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An interview with:

COACH TRAVIS FORD

PETER IRWIN: Coach Travis Ford, Oklahoma State. Coach, welcome.

COACH FORD: Good, thank you. Just seems like we were here just the other day. Great to be back. How quickly time flies.

Little bit about our basketball team. We're a very inexperienced basketball team. Not necessarily young, even though we do have probably over 65% of our team are sophomores or below, freshmen or sophomore, but very inexperienced. Even our upperclassmen are inexperienced. Our most experienced player is Keiton Page, a junior, as far as playing the most minutes. This is a team that needs to earn its stripes very, very quickly. I think our schedule will do that for us.

We have got a very, very tough early schedule when we go to Anaheim in the Phillips 66 tournament with a very tough field and with some other games, Alabama, Stanford, Tulsa. This team is going to be tested, but it needs it.

Our won-loss record may not be great, but it needs the tough games early to get these guys experience. Because our basketball team, we lose quite a bit of our scoring when you lose almost 40 points a game, close to 40 points a game when you lose James Anderson and Obi Muonelo, the top two scorers. I think we can replace the score and I think we can do it by committee.

We don't have a 20-point game scorer on our basketball team. We have some guys that get 20 points a game. Whether it be Marshall Moses, we have some guys who can put the ball in the hole. We don't have that one guy we have been able to rely on in the past couple years, kind of that X factor when things aren't going well, can just create his own shot. But I think by committee we can make up for some of those points that we have lost.

But the inexperience is a concern for our basketball team. We have some guys who we're expecting to play a lot of minutes, make an impact that haven't played at this level. And that's a concern. You look at some of the newcomers who are going to make an impact. JP Olukemi, Darrell Williams inside, these are two guys who will play a lot of minutes for us who we are trying to get them at this point to understand how difficult it is to play at this level, how hard you have to play every day.

I think we have improved our team physically in a lot of areas. We have improved our team athletically. It is the most athletic team I have had since I have been at Oklahoma State.

We should be deeper and have more depth, if everybody stays healthy and if everybody does what they are supposed to be doing and everybody is ready to go. We should have more depth. But, again, it is just -- it is inexperience. And the physical part we have, it is the mental part, the mental comes from inexperience. Going through a week of practice already, we just got to get mentally stronger. Some of these guys don't understand how hard you have to play at this level and how difficult it is. So that's been a challenge for us so far.

Luckily we have got returners like Keiton Page who has great experience, Marshall Moses who is a senior but has been inconsistent throughout his career. And we need him to be more consistent if we're going to have a chance to be successful.

Thus far, through the preseason and through the first week of practice, Marshall seems to be very motivated to have a great senior year. We just hope it can continue and he stays focused because Marshall can really make an impact in this league and within our schedule.

Nick Sidorakis is somebody who hasn't played a lot of minutes in his career at Oklahoma State, but is playing great basketball right now and brings us great leadership within our basketball team. And, again, another senior, Matt Pilgrim, who is more or less an inexperienced player, we need him to stay focused and be ready to go.

So, you know, again, a team that is going to rely a lot on inexperienced players, but the backbone is going to be from some seniors that you will see here today, Keiton Page, Marshall Moses, and Nick Sidorakis. We just have to grow up very quickly.

I like the makeup of our team. Our young kids have been extremely impressive in practice this week. It is one of the big bright spots. Our young kids have been very impressive. I am very excited about that.

I think we just need to rely a little bit more on our athleticism this year. I think one of the strengths of this basketball team should be its defense. We should be a much better defensive team than we have been the past couple years, especially when you looked at the statistical categories, we should be able to improve hopefully in some of those stats to make us a better basketball team.

Q. Given the situation that you face, how much does it help having two, three guys who can handle the ball out front to help you make those steps?

COACH FORD: Well, you know, it helps that, you know, Fred Gulley got some valuable experience last year as a freshman, when Ray Penn went down, Fred Gulley became the point guard. Ray Penn who started the first 15, 16, 17 games, whatever it was, had a decent beginning of his freshmen year. But we are still looking for a lot more from those two guys who will be running the point guard position for us.

I like that they are not freshmen anymore, but we are still looking for consistency. We are still looking for better leadership. And plain and simple, as I told them, we are looking for them to be point guards, to be true point guards.

Our assist-to-turnover ratio has got to improve. It is a must. It will be -- if -- from Fred Gulley, from Ray Penn, if our assist-to-turnover ratio doesn't improve from last year, it is just unacceptable. It has got to improve for this team to be any good. Why is that? Because we don't have that one guy who can go get his own shot, like James Anderson could. James Anderson is not there anymore. So James camouflaged a lot of our weaknesses as a basketball team because he could go create his own shot and get some shots off and it camouflaged some of our struggles at the point guard spot at times last year.

So with that said, though, even though they are experienced and they are not freshmen

anymore, we need more. That's a big position for us. That's going to be a huge focal point when you look at that position is going to tell a lot about our success as a basketball team.

Right now Ray Penn, Fred Gulley are going at it in practice. If we had to play tomorrow, I don't know which one I would start. I would probably just flip a coin at this point. It may even be Fred Gulley because he started last year and make Ray Penn earn it back maybe.

We experimented with Keiton up there a little bit and that's still not out of the picture. It is still not out of the picture. Probably somebody who understands where everybody needs to be and understands the play, Keiton is probably the best at that. Also we don't want to take Keiton away from the past two years and had success in the two-guard spot. We don't want to distract. We just need more from that point guard position. We need some production, some high assists, low turnovers and a little bit more scoring from Ray Penn.

Fred Gulley won't give us that. Ray might give us that because he has the ability to put the ball in the hole.

Q. You referred to Marshall as a guy who has been inconsistent. What's your faith that he will be consistent as a senior?

COACH FORD: He has got to earn that faith, and he is doing a great job of it thus far. He is here today which is a good step. I wouldn't have brought him today if I didn't have trust in him. We have talked a lot about where he was the second half of his sophomore year. We talked a lot about last year and how much better we want him to be. He totally understands that. He grasped it. Marshall is a smart, young man.

It is all about consistency. Marshall is somebody who plays with incredible emotions. He's got quite a personality. He just at times has to channel those emotions. I love his attitude. I love his personality. We just need him to, again, stay focused on having a great senior year, stay focused on being a great example for the younger kids in our program because we have some really talented, good kids, younger kids who can be influenced by him in a very positive manner.

Because thus far through preseason workouts, through individual workouts, through conditioning, through the first week of practice, Marshall has been probably the leader as far as

work ethic, which is a good start. I mean, he sets the tone, energy-wise, in our practice. He sets the tone just how hard he has been working.

Now, can he continue to do it every day? Marshall is going to be judged on every day. Every day is a new day for him. Just because he has done well the past week and past two, three months, he's got to show that he can do it on a consistent basis. But thus far I'm very proud of Marshall and we hope it continues.

Q. You talk about Marshall being a leader in the preseason and stuff. Do you see him being a leader on the court? Where do you see him falling there?

COACH FORD: Yeah, I do see him being a leader on the court because of his physical presence and his emotions and his personality, can be a great leader as long as it is channelled in the right way. And we've seen a little bit of both. We've seen a little bit of both where he has been an incredible positive influence to our basketball team and been a leader for us, even as an inexperienced sophomore at the end of his year, he hadn't played many minutes, but he was quite a physical leader when we made our -- when we went to the NCAA tournament my first year at Oklahoma State, he had a lot to do with that.

Where he didn't get any minutes, none at the beginning of the year and then towards beginning of January, end of December when he started understanding his role and understanding what made him successful, he grew up very, very quickly and was obviously a very positive influence to that basketball team. Last year he was just inconsistent. Very inconsistent and had some distractions that, you know, kept him from being his best, some distractions that didn't allow him to be the leader we wanted him to be. Hopefully he has learned from all those experiences, the good and the bad.

Now he is a senior. There is no -- so we told him there is no making up for it. At this point in time, whatever he does this year is what he is going to be remembered for. That's kind of the approach we've taken with him. Hopefully he has grown up. He can definitely be a leader on the court because he has the physical presence, he has the personality. Hopefully he will be playing the minutes that can cause him to be a leader. And he will get those minutes as long as he is focused and doing the right things and there is no distractions.

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