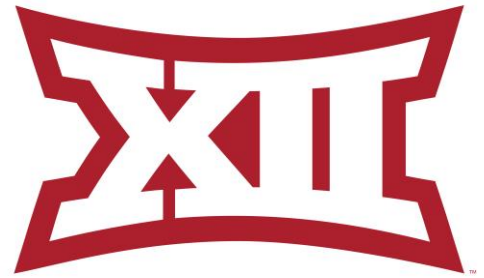


**October 15, 2014**



An Interview With:

## **COACH TRAVIS FORD**

**COACH FORD:** We've been going for about a week, full practices. It's been a fun group to work with. Very hungry group, very competitive team. Very aggressive basketball team. We've got a great mix of basically seven returners with experience and seven new guys, whether it be incoming freshmen or junior college transfers or a transfer from LSU.

Our team's going to rely -- we've got four guys with great experience. You look at guys like Michael Cobbins, who's back and healthy, been a four-year starter. Le'Bryan Nash will be a four-year starter for us. Phil Forte, who started last year as sixth man of the year in the league. And Anthony Hickey, who's been a three-year starter at LSU. So these are four guys who bring us very good experience, who have played a lot of big games in their career, and these are the guys that we need to lead our basketball team.

These are four veteran guys. All four guys, we talked to, need to have the best years of their career at this point.

The young kids on our basketball team have showed a lot of -- we keep calling it grit. They've been very aggressive, a very aggressive group in practice. I like our basketball team. I think we have a chance to be very good defensively, very good. We've got a lot of good pieces. Anthony Hickey is one of the better on-the-ball defenders I've coached. He's a very, very good defender on the ball, really sets the tone.

We've got some wing players who really understand defensive rotations and understand what we're doing. Then we've got the best shot blocking group I've coached in Michael Cobbins and Anthony Allen. One kid we brought in from junior college that led in blocked shots last year.

We've got quickness that I hope should hang its identity on defense.

We're impressed turning people over in practice, and hopefully the defense -- we can hang our hat on defense.

**Q. More on Hickey, a lot of times when you have a Division I transfer, you get to practice with the team for a year. That's not the case here. How is it going to blend?**

**COACH FORD:** Again, good point. One thing that helps is we get to work with our players in the summertime. One thing we did was mostly team workouts. We used the summer to really bond together as a team because we to have new players that are going to play significant minutes, and we've used most of the preseason starting in August and September and early October for individual workouts.

One thing I've been impressed with the team is the chemistry thus far. It's been impressive. So hopefully, we can continue that. Hickey, one thing I've seen is he seems to be very hungry for this opportunity to be able to play in the Big 12 and play at Oklahoma State in a system, I think, that's going to fit him pretty good. He's been obviously a big addition to our basketball team.

I was excited about a lot of our players, but we did have that inexperience at the point guard spot until we've got him. Now we go from having some guys that have been playing the position that didn't have experience to a guy that's been a three-year starter at the highest level. Played in tons of big games. In high school, he's Mr. Basketball, Kentucky, won the state championship in Kentucky.

So he understands what he's walking into. He fully grasps what this is all about. And in practice, to be honest with you, with how he's played, he looks like he's been there for a couple of years, how he's led and talked to guys. But when you're a three-year starter in the SEC, you immediately get that respect. You get that respect.

He led the country in steals, led the

country two years ago. So he's a really, really good defender.

**Q. It seems like every team has a Division I transfer these days. Iowa State has really built their program around some of them. Kansas State has one. How has that changed the way you approach recruiting, the way you approached building a team the last few years?**

COACH FORD: That's a great question. I know a lot of teams this last summer in July, you almost have to keep a scholarship available for the springtime. You could almost do all your recruiting in the spring, as many good players were out there, as we call difference makers. There's a lot of difference-maker players who were eligible right away that will be playing this season that transferred.

Now, with that said, I don't think you can change your recruiting a lot because all the talk of changing the rules. They're going to make everybody set out. You hear that. I don't know if it's going to come into fruition or not. There's a lot of talk of stopping the immediate, players being to play immediately.

With the rules the way they are right now, to be able to get players to play immediately, you almost want to keep a scholarship available because there was an enormous amount of players that can help your team at any level that can play right away. A lot of them. And we got one.

We were in a position to get Anthony Hickey, which was a spot we needed, and got a heck of a basketball player, got a heck of a player. So we benefited from it. But it's going to be interesting to see how they change the rules. If they don't change the rules and we stay the way we are, I think you'll see recruiting change. I think you'll see everybody trying to hold onto a scholarship, have it available, maybe even two the way it's going.

**Q. Travis, for the last couple of years, the identity of your program, or at least the outside, was shaped around Smart, an All-American, and now you're having to reshape the identity without that. Tell me about that.**

COACH FORD: That's good. You're exactly right. Obviously, a lot was centered around Marcus Smart and things like that. This team, we've got more depth than we've had. Probably

more depth at this point. Hopefully, we can stay injury free -- than I've had at Oklahoma State.

Now, do we have that preseason All-American and all that? No, but I think we've got great balance. This team seems to be very hungry, from what I've seen in the first week. They read everything and all that. As I tell them, what they say about you is where we're at. So it's -- embrace it. Enjoy the challenge of it. Don't think any different. We don't want to take the -- we're not taking any approach of, oh, we're better than this. No. These are the facts. Let's deal with it, and let's get after it.

They've kind of taken that little bit of a chip on the shoulder attitude to the point, even in drills, I mean, we've -- after the first couple days of practice, we had to change some drills because we're afraid to get guys hurt, how aggressive and physical guys have been. So I like that. That's my mentality.

There doesn't seem to be any egos on this basketball team. That's been fun to work with. But, no, this team has to go out and create its own identity. No question, the identity of our team last year was Marcus Smart, and we had guys returning, things like that, understandably. But this team, I think, is eager to develop its own identity.

One thing I do like, though, is we do have four people -- I think people forget we have four very experienced players who have all been starters for basically three years on a BCS team, whether they be in Oklahoma State or LSU. Now, we rely on these guys. These guys are some of the best players we have.

If we can get that out of them, then Leyton Hammonds, who got some good years, especially late in the year, right now he's fighting for a starting spot. He's playing very well. Jeffrey Carroll, who we had sitting out last year, can be one of the better shooters in the country, at 6'6" and athletic.

So we've got some pieces. They're just not proven pieces exactly yet. I like the mentality of our basketball team right now with where we're at and all the different things. It's what you would want out of your basketball team, the hunger part of it and playing with a little bit of a chip on his shoulder. So hopefully we can continue that and continue to develop that chemistry.

Again, I think we could be special defensively. We're going to have to figure out where all the points are going to come from. We've lost a lot of points. It's not a concern so

much as just figuring it out and getting guys in the right spot. But we have some pieces. We've just got to put them all together and develop them.

Our preseason schedule with four nonconference is going to do that. It's tough, extremely tough.

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