

July 30, 2013



An Interview With:

HOUSTON COACH TONY LEVINE

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by University of Houston Richie Leon, offensive tackle Rowdy Harper, linebacker Derrick Mathews, cornerback Zach McMillan, and also Head Coach Levine.

COACH LEVINE: I was going to introduce our players and I guess you just beat me to that. But we're excited to be here, and "excited" I think is a word you're going to hear me use a number of times over the course of the next 15 minutes, next four, five, six months.

We have a lot of exciting things going on right now within our program. Certainly we couldn't be happier with our move to the American Athletic Conference. I think most everyone knows about the new stadium. We'll be playing in Reliant Stadium the majority of our games this season as they continue to work on our stadium on campus that will be ready for the 2014 season.

We also have brand new practice fields that will be completed here the next 48 hours, an outdoor turf field and brand new grass field that will be really, really good for our program.

And then last week we unveiled new uniforms for the upcoming season as well that I know our players, our fans, and even our recruits are excited about.

One more thing I want to mention is a few months ago in the NFL Draft, we had the 12th player taken, D.J. Hayden by the Oakland Raiders. Signed his contract a couple days ago. We're certainly proud of him and proud of that accomplishment as well.

So a lot of things going on right now. And as excited as we are about all of them, we're really, really looking forward to our players officially

reporting in three days in practice number one on Saturday evening.

So it's going to be a tremendous challenge for us this season. It's one that I've been through before when I was at Louisville almost 10 years ago, making transition from conferences and a successful one. So I draw on some past experiences.

This move is something we've certainly anticipated for over a year now. We've been preparing for it in a number of ways. I mentioned our facilities. We've addressed it in recruiting the last two classes and are currently doing it now as well.

So as we look at our schedule, and it's one that our fan base is certainly looking forward to, it's certainly one that our players and our staff is excited about as well.

Our focus, as it will always be, is on game one, and that's against Southern, our first non-conference opponent.

We're excited about everything going on within our program. We're excited about the direction of our program.

I think things take time and what we're trying to accomplish at the University of Houston is build our program into a consistent winner.

Everybody certainly remembers two years ago being 13-1 and beating Penn State in the Ticket City Bowl, and the year before that we were 5 and 7. So we want to build in a consistent winner, one that's going to Bowl games and competing for championships every season.

In terms of our players, I've said this for a long time, I'll always continue to say it, is we have competition. And it's regardless of position. Quarterback, kicker, linebacker, we're going to have open competition. We always will. It goes through the spring.

And then when our newcomers join our program in the summer, which the vast majority of them were here at the end of May, they have an opportunity in the first couple of weeks of August

as we prepare for that first game to compete to play for us as well.

So we're looking forward to Friday getting here and getting going Saturday evening. With that I'll open it up for questions.

Q. Just outline some of the positives and negatives that you took away from your first full year in charge of Houston.

COACH LEVINE: I think I've only got about nine minutes left, so I'm going to not go through all of them.

But I think the first year at a job, regardless of occupation, is the toughest. I think you learn things about yourself. You learn things about your staff. Certainly you learn things about your players, things that work for you and some things you want to change.

And I think every coach, every head football coach at some point has been a first-year head football coach. And when you get that opportunity, you draw on experiences from people you've worked for, people you've worked with, and try to put your own spin on it and make it your own.

We were a young football team last season. And we did some great things offensively in terms of putting points on the board, but certainly we turned the ball over way, way too much. Defensively, we gave up too many points but we created turnovers.

In the kicking game, we weren't as explosive in the return game as we had in years past. So there's things we've got to correct.

And I think part of my philosophy in terms of making mistakes, everybody makes mistakes. And if you make a mistake, I think you need to admit it. I think you need to correct it, and I think you need to learn from it and not repeat it.

So we've made some subtle changes. There have been a couple of staff changes. We've moved some guys around by position. We address some things in recruiting.

And going into year two, you know, you talk to football players about when they really become successful, the game slows down for them.

And I think in year two of any job, any occupation, things tend to slow down and they certainly are right now for me and our staff moving forward.

Q. Coming into the conference, what's the biggest challenge you think you have during the transformation?

COACH LEVINE: Well, you know, it's going to be a tremendous challenge moving into this conference. I think it's a very, very -- when you look from top to bottom, per se -- and I'm not naming programs, but the conference overall is a tremendously competitive league.

And our focus, while we know what's ahead of us and certainly we've looked at our schedule and our opponents and where we're playing on the road, our focus is on our own program. We've got to improve some things. We've got to get better and as we do that, the wins will take care of themselves and we'll be successful.

Q. I wanted to get your comments on the new targeting rules and how you feel that's going to shake out this year, any barriers, any gray areas, so on?

COACH LEVINE: The targeting rule, I think if fans are not aware of it, they will be the opening weekend of college football. It's going to be very impactful for the game.

And first and foremost on the top of our agenda -- and this is nationwide -- is player safety. That's an absolute must. So any rule change regarding player safety, we're certainly for that.

And obviously people can complain and talk about, oh, this rule is going to do this, this rule is going to do that. But the bottom line is this rule is in this season. We're going to prepare for it and adjust for it accordingly.

But at the end of the day, it's going to be interesting to see how it plays out. I think there's some scenarios that could come up which could affect not only the current game and the outcome of the current game, but certainly the next game if a young man is ejected in the second half.

So it will be interesting. I think it puts added pressure on the officials to make that call right there with a packed stadium on national TV, but it's something that will be in this season.

And us, like every other 120-something Division 1-A football program, will have to adjust because I know this: It's a point of emphasis for the upcoming season as it's a new rule. And officials are not going to not call the targeting because it ejects a player.

If they see it, they're gonna call it, and along it is going to be the 15 yards and a reviewable objection. It's going to be interesting, and I think it's one that's going to be impactful

nationwide in that first weekend of college football.

Q. Talk about the new facility, how you're going to open it up next year and how it affects all aspects of your program, your current program and your recruiting.

COACH LEVINE: The new facility is going to be tremendous. I actually put a hard hat on last week and had about a 30-minute tour through it. And literally, as I stand up here and speak before you, they're working on it. I know they always say they're ahead of schedule, but they are ahead of schedule.

I've said this publicly, if you're an alum or a fan of our program and you're in Houston, you need to find 30, 45 minutes to drive down Cullen Boulevard and see what's taking place on a daily basis.

It's helped recruiting. It's helped the excitement surrounding our program. When you talk about moving to the American Athletic Conference and new facilities, it's something our current student-athletes enjoy, our alumni enjoy, and again, recruits are really excited about it as well.

So we're looking forward this season -- first and foremost, we've got four student-athletes here with us. Two are seniors, so two will not have the opportunity to play in the new stadium. But so we're looking at this season first and foremost, but a year from now, we'll be excited about the new building.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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