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An Interview With:

UCONN COACH PAUL PASQUALONI

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by UConn Coach Paul Pasqualoni and quarterback Chandler Whitmer, offensive guard Steve Greene, cornerback Byron Jones.

COACH PASQUALONI: First, I've been very, very blessed in my coaching career and my playing career to be around a lot of big-league first-class deals. As an undergraduate of Penn State, I promise you that was a first-class program.

Opportunity to go to Syracuse and coach in the original Big East, things were done in a big-league manner. You coached for the Cowboys and the Dolphins. Things are done in a big-league manner. University of Connecticut, things are done in a big-league manner.

I can't tell you how impressed I am with the job, this conference, the American, has done.

Mike Aresco and Nick Carparelli, the entire staff, everybody, the diligence, the hard work that they've put into this and the results all the way around, from top to bottom to me is just very impressive. And I feel, one more time, very lucky to have the opportunity to be the head coach at UConn and to be in this league against these fellow institutions and football programs.

I'm very, very anxious to get the team in on Thursday, very, very anxious to get started on Friday. Friday's the first day we can actually get on the field and practice. Very anxious to see what the team looks like. The first thing as a coach that you want to get done is to see the team and see if they pass the look test, from a conditioning standpoint, from a strength standpoint.

So we start at the beginning in preseason camp, and that will start with what kind of condition

are we in, what's our strength level, and are we focused and are we ready to go.

We have a number of players out this spring. We had a little bit of an unusual high number of shoulder injuries. Shamar Stephen had a shoulder. Yawin Smallwood who has gained a lot of notoriety here in the last couple of months as a linebacker had a shoulder. Jimmy Bennett was out in the spring. All these guys are healthy, they're all ready to go. I didn't have my hands on them in the spring. They were there watching in the meetings, doing their due diligence as to what they could do, but they couldn't practice.

So even a young guy like Omaine Stephens, a linebacker from Orange, New Jersey, for us had a shoulder injury. And he didn't participate in the spring. So we had a number of those things.

And I'm really anxious to see that group and the 25 freshmen we signed. They've been on campus and school. As you know, the NCAA rules won't allow me to go down into the weight room to see these guys or to watch them do their conditioning and to do the things they do over the summer. So really, really looking forward to getting the team together and to see Friday morning what we look like.

Q. Paul, would you talk for a minute about the number of 2012 guys that have a chance to play on Sunday this year and how you're addressing the roster voids they left behind?

COACH PASQUALONI: Let me make sure I heard you. Could you say it again? I didn't hear the whole thing. The guys that were drafted --

Q. There were a number of guys that have an opportunity, drafted or free agents to play in the NFL and how you're addressing the void.

COACH PASQUALONI: Well, we had five guys drafted. We had three guys sign. Ryan Wirth

had a rookie tryout. We had a total of -- from last year's team we had a total of nine guys who were in some sort of NFL camp in the spring or preseason.

So offensively it starts with Ryan Griffin, the tight end. We're working hard. Sean McQuillan is a young player, very, very athletic, could take some of that pressure off. Spencer Parker is another older guy in our program who has not really played much but is very, very athletic.

And I'm optimistic that Spencer will have an opportunity to contribute. We brought in Tommy Myers from the state of Connecticut. He's an in-state guy from Coventry. He's just an outstanding athlete. I don't know how far he'll come in preseason. So the tight end position we're working hard at. I think we've got a couple of guys that could help us there.

The big concerns with the guys that were drafted are the corners. We've moved Byron Jones to corner. Byron's here. I'm sure you guys will talk to him. I think his skill set is very conducive to the corner position. I think he has those skills.

Taylor Mack is going to be a senior. Taylor Mack has played corner for us. He's been a role player for us, but it's time for Taylor to step up. Jhavon Williams is a young player from South Florida in our program who redshirted last year who I think is going to have a chance to be in that top four at the position.

So we're not going to have the experience there, but I think we're going to have some guys who are athletic and we're going to have to ask them to do things they can do.

So we'll see them more at the Sam backer position. Obviously, he's out at Oakland. I think he's listed first on their depth chart right now. I talked to him. He called me last week.

So we've got Jefferson Ashiru who has been in the program for two years, and we've got Graham Stewart who transferred from Florida. He's an Xavier High School, Connecticut, Middletown, guy. Played at Florida as a freshman, from a special teams standpoint, he's explosive, very, very fast. I'm excited there.

Ryan Donohue transferred from Maryland as a linebacker. Ryan Donohue is a pretty consistent steady performer. Yawin, knock on wood, is healthy and he can play the Mike backer position.

We'll be a little less experienced, but there again, we've got some guys -- one of the guys I'm

concerned about replacing is Ryan Wirth. Ryan was kind of the quiet leader on our team a year ago. Ryan Wirth played week in and week out, play in and play out, very dependable, very high level a year ago, and elevated -- I thought elevated the play of everybody around him.

Shamar Stephen is back. And Shamar had a really good year last year. He's going to have to. He and Jesse Joseph who was out in the spring with an injury. Jesse was granted a fifth year. Jesse has played a lot of football. Jesse and Ryan will have to be the leaders of that group up front. It starts up front. And I'm excited to see them on Friday again.

So we've got some holes to fill but I think we've got some guys that can step in and step up.

Q. (Off microphone.)

COACH PASQUALONI: We've got Tyler Bullock and we've got Alex Mateas there, and we haven't settled on who the starter is going to be yet. We're going to pick it up where we left off. I'm excited about both of them. I think they both can play. I think as opposed to a year ago where we were trying to replace a veteran in Moe Petrus, I think we've got two guys that have gained some experience, know what to do. So I think we're going to be in much better, much, much better.

The offensive line is an area of this team that I'm excited about. Jimmy Bennett coming back. Kevin Friend has been real consistent. Steven Greene has been really, really consistent. He's a very smart player and helps us a lot. I think we've got a couple of good young guys up there. I'm anxious to see Kyle Schafnacker from St. Thomas Aquinas. I want to see what he looks like on Friday. Tommy Hopkins, I want to see what he looks like. I think those guys may be able to compete in preseason camp and maybe provide a little bit more depth over there.

So I'm kind of excited about that offensive line, I really am. I think it's the first time since I've been at UConn we've got these guys coming back and they kind of know each other and they communicate well and know what's expected, know what's going to be accepted and know what's expected.

The first year you're putting in a whole new system. So that's a whole new box of chocolates. The next year you lose key guys, you lose the apex of the thing. It's the old adage you've got to be strong up the middle. And Moe Petrus was

pretty experienced player. So we lost Moe. And we didn't have a guy who had really played center a lot. So that was a concern trying to identify the defense and all that.

So I think we're much further, to answer your question, I think we're much further along.

Q. A little more broad question, there's been a lot of talk Mike Aresco, the Division IV and everything. What's your feeling? Do you feel that the American and the schools and specifically UConn is closer to the power five than they are to maybe the rest and can you explain why you feel that yourself?

COACH PASQUALONI: I really do, I really do. I think that -- I don't know much about it other than the four conferences trying to, I guess, put themselves in position to satisfy the needs of their conference, with the issues that Mike talked about, I thought he explained it very, very well, very, very clearly. I think when you add teams like SMU and you add teams like Houston, you know, to your league, there's plenty of tradition, plenty of great football.

Those teams have been at it for a long time. Nobody has to tell them how to play football, I promise you. Central Florida is an outstanding program. They'll line up toe to toe and compete against anybody.

Just look at the linemen that they brought in here, pretty good looking players. So in my heart UConn is lined up and competed against those teams in Bowl games and has had great results. So without question you know my background. We've competed at that level for a long time forever.

So I really do believe that this conference is better aligned with those four.

Q. What are your expectations for Chandler going into this year in terms of progression as a player and leader?

COACH PASQUALONI: I'm excited. Chandler is a very, very diligent guy, very smart and he's worked extremely hard since the end of last season. Nobody's more disappointed at being 5-7 than Chandler Whitmer, I promise you, and he's worked very hard.

So I'm really, again, anxious on Friday when we break the huddle and run up to the ball and get to the line of scrimmage. I'm anxious to see Chandler and the leadership part of it, the communication part of it, the role of the quarterback, the consistency, play in, play out.

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So it's going to start on Friday. It's a cumulative, how consistent, how high a level can you perform in, rep in, rep out, preseason camp, day in, day out. We're going to hit the dog days. It will get hot. We'll hit the dog days, just like any other position on the team.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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