

Big 12 Conference Men's Basketball Media Day

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Travis Ford

Oklahoma State Cowboys

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Travis Ford of Oklahoma State. Coach, welcome, and your thoughts about the upcoming season?

COACH FORD: Well, we've had very competitive practices. We've got a lot of new players, a lot of players on our basketball team that have new roles. The returning players' roles are going to be increased drastically. So from that standpoint, practices have been very good from the standpoint of how hard they're working, their attitudes.

They're going pretty slow right now as far as implementing a system. Got a lot of guys learning from scratch. But it's been fun coaching the guys.

The league this year, I think going through my eighth season at Oklahoma State, and I think this could be the best year of the Big 12 since I've been there. Our team has to have a mentality of being very hungry. We understand where we're picked and the expectations and different things like that. But it's a great challenge for us. But I like our team.

Obviously Phil Forte is really playing well for us. I think this team is going to be much more balanced than a lot of our teams of lately. Last year we were very dependent on two guys scoring the ball. I think we'll be much more balanced this year scoring-wise, playing-wise, as far as a lot of guys getting a lot of different minutes. Lot of versatility on our basketball team and a lot of depth, balanced depth. From that standpoint, if I had a game tomorrow, I'm not sure who I would start other than one or two players. So there's very good competition in practice right now.

I like our team. We just have a lot of new faces and returning players who are going to have increased roles. Again, from that standpoint, we're trying to define who we are and our identity each and every day. But I like our basketball team.

Q. Last year you guys had a lot of ball screens and trying to create opportunities for Phil and everything. With the rule changes we just heard about and specifically the screening, what have you done in practice to try to prepare for that?

COACH FORD: Well, we've brought in referees on a



couple different occasions already and scrimmaged with real referees so our guys can get a feel for the changes. We have had several illegal screens called on the ball, but that was a great learning experience for our players. We're not going to change -- I think we have a very good point guard that is really good off ball screens, so we're going to set him, it's just doing it correctly. Doing it the right way, wait on the screen, make sure our screener understands what he can and can't do. But we've learned a lot through the scrimmages with the referees, and we're going to continue to do that.

Q. You're a Pitino guy, close to Rick. I'm curious what you feel should be the way forward for Pitino and Louisville? Also, big picture what this whole deal has meant for college basketball and will mean in the future?

COACH FORD: Well, obviously I don't know a whole lot about it other than what you read. One thing, I'm extremely 100% confident in him, that he knew nothing about it if they were to come out to be true in some fashion or form. I can guarantee you that. For somebody who played for him and knows what he stands for and his expectations out of his players and how he does things, I know there is no chance in the world he knew anything about it.

The question has been posed a lot in these back hallways and different interviews and things about accountability amongst coaches and things like that. I think every head coach you do -- you meet with your coaches and staff and have expectations. You meet with your players and you have expectations and you do the best you possibly can. It's impossible to know every little single thing that's going on within your program, as much as we'd like to and as much as we try to.

Again, I don't -- I know what I've read, and that's about it. I've been so involved with my own team, but also I've texted him and done different things. I know how much he cares for Louisville basketball and cares for his team and his players and his coaches. I think the hardest thing probably for anybody is not knowing and then finding out something. How could it occur, if it is true and things like that?

So I think at this point, you've just got to -- everybody's

got to wait to see what's going on.

Q. You guys have the first homecoming scrimmage this week. How excited are you to get out in front of a big crowd?

COACH FORD: Yeah, it's always exciting. Homecoming at Oklahoma State is like nothing in America. It's the best, the biggest, the greatest. It's always a fun week.

The football team is obviously playing unbelievable, we're 6-0 going into this homecoming weekend. We've got some special things planned as far as our team for the students and for the fans with Homecoming and Hoops. It will be very entertaining and fun to watch, something our players, along with other groups on campus and teams, that we're going to do some things that I think the fans and students will like. Then we'll scrimmage just so they can get a look at the team.

But, yeah, we always look forward to it. It's a lot of fun. You have recruits in and do different things. Homecoming at Oklahoma State is a week-long event and it's a lot of fun.

Q. Initially, at least outside perception was that Phil was sort of a sidekick to Marcus Smart coming in. Safe to say he's the leading man now for this team?

COACH FORD: Yes, he is the leading man. He is a captain on this team, a leader on this team. He's got the most experience of anybody on this team. He's been through the most on this team. But he is not a player that can do it by himself.

I think last year we relied way too much on just Nash and Forte and that was my fault. I'm talking about more scoring. We just -- everything was designed to try to get them a shot. Now it worked a lot. We had a lot of big wins and probably overachieved in a lot of areas, but it caught up to us at the end of the year. It caught up to us. But it got us through a lot of tough moments. But at the end of the year, we just weren't balanced enough. We were not balanced.

With that said, we are really concentrating on being more a balanced, scoring team. I think part of that that's going to help is we have a point guard that makes other people around him better.

Last year we had a point guard that was really good. Anthony Hickey won great games for us, but he was a scoring point guard first. His success and our success a lot of times depended upon him scoring. When he scored, we played well.

We're not going to be as dependent on that. Jawun

Evans and Tyree Griffin are point guards, pass first point guards that get other people involved, which opens the court a lot. When you have a point guard that with penetrate and create, he has to be honored by all five defenders. So hopefully that opens things up for Phil Forte. Whereas at the end of the year last year, people are so locked onto him and they didn't really have to help except for Nash, to an extent.

I think opening the court up and having a point guard and some other balanced scorers on our team and having an offense that's designed more for balance, I think it's going to help him. With that said, yes, we do need him to score points. We do need him to get his 16, 17, 18 points a game. But I think he'll hopefully get it in a little easier manner by playing off other players than just having to come off screens all the time and just be the focal point. But, yes, we need a big year from him. He's come a long way.

You're looking at a young man who a lot of people questioned could he play at this level and things like that. He led the Big 12 in scoring for pretty much half the year last year, and he's continuing to try to develop his game over the summer by studying different NBA players and doing things we've asked him to do.

Just watching him in practice the last week or so, he seems a whole lot more comfortable in getting shots, a lot easier within the offense we're running right now. Even though we have a long way to go offensively.