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An interview with:

TEXAS TECH COACH PAT KNIGHT

THE MODERATOR: We are now joined by Pat Knight from Texas Tech University.

Coach, welcome. Your thoughts about the upcoming season.

COACH KNIGHT: You know, we're just looking -- I don't get into all the coach's speak. I just kind of like to open it up for questions so you guys get your answers.

Of course I'm excited about the season, and, you know, I think we'll be more talented and more athletic. But we'll see what happens.

So let's just open it up for questions to make sure I'm here for you guys so you guys get everything that you need.

Q. Pat, I know you're pumped about your newcomers. Talk about them. And from top to bottom, is this the most talented team that you've had at Tech since you've been on campus?

COACH KNIGHT: Yes, obviously. I think it is just from an athletic standpoint. The talent standpoint.

I really believe that to compete at this level, one of the top conferences, you've got to be nine or ten deep. We're there now, you know.

I think we'll have a problem now just trying to figure out who our top nine or ten are because we have probably 12 we can choose from, I think, and at least compete at this level of the Big 12.

We're just excited. It's just something -- we've had talented teams in the past, but I just think from an athletic standpoint, this is probably the most athletic we've been in a long time, or really since I've been there as an assistant or a head coach since last year.

You know, we're always going to be half junior college when I recruit. It's just Texas Tech is just a really good situation to recruit junior college and high school kids. The three junior college

kids -- Reese, Tairu, and Jenkins -- we brought them in immediately to upgrade our talent and athleticism, and I think you'll see them in the starting lineup a lot this year or being one of the first to come off the bench.

So really those three kids are going to make a huge impact for us just from an athletic and talent standpoint that we didn't have last year.

You know, I think they'll be having those kids added to the mix with good players like Roberson and Singletary, now you have five guys that are actually a threat with the ball. But we can actually play defense now. We can get back to playing man to man.

I really don't like to play zone. People were on my ass last year about giving up so many points like I didn't work on defense. We worked on defense two hours a day. We just didn't have the personnel to guard anybody.

We had guys, if you got by one, the next guy was probably just as easy or easier to get by. It wasn't from a lack of my staff and I not trying to coach it.

To be honest, there's no secret to coaching. You've got to have the personnel. I just didn't think we had it last year. Now we have it.

Now we're able to be in the pass lane. We're able to be on help side. Web guard the ball.

For me, it's kind of nice. I can get back to playing man-to-man defense the way I was taught, the way I played, and the way I taught -- was taught as an assistant.

So, overall, just from that standpoint, I just think everything's going to be better for us.

Q. Coach, can you talk about Mike Singletary. The last half of the season last year, he really started to come along. You can give us your comments on him this season.

COACH KNIGHT: I look for good things from him and John Roberson and D'wain Roberts. Those three kids came in together. It was kind of a highly touted class.

We just haven't had the support for them overall to help them out, help them along. And

now we have that.

You know, Mike did a good thing for me last year. I brought him in before the season. We were only four or five deep, and I didn't want to get in a situation where I started my five best players, and I had no bench whatsoever. So I actually brought him in and asked him if he'd mind coming off the bench because he's really the one kid I knew from a personality standpoint wouldn't pout, I wouldn't be hearing from his parents, why is my son not -- you know, all the BS that goes with it.

He was just concerned that he'd get his playing time, and he really took one for the team. I think it showed. He ended up really well the last couple months of the season, especially the A&M game.

But now this year we are deep enough. I think, you know, he's going to be in the starting lineup. But the best thing for him is just the upgrade of talent. It's not just from us, hopefully from a one-loss situation, but now every day the starters are going against Big 12 caliber players. Or the caliber of Kansas or Texas? Maybe not. But at least Big 12 caliber players.

Is this going to make Mike better? I think, if you ask Mike, his first week of practice for him and John, it's probably a little tougher than it's been the last two years. It's been really easy for them. We just didn't have the talent to push them.

I hope really good things for those three kids -- D'waly, John, and Mike. They came to Tech, and their first two years didn't go as well as we wanted, but I think they can finish up well the last two years because of the talent we've added and the way they've improved. I look for good things not just from Mike, but from those three kids to finish up their careers.

Q. Pat, what's Mike done? I understand he's lost about 20 pounds. What's he done to improve his physicality?

COACH KNIGHT: You'd have to ask my strength coach, Chris Braden. I've got a great strength coach. Actually, Rick Barnes recommended him, and we hired him, which is kind of strange.

He was the number two guy in charge of men's basketball at Texas. Actually, it started with my dad. My dad was tired of seeing other people's guards bigger than our post guys. So I finally had to explain to him that a lot has to do with weightlifting, and that's come into play a lot in basketball, not just football anymore.

So we actually called Rick because his guys -- Todd's known around the world as the number one guy in basketball for strength and conditioning. And it was funny, we thought, being rivals, even though we're good friends, he'd probably tell us about some football guy down at Auburn or LSU. He actually told us we needed to hire his second guy in charge.

We actually played him as a Monday. We're going to play him on Wednesday there. He actually set up the meeting at the shootaround. We met with Chris Braden and hired him right there on the spot. It all has to do with Chris.

Chris is really good at seeing guys. He thought Mike wasn't playing athletically enough, because Mike's an undersized post player in a way. And we thought he needed to become quicker, being able to jump better, play more athletically.

So Chris, it's all him. You know, I just give him ideas how I'd like to my guys to play, and then he oversees it and then gets the job done. So he's really taken -- he took 15 or 20 pounds off of Mike, and now Mike's able to drive more, get by guys. He actually dunks in the half-court situation.

I think it's helped his rebounding. But is this really -- I can't really take any of the credit. I just thought he needed to lose some weight, but my strength guy, Chris Braden, did all the work.

Q. Coach, you talked a little bit about how important it is to have good personnel already, but is it more important as a coach to adapt to that personnel or adapt them to your coaching style?

COACH KNIGHT: You can't win without personnel. You can have bad personnel, and you can do all you want from a coaching standpoint, and you can't win.

You need to get your personnel that fits your style of play. And when you inherit a program, it's tough. Even in -- we tried to adapt. You know, that's why you saw us play so many junk defenses, zones, trapping, and trying different things.

But, you know, from a standpoint as a coach, you've got to get your personnel. That's what we did from a recruiting standpoint. That's why you'll see this year it's more of the personnel that I want.

But, you know, maybe there's a few guys out there that they can win with not very good

players, but I really don't see it. Look at all the -- look at what's going on in baseball right now in the Major Leagues. Everyone talks about how loose the Yankees are this year. Look at their talent level. Look at the talent level of the Dodgers, the Phillies.

You can talk about, yeah, this guy's a great coach, but all the great coaches have got great players. I know one guy that maybe could win with some bad talent, maybe my dad, but I'm smart enough to know I can't. I've got to get better players. That's what I think we've done this last year from a recruiting standpoint.

I'm not going to sit here -- I honestly don't believe that anymore. You have to have the talent. Look at the teams that went to the Final Four. None of those teams were underdogs or guys that did not have talent.

So nowadays, you have to have talent. I mean, I know you've got guys out there that like to write books and sell videotapes like they're these great coaches and everything and did a lot with a lot less. That's all BS. You've got to have talent.

Tony La Russa's book is out. It's a great book. You need to read it if you want to know about coaching. He summed it up. You have to have players to win. I don't care what sport it is.

Q. You talked about your strength coach and getting guys physically ready to play, kind of physical basketball. That seems to be the way the game is now. How much has that changed since maybe going back to when you were a player, that emphasis on weights and playing physical?

COACH KNIGHT: Well, one of the big differences really is how you guard the post or block out. You know, when I played, you'd work on different pivots to block out, front pivot, reverse pivot. You'd even work on pivoting how you guard the post.

But I think guys are so strong and so quick now, really you just tell them, from a rebound sense, you make contact. Just make contact and go get the ball.

I mean, guys are so big and athletic now, you can't sit there worrying about, well, I'm going to pivot this way or that way to block a guy out because he's right by you, or he's got you shoved underneath the basket.

So I think it's taken some of the technique out of a lot of areas where I was growing up -- I mean, we worked one on nobody, on how to pivot to block out. We'd work on how to pivot to guard

the post. And so a lot of that's gone out of the way.

You know, I remember at camp, learning all these different pivots. Now that's kind of going out of the way. You've got guys that can outrun you. So you just get down the floor.

They used to teach you how to turn and pivot to get down the floor. I think a lot of that stuff's going out of the way.

The so-called fundamentals, when it comes to footwork, is going out the door just because guys are so powerful and strong. Now you've just got to -- it's more brute force on a defensive situation.

Q. Roberson was a 200, 100 assist guy last year, which on that team is pretty remarkable. Could those numbers rise even because he's got better places to throw the ball?

COACH KNIGHT: I think so, but I also think his assists may be down because I like to get the ball out of his hands. Because he's such a good shooter off the screen.

I felt bad. It wasn't his fault. I just didn't have anybody else to handle the ball. But I think honestly I'm in a situation now where I'll even let my center bring the ball up.

I think I'm going to have five guys, or at least four guys, whoever gets the rebound goes. It would be better to have him coming off the flare screens or coming off down screens.

His assists may be down a little bit this year, but it has nothing to do because of him; it's just because we have better players, and I can get him more involved in our entries and motion and coming off the screens instead of having to handle the ball all the time.

Then I think his defense improves. It wears you out bringing the ball up all game long, especially in the Big 12. You know, when teams are starting to pick you up full court. And so I think this year maybe his assist numbers could be down, but that's just because I think his overall game is going to get better.

I'm trying to get the ball out of his hands. I want him to be more well rounded the next two years. Because he really is. People haven't seen what a good player he is cutting and moving off of screens.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, best of luck to you. Have a great season.

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