

October 19, 2011



An Interview With:

OKLAHOMA STATE COACH KURT BUDKE

THE MODERATOR: We're now joined by Coach Budke from Oklahoma State. Your opening comments?

COACH BUDKE: Well, just like everybody else, you know, we've got about a week under our belt now. A little more. And very excited about our group. We returned 80 percent of our scoring, 81 percent of our rebounding.

Last year at this time we got up here and we couldn't speak much about returners and what we were going to be like.

But I like the leadership we have back. I like the five freshmen we brought in. We're still young. We're still one of the youngest teams. We've got ten freshman and sophomores, three juniors, so we're still pretty young.

But really like where we're at in practice right now. I think we're way ahead of where we were last year at this point in time. And we're excited to play.

I think this could be one of the deepest teams we've had. So it's just a matter of getting out in the games, getting a little experience and preparing for the best conference in America.

THE MODERATOR: Questions?

Q. Coach, this is not your first rodeo. Have you ever had a team with no seniors before?

COACH BUDKE: You know, I think this probably is the first time. You know, when I was in junior college I never had a senior. So I guess I've had that problem before.

But, no, you know -- but it's exciting because we at least returned experience. Tiffany Bias started 31 games last year. Vicky McIntyre came on. Toni Young led the Big 12 in double-doubles last year, so at least we have

experience. They don't have to be senior experience, but they've at least competed in this league to where they know what's going to hit them in the face come January.

Q. Does this feel a little bit like maybe a couple of years ago when it was the season after you'd started to make the breakthrough and you really had high expectations? I know it's hard to compare teams, but do you feel like this team could compare to the Sweet 16 you had a few years ago?

COACH BUDKE: I can't put them in the Sweet 16 type of team yet. But the good thing about this team is everybody will be back next year when we're sitting here talking again, and this team -- last year we lost seven games in the final five minutes.

And so that inexperience really showed last year. If we just win half of those games, you know, we're looking at a 20-win season.

So I'm really anxious to see the step we've taken. I've seen it in practice already. I can't wait to get to the games, can't wait to get to a game where we're tied with five minutes to go and see how we handle it. We're going to handle it a lot better this year. Just it's hard to win in this league when you start freshmen, and we started two most of the year last year, and our leading scorer was only a sophomore.

So it is a much better feeling coming into the fall this year than it was last year, because we at least know again what's coming.

Q. I know you have a lot of starters back, but you also have a very solid incoming recruiting class as well. Do you see any of them having a impact early, especially Brittney Hardy out of the Dallas area?

COACH BUDKE: It's been really fun to watch these freshmen. They're a little wide-eyed right now, just catching on to a lot of the team drills and a lot of the offenses and defenses that we're going to try to put in.

So they're thinking right now more than

they're playing, but it's been fun because one day it will be one of them, the next day it will be Brittney and the next day it will be LaShawn. And you can see to where all five of them could help us or possibly start at some point in time this year.

But they've improved so much in one week, and I think three weeks from now we'll see where they can truly help us. But we've put back-to-back classes together of five and five that we feel really good about.

Q. Tell us a little bit about Toni, what part of her game you think we'll see improved this season.

COACH BUDKE: Well, Toni -- Toni had a tremendous year last year. I mean, when you lead the Big 12 in double-doubles you've done something.

And, you know, she was injured in the spring. She broke her arm. So she didn't quite have the summer that we wanted her to have. But I would think just the experience of being a go-to person -- that Toni wasn't sure she was a go-to person last year, and at the end of the year she started feeling a lot of confidence that we were going to come to her to finish off games.

And so I -- hopefully as a junior she just takes that next step, and as soon as she's healthy -- she's not quite 100 percent yet -- comes in. I need her for January.

And so she'll be 100 percent by January. But it's not -- last year a lot of it was on her shoulders. And this year we feel like we can spread out the scoring. We feel really good about all five positions that any one of the positions could go for ten points every night.

So hopefully Toni doesn't have to do as much as she did last year.

Q. How do you think Brittney's presence has sort of affected the post players in this conference and will continue to the rest of her career? Has it helped them? Has it changed the way you think the coaches have prepared those players?

COACH BUDKE: You're talking about Brittney Griner; is what you're saying?

Q. Yes.

COACH BUDKE: Well, she is -- I think the whole league went out and tried to find somebody that one could defend her and slow her down a little bit.

We were very fortunate in finding a young lady named Vicky McIntyre who had a great freshman year for us last year and who really -- you talk about getting excited to play someone, she really gets excited to play Brittney Griner when we do play Baylor.

But she changed the game. She changed how you attack Baylor, because, you know, offensive rebounding against Baylor and there she is and you don't get put-backs against them.

And she pretty much takes away the paint. So a lot of times -- and I've seen it on tape, and we've done the same things -- you game plan different for Baylor than you do other people. If you're really truly an inside-out team, you might have to look at another way when you play them.

Q. Obviously Deb and her red-robin schedule this year, and I know in the past in the South it seemed like a steel-cage match with the way the schedule was set up, everybody playing each other. How do you see things being different now that everybody is going to be playing each other in the schedule?

COACH BUDKE: I think the biggest thing is you'll truly have a true champion playing everybody twice, and it didn't matter if you were going North, South, didn't matter. There's just not a night off in this league. There never has been a night off in this league, playing 18 games is a whole lot of games for the top league in America.

So I'm kind of interested to see how playing 18 instead of 16 affects us, how will we be at the end of the year. Then go to the Big 12 Tournament also.

So it will be interesting to see. But it will be a true champion this year.

Q. A lot of times a player between first year and second year will make a big jump. Of your first-year players from last year, who do you think will make the big jump this year?

COACH BUDKE: Oh, that's a tough question, because they've all had good summers. But right now I look at Tiffany Bias. I think Tiffany. She was put under the gun last year.

I mean, coming in trying to replace Andrea Riley and the numbers she put up and coming in and being a freshman point guard in the best league in America, I thought she had a very solid freshman year.

But I've already seen in practice her

leadership, the ball handling, the moves to the basket, her shot is better, I think you're going to look up and see Tiffany Bias be 15 points a night minimum.

Q. Did you have some moments either this summer or last summer where you were thinking you're going to play in the Pac-10? These rumors were going around. It seemed like -- now Pac-12, Pac-16, whatever it was going to be, what was your thought then? Like I said, I've asked some other questions, a lot of it was out of your control, but what were you thinking when you thought it might be a possibility?

COACH BUDKE: Well, it was all out of our control. We were never involved in any of those discussions. But it did cross our minds. It sure did. We even looked at changing our recruiting base just a little bit, hitting California a little bit more, if this truly was a possibility.

I'm just very grateful and thankful that our league stuck together, because central United States needs this conference, needs this major conference for our fans.

And I just think about all the history and all the national champions we've had in this conference, and this conference needs to stay.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports