

July 21, 2015



An Interview With:

IOWA STATE COACH PAUL RHOADS

COACH RHOADS: We've had a great summer. Our kids are now just finishing up their last week, their last week of academics, their last week of workouts before they're going to have an opportunity for about a ten-day break, a well-earned and a healthy break coming up in front of them.

The bottom line coming out of this summer, coming out of this off-season is we are a closer football team heading into 2015. Talent, experience, continuity, all very important, but if you don't have that chemistry, you don't have that closeness, you're starting at a disadvantage.

Speaking of experience, we've got a fair amount of it on our football team. Offensively, we return 11 guys that have starting experience and up to 13 that have played. On the defensive side of the ball, we've got six guys with primary starting experience, but then we have another ten that played a bunch of football for us in 2014 and earlier.

Then we're going to add in seven junior college players, three that have been in our program for a year that we've redshirted, three that were with us this spring, and then a seventh that will join us in August.

Both specialists, kicker and punter, both return. I think our kicker, Cole Netten, is as good as there is in the country.

I want to take this opportunity to talk about a young man by the name of Mitchell Meyers. Mitchell was diagnosed with Hodgkin's lymphoma this past January. Since then, he's gone on to receive six months of chemotherapy. This Friday will be Mitchell's last chemo appointment. During that time, this entire summer, he hasn't missed a workout with our football team and with his teammates, going through six months of chemotherapy.

From here, Mitchell will come back to his hometown in Houston, Texas, and undergo radiation before joining us in the month of September. Prayers still extended for Mitchell and his family and everything that he's going through, and our football team watches in admiration and appreciation each and every single day.

Those of you that will be joining us in Ames this fall will be greeted by a newly expanded and renovated Jack Trice Stadium. We'll be up to 61,000 seats, which will put us as the third largest venue in the Big 12 Conference. We look forward to welcoming you up there this fall.

Q. Run defense has been a problem. What steps have you guys taken this off-season to fix that? And do you think that's going to be a pivotal part of turning things around and getting back to a Bowl?

COACH RHOADS: It always is. Both run offense and run defense are always an important part of any program's success. Yeah, we've been porous as far as stopping the run. I think the addition of several defensive players, the junior college players that I talked about, I think the continued development of the players within our program, I think our defensive line is going to have depth. I think our defensive line is going to have talent.

We look forward to putting those guys out there and having a better run defense in 2015.

Q. What has been done to reduce the amount of injuries this upcoming season after last year?

COACH RHOADS: I wish it was that easy. I wish there was something that you could put out there and say, good, we're going to remain healthy this season.

I think our training methods are always analyzed. I think everything that we can do preventative-wise as far as conditioning, different lifts, different weights, and then being smart going into training camp and how much we hit, how long,

how hard we practice, all those are things that we've talked about.

But at the end of the day, a lot of it comes down to just blind luck.

Q. Paul, you touched on it a little bit about the running game, and I know it's something that Mark Mangino has been working on in the off-season to get it going. What do you guys need to do to get it back to where it was when earlier on you had more success?

COACH RHOADS: It goes hand in hand with what you're doing up front and your ability to block people and your ability to open up holes. But then the backfield takes a large chunk of that responsibility. Not only do they got to run through holes, they've got to make folks miss at times. And it's one of the things that we haven't done a good enough job of accomplishing since Alexander Robinson was rushing for 1,000 yards back in 2009.

I think Mark has a much better understanding of where the league is at right now, going into his second season as the offensive coordinator, and his job and the staff's job to put us in position, run-pass position to run away from numbers and throw away from numbers in a positive sense offensively.

Q. Last year, as you mentioned, offensive struggles, 89th overall in total offense and also winless in the Big 12. For the fans out there and you have the stadium upgrades, is there reason to be optimistic that this season will be different?

COACH RHOADS: I think our fan base, which I'll categorize as the most loyal in all of college football, they've got a realistic view on what's taken place with injuries the past season. I think they share in the excitement and expectations of this football team and what we're going to put out there on August 7th.

Now, what we take from August 7th to September 5th and beyond will flame that enthusiasm, and that's exactly what we want to do.

Q. Can you give us a rundown on your quarterback, where everybody stands with that, and how competitive it's going to be at all?

COACH RHOADS: Sam Richardson returns as a redshirt senior. We're very fortunate to have Sam in place. It's the first year in seven years at the helm that we've had a veteran

quarterback like Sam ready to lead us into the season.

He's backed up by Grant Rohach, who's also had a number of starts and led us to victories as a Big 12 quarterback. And then Joel Lanning waits in the wings as a redshirt sophomore and a guy that we think has great ability and promise in this league.

So we're very happy to have a fifth-year guy who, I think, is one of the best in the Big 12, ready to lead us into the season.

Q. Paul, the way offenses have developed, particularly in the Big 12 area over the last 10, 12 years, does your geography, your weather, impede you from doing anything you do if you were in a warmer climate? Or can you do whatever you want to in Iowa, Nebraska, Minnesota, those kinds of places?

COACH RHOADS: One would think that you can't, and this is certainly something that we sell in recruiting. We've averaged kickoff temperatures 62 degrees in the six years that we've been there. So growing up there and understanding the swirl of the wind in Jack Trice Stadium, I would have said yes to that question, that there are things we can accomplish and we can't do on a consistent basis.

Two years ago, I think it was, we played the coldest game in the history of Jack Trice Stadium against KU. The field was a sheet of ice, and we threw for 300-plus yards and scored 30-some points and had one of our most productive offensive games of the season. I don't know if that means the weather favored us or that we can actually execute whatever style of offense that we want to in that weather environment.

Q. Coach, you mentioned about the renovation of your stadium. How important is that just to your program and just the facilities as a whole for building a program?

COACH RHOADS: I think that the administration continues to show the support and put in place the things necessary for us to compete in the Big 12 and nationally. Jamie Pollard, our athletics director, he so fully understands Iowa State, and I don't think people appreciate and give him enough credit in regard to that.

Jack Trice Stadium has always been, in my estimation, a sensational venue. It's loud. The fans are on top of you. And now we're bowling in

that south end zone, and I think it will be even more exciting and the decibel level taken up to several more notches.

I think, if there was one thing that our fan base really wanted to see take place with any of our facilities, it was this project. I don't think they can wait for September 5th to get here and enjoy this project coming to fruition.

Q. Michael Warren, what have you seen from him in his time at campus? How does he factor into the running back situation for you guys?

COACH RHOADS: He's an exciting freshman for us. We're excited to get him finally on the field. We're going to be very young at the running back position. Tyler Brown will be a redshirt sophomore and Michael will be a redshirt freshman, and we'll probably have to play true freshman Joshua Thomas this fall as well.

Michael brings speed. He's developed his size and strength in the short amount of time that he's been on campus. Looking forward to him running more behind his pads as he goes into the season and further takes the coaching of Lou Ayeni and running with his head up and being able to deliver the impact that his body is capable of delivering.

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