

Big 12 Conference Football Media Days

Tuesday, July 19, 2016

Bob Stoops

Oklahoma

THE MODERATOR: Joining us now at the dais is Oklahoma Head Coach, Bob Stoops. Coach, your thoughts about the upcoming season?

BOB STOOPS: Thank you. It's great to be here today with my four great leaders on our team, Jordan Evans and Ahmad Thomas on defense, Samaje Perine and Baker Mayfield on offense. Again, excellent leaders and great leaders on our team. Great to be here, I guess, going on my 18th season coming to this event, and really, like all the other seasons, really excited and looking forward to being on the field again with this football team.

It's a group of guys, a good number of them back from last year's Big 12 Championship team and Final Four team are back, but it's still a new team. There are enough new pieces that it's a new team all together. But I've been really pleased with the overall intensity and the effort and the winter conditioning and spring practices and what they've been doing here this summer.

In today's world, we're able to keep track of them more in the summer now and from what I've seen and engaging by how pleased my strength staff is, I feel like our guys have worked hard coming into the season. I've been asked already about preseason rankings. It really doesn't matter to us. Going into our 18th season, we've been picked to win. We've been picked not to win. I don't recall it every mattering. What matters is the work you put in, what you earn day-to-day and the way we practice, the way we prepare in meetings and how we ultimately play and coach.

So, again, we're just excited to be ready to start the season and looking forward to hopefully having another championship-type team.

Q. You're now the longest tenured coach in the FBS and I was curious, how long do you plan on seeing yourself coaching?

BOB STOOPS: You know, that's something you would ask a guy that's maybe 65, but I'm only 55. So I don't see myself anytime soon, that being the question that I need to answer.

I would like to think I'm in really good health. I take



care of myself. I can't wait for this season, much like I couldn't 17 years ago for my first one as a head coach. It's exciting. You have a new team every year, and I can't wait for it. So hopefully I'm going another ten years or so. I don't think I will be one of those guys, God bless him, like Coach Snyder, I'm not going that long, but I sure can go to retirement age.

Q. What are your thoughts on the Walk-on Transfer Rule change this summer and the fact that Texas Tech actually supported the rule change?

BOB STOOPS: Hats off to Kliff and Kirby Hocutt, their AD and ultimately it's the right thing to do. Obviously I'm going to say that. I get it helps or is a positive advantage for Baker Mayfield, but let's look beyond one guy. It's the right thing to do. That's the bottom line. Pleased that it worked out that way not only for Baker, but any guy moving forward if a guy can leave one program and go somewhere else, he's not on scholarship and get on the field and play, then that's what he should do. I don't see it being a problem whatsoever.

So, anyway, I think it's great that we came to the right conclusion, and, again, ultimately for all sports it's the correct thing to do.

Q. Your one-two punch at running back with Samaje and Joe, is it as good as you've had in your 18 years?

BOB STOOPS: It's fair to say, yes, absolutely! These guys are such all-around players. They're amazing when you watch the coaches version of the end zone copy, the holes they pick and the patience they have. Then you notice the obvious is the strength and power and they rarely get caught.

They're unusually fast for that size. So they have it all. They got great hands! They're really well-rounded guys that way and complement each other, I think, really well. So, yeah, that would be -- I'm trying to think of the of some of the other tandems, I don't know that I've had two of that quality.

Q. You voted to institute a Title game starting next season. Sounds like divisions are going to be, have decided to go to divisions despite a round Robin. How would you like to see the divisions split up?

BOB STOOPS: I have somewhat of an opinion. I don't feel like -- I don't want to express it. This is how I want it. In the end, heck, I don't want to say I don't really care, but in the end, you know, whatever is best for the fans and for us, as you space out the year and who you are playing when and where, you know, whatever is best for the viewership and the fans I will be all for.

Q. You've had the last few years several strong personalities on this defense with obviously Eric Striker and Zack Sanchez and Charles Tapper, those guys are all gone now. Is there another guy who is going to be like that in terms of leadership for this defense, or is it just going to be a different dynamic without those guys around?

BOB STOOPS: I have a couple of them here today, and I've said this almost every year, in college you're always losing leadership. You're always losing seniors, and now guys are now in a position to do it. Ahmad Thomas has been a leader for us. Jordan Evans has been a leader for us. Those guys are back and doing well. Matt Romar up front is a guy that's been a strong leader for us, already, and other guys as they go through the year. Steven Parker, even though he's a year younger, Steven is a leader in every way in what we're doing there. So we will have other guys in a position to do it.

Q. Coach, in light of all the increased public awareness on domestic violence on-campus sexual assault and things like that, have you found it difficult to rationalize or justify the existence of Joe Mixon as a full-scholarship athlete?

BOB STOOPS: You're talking about a situation that occurred three summers ago, I believe, right? And Joe Mixon was punished. We've already been through all of this. He's met high standards. Continues to have to meet high standards to remain a part of the football team, but he has done so all along.

So everybody has different measures of what's enough punishment and what is not. In the end, we felt, myself along with our administration, that this was the right punishment and he's met all the conditions we put in front of him and he was removed for a full season.

Q. I think most people agree that the Walk-on Transfer Rule is the right thing to do. However, Kyler Murray transferred to your program thinking he could play in 2017. Now he may have to wait an extra year. What's his reaction been like?

BOB STOOPS: Kyler has been nothing but positive. He's been a positive member of your team in the way he's worked all through the winter and spring. Brings positive energy every day. I've seen nothing but positive from Kyler.

Q. You've got playmakers on offense, but you lose just a fantastic asset in Sterling Shepard. What do you see at the receiver position that can provide what he did or come close to it?

BOB STOOPS: Well, for one, I don't know that you every replace -- Sterling was a dynamic, big-play guy for us. Couple of things. I do believe Dede Westbrook and how he's performed in the spring and what he's capable of that he can create more big plays in that type of way this year. And Mark Andrews was a guy that everybody was clamoring to get on the field a year ago, who was a different style than Sterling, but was highly effective when he was on the field. He is a guy who will have a bigger role now, and I believe there are more guys in the room this year prepared to play at the receiver position than there were a year ago.

So I feel like overall we will be able to absorb the absence of Sterling with better play for more guys. Hopefully that's how it will work.

Q. Bob, you won a National Championship in your second year and you've been in three or four other ones, come very close. Do you reflect back on those years and think about how close you came, and has there been a missing ingredient that you apply going forward?

BOB STOOPS: All those years are all so different. A few of them were in the BCS era, just last year in the Final Four. But in the end they're a little bit different. I can't say no, there is any one piece. Just that overall I've talked to Coach Switzer at length, we had a good talk one day. Back at a certain time in your last game of the year you might play the 10th or 12th best team in the country. Say we're in the Orange Bowl. That's where we always went when everyone went to a Bowl.

Nowadays that's not happening. You're going to play the next best football team, debated who is best, but in the end you're playing a very good football team, and whether it be by injury or whatever, if you're not at your best you're going to have a hard time winning that game.

So, in the end, I don't reflect back much on it. I look forward and try and continue to improve, be a more powerful team is what I'm constantly preaching.

Q. Charlie Strong was in here earlier today and asked why his team has performed so well against your team the last three years, and he said it's the one game that you don't have to say anything. It is the one game of the year where he doesn't have to give a pep talk or a pregame speech. From your perspective, why have you guys not been able to execute like you want to and like you've seen them do in the past?

BOB STOOPS: Three years, or did we lose last year?

Q. Lost two of the last three.

BOB STOOPS: In the end, you're talking how many years back. In this last game they ran the football better than us. They were more physical than us. We didn't execute well enough on either side of the ball. We had more missed tackles in that game than maybe up to the Clemson game. As well as I didn't feel we executed very well offensively as well. We didn't throw it very well and couldn't run it. So in the end that's where it was a year ago.

Q. You haven't been shy about scheduling nonconference opponents, but do you notice that happening more around the country and why do you think that is?

BOB STOOPS: I can't speak for the rest of the country. It's always been our view. Joe Castiglione and I setting up the schedule and Joe has always conferred with me on it on who we want to play and I've always accepted whatever has come across. We're not only Ohio State these two years and Houston with it to start the season, and then the previous six we had series with Tennessee, Notre Dame and Florida State.

We've always just believed if you're going to be a top-tier program and one of the better teams in the country play "like" teams, challenges yourself. It's what college football fans all around the country want to see. I know it's what our fans want to see, as long as you win.

But in the end, our players are challenged and excited about it as well as, you know, us as a coaching staff.

Q. Do you think those other games have anything to do with the playoffs?

BOB STOOPS: Well, I guess other teams are looking that -- I believe it made a difference a year ago, us getting in the playoff and getting into the Final Four the fact that we went to Tennessee and won.

Had we had a lesser opponent and if it was someone no one cared about, we may not have, who knows? In the end, and I think through the BCS era, I was asked earlier about some of the other games we were in. In those years we played tough out-of-conference games to give ourselves a chance. Say you were the one team tied with two or three other teams with one loss, if you played the tougher out-of-season schedule, then usually you got the nod. So maybe that's how other teams are now looking at it.

Q. What are your thoughts on the championship game this year, given that last year if it would have happened you would have been playing Oklahoma State twice in a row, also the fact that you could be

facing Texas twice in a row in that championship game? What are your thoughts?

BOB STOOPS: I think for the right reasons it's the right thing to do. It's been talked a lot about, primarily the 13th data point and primarily also everybody gets an extra \$3 million. That's significant. In the end, let's go play! However they set it up, we will be ready to work with it.

In regard to what you said I've been sorta back and forth talking through it that we should just take the top two teams and play again, but then that would have created a scenario like last year where we are playing Oklahoma State immediately after just playing them.

So then you say better off to go to divisions and then you may not be playing the top two teams, you may be playing a team that in one division that may have more losses than the two in another division. So I've been back and forth on that. Obviously I don't know how to set it up.

Q. Bob, you got guys who are going to be stepping up on defense with Dominique having moved on and others, Tapper, Striker, and there is no time to get going because there is Tom Herman right off the top. Talk about the leadership on your defense and how far you think they've come?

BOB STOOPS: Yeah, again, I'm pleased with the way our guys are working. I mentioned some of them. We've got guys that aren't here even, Matt Romar has been a strong leader for our team really in the last couple of years on the "D" line. Jordan Evans is here at linebacker. Ahmad Thomas, Steven Parker, now going into his third year of starting is a guy that's not here that's a younger guy that has been a strong leader for us.

Then there are a whole host of guys that have played a lot of football around them, Charles Walker has played a ton of football up there and on and on. So I feel we've got work to do definitely in those areas, but I feel like we have some talented guys that are now in a position to hopefully take control of those positions.

Q. Obviously Baker is your quarterback. How comfortable are you with a true freshman, Kendall, being your back-up quarterback?

BOB STOOPS: Really loved what he did. Having him here all winter and spring was a big boost because he's in this situation. He did a great job through the spring, really pleased with him. Really smart in his decision making, avoided the bad plays, you know, for a guy that's just out of high school. Talented arm. I feel good about him. He's only going to keep improving and getting better.

Coach Riley does a great job with those guys, so I feel good about Austin and the spring he had and the summer he's having right now.

Q. Would you be in favor of the Oklahoma and Texas game being played a second time in one year, or is that a game that should be played just once?

BOB STOOPS: Obviously, if we're in different divisions, hey, let's go again! That would be exciting. Why wouldn't it be? Two is better than one, right? That's what -- usually anyway.

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