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An Interview With:

**USF
WILLIE TAGGART**

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Willie Taggart from USF. Student-athletes are wide receiver Andre Davis, defensive tackle, Luke Sager. And Head Coach Willie Taggart. Coach, an opening statement.

COACH TAGGART: Good morning, everybody. Excited to be here. Really fired up about being here in front of you all and getting a chance to answer some of your questions. But excited about the season.

I think for everyone else, New Year's Day is January 1st, but for us it's now. August 4th is for us football coaches. Excited about the new year, excited about our team and the work they've been putting in in the off-season, and excited about our new league and what we're going to do here. Questions?

Q. Have you thought about the unique opportunity that you guys have this year in that you only have to be the best of 10 to get a BCS Bowl? The next year it changes; they're only going to take one from that group.

COACH TAGGART: I thought about it when I got the job. I think it's a great opportunity for us. You look at our schedule, and I think every game we have on our schedule is winnable. But we gotta go out and take care of business ourselves.

I think it's a great opportunity for our university and a great way to get our football program back to where it was.

And I think you said it perfectly. I think our home schedule is great. We have tougher games at home, but they're all going to be tough. We've got a lot of them there in Tampa, and we've got

some really challenging out-of-conference games, and it's exactly how we like it.

If we're going to be big time like I say we are, we gotta play big time people. And we have great opportunities this year to do it.

Q. As we move not only this year but to next year, when Louisville and Rutgers are gone, it's really going to be UConn, USF, and Cincinnati as the old remnants of the Big East. Do you see USF being one of the leaders in this conference?

COACH TAGGART: I see USF being one of the teams, being one of the leaders in the country, once we're continuing to build our program and get our players to play up to their potential. We have some players on our football team that are pretty good, and obviously we've got to continue to do a great job recruiting and adding on to it.

But we're a program that really hadn't lived up to our potential. But it's on us. And a big reason why I'm the head coach there now is to try to get our guys to live up to the potential.

But it's not just us, our players. It's going to be coaches and everyone else that's involved with it. But I do think we can be one of those teams. Are we there yet? No, we're not. But we can get there.

Q. What is the biggest hurdle -- and I apologize if this has been asked -- but in terms of trying to change a culture of the program when you come in?

COACH TAGGART: Our guys, some of our guys have been through -- now they're on their third coach, and they've been trained different ways. And now we're trying to train them another way. So I think that's a big part of getting everyone to buy into what we're going to do, what we're going to be about as a football program. And not all the time is it easy.

But I will say that our players have done a

great job of buying into what we asked them to do, and it's made it a little easier on us as coaches because they are doing and trying to do what we asked them to do and they're getting better. And they're hungry.

But a big part of it is just being consistent, being disciplined, and holding everybody accountable. Not just players, but coaches and everyone else. Everybody's got to be held accountable to do their jobs. And I think a big part of changing a coach is getting the football team to play for each other and care about each other.

Like I told those guys, the way they play is like a gift to their teammates. And I don't know if it's always been that way. And that's one thing we're trying to do. And once they play for each other, I think the rest of it comes pretty easy.

Q. Can you tell what's been the most favorable thing you've seen so far? You've just taken over the team. What's been the most positive thing that you've seen from the spring to now?

COACH TAGGART: Our guys are in our office all the time. They're up there, around, and you don't get that a lot, but our guys are around our offices a lot. They've been working hard and been eager to learn. And just hearing the feedback from our players, guys are starting to come together. They're out there working together and have a better understanding of what we're doing.

But I will say we hadn't had a lot of discipline problems, and that's huge, especially with a new staff and coming in, trying to figure us out. And we're trying to figure them out.

But like I said earlier, I think a positive thing, the most important and the best positive thing of it all is those guys are buying into what we asked them to do.

It doesn't always happen that way when you start over new. But I feel like our guys have. And it's going to pay off.

Q. How do you size up the new rule for targeting this year, not only hitting a defenseless player, but also the ejection penalty? Any observations, comments from that?

COACH TAGGART: I'm all for making the game safer. I think it's going to be some tough calls. It's going to be hard on the officials. But you gotta start somewhere. And it is what it is. I'm not going to make any excuses or do anything. We've

got to control the things we can and that's trying to teach our kids to play the way that the rules say we have to play.

Will it be easy? No, but as coaches, we've got to go and find different ways to get these kids to play football in a different way than they grew up playing.

And it will be interesting. It will be a lot of frustration and some guys will be happy. Some guys are going to be really upset. And pretty much, that's the way it's going to be. And we all gotta deal with it. And hopefully it don't happen often for your team where you probably won't have enough players out there to play.

But I think, like I said, we're trying to make the game safer and you've got to start somewhere. But it's going to be tough on a lot of people. It will be. And it will be interesting to see how it plays out.

Q. Just trying to find out what it's been like for you making the transition from your level to this and what enticed you about South Florida?

COACH TAGGART: There's been a lot of things, and there's been a lot of changes since I got the job. But I think first and foremost, not often in this profession do you get a coach back where you're from. And I got an opportunity to do that. And not only an opportunity to coach there, but there's some great players out there, a great recruiting base. We all know you've got to get some really good players in order to be successful.

But I love the passion of the fan base there, and I do know that the Bay Area love winners. You win ball games, they get behind you and support you. It's on us as a football team to go out there and earn that support. We can't ask them to do it without going out and doing it ourselves. So it's on us to go out and earn that support.

But I think it's a great opportunity. I really do. You hear a lot, I think: Our program is a sleeping giant. But we can't rely on anybody else to say that for us. It's on us to go out and do it. We've got to stop making excuses or blaming anyone else. It's on us to go out and do something and make it happen.

I'm excited about it. The players are excited about it. There's not a lot of expectations other than the ones we have. And our expectations are high. And our intention is to win a

championship. That's what we want to do. And we intend to do that.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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