May, which I know makes his mom extremely proud. He's lost 30 pounds.

We were just in the back, Jacob Pullen and Merriewether and myself, we're laughing because when we go into strength camp the coach

takes pictures of ourselves with boxers on. Every year he takes another picture.

When I saw his picture about a week ago, I literally had a tough time eating later on in the day. But now he's transformed his body. He looks like a high major athlete again, and he's playing that way. He's been tremendous.

He gives us a presence at the rim, both on offense and defense, and he's been great.

Q. How much potential exists within those guys in the front-court to possibly take some of the scoring load off of Denny and off of Jacob?

COACH MARTIN: That's what we're hoping. Last year we were not very athletic on the front line. Darren Kent, bless his soul, worked his tail off and gave us a chance to win. Luis Colon will be a fourth-year guy this year. Worked his tail off and gave us a chance to win. And he's going to be a better player this year.

Jamar was a freshman. Jamar was 20 pounds lighter then than he was now. He'd do certain good things against certain people, and he'd bounce off other people. It wasn't that he wasn't trying. He just wasn't physically ready to do it. Now we've got more guys.

Wally is every bit of 6'9", 242 pounds. Curtis is 6'9" with a 7'2" wingspan and every bit of 238, 240 pounds. They're both as athletic as you're going to find.

Jordan Henriquez has a 7'6" wingspan, and he's a lot better than I anticipated him being this early in the year. Jamar is 20 pounds heavier. Because of that depth on the front line, now we're being able to kind of move Jamar over to the three a little bit.

So it's fun when you throw all those guys in there together. You just have more to choose from. You create a certain competitiveness within your team on a day-in-and-day-out basis that you need to have so you can be good.

PETER IRWIN: Okay, Coach. Best of luck to you.

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