

**July 30, 2013**



An Interview With:

## **MEMPHIS COACH JUSTIN FUENTE**

THE MODERATOR: We're joined now by the University of Memphis student-athlete Antonio Foster, Charles Harris, and head coach Justin Fuente.

Coach, an opening statement.

COACH FUENTE: My name's Justin Fuente, head football coach University of Memphis. On behalf of our university, our community, our athletic department and our football team, we are honored to be part of this conference. We are excited about the future, looking forward to the season.

We know that we are obviously faced with an incredible challenge to build a football program while simultaneously taking a step up in competition. But we're going into this with our eyes wide open and with full understanding of what it's going to take to get the job done. And we're looking forward to the challenges that lay ahead.

I think our kids have made large strides in the one year that my staff and I have been there. We've seen them grow in many ways, but most importantly in kind of the fundamental principles of what a team is.

And that's basically where we started, with accountability to each other and accountability to the program. And because of that I'm excited about this group of guys and our season coming up.

So that being said, I think if anybody's got any questions, I'll be happy to answer them.

THE MODERATOR: Questions?

**Q. You are surrounded by SEC schools down there. Do you think this league will help**

**you kind of differentiate yourself in terms of building your own identity?**

COACH FUENTE: I think so. I go back to my time at TCU. Their program was a lot farther along than ours is. But when you think about what Gary did down there in the midst of the Big 12, and he used to say to us: Guys, we don't have to be the big brand. We can be our own niche. We don't have to be to use an example Coke or Pepsi, we can be Sprite.

And I think that's there for us. I think we have an opportunity to kind of establish our own brand and take this conference as people begin to know more about this conference and the conference begins to earn more credibility on the football field, being a part of it and people know more about it, I think we have that chance. Absolutely.

**Q. To that point, there's a unique opportunity here for schools like Memphis. All you have to be is the best of ten this year to get to a BCS Bowl. Next year it changes totally. You have to do the best of 55 or whatever the number is.**

COACH FUENTE: Sure.

**Q. Do you even go there with your players, express that?**

COACH FUENTE: To be quite honest with you, no. We have talked very little about anything other than ourselves. And I don't mean that from an arrogant standpoint, I mean that's where our focus needs to be.

On our team building, on our ability to continue to get bigger, faster, stronger, and our accountability level and all those things that go to the fundamental building blocks of a team.

So we have spent very little time on anybody other than ourselves, because ultimately those things will take care of itself if we take care of ourselves.

**Q. Most teams, especially when they're picked high, they say they don't pay attention to the preseason polls. Where you're picked in this league, does it matter if it's discouraging, you have this fresh start and picked where you are?**

COACH FUENTE: No, I don't -- no. It's not discouraging. We know where we're at and where we're going to go and what we're going to do. So I don't take other people's opinions and consider that as a step backwards.

We're just solely focused on ourselves. We made large strides last year. We'll make large strides this year. Where it all ends up, I don't know. But we have an older more mature defense, a younger more inexperienced offense.

And our challenge as coaches are offensively to get our young kids to play older than they are; defensively, get our old kids to play their age and play together. And that's our focus, and we'll go put a productive unit out there.

**Q. Can you give us a sense of how the city feels about coming into this new venue, the American Athletic Conference, and the response of those alumni and fans?**

COACH FUENTE: It's been tremendous. I think they're anxious to learn more about it is the biggest thing. I think obviously having the basketball tournament in Memphis is a big deal. Our community is excited about that.

I think the Liberty Bowl, I don't mean the Bowl game, I mean the stadium, is a great venue for us to play our home games in and represent the city.

People are excited. People are talking about it. I think people in that city or in our city will reward a job well done. And they're excited about the direction of our football program combined with the move to the new league.

Now, I'm hopeful that they understand what that means, the building of a program and taking a step up in competition at the same time, but there's a lot of buzz around town about kind of a more inquisitive, what is this going to mean, what's it going to be like, as we move forward in the deal.

But there's a bunch of people in the city that are excited about the move.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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