

Big 12 Conference Football Media Days

Monday, July 18, 2016

Mike Gundy

Oklahoma State

THE MODERATOR: We're now joined at the dais by Oklahoma State Head Coach, Mike Gundy. Welcome and your thoughts about the upcoming season.

MIKE GUNDY: We're excited about the season we've got a number of players coming back on both sides of the ball that are experience and had understand the -- culture and understand what it takes to have some success. We've had a great summer, our players have worked really hard. Our coaches have a week or so more of break, then looking forward to getting back to work and really excited this year having so many home games in September, I think it will be great for our fans to be able to come watch us play at home during the month of September.

Q. Mason obviously had the injury and the surgery before the Bowl game but from appearances in that game he didn't seem to have any issue either mentally or physically with it. How have you seen him adjust not since then? Is that sort of different with different guys and how they adjust to something like that?

MIKE GUNDY: When we finished spring ball, he was very close to being pain free. He's a tough football player and in the Bowl game he wasn't 100%. But at this point I have not talked to him about it, but I would guess that he feels like he did prior to the injury, and he's had a really good summer. He's continued to developmentally, he's been very humble, understands the team concept, and he looks really good. His strength levels are the highest they've every been so we're excited about watching him play this fall.

Q. Coach, just with this conference championship that's going to be coming in 2017, there is uncertainty as to how the league will go about deciding who plays in the game. I was curious what your thoughts were on it and if you thought expansion would help with that?

MIKE GUNDY: Well, I don't know that any of us know what direction we will go. I will say that I have a lot of faith in the Big 12 Office, our presidents and athletic directors through statistics and data have come to the conclusion that we need a championship game in '17. So I'm behind them 100%.



I have seen a few different layouts for ways to decide who those teams would be. My only suggestion would be to make sure that the two teams that play in a championship game are the teams that have earned a right to get there and have the best records in our league.

Q. You don't have the luxury of a J.W. Walsh backing up Mason Rudolph this year. Do you handle Mason differently in terms of the offensive line? I know you think it's going to be better but if he gets hurt you're kind of in a pickle right there and with that in mind do you get the back-up snaps early in the season?

MIKE GUNDY: We won't handle Mason any different and if we have somebody on our team that can help contribute on game day whether it would be in a package similar to what J.W. executed for us last year, some short yardage and goal line packages, then if there is somebody out there, then we will certainly take advantage of their efforts. If not, then we develop a scheme for Mason that fits those categories. Our goal will be to establish a back-up quarterback as quickly as possible and you guys, most of you have covered college football and watched it for a long time and that's not something that happened overnight. It takes some time. But we will do the best we can to get a young man prepared in case we need him.

Q. With the whole Baylor situation unfolding, Kliff said it made all the coaches around the nation think twice and reflect a little more. How did that register with you?

MIKE GUNDY: Well, I think the situation at Baylor is like having a discussion with politics and religion in that there is not anything that any of us can say other than we have confidence or I have confidence in our league that we will do everything possible to try to make the best decisions possible. It hasn't really affected us at Oklahoma State.

We've had a pretty unique way of handling things in our program. We have a lot of confidence in it, and we always try to do the best we can. So I'm hoping in the long run it will work out for everybody.

I will say this: I'm guessing the question is going to get asked. I know very little about what's going on at Baylor, you guys know more than I do. I'm not on the

inside down there and I'm not comfortable in commenting on any situation, but I will say that I thought it was a very smart move in hiring Jim Grobe. I've had some conversations with Coach Grobe, and I was in the ACC for a period of time and I think he's a first-class guy. I think he's experienced. I think he's intelligent. He's patient and was probably as good of a hire that they could make at that time with the situation that they had.

Q. Mason Rudolph broke out last year, almost threw for 4,000 yards but you guys struggled to establish a running game. How do you become more balanced and help him out?

MIKE GUNDY: You're being nice and saying we "struggled" with the running game (chuckles.) We weren't very good at all! When you look back at the last couple of years with our running game, we didn't do a good job of covering guys up and giving our backs an opportunity to make cuts. We were making too many cuts behind the line of scrimmage.

So we worked considerably hard in the spring and I feel like we've established continuity and we've got a group of running backs returning that are a little more fresh. They are bigger and stronger than they were last year, and I think when we put all that together we're going to improve in the running game.

Q. Mike, your first impression so far of Barry J. Sanders.

MIKE GUNDY: I haven't been around Junior much. He finish up at Stanford in the middle of June. He come in and has been with us for a few weeks now. Took him a week before he could pass all of his physicals and take care of everything he need to do before he could start working out. At that time, we were in camp and I've been gone some. So I know that he's a college graduate. I know that he's mature. That he's dependable, seems to be durable. He came from a winning program and from an offense that obviously runs the football. So we're excited about him being a part of our team. We hope that he will make a contribution that will help us be a better running football team. But his personality, his attitude has been really good up to this point from the people inside the program that keep me up with what's going on. I'm excited about getting out there with him in August and seeing just what he can do for our football team.

Q. How does it make you feel when you are coaching a guy who you played with his dad and you're so closely associated with in Barry Sanders, obviously; and, two, how much better do you think your offensive line is going to be this year?

MIKE GUNDY: As I said earlier, I think we have -- I know we have more continuity this year than we've had

in the last two years and in offensive line play that helps. We have more size and strength and that's going to help.

I feel like we'll cover guys up. I guess as I said earlier, we're excited about Junior being here. In my opinion, his dad was the greatest running back in college football, maybe ever. So to have him in our program at this point in his career, I think, is great for Oklahoma State and Oklahoma State football. When he was coming out of high school he had expressed a desire to maybe go somewhere else based on maybe a small part of not wanting to follow in his dad's foot steps and I think we can certainly understand that. At this point, he's excited about being at Oklahoma State and we're excited about having him on our team.

Q. You received a two-year contract extension this off-season. What is your excitement level to know that you're backed by a program that wants you to be there for the long-term future?

MIKE GUNDY: Well, Oklahoma State has been very good to me, and the administration with Mike Holder, our Athletic Director and Burns Hargis, our President, we've all been there for a long time now and we've developed a relationship where we can work together as a group and long-term commitment. I believe in my profession is very important and I'm at a place that I'm very happy and enjoy being around the young people, so I'm always honored and feel privileged to be able to essentially get another long-term contract at Oklahoma State.

Q. Mike, you got a switchback as fourth year as your offensive coordinator, you hired a guy from Division II, definitely has a lot of credentials, a lot of secrets and struggled early, but how much has he come into his own as the offensive coordinator and how much of your offense now is mostly his stamp?

MIKE GUNDY: Mike has come a long ways. The reason that we brought Coach Yurchich to Oklahoma State is because we felt he was a young, upcoming, innovative coach and I had been very fortunate as a head coach to have that style of a coach with Larry Fedora and Dana Holgerson and Todd Monken, guys that are innovative and strong-willed and can make a decision and Mike's fallen into that category. He's an extremely hard worker. He's a really, really good recruiter, and he's turned into a very good play caller. He made some adjustments, certainly different being at Oklahoma State than where he came from. He's been willing to make some adjustments and he's done a really good job. You see different style of play, you know, his involvement with our J.W. Walsh package last year was maybe as good of a coaching move as we've had at Oklahoma State in a long time.

Q. Mike, how comfortable are you that defensively you have what it takes to -- what it takes to win a championship?

MIKE GUNDY: I feel good about our defense. We have depth. I was visiting with a couple guys earlier and my third, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth year. We had been competitive across the country and won a lot of football games, but at this Media Day the conversation was our depth on the defensive line was the concern and could we stay healthy? Joe Bob Clements has done a tremendous job of recruiting defensive linemen for us. We have some depth. The one area that is a concern is Emmanuel Ogbah because he was a great player for us last year, and we have young players at the defensive end position who don't have as much experience and are hopefully six or eight games away from getting to what a Jimmy Bean level of player was. Jimmy Bean was a really, really good football player for us last year. Ogbah is an unfair comparison because essentially you're talking a guy who was picked in the first round. I know he was second round first pick, but there wasn't 32 picks. If there were 32 picks he would have been first. So we have experienced linebackers, and we have some experience in our secondary.

We need to get some good corner play with the style of quarterbacks that we face in this league. We're in a turnover year, again, where the quarterback play is going to be so good in this league that if you turn the ball over a couple times, you may end up scoring 31 points and lose the game. The other team may score 40 and that's what can happen in this league. So defensively we try to do the best we can to limit big plays, continue to force turnovers and put the ball back in the offense's hands.

Q. Picking up here on the defensive end position, does it look like Jordan and Jerel are guys that can replace Emmanuel and Jimmy, and I was looking at your schedule, five of your first six games are at home. Have you had that luxury before as a head coach?

MIKE GUNDY: No, we haven't. We have a great opportunity to create excitement with Oklahoma State football this year. We've played on the road early in the season maybe more so than we should have, for whatever reason. So we are excited about being able to start the season at home. We have good, young talent at the defensive end spot. Again, it's unfair to compare them early on, but as the season progresses, with Jarrell and Jordan and a couple of the other guys, I'm hoping that they will develop into becoming good college football players. They're young enough that they can develop into being really good college football players if they desire to, with hard work and effort.

But there is not any question and I go back to what I said earlier in the quarterback play in this league you better get some pressure on those guys or they're going to score a lot of points.

Q. Obviously you hated to lose Ryan Simmons last year, but how much did that get Chad Whitener ahead of the game? And also Kevin Peterson is gone at corner. Who replaces that leadership on defense?

MIKE GUNDY: Well, at the time, it was devastating for us to lose the experience and the leadership that Ryan Simmons brought our football team, but it certainly helped us at that time, now, based on Chad Whitener in getting a few games under his belt, leadershipwise on defense, Chad Whitener is one of the guys that's going to have to replace Peterson. Burton needs to be a leader for us. Sterns is out there. He will become a leader. Motekiai, Vincent Taylor, guys that are on the inside that need to provide that toughness to our team. We will look to those guys for leadership.

Q. You talk about having five of six at home to begin the season, but on the flip side of that you have some tough road games, especially TCU and Oklahoma to end your season. How do you balance that out and how difficult can that be?

MIKE GUNDY: We get asked about big games and during the season they will say it's a big game this week, and we all know in college football every week is a big game. If you don't win one to get to the other then in the end, you'll have a hard time making up ground.

In Big 12, I think it's fair to say that you can go back over the last four, five years and see that you could have a good football team that went on the road at many places in this league and we're supposed to win and not play as well as you should and lose. So each school in our conference has a great home venue and when you play on the road you have to be able to run the ball effectively and you have to be able to limit big plays on defense to try to control the crowd and that's what we lean on when we play on the road.

Q. Two-part question about the offensive line: Do you have a sense of the starting five right now? Secondly, looked like a fairly good pass-blocking group last year. But with Mason and not having watch anymore can you quantify how important it is to keep Rudolph healthy?

MIKE GUNDY: It's no question that it's very important for us to keep Mason healthy with the way that transfers are set up in college football now, unfortunately, this is going to be a very important of most team's success. Because if you have two good

once, a lot of times one is not going to stay anymore.
So we need to do the very best we can to protect
Mason.

With our offensive line, we've got seven guys that I had mentioned after spring ball and I know you guys are familiar with them, that we feel like have to rotate through and give us the best opportunity for success. They were a good pass protecting team last year. It was one of the most unusual times for me as an offensive coach or head coach to be around a group that were really good pass protectors and we weren't very good at run blocking. The combination of a lot of different things. Hopefully we will improve in both areas, and if we can protect for Mason I'm fairly comfortable with our wide receiver play that we should be able to move the ball throwing it through the air.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you for your comments and good luck this season.