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An Interview With:

TEXAS TECH COACH MIKE LEACH

PETER IRWIN: Coach, if you'll open up with an opening statement, and then we'll take questions.

COACH MIKE LEACH: Well, in the past I've always tried to avoid the opening comment thing, and I've dismally failed because they don't let you get out of here with an opening statement.

Anyway, we're excited about the upcoming season. Always are. Had a good off-season. The players, I brought the biggest ones I could find. They're filing out right there, you can probably hear them before you see them. But anyways, I feel good about this year. I always feel good about it but I'm one of those guys that can talk myself into anything, so just looking forward to the season.

Q. The guys going to a spread offense this year at Baylor, few wrinkles, but he's been watching what you've done to the defense for a while now. What are your thoughts on the proliferation of that kind of offense (inaudible)?

COACH MIKE LEACH: It kind of comes and goes. I mean, you know, spread offense. It's gotten to where it's hard to specifically nail it down. I think Baylor and us will have some stronger similarities just based on, you know, the fact that they observed us and Guy and I used to be on the same staff at Kentucky and all the rest.

But that means when Baylor plays that we'll have good film to compare, you know, when they play somebody that we're going to play, it would be a good film to watch, probably.

But I'm looking forward to seeing how it comes together and it's -- but one way or the other everybody is changing offenses all the time. So it's like I told somebody the other day, I'm kind of looking forward to seeing the wishbones show up in some other conference so I can kind of see it happen and see it all go. And you kind of wonder

why anybody ever got rid of it or whatever. It's a pretty good offense and none of us guys truly fail to score points with it. And all the rest. And then got really, you know everybody wanted to throw the ball.

And then they -- then they kind of do something halfway in the middle and some of them go to the extremes as far as throwing it or running it. And your people and everybody can run together well is a good offense, I think.

Q. Mike, how far has your defense as a unit come and some of the switches you made, particularly with Dawson, how important were they from two years ago when --

COACH MIKE LEACH: I think the biggest difference is that last year we were predominantly a junior offense. Two years ago we were predominantly a freshman or sophomore defense. And the biggest things a lot of them have been starting since they were freshman -- and last year everybody -- they said, oh, geez, it's so improved, how did it get improved? Everybody got a year older.

And so I think that we're a little more experienced than we have been, and I think that was part of it last year, and I was really proud of our defensive staff and our defensive players as far as how they improved I felt like as the season went on. I didn't feel like we were a team and really leveled out or, you know, quit improving, any of that. I felt defensively we improved as the year went on.

Q. Is it going to be weird not seeing Taurean Henderson out there this year and did his success make you want to replace him with a guy kind of like him?

COACH MIKE LEACH: It's going to be strange not to see him because he's been there a long time and he's a real resilient guy, never got injured, any of that. And the other thing is he could do so many things, which I think was the most impressive thing about him. And I think his ability to do a variety of things I think was better than anybody else in the conference. And this

conference is full of great running backs and some of them may be better than him.

But there wasn't anybody in the conference that could do as many things as Taurean Henderson could. And I feel good about the running backs that we have, the people that we have, the bodies we have, that type of thing. But I don't know that we'll be able to do all the things with one person. It may be like two or three people, and we just have to sub them in around what we're trying to get done.

Q. Mike, you face another transition at quarterback which you made pretty effectively over the years, how is this one the same, how is it different and what's been the key to doing that so effectively?

COACH MIKE LEACH: There's no real secret to it. I mean, you try to figure out who is the best one and then you play 'em. I mean, it's honestly about as simple as that. You got however many you've got. Line them up out there. Let's see, I think this one is a little bit better than that one. Then you play them.

But with that I think you center the reps around them and try to be as specific as you can, you know, so he can be as effective as possible as early as possible. And then the other thing, you know, that you hope in the course of the previous couple years, that you know he's done a good job as far as learning and building and adding to his game so that when his time comes he's ready to go. And I think some of it is an emphasis. Some of it is -- a lot of it is off-season as far as what he does on his own, and then on Thursdays we always scrimmage, every Thursday we'll scrimmage with the nontravel guys, semi-travel guys to get them as many reps as we can to build towards the future.

Q. Coach, how does Graham compare as being just a sophomore (inaudible) regiments, being able to move your offense (inaudible)?

COACH MIKE LEACH: I think he's doing pretty good. One of the advantages is he played on a similar offense in high school. But there's no saying it's going to be Graham and the same thing can be said for Chris. They're neck and neck in spring. And be interested in seeing how they are at camp.

But both of them, real accurate guys. Both of them sharp guys. Both of them, you know, you

go to close the building and you have to kick them out of some film room, saying, Now we gotta lock the doors so you're going to have to watch more tomorrow, or something like that, and then, you know -- and you'll literally just go down the hall and stumble on them and they're still there. And both their fathers were coaches, so they -- I think that provides just a pretty good knowledge-base on stuff, you know, whatever is passed back and forth in the car, over the dinner table, out in the yard. I think it does pretty good things as far as helping you out with the quarterback.

So I feel good about the two of them, and I don't know about the age thing. I think they're both ahead of their time, I think, a little bit.

But, you know, the biggest thing that needs to -- as a team, we need to improve. I mean that's -- you know, it's funny. It's like these things tend to ride on the extremes. Somebody wants to say some deal you can do or you can't do. You guys sucked at this, what are you going to do about that? Well, try to get better.

And then or they go, you know, Oh, you guys are so good. Oh, my God, that's so awesome. I mean, and then what are you going to do with that? Well, we're going to try to get better at that. It's the same thing. And as a team we got a long ways to go. We've got to improve on a lot of stuff. And hopefully we can improve on those, too.

Q. One of the biggest things in your offense is how big splits are with your offensive line, when did you feel comfortable with Guy going through that process now, how comfortable he is using splits that you guys used and everything that goes along with that, how long did it take you to evolve to those gigantic splits?

COACH MIKE LEACH: The first time I did it, it was in Wesleyan College when I coached the offensive line. You know? I mean you tinker with it. It's a deal that you want to kind of keep an eye on. You know, some guys you want to scoot up, some guys you want to scoot in, and you just try to keep it monitored. And some of that will have to do with who the fellow across from your person is.

And then, of course, in the course of that you've got to find other people to get involved in the protection.

Q. Mike, have you got a so-called dream job somewhere else you'd like to go to,

or are you pretty content where you're at?

COACH MIKE LEACH: The one where I'm at is pretty darned good. You know, the exciting thing, we've had the opportunity to expand our stadium for the second time in three years. So that's exciting. And any time you are amidst growth that's an exciting deal. And then, you know, just all these players that we've worked hard to recruit and seeing them improve and seeing what they can do. And then, of course, the Big 12, which I think is the best conference, that's exciting, too. So I'm really excited to be where I'm at.

Q. Does the NFL intrigue you or is the college game more suited, do you think, for you?

COACH MIKE LEACH: It's difficult to say. I mean, you know, football from both ends is exciting. But I'm real happy at Texas Tech and it's really a thrill to be there. I mean, it's -- I imagine the temperature is about like here but no humidity. So if you come up there, I'll show you a great steak place and pretty soon you'll move to Lubbock, Texas. You'll have to keep that to yourself, otherwise everybody will be there and you and I will both want to move (laughter).

Q. Coach, defensive coordinators have been pulling their hair out trying to figure out how to stop your offense. Last year Oklahoma State, Texas did a fairly good job. What did they do that led to their success?

COACH MIKE LEACH: Well, I think in a lot of cases played better than we did. Played harder than us, played better than we did. Texas, in particular, we made some blatant mistakes, and Texas is a really good football team. I was really impressed with how Oklahoma State played in the game that we had against them. I thought they just flat out played better than we did.

And, you know, both cases the other guy deserves the credit, and, you know, you try to put yourself in a position where you prevent that, where you don't have to answer the very question that you asked. I mean, if we played better then you'd get to ask the guy at Oklahoma and Texas. Unfortunately, we didn't play as good as we should have, so you get to ask me. So hopefully we can straighten it out and make it go the other direction.

Q. Mike, did you shed a tear when they tore up your old Astro Turf?

COACH MIKE LEACH: I'll kind of miss it, honestly, because about the time nobody else had it, the guys would come out and kick it in disgust like, What's this? And I'll kind of miss it a little bit, I'll be honest. There was a time when the teams that I heard that still had it -- and I don't know, this may not be perfect -- but I heard there was a couple years back, there was Oregon State, Indianapolis Colts and Texas Tech. And there was kind of a cool little club to be in. But the thing that happened, of course, is you can't get parts for it anymore.

I remember it went something like this: Before last season, we had to repair and reguide the Astro Turf. How do you do this? Who does it? Anyway, we find this guy in Oregon that used to work for Astro Turf. Something like this. I don't know if it's perfect. And he says, Yeah, I used to work for Astro Turf. I'll come in and straighten it out for you. Come to find out he goes all over the nation, the handful of Astro Turf left -- it's obviously a dying profession. But he goes all over the country and he'll fix up your Astro Turf field.

When he got done with ours, it looked like a million bucks. If you have an Astro Turf, I recommend you call Texas Tech and we'll figure out who he is and you hire him. It tells you something where you're from Oregon and you're the Lone Ranger going around straightening these deals out.

Anyway, it was fun. It was fun having a unique deal that other people didn't have. It will be fun having this new stuff. But now it's just like the Jones'. It's now more like the team down the road saying we have a boat and then we puff our chest out and say we have a boat too. It's just different (laughter).

Q. A lot of us just assumed Graham Harrell is going to be your quarterback, but is it pretty wide open between him and Chris?

COACH MIKE LEACH: Yes, certainly is based upon spring. And it always is, because you know what happens in spring is you try to put them in the best position to improve, you know, between spring and when you have camp. And then so you make the situation as competitive as you possibly can. And then from there you just go back to picking the one you feel best about and then of course you got to split the reps a little bit.

Q. If they are that close, could this be a

season where you might not be as reluctant to play your backup at times?

COACH MIKE LEACH: You know, if you get way ahead of somebody you're less reluctant to play your backup. If you can tell these other guys to spot us a couple points, I'll play the backup a lot. But the trouble with this conference is that everybody has been fairly stubborn about doing that.

And so you don't get the opportunities you'd like. But if it was a team you'd go out and play well, and improve and you know I'd like to be able to do that. Hope we can.

Q. Mike, in the last two years, OU played for National Championship, Texas won one, they're both in the same division as you guys are. Do you feel like the gap between you guys and them is narrowing right now?

COACH MIKE LEACH: I don't feel it's like that. You go out there and improve and play the best you can. If you don't like the results you got play better. And then I think that because all you have is what you're capable of. Just make sure you get all that. If you do, then you put yourself in the best position to win and hopefully you do quite a bit of the time, you know. Hopefully you do all the time.

But, you know, trying to be nice and all this. No, we want to win all of them. But hope we do. So that's our whole thing. We're in the improvement business.

PETER IRWIN: Thanks, Coach.
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