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An interview with:

COACH BO PELINI NEBRASKA CORNHUSKERS

PETER IRWIN: We're joined by Coach Pelini. We'll take questions.

COACH PELINI: Hi, it's great to be here. We set on out for the start of the season, and this was our goal to win the Big 12 North, and to be in this game, and we find ourselves there. We have a great group of young men. I'm proud of them, proud of the effort they've put in. We've come a long way in a fairly short period of time. We're excited to play and to be in this game and be playing a tremendous Texas football team. We know it's going to be a great challenge, and we look forward to that challenge.

PETER IRWIN: Thank you. We'll take questions for Coach Pelini.

Q. After the Iowa State loss, what did you guys do after that game for the rest of the season? Now you've won five in a row since that game.

COACH PELINI: Honestly, we don't do much different. I think that's one of the reasons why we're able to fight through times like that is we have a very consistent approach in how we go about it. We're very black and white as a football staff and as a team.

I believe a game like that it's really easy to point the finger and to, you know, let things divide you at that point and look for excuses. We don't approach it that way. We took responsibility for what happened in that game, you know, the eight turnovers and the five inside the Iowa State five. But we caused that, and we didn't execute our football. We didn't do the things necessary to win that game. We took responsibility for it, and we let it make us better in the end.

You know, we came together, and we fought through that time and now we find ourselves with an opportunity to win the Big 12.

Q. Can you talk about the approach you take with the group? Do you talk about this as strictly a chance to win the conference title or also about the chance to play spoiler?

COACH PELINI: It's about us. It's not about playing spoiler. It's about us having the opportunity to achieve our goal, which is coming into this season was to win the Big 12. You know, the spoiler aspect of it in our mind, it's not about Texas. It's about Nebraska. You know, if that happens, so be it. There are going to be a lot of things that happen one way or the other. And everyone's going to have their different motivations. Ours is strictly motivated by what it does for us and our football team.

Q. I'm wondering if you can talk about the importance of your team being able to run downhill against a Texas team that's ranked number one in rush defense?

COACH PELINI: We feel like we're in our best when we're running downhill. We feel that's something we do well, and we're going to need to do in the game tomorrow night. But we also feel like we're going to need a good mix to move the football on this team. You can't be one dimensional ever.

We know they're a good defense. We know they're very capable. You know, their stats and the things they've been able to do defensively, you know stacks up, speaks for itself as far as what we're facing.

But it's 60 minutes. We need to execute our football and I'll execute them on both sides of the football. We know -- I believe our offense, I like our plan. I like who is executing it, and we look forward to it.

Q. Can you please talk about Ndamukong Suh, the type of season he's had, and the importance of Suh for this program in these last two years that you've been with Nebraska?

COACH PELINI: Well, you know, I'm proud of Suh, and, you know, how he's developed since I've been here. He was a talent, I believe, when we took over here. And now I believe he's turned that talent and making himself, you know, a formidable presence on the field, the football field.

He's a heck of a player, obviously, he's getting the attention that he deserves and winning the accolades that he's earned. He's been a big part of our defense, but he's only one of 11. He's a big part in it, but we have a lot of guys that have played tremendous football around him also. And I think it's obvious. We take a team first approach, and it's a big part of the aspect on the defensive side.

I believe he makes the guys around him better. And I think it's been great. I'm tremendously proud of him because he made a tough decision to come back. And he turned down a lot of money and a year ago. And it's nice to see it worked out for him. It turned out to be the right choice, and it's obvious what he's gained from it.

You know, he came back with a purpose, and I believe he's fulfilled that purpose. And tomorrow night we'll go a long way to add to hopefully what he came back to accomplish.

Q. You obviously made it into the conference title game, so you've achieved one goal. But do you ever without trying to look back too much kind of get these players perspective of what you've done and how far you can still go? Because if you look ahead at your record. Do you try to give them that perspective without looking back too much?

COACH PELINI: Not really. I choose to live in the present. You know, it doesn't really do you any good. I'm disappointed and I think our football team is. If you look back that we're not sitting here 11-1. Because I believe we had an opportunity to win them all. It didn't workout. That's something that we didn't accomplish. We lost some football games we let get away because ever what we did. Because we didn't accomplish. We didn't execute and do what was necessary to win the football games.

But that doesn't matter right now. At this point it's a matter of where you are, what you have to accomplish, and regardless, you know, my approach is never as good as you think, and never as bad as you think either. You're going to have to keep progressing.

Whether we were sitting here 12-0, I know this, that I would still take the approach with our

football team that we could be a lot better. There's not a team out there that's fulfilled their potential, and there's not a football player on neither one of these football teams that's fulfilled its potential yet. If you stay in the process, and do what you do each day, you've got to stay with more. That's the approach we take, and it's a very consistent one. It's not about looking back and wondering what if. It's about taking care of the here and now. That's very consistent approach. That's how we approach it.

Q. Jordan Shipley has been their go-to guy all year. And obviously, teams try to take him out and he still keeps catching passes. What will you try to do to slow him down tomorrow?

COACH PELINI: Well, you know, we feel we're pretty talented with the guys that are going to be covering Jordan. He's a heck of a football player. And Colt McCoy, he understands that also, and he goes to him, and rightfully so.

But, you know, they have a lot of talented guys on their offense. And if you spend too much time just, you know, dedicating your coverage and things to Shipley, then there are a lot of other guys that can hurt you. Believe me, we'll give him his due respect and we'll know where he is. We'll give him attention.

But you can't just go too far outside of your scheme to take care of one guy, because that's when you really get hurt. And that's really not the approach that we take.

Q. You guys are not like most teams who go through walk-throughs on the road, typically, and I'm just curious why you choose that?

COACH PELINI: Why we're coming here today?

Q. Usually you don't go through, is it typically you don't go through walk-throughs just to familiarize?

COACH PELINI: No, we do most of our work at home. In fact, this morning, we did our work at home. And why we don't go on the road, I have never really, you know, the last I saw every field is basically 120 yards long I've never understood the idea.

I've been around it where you walk in, and walk around the stadium, and take your shoes off

and walk around in your bare feet. I've never understood that ritual, but I think our guys would rather get over to the hotel and relax, and get their minds ready for the next day. Just a personal preference, I guess.

We're going to bring our football team over here today because this is a little different environment. We just wanted to make sure they saw it before we get over here on Saturday.

Q. Roy Helu Jr., your thoughts about his playing and what he means to your offense?

COACH PELINI: Roy's had a really good year for us. He's a tremendous player. He's really fought through tough times this year. As good a year as he's had. He's been nicked up, he's been banged up, but he keeps, you know, he keeps answering the bell. I think he's had a great year for us. And I think he's looking forward to this opportunity against playing against a tremendous Texas defense.

One thing about Roy is he steps up when the lights are shining the brightest. He always has. I believe he'll play a tremendous game tomorrow night.

Q. You have arguably one of the best special teams weapons in the country in Alex Henery, how big can he be in this game?

COACH PELINI: Well, you know, Alex is a tremendous weapon, both as a kicker and a punter. He obviously the threat that he's become, and he's really taken on the punting duties and done a great job this year. When you have a guy back there returning kicks and returning punts like Shipley, and some of the talent they have around them, you know, you need to win that aspect of the game. We need to be good on special teams and we need to take care of our business here, and Alex will be a big part of that. He's always risen to the occasion.

He seems like he comes up with the biggest kicks when we need him the most. That's just who he is. And I believe he'll answer the bell tomorrow night.

Q. I know you said this game was about you guys, but there's a team 15 to 20 minutes from here, TCU, that's really pulling for you guys tomorrow. I think they'd see it as a big payback for 2001. Are you familiar with that? What is your thought on TCU and what they've done?

COACH PELINI: They've had a tremendous year. I know Coach Patterson and what they've accomplished. They've got to be proud of sitting there undefeated. I can say this, we're not playing this game for them. But I'll gladly shake his hand if we're able to help him out.

But what happened in 2001, I wasn't even in college football at that time, so I'm not real familiar with that one there. But obviously, TCU deserves a lot of respect for what they've been able to accomplish this year.

Q. Could you talk about Phillip Dillard, and what he did to turn it around for himself, and what he's meant to your team since then?

COACH PELINI: Phil's a guy who was a full-time player last year, probably, you know, if you asked him, he didn't have the best year. He had a long way to go, and he had a lot to learn. Kind of went through some difficult times earlier in the year. He needed a little bit of a wake-up call.

He's a tremendous character guy. He's a high-energy guy. I think, you know, he went through that period of time where he didn't know what he didn't know. And in the event we kind of moved him down. We started looking at some other guys. Eventually I told him, if you persevere through this time and you get your opportunity, we'll see what you do with it.

Right now I'm as proud of him as any guy I've ever coached. He's had a tremendous year from the time we've inserted him back into the lineup. He's happy, he's been a tremendous leader on our team. He's been very productive. He's come a long way as a football player.

I've been through this a lot of times with a lot of different players. And a lot of guys if they went through some of the things that the events that Phil went through, they would have shut it down. He didn't choose to do that. It shows the type of character that the young man has.

Q. Could you talk about facing Colt and the challenge he presents?

COACH PELINI: Colt's a tremendous football player. He's a multi-talented guy that you'll face. He can run and throw and do it with the best of them. Obviously he has great character and leadership ability. You watch him on film, and he's smart, he knows where to go with the football. He's very decisive. He's -- I mean, you're talking about a guy who has done about everything you

can do as a college football player and obviously it's going to be a tremendous challenge.

You put him in this type of offense with the type of talent he has around him, and obviously they're a very well-coached football team. So it's going to be a heck of a challenge for us. Our defense is looking forward to that challenge.

PETER IRWIN: Best of luck to you tomorrow night.

COACH PELINI: Thank you.

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