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An Interview With:

OKLAHOMA STATE COACH TRAVIS FORD

THE MODERATOR: We're now joined by coach Travis Ford from Oklahoma State University. Welcome.

COACH FORD: Good to be here. It's amazing how fast time flies. But I'm excited about this year's team for the fact that I love coming out of preseason workouts.

We've had great attitudes. The chemistry on our team is just fun to work with. It's fun to watch. They're very, very hard-working group of guys.

Now, with that said, since starting practice on Friday, we're dealing with six new players. And as I keep telling them, as great as their attitude is and as great as their work ethic is, that's not alone going to win games. We've got to start executing a little bit.

A lot of mistakes in practice right now. But I like the makeup of our basketball team a lot more than I did on last year's team, as far as the pieces to it.

I think we've got a few more pieces to our basketball team, a few more options, a lot more versatility on this team. We've got some great competition at the point guard spot right now.

Some really tough competition with really Fred Gulley and Reger Dowell competing every day in practice, picking each other up full court.

And then you've got Keiton Page that can play the point guard position if we need him to and there's times that he could do it. And Cezar Guerrero could play it as well. But the versatility of this team is something that I like. We've got to continue to develop a low point presence that we they'd to get a high percentage shot at times.

But this team is, I think, going to play an exciting style of basketball. I think you'll enjoy watching their attitude and how hard they work.

But as all coaches say at this time of year, but I believe this. I've been a college head coach going on my 15th year, I believe it more than any year than I have, that probably this team will be a work in progress as far as from where we are now to what you'll see hopefully in February. We've got an overly tough nonconference schedule. Overly challenging nonconference schedule, which is going to be one or the other.

It's going to be either really, really good for this team or it's going to -- hopefully doesn't take too much out of us. But it's a very challenging schedule for a young basketball team.

THE MODERATOR: Questions?

Q. LeBryan Nash, do you have to strike the balance between him being a freshman and him being talented as well and how much of a load can he take his first year, what have you seen from him?

COACH FORD: LeBryan is fortunate he comes from a basketball team that we've got some really good basketball teams from, J.P. Olukemi, who at this point has really learned a lot from last year and is being in practice right now a dominant player. It's basically the same size and a lot more experience than LeBryan right now. You've got a very veteran Keiton Page out there. You've got a Markel Brown who has really improved a lot from last year.

I can go down the line. So it's not like he's going to come in and like a lot of people are saying and kind of be the savior. We're not putting that on him. He does not need that pressure.

Now, does LeBryan Nash improve our team? Yes, he does. Greatly. LeBryan Nash has a lot of talent. Is full of talent. Can do so much. Can play the point guard, play the 2, 3, 4, and even the 5. He can do a little bit of it all.

But as true from a lot of freshmen he's first got to learn you have to play both ends of the court. You gotta play both ends of the court, and you've got to learn to make what we call multiple efforts.

How hard you have to play and how long

you have to play that hard is a work in progress right now. He's getting better each day. We're just excited about the day that becomes habit, that when he crosses those lines that it's nothing -- he knows nothing but playing hard every second, understands how important defense is, and he's got a great attitude about learning right now.

But he is a talent. No question he's a talent. But he's also very fortunate that he's surrounded by a group of young men that are doing a good job mentoring him that are very good basketball players.

So he does not have to feel like he's got to be the guy. He doesn't need to feel that way. There's some other guys right now that are really, really playing well.

Q. I know there's no magic fix, but how do you go about helping this team learn how to play better on the road in league and get wins?

COACH FORD: Well, that's a point of topic for our basketball team and something we've talked about preseason, something we talk about a lot with our basketball team.

The road mentality, winning on the road, things that we learn hopefully from last season, and you know there's nothing particularly other than practicing really hard that you can do in practice. There's no drills as far as winning on the road drills.

I think it's more of a mental thing and developing, obviously in practice, a concept of developing some toughness and trying to create as many situations in their mind that you're on the road in practice situational drills.

But it's more of a topic of conversation, more of reminding our team every day of our overall schedule that we have in front of us. And then obviously improving on winning on the road last year.

I think a lot of our problems last year stemmed from just not very good chemistry, off-court distractions, and things like that.

So hopefully we can improve in those areas as well as just mentally preparing our guys to play on the road and the challenges of being on the road. It's only enhanced now that you have to go to every single team's gym, it's only enhanced, that you probably better come up with some road wins.

Q. This conference has had kind of a recent history of freshmen who can have the ability to lead their team in scoring and actually

win some national honors, and just great freshmen. Is LeBryan Nash, does he have the potential to be that kind of guy?

COACH FORD: He has that talent. Again, it's how quickly, how fast is he going to pick up and develop the habits that all freshmen have to learn of playing both ends and things like that. But no question he has the talent. He's going to be put in the position to win those. No question, he's got good players around him, but no question we need LeBryan Nash to play well. We need him to be great on the court to make everybody else better, to score points to do a lot of different things.

But he has the talent to do that. And he's going to be in position to do that as far as how our offenses are run and things like that, the opportunity to be there. But it will be a work in progress, it is a work in progress.

And as soon as it becomes habit of playing hard every second of every play of every practice, competing every second of every play of every practice and playing both ends, then the sky's absolutely, positively the limit.

I don't think there's a better freshman in the country when he learns that. Because he is a talented individual. He is talented. The things that he can do at his size.

But in order to showcase all those talents and for those talents to shine and those skills to shine, those habits are going to have to be formed.

Q. You had a scary situation with one of your freshmen, Cezar Guerrero the other day. I don't know if you talked about that yet publicly, but I guess he walked out to your open practice yesterday and got a huge round of applause that he's okay.

COACH FORD: Yeah, we had something that's never happened to me in all of my years of coaching. Cezar Guerrero, a freshman, who was playing really, really well, picks up things as quick as any freshman I've ever had and somebody we count on playing some minutes hopefully, was trying to -- was coming off the baseline up through the lane guarding his man and got a screen set on him, and first thing to hit was kind of his neck, his shoulder area.

And we watched it on film yesterday, and he just literally collapsed. And we've had that happen before. And I think he was knocked out for maybe five or ten seconds. And then he was screaming and yelling "my neck, my neck,"

different things like that, and was just flat on his back.

Our trainer, first and foremost, Jason Miller, did an unbelievable job of handling the situation. I mean, I can't say enough of what Jason did, our trainer, how he handled him. He immediately came out there, immobilized his neck immediately and started asking him questions, doing different things.

We immediately called the local paramedics in Stillwater. They got there very quickly. They did a round of tests and immediately called for a helicopter. And we knew the seriousness of it at that time.

And there was concern of paralysis from the tests that they were doing. So obviously everyone was shaken up at that time. Players were really tore up like nothing I've ever seen. It just goes back to the chemistry of this team, the closeness. They were tore up. To the point we had to take them off the court and console them. And we didn't even know what was happening at that point in time.

Helicopter came, took him to Oklahoma City. They wouldn't let me go with him. Nobody could go with him so me and one of my assistants drove immediately to Oklahoma City to the hospital. They did a great job there, immediately doing tests.

Throughout the night -- we didn't even know yet -- he was starting to feel better in the hospital, a little bit better, was still very groggy and very, very sore, started to get movement in his legs, no question, feeling back, we started feeling good, this is not as serious as we thought it was.

Still didn't have the answers to the MRIs or the CAT scans, until the following morning, and I was there. We spent the night with him. And the next morning the doctors came in at 7:00 a.m. and told him everything looked absolutely positively normal, perfect. Nothing wrong.

A stinger is what he called it. So he is back going to class. He has a neck brace on. He sees the doctor again on Monday. We are hoping -- the doctor even said hopefully at that point in time he may be able to resume playing.

But scary moment, but I think he's going to be okay. We're more probably concerned about him mentally at this point than anything because it was a great scare for him.

But it was great to hear the doctor say that he's okay and that's what we're telling him. Because he's getting around very slow. We're

telling him you're okay, we need to start loosening it up a little bit.

But it was great to have him at practice. We had an open practice yesterday and it was packed. We didn't know exactly how many would show up. And it was surprising, a great, great crowd and they gave -- a lot of people -- almost a standing ovation. So it was great to see that.

And even the players were cheering for C.J. We call him C.J. And so hopefully he'll rejoin our team very, very quickly. So thanks for asking. Appreciate it.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you very much.

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