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An interview with:

COACH PAT KNIGHT

PETER IRWIN: We are now joined by Coach Pat Knight from Texas Tech University. Coach, welcome. And your thoughts.

COACH KNIGHT: You know, my thoughts for this season, obviously it is going to be the best team I've had, being my third year at Texas Tech. I really think it could be one of the better teams that we've had in the ten years since I have been there.

Six seniors, three of them this will be their fourth year, and actually have a year underneath my father. I couldn't ask for a better situation as a coach, just having leadership like that. It is going to be the most athletic team we've had since we have been there in ten years.

I expect a lot out of this team. I know this being my third year, to me this is either get an extension or get fired type of year. It doesn't matter if you are a coach or a business. Any time you are the head of something and it is your third year, you know, by that time you have the type of players you need, they know what you want from an offensive and defensive situation, it is a big year for me also.

We are looking forward to it. I couldn't ask for a better group of kids, especially having three of my seniors, John, Mike, and D'walyn, who I really consider all-conference caliber kids, we really have everything we need right now to be successful.

Q. Pat, I know a big deal was made last year of your sideline attire. I'm wondering if you bought the jacket and button-down shirts for today's event?

COACH KNIGHT: Coach Tuberville took me out and wanted to work on my dress. So he took me shopping for some suits so I could look a little more appropriate at the press conferences.

Q. Can you talk about the difference when you have D'walyn on the court and when you don't?

COACH KNIGHT: It is a big difference. As a coach, I don't like to talk about injuries, but I thought it really affected us last year when he couldn't play 100%. He played a lot of games pretty much at 50%.

He is a kid that, I think, from a defensive standpoint when it comes to rebounding or shot blocking has as much effect as a kid like Udoh did last year for Baylor. His huge force last year really not to have him for a lot of the Big 12.

I'm excited this year. We figured out really what's wrong with his foot, and this is the most pain-free he has been. He feels really good right now. I will have to watch it and make sure from a practice situation, if he needs rest -- because I really think that he's a key that nobody talks about. He is really important to our team, does a lot of things that don't show up on the stat sheet or people, you know, people really don't talk about from a news standpoint.

If we can keep him healthy, a lot of good things can happen.

Q. Can you talk about Robert Lewandowski and how he has progressed and what do you expect out of him this year?

COACH KNIGHT: He digressed last year, which was disappointing. He had a great freshman year, started for us almost every game and averaged six points. After his freshman year, you know, we really thought, we have a kid that has a chance to be all-conference when it is all said and done.

But then last year -- and I really think it was mental. He had the sophomore slump and didn't play a whole lot for us last year. If you look at his numbers, they were down. I think he might have averaged maybe one or two points.

But the kid is coachable. You can get on him and he has really turned things around. I think we figured out some things that were wrong with him from a mental standpoint that were bothering

him, and he has had a great spring. Right now is my starting center. And I look for him to carry on what he did his freshman year.

If we get the Robert we had freshman year, we will have an inside presence. He has a Big 12 body, 6' 10", 250, really nice soft touch, soft hands but he's a tough kid. And he knows it. It is not like I had to bring him in.

He came and talked to me about why he thought he didn't play as well as he did his freshman year. It is not a kid that doesn't know what's going on.

He is probably the smartest player I have on my team, not just from basketball, but book-wise. To me, I always kid him, he needs to take basketball serious because he is always going to have a job. He will end up being like Bill Bradley. He makes him -- being like a Senator. He is that type of kid. I would like him to be tougher and meaner on the court and get something out of basketball before he decides to make a better living than I am.

And so -- but I expect good things. I think we got him turned around. You expect that. A kid's sophomore year playing in the Big 12, especially a big kid that gets beat on, that's probably the toughest position in our league, being a big guy. He just had a down year. I really expect him to get back to where he was his junior and senior -- for his junior and senior year like he was as a freshman.

Q. Pat, you mentioned everything you like about this team. I guess what's your biggest concern right now going into this season? Where would you like to see this team improve or where do you think it has to improve?

COACH KNIGHT: Defense. We have been last in the league in defense the last two years and rebounding, even though we improved last year, my second year, it wasn't enough. You have got to defend. You know, it is really ball pressure. We call it the blue line. We tape off a blue line down the middle of the court, so we got to be helped by the blue line. If someone drives, there is three or four bodies there, make a wall, have them kick it out and rebound it.

So if we defend, I think really good things can happen. If we don't, it is going to be a long year. In the preseason, you can get some shootouts with some teams and blow them out. But that's just because of the caliber of team you're playing in the preseason.

You can't do that in the Big 12. You got to realize as a player, you know, it is kind of like -- if we get in a shootout with Kansas or Texas, it is like the O.K. Corral, we won't be Wyatt Earp. We will be the guys killed on the other end.

We have got to get stops. And we can score. The great thing about the motion offense, you can run it badly and still score enough points. You have got to get spots. But you also need game management and realize when you need to slow it down and not take a bad shot.

So defense we have been preaching since the spring and hopefully, you know, we will see if these guys get it. Actually, the media has helped me a little bit, the magazines that come out have talked about if we do defend, you know, we have a chance to really move up in this league. So that helped me because they get tired of me saying it. So they all read those magazines. So for once, I can say, you know, you never heard this -- probably never thought you would hear this from a Knight, but the media has actually helped me in my coaching this year.

It will come down to defense. If we defend, I think we are going to be okay.

Q. John Roberson has played such a big role for you guys the last three years, but nationally he is in the top 50 list. And in the preseason he doesn't appear on there despite his great statistics. How does he rank or compare, I guess, to other guards or good guards around the country in your opinion?

COACH KNIGHT: I think he has got to be in the top ten guards. I think Mike Singletary has to be in the top ten small 4s. That's also our fault. If we would have had a little better year last year -- really, the three-week stretch killed us when we lost seven in a row. That's actually the time when the voting came out for the All Big 12 team. If we win a couple more of those games, I think you see John and Mike's name on more ballots and they are all-conference.

To me, they are all-conference-caliber players. And I think other coaches would tell you that who play against them. It is just from our standpoint, it was just bad that we had that three-week period. But I think people are going to get to know them this year. It is their senior year.

From a coaching standpoint, I think in the nation, they have got to be listed in the top 10 or top 15 in the nation. I just -- not our league, but

the nation. We get overlooked sometimes. It is tough, you know, our location, we have one newspaper. And so I think it would be a little different maybe if we were in the Dallas area because it is all media. It is all hype.

A lot of these kids, there are a lot of kids on that list that can play. But they're in a situation at a school that's a glamour school when it comes to the media. But it is something we have to overcome. If we have a good season, they will get noticed.

So I talk to them about that, don't worry about that. If you win, people will take notice of you.

Q. What kind of sanctions are you going to face from your dad for giving the media credit for what you did?

COACH KNIGHT: He's one of you guys now, and so, I mean, he can't say anything. That's what he's become. So it is in my family now, so he should be happy. I'm actually kind of giving him a compliment.

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