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An Interview With:

OKLAHOMA STATE COACH MIKE GUNDY

COACH GUNDY: As always, we're very excited about the season. Our players have had a good summer. Coaches are just finishing up vacation, and attitude's really good. I'm excited about our conference, the teams, and I think it's going to be really challenging for all of us.

So it should be a lot of fun. Looking forward to the start here in a couple of weeks.

Q. You're known year in and year out for having one of the most progressive offenses not only in the Big 12 but in the country. What do you do during the off-season to make sure that you're always staying at the top of your game with your offense like that?

COACH GUNDY: We study a lot of tape from other football teams, watch a lot of NFL, watch a lot of high school, and try to gather ideas and see how they fit in our system.

When I was playing in high school, I had a coach that I thought did a great job of using the talent that we had in the best way possible, and we try to do the same at Oklahoma State. We've been very fortunate we've had good players, and we try to put them in a position to have success.

Q. In 2011 and '13, you guys were very successful in the turnover game and forcing turnovers and, not coincidentally, had a lot of success that year in winning games. What are you guys doing to prepare to get those numbers up again this year? Do you think that's going to be a big part in getting back to potentially a Big 12 championship?

COACH GUNDY: Yes, turnovers are a big factor with every team, I would guess. Those years, we had success. We've gone back and worked really hard in the spring and tried to make an emphasis on forcing turnovers, getting the balls

tipped, getting balls punched out on the ground, and then taking care of the ball on offense.

Q. Mike, could you ever have envisioned before the rekick in Bedlam, with all the struggles that you were experiencing with the performance of the team, that you would be where you are right now so quickly? Now that you and Boone are together, things are very, very positive and such big expectations?

COACH GUNDY: I don't think that you think about something of that magnitude at that time. But we've come a long way in the last six months, not only as a football team, as a coaching staff, an organization, as a university, and the relationship with Mr. Pickens and our communication has been tremendous.

I know I feel a lot better. I'm sure he feels better. Things have been really good for us over the last six or seven months, and we're very proud to be where we are, and we've made some great strides.

So we're excited about the future, and we're all pulling together again.

Q. Mike, what would you consider the bigger regret, trying to redshirt Mason Rudolph or not being able to redshirt him and pulling the trigger earlier?

COACH GUNDY: Well, now I wish I had another year with him. It's really difficult to predict how redshirt years will take place, especially at the quarterback position. I think most teams across the country now feel very lucky to have two players at the quarterback position that they can put out there and feel comfortable and run the offense.

In our situation last year, the way we handled Mason obviously was what we thought was best for our football team, and it worked out for us in the long run. But you would always like to have the extra year. It certainly paid dividends for us to play him at the time that we put him in.

Q. As a former quarterback yourself,

how different is that second summer going to be for Mason as opposed to coming in after high school that first summer?

COACH GUNDY: It's much different. He's the leader on our offense. He's worked hard this summer. He's shown signs of toughness. And he has to continue to push forward.

It's only human nature to get comfortable in things we do in life, not only as a player but in the professional world.

I like where he's at at this time. And if he continues to work, be a student of the game, distribute the ball the way he needs to, the way we ask him to, depending on what style of defense we're going against that week, toughness and leadership are very important, in our opinion, at the quarterback spot.

So I guess the answer to the question would be I like what he's accomplished this summer, and we look forward to him continuing to grow.

Q. A lot of people picking TCU to do well in the league this year, Baylor to do well in the league this year. Why couldn't you guys win the league this year?

COACH GUNDY: I think, if we played well and take care of the ball, that we'll have an opportunity to win the league. We have good young players. We've got some depth. Like most years, we have to stay healthy at certain positions.

But we've certainly worked toward that goal from winter conditioning through spring ball and summer conditioning. We like our football team. I like our coaching staff. I like how the team cares about each other. And as I said, we get good quarterback play, take care of the football, force some turnovers on defense, and we should have an opportunity to win the league.

Q. A lot of people talk about your offense, that usually comes up first, Mason dropping into the pass and Weeden and some of the great players you've had. On the All-Big 12, you've got three guys on the All-Defensive First Team media pick. Just talk about how the expectations of your defense should rise this year.

COACH GUNDY: We put a lot of importance in planning in our defense about four years ago. We felt like we needed to be more competitive on defense, and we built up our numbers. We allotted more scholarships on that

side of the ball than we did on offense. I think it's paying off for us now at this time.

We have a good group on defense. I think we have some young players that should show up this season that most people are not aware of. They've been in our program a couple years, and we feel good about what they've done up to this point.

So we'll see how they start in September. We'll see if we can bring them along and get them ready to play, and for that stretch during the season in conference, where usually determines which direction teams go.

But that second group of guys on our defense that we've stressed over the last three or four years should be the ones that help us this season.

Q. I wanted to ask you about Mason Rudolph. You pretty much named him the starter early before spring started. Can you talk about the thought process of why you wanted to name a starter so early and especially, I guess, when you still had three quarterbacks on the roster and why he's the number one guy.

COACH GUNDY: The way we ended the season -- each situation is different each year with the players. We felt like it was best for our football team to name him the starter. His ability to lead, the toughness. Obviously, we had success at the latter part of the season with him.

We're very lucky to have J.W. Walsh on our football team. J.W. is going to play. He'll be a factor in the success of our football team this season. But at that time, we just felt like it was best for Mason to understand that he needs to be the leader on our offense, and the players need to start rallying around him as their quarterback.

Q. How have you seen Kevin Peterson evolve, not only on the field with his play, but as a leader for that defense?

COACH GUNDY: Over the last couple of seasons, he stepped up and developed some leadership skills and really helped our football team in that area. He played early in his career, went through a stage where he was developing his body physically, but mentally he's grown and has helped carry our players over well last summer and the summer before.

He's an example of what happens to

young men that come through our program that make us very proud. They understand commitment and the team concept, and he certainly has done a good job of that over the last couple of years.

Q. What potentially can Chris Carson give you guys on offense? Is he as good as it seems like the reports have him being pegged?

COACH GUNDY: Well, we don't know yet. What I can tell you is he's done very well in summer conditioning. His attitude's been terrific. His work habits, his testing, his speed, his footwork -- all the things that we would want to see in a back that's going to be successful at this level, he's shown us to this point.

The most important is playing in the game, durability, toughness, vision, making plays, teamwork. The things that are the most difficult. But up to this point, he's shown us that he can help our football team.

We thought Rennie Childs had a good spring and has had a great summer, and I think Chris has contributed to that. When we've had success at Oklahoma State, not only in the win/loss column but on offense, we've had a lead back, and then we've had another back that's been pretty good. So we need those guys to really play well for us, and, hopefully, Chris can come through.

Q. Mike, have you ever been to Mt. Pleasant, Michigan? And are you worried about what might be there when you get there?

COACH GUNDY: I have not been to Mt. Pleasant, Michigan. I've been to a lot of places in Michigan, and I've been there quite a bit since my family's from there, but I have not been to Mt. Pleasant.

Q. What about the second part? Worried about what's there when you get there in terms of sort of a northern Troy.

COACH GUNDY: I don't think that worry is the best word. As a coach, you're always concerned playing the first game on the road. I would think they would be very excited for Oklahoma State to come into town.

But it's a challenge that we need to meet as a team and as a coaching staff in order for us to reach our goals and have success, win games, win a conference championship. You have to be able to overcome situations. You've got to play well on the road, as we all know.

So we're looking forward to the game, but we're certainly taking it very serious as a coaching staff and as a football team.

Q. Mike, in the past, I know how you felt about scheduling, didn't like certain games. You've got Oregon State coming up the next few years, a home and home. Have you changed your viewpoint on how you want to schedule, especially when it's talked about in the Big 12 about everybody needing to beef up their schedules and things of that nature?

COACH GUNDY: I feel the same way. I think that we have a good plan at Oklahoma State. I've put a lot of thought into what our coaching staff thinks is best for Oklahoma State, and I'm comfortable with the schedule that we have over the next five or six years. I think we're scheduled all the way up through maybe six years.

I think it's really good for our football team and good for our school. I still am a strong supporter of Big 12 Conference and each school plays each team, and I think that's a sign of strength in our league. I think right before Ohio State beat Wisconsin by a large margin, we had a good chance to get two teams in.

So I don't know that we need to overreact. I think that our conference is strong. I have a lot of confidence in our league office, Commissioner Bowlsby and the staff and the direction they're taking us and that we'll make the right decisions. For that reason, Coach Holder, myself, we need to make the right decisions in our scheduling, and I think that we've done a good job up through the next five or six years.

Q. Mike, you know the quarterback position as well as anyone. You and K.O. were great players. You've coached really good players, Zac and Brandon and others. Where does Mason stack up? What are the things that make him who he is?

COACH GUNDY: We're going to find out. I think, at this time next year, we could probably get a more accurate answer. He's played in three games.

The things that I said earlier about him, we feel strongly. It's important to us at Oklahoma State that our quarterbacks are tough, durable, and they're gritty and they're good leaders. I think he's shown signs of that.

The time he puts in the classroom,

studying, understanding how to distribute the ball, take what the defense gets him is going to make all the difference.

We see it across the country, certainly in the Big 12 Conference, and at every level of football, if your quarterback plays well, it gives you a chance to have a really good season. If your quarterback is average or you get into a situation where you're playing multiple quarterbacks from an injury standpoint, then it's difficult to have a lot of success in most cases.

So at this time next year, if he plays throughout the season and we go the direction that I think our football team can go, I could give you a really accurate answer. Right now it's just way too early.

Q. In general terms, quarterbacks that have been successful in spread offenses, you see some that are Brandon Weeden, stand-in-the-pocket guys; you see guys that run around a lot more. Do you feel like there are any characteristics, either physical or mental, that help quarterbacks be most successful in those air raid spread offenses?

COACH GUNDY: I think that the intangibles the quarterbacks bring to the table -- you can go back the last five or six years in the Big 12, and we've been very fortunate that we've had not only some good quarterbacks but some great ones. Multiple first-round picks, guys that are taken the first pick in the Draft. And they're different in their own way, and they have intangibles.

Like Boykin at TCU, there's times he'll make really good throws, and there's times he'll take off on quarterback draw. And then we'll run a little option, and then he'll scramble around and find a receiver downfield. His way of success is much different than Brandon Weeden's.

As you mentioned, Brandon might move in the pocket and then just throw a dart 45 yards on a line and hit a receiver, much different than another player.

So it's the intangibles and their ability to make a play and overcome one of two things -- one, a poor play call, or, two, a missed assignment with the other ten guys on the field.

In our opinion at Oklahoma State, that's what separates quarterbacks.

Q. Vili Leveni posted on Facebook earlier today that he's out for the season, had surgery. That's a position that you guys can't

really afford, I guess, with the people that you lost, to lose a projected starter. Can you kind of describe what that means for you guys.

COACH GUNDY: It's always difficult when you have a player that's injured, just because they put so much hard work and time into getting prepared for the season. As a coach, it's one of the most difficult things to swallow. You have a young man that's done everything we've asked him to do and he's put a lot of time in, and he's come to a bump in the road.

But the next guy has to make plays. Unfortunately, we're in a sport where there are injuries, but that's why we have 132 guys on our team. That's why we continue to coach and work and develop young players. So the next guy will have to step up and make some plays.

We're not as experienced and we don't have as much depth at that position, but there's certain things that we can control, and that's certainly not one of them. So Vili will be back with us at some point, and we're looking forward to getting him back.

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