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An Interview With:

COACH TRENT JOHNSON

COACH JOHNSON: My thoughts on the upcoming season, I've been asked this question on a couple of occasions, why am I so happy? Why am I so excited? Number one is, for the first time I've been at TCU, we've had nine practices, and I have a full complement of players, 13 guys on scholarship and 3 walk-ons, and we're healthy.

Obviously, we've improved from an athletic standpoint. Some of the guys we had sitting out on our basketball team, some of the guys we signed from a recruitment standpoint. So our practices are much more competitive. We're a lot better. Our skill level is a lot better. We have an opportunity to compete at a high level.

We've established ourselves in terms of how we conduct ourselves socially and academically and all those kinds of things, which I think are really important in college athletics. So the next step for us is winning our share of basketball games.

I am happy until we play our first game, and then we'll find out from there.

Q. Do you see any benefit from being under the radar for a year or two?

COACH JOHNSON: A benefit to being under the radar for a year or two? No, I don't really get caught up in that. This is not coach speak, but for me, it's about being as competitive as you can be and overachieve.

For me, when I speak to our players and speak to the teams we've had in the past, it's about being the best possible player, person you can be day in and day out.

So under the radar, if you look at what is going on in college athletics across the board, I don't think there's anything that's under the radar. If you look at games like that, like you're under the

radar, that speaks volumes to where you are or where you aren't as a competitor. So I don't think in this league, for the most part, because there's a lot of guys in this league that know what they're doing, there's a lot of talented players in this league. I don't think they look at this game, as you're playing TCU or you're playing this team and think that you're going to have an easy win.

So from my standpoint, under the radar? No.

Q. Hey, I'm always interested in new guys. Your optimism, it sounds like part of that has to be because you've got some transfers who probably factor in right away. Can you just talk about Zeigler and Washburn?

COACH JOHNSON: I'll start with Trey, who's played a lot of basketball. He's one of our leaders. He's a guy that's got to perform at a high level, and I think he's excited about this, it's his last go around. But he'll play the two for us, he'll play the three, and sometimes he'll be in situations where he'll play the one.

He's a guy that can create for himself. He's a scorer, not a shooter. He's a guy that can create for himself and can create for others.

Chris Washburn, I've been very pleased with up until this point. Obviously, his last time playing competitive basketball was at El Paso. He gives us a lift at the four spot because he can pass it and he can rebound it. He does all the little things in that involve winning that go unnoticed sometimes. He sets great screens, he makes the pass that leads to the pass that leads to the score. Those two are going to have to have good years for us.

Along with that, there's a kid by the name of Kenrich Williams from New Mexico, who's probably going to be one of our better defenders with time. So we're in a position where, just in the short, that this team is capable of defending and rebounding at a high level, and that's how we can keep ourselves in games versus high caliber competition and have an opportunity to win some

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of those games, which we haven't had the opportunity in the past.

Q. Coach, when you're establishing a new team, is defense the first thing that comes around for you generally?

COACH JOHNSON: Regardless of whether it's a new team or an old team, it's always been your ability to defend, your ability to rebound, and your ability to take care of the ball. I think, in general, kids in this day and age, they all want to play fast. They all want to run. To me, I tell them, if you rebound, you can go as fast as you want as long as you can make good decisions.

It's all relative regardless of the sport, but to win at the championship level, you need to be able to play on the half-court. You need to be able to defend, and you need to be able to rebound. Good teams aren't going to let you run. Great teams aren't going to let you run. Mediocre or poor teams, you'll be able to get out in transition.

As limited as we've been in the previous two years in terms of our talent level, I think for the most part we've had to slow the game down as best we could on offense, and defense we try to stay in front of people and grind. We've been mismatched from a talent standpoint. I think we've done a decent job. For now, I fully expect this group to be able to defend at a high level. That would generate more fast break opportunities, and we can make decent decisions and score the ball from there.

Q. How much of this team's success do you put on Kyan's shoulders?

COACH JOHNSON: Kyan, he has better players around him. What he did last year, for a team that was decimated by injuries, was pretty impressive because he always kept playing and kept competing, and his percentages, whether it was scoring or shooting free throws, will improve.

The big thing for him, which is the big thing for us, is being able to defend. I think we're going to have an opportunity to score. He's a leader of this basketball team, and the next thing he needs to do is improve his ability to guard, which will improve our chances of winning. If you can defend at the point and defend at the post, which is Kyan and Karviar, I think we'll have a chance. Both of those guys are very capable and both of those two guys on this basketball team that, when we went to conference play, their statistics improved. To me that's how you measure if a guy can play or not.

Kyan and Karviar, both in nonconference they were so-so, and when they got to conference play, they improved.

I'm looking forward to him having a good year. He's enjoyable to be around right now. My first two years, I don't think he enjoyed me, and I don't think I enjoyed him, but we have a pretty good relationship right now. I'm saying that because he's sitting over there in the corner listening. That's okay.

You guys must think we're going to be good too. Last time I got two questions, and I was off the podium and gone.

Q. Is confidence building a big part of the job for you this year?

COACH JOHNSON: For me or for the group? I've never lost confidence. I mean, how can you lose confidence? This is not my first trip. I've always felt for the kids. I try to pride myself on being realistic and proactive. Realistic to what we have and proactive to where we're going. What this group went through, and this is the last time I probably want to talk about this year. I think they have a level of confidence where we're healthy, if we do certain things, we'll have a chance to win some games. But also that can be false sometimes because the reality is you're only as good as your win/loss record, and what went on last year, we need to carry over and understand that, if you don't do certain things at a high level, you're going to be back in that same position.

For me, personally, I've never lost confidence. It is what it is. We run the same stuff I ran with certain other teams when we won a lot of games, won championships, and we're going to do the same thing we've always done. I just think, for the most part, you're talking about a basketball program that hasn't had any basketball tradition and hasn't won a lot of games. We don't talk about that. We just talk about the opportunity we have in front of us at this level of play in this league to be good.

A lot of exciting things going on at TCU. When you look at all other sports in our athletic department, they've always won at a high level and been very consistent. It's time for us to start doing our share of the work.

Q. With the majority of your roster being freshmen and sophomores, what do you expect out of them this season?

COACH JOHNSON: To understand what we are doing, Number one. Number two, to push the upperclassmen, when you say the majority of our rosters is freshmen and sophomores. We've got our classes staggered. We have got three seniors who are very capable, very talented players. We have two juniors, six sophomores that are going to be the mainstays of our program, and three freshmen that came in. We think we have, in terms of our roster, staggered, our recruiting class is staggered, but we have to continue to get good players.

Whether you're a freshman or sophomore, experience doesn't mean nothing to me if you can't play. I fully expect those kids to fully be in a position where they're competing every day and challenging the guys in front of them. It's nice to see we have that. We have a very competitive practice. We've got guys who are healthy, and our recruitment has improved. It's going to continue to improve.

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