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An Interview With:

OKLAHOMA COACH BOB STOOPS

THE MODERATOR: We're joined now by Oklahoma coach Bob Stoops. Your opening thoughts about this upcoming season.

COACH STOOPS: Thank you. I guess just to start off, I would just like to say I'm sure like everybody just very anxious and excited to start this year here in 2011.

And I love the way our team finished up the winter and spring, just the overall attitude, the work ethic of the team. And so hopefully they've had a great summer. And just very anxious to get with them next week to find out what type of condition and where we need to start.

But I have a great feeling just about, again, like I said, the attitude, and I have a great feeling about the chemistry of the team.

I've got three outstanding players here with me in Travis Lewis, linebacker, senior linebacker; Ryan Mallett, a senior wide receiver; and then junior quarterback in Landry Jones.

So those are three great leaders on our football team, and I'm sure they've done a great job going around here today.

THE MODERATOR: Questions?

Q. The real perception was that Landry took some great late-season strides, competitive, leadership-wise, what have you seen from him in those two categories during the offseason that have contributed to that team chemistry you speak of?

COACH STOOPS: Yeah, I think just naturally, you know, he had some really big games down the last stretch of the year. When you look at on the road at Oklahoma State, and you look at the Big 12 championship game against a great defense in Nebraska and the way he played and into the Fiesta Bowl, he really played great and

was a great factor, major factor in his performance in us winning those games.

So I think -- and then you add, you know, the winter, how hard he works that everybody recognizes and just now the experience, his confidence, all of it is natural as a guy matures and gains in age and gains what's success.

So he's just become a really strong leader. And now he's more comfortable. And I think anyone, the quarterback needs to be a leader. If he hasn't played and earned the respect by performance and meeting challenges and then doesn't have the confidence yet, it's hard to be that guy.

Well, he has all of that now. And so he's a true, true leader on this team. And a special one.

Q. You had pulled the team through a really tragic thing in May. How do you do that? And how did the team handle all that, do you think?

COACH STOOPS: Yeah, I don't know how I did it, to be honest with you. And I think the players, more than anything, really, I think, leaned on each other, us as coaches leaned on them.

There's no words that truly can describe how you hurt and how the players hurt. Austin was a great, great spirit in the locker room. Everybody -- he was a friend to everybody, and he's one of those special characters, a young person that everybody loved to see.

So you miss that. And it doesn't go away. So, again, there's no really proper way to describe it. So we're still working through it.

And, again, I think that the players have really leaned on each other. And the leaders are guys that have -- I'm sure will help pull us through it. And as a team, it's something even when we get back together that we'll address again and just try to keep putting one foot in front of the other to move forward without forgetting.

Q. How do you replace DeMarco Murray? Do you do it by committee, or do you want one guy?

COACH STOOPS: I think I'm really excited because there's a lot of potential in that back field with those running backs.

DeMarco was -- being a fifth-year senior, big, strong guy, could do so much, you don't replace him -- or we have to really replace him by committee.

But that's okay. And I feel this way that last year we snapped the ball more than anybody in the country. So there's a lot of snaps there.

And I don't see any of these guys have the physical presence at this point and maturity to play 45, 50 snaps like DeMarco could.

So we'll divide it up. But also play to -- there's a guy in there that's hot, keep him in there until he needs a break, and then get him back in there.

But I think it will benefit all of them being able to divide them up some. You think back to the year 2008, with Sam Bradford, the year he wins the Heisman Trophy, and we played in the national championship game, that year we had 2000-yard rushes.

So it doesn't have to be an issue. To me, we have guys, if the guys up front do their job, they'll get through the hole and make something happen.

So I feel good about it.

Q. For the last few years we've heard repeatedly how dominant the SEC has been and remains the class of college football. Are you tired of and do you feel there should be an impetus on the part of the coaches in the Big Ten, Big East, ACC, and everybody else to unseat that conference as sort of classic college football?

COACH STOOPS: I think at the end of the day they've won the national championship. So you've got to do that. When you say unseat them, someone else needs to win it for that to happen.

So that's what needs to happen. So you can't -- whatever is said about it is said about it. But we, along with these other conferences, I think are all very similar in that the teams at the top are very good. The teams in the middle are going to bowl games, they're pretty similar across the country, and you've got some teams that are struggling.

And every league has it the same way. But, again, they've won that last game here for five years. So it's our job as other conferences or other schools to win it. And then you can claim it.

Q. You had a couple of players who had hard decisions about maybe entering the NFL Draft, or coming back, did come back. When they make that kind of decision and come back, does that send a message to your team? And you talked about leadership. Does that also provide the tenor for leadership, when you have guys deferring one more year to come back and try to do something special?

COACH STOOPS: It definitely adds leadership. Those guys have the experience. They're respected by their teammates by the way they've played when they're that caliber of player.

So there's no question it adds a lot of experience and a lot of leadership to your team when those kind of guys do come back.

And the other message, I'd make it clear, I don't really -- my job really when these guys come back is I want them educated on the whole process, and I want them to maximize their small window of opportunity to make money in the NFL to get where they're valued, to not play for a discount. That's all it is.

And it does send a message to my team to be able to say the year before Sam Bradford comes back, Gerald McCoy comes back, Jermaine Gresham comes back, Trent Williams comes back, and all four of them are drafted in the first round, Sam the first pick.

Two of those guys, the year before, were not projected to go in the first round. So the money they gained from coming back and finish with their degree, there's no way to add it up.

So, again, I just want our guys are well educated on maximize your opportunity.

Q. Today the NCAA sent out a release they're going to consider a proposal to expand the definition of agent to include third parties such as family members and such. Just wanted to get your opinion on that. Is that something that's needed and would that be beneficial?

COACH STOOPS: Well, I'd have to read it all and see. You caught me a little by surprise there. So I don't want to say too much and not be totally informed on it.

But at the end of the day, you know, we're very -- in our recruiting, we've been fortunate to -- we deal with the parents and the coaches, and I've not had much success beyond that, because we don't -- I'm not much on playing to anybody else.

I believe there's too many good players out there. So we're going to -- that type of activity for us, I haven't had much experience in it. It's not the way we've done things.

Q. Bob, what inkling did you have that 2000 team was going to be as special as it is, and just compare that to how you feel about this team?

COACH STOOPS: The 2000 team, I didn't have any inkling going in, to be honest with you. I had a couple of -- I guess a couple of things I was excited about, the leadership of Josh Heupel and his ability. And then, you know, we just got really fortunate in so many young players playing so well.

I could go on and on. All of you looked at all the first-, second-year guys that were playing and making a difference.

And then it got to the point in the middle, end of the year that you had this feeling you couldn't lose. But the difference then was we had something to prove. Like they had seen all these Bud Wilkinson, Barry Switzer's teams and all these great players on the wall. And this was our tradition that these guys -- we hadn't been doing. We had lost that.

And so we had something to prove, and we were bound and determined to do it, to live up to what we're supposed to do at Oklahoma. And then as years go by, then you have some recruiting classes and you have a couple other years where you're competing for the national championship or winning the Big 12 and sometimes you can get some kids come in and feel entitled.

So I go from trying to convince them in 2000 that we do deserve to do this and we are good enough to do it, to a few years later saying: Wait a second, you haven't done anything. Why would you expect to do this, until you've earned it? And so that's what you are fighting.

And that's why sometimes it is harder to keep doing it. Now you gotta get -- so now going into this season, though, after so many years and with the number of guys back, we expect it.

But it's really convincing them expect to work first. I mean, the work is what gets it done. And you have to have that attitude of something to prove to get it done, to finish it off.

Q. What are your thoughts on the impact the Longhorn Network might have on your program and the conference overall, any concerns?

COACH STOOPS: Well, sure. To me the lifeblood of every program is recruiting. And so we either all recruit by the same rules or we don't.

So I've got total trust in our administrations and leadership of the league and the NCAA that we'll all play under the same rules. And if not, then let's change the rules so that we can all do it the same way.

Q. You like to talk about don't play for a discount. Lockouts been over for 24 hours now. Rookie salaries are going to go down for the big contracts. Have you thought about if that will keep guys in school more, more likely to keep them in school or not?

COACH STOOPS: I don't know that it will in that it's hard to predict, I guess, because that's only going to affect maybe -- I haven't studied it or looked at it. Seems like it's only going to affect maybe the first half or so of the first round, right?

And so we'll see. I don't know that it will a whole lot because, again, those are usually only a few guys. And I've never had a problem of a guy wanting to go out, if he's going to be in the top half of the first round, hey, have at it.

Guys like Roy Williams asked me that when it was his time. I told Roy, I said, I felt you're too good for what we're doing. He said he was bored. I said, This isn't challenging enough for you. And I thought Roy would be a top 10 pick. I said, Hey, you ought to go.

So, anyway, I don't think it will change what I'm talking about about playing for your value. I don't think it will change that.

I guess the long answer I got myself to say, no, I don't think it will change much. Had to figure it out, I guess, verbally.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.
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