

**July 26, 2006**



**An Interview With:**

## **IOWA STATE COACH DAN McCARNEY**

PETER IRWIN: Coach, if you'd like to introduce your players and make a couple comments and let them go to the back.

COACH DAN McCARNEY: Thank you. It's an honor for us to be here. Hope you're not worn out yet; we know it's the third day of the interviews. We're honored to be representing the Big 12 Conference and to be here with you today.

Right in front of me before these guys sit in the back, Bret Meyer, our starting quarterback, going into his junior year. Honorable mention Big 12 quarterback last year, one of our captains coming out of sophomore year and made a great impact in our program in the two years he's been starting. No doubt his best two years are in front of him.

Next to Bret -- by the way, Bret's from Atlantic, Iowa.

Next to Bret is DeAndre Jackson from Garland, Texas. All Big 12 defensive back, second in Big 12 in kick returns. He'll be going into his senior year, and he'll be one of the only three returning starters we have defensively at Iowa State.

Next to DeAndre is Scott Stephenson, a young man that was All Big 12 as a center. Transferred from Minnesota, sat for a year and had a tremendous junior season last year. He, like DeAndre, will be a senior this fall.

And really appreciate these guys taking time out of their schedule to be down here and be with us today.

Thanks, guys.

PETER IRWIN: Opening comment?

COACH DAN McCARNEY: Great to be with you. I'm not going to go into a long dissertation from a statement standpoint. I'm really honored to be back for my 12th year at Iowa State. There weren't a lot of people probably thought 12 years ago I'd still be here. I've seen a lot of transition, coaches, players, administrators.

I want to thank Kevin Weiberg and Donnie Duncan and Tim Millis, some people that have done really a fabulous job running this conference in recent years. Welcome Walt Anderson, our new supervisor of the officials in the Big 12. There's transition in the Big 12 Conference like there is a lot of places in the country, but one of the many reasons we have such a great reputation nationally is because of leadership that we have in the Big 12 Conference.

Like all coaches this time of year, we're optimistic, we're excited. We're looking forward to the season. I believe we probably had the earliest kickoff in the Big 12 Conference this year. We'll play a tremendous Toledo football team August 31st. 16 starters returned. They won their Bowl game by over 30 points over UTEP. They're in the hunt for the Mid-American Conference Championship each year. That will be the first of many, many challenges as we go into this season. It's well documented the caliber of the schedule we'll play this year. Nine Bowl teams, six Bowl champions. Defending national champion Texas. Northern Iowa will play for the National Championship, finish national runner up, and half of our 12 teams that we played will be new preparations for us this year, which obviously takes an awful lot of work when you've not played that team the year before.

But it's an exciting time at Iowa State. We set the all-time season ticket record a year ago, broke that. Jamie Pollard, my new athletic director, has done a fantastic job in the short time he's been at Iowa State. Setting a goal at 30,000 season tickets. Hopefully by this afternoon or tomorrow we'll hit that mark. I think we will.

So there's a lot of excitement around our football program. Offensively ten starters returned. Led by Bret Meyer, there's a great deal of kids coming back that led us on the brink of some real, real tremendous things a year ago. We were close to having a phenomenal year, but we came up a little short. We lost three overtime games on the road to eventual Bowl champion teams. We came within a play or two of winning our Bowl game against an outstanding TCU, won eleven.

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But some very, very positive things. Defensively we start over, with the exception of DeAndre Jackson, Shawn Moorehead and Brent Curvey who have already shown that they can play winning football every week of the season. So lots of new faces on defense.

But it's just a really exciting time to be in Iowa State, and I'm humbled and appreciative and respectful of the opportunity that the administration at Iowa State gives me to be the leader of the football program.

So open it up to questions and be glad to answer any of them that you might have.

**Q. Coach, could you talk about stability at quarterback as it relates to Bret Meyer but also generally speaking?**

COACH DAN McCARNEY: You know, you go into a season, which almost seems like a daunting schedule. You look at it and look at some of the teams we gotta play, but it gives me peace of mind going to practice, going into meetings, our kids report on Monday and the season is just about here to get rolling, knowing I've got a guy that will lead our offense and our football team that has already handled success and already handled adversity. I've seen him in the best of times throughout a game; I've seen him in the toughest of times throughout a game; and I've seen how he responds.

But Bret has all those intangibles you're looking for, and sure you've got to have talent. He's got to have an arm. He's got to have mental toughness. He's got to have physical toughness, and he's got good feet, and he can be elusive in the pocket. But he has tremendous leadership ability, and we all are looking for those players and especially quarterbacks that will elevate the play of those around him, and Bret Meyer is a great example of that.

**Q. You touched a bit on this, is there a common thread for, say, a young -- particularly a quarterback, who comes in, is successful right away? Is there some common trait to somebody like that?**

COACH DAN McCARNEY: First of all, better have a pretty good supporting cast because if he's got the leadership and the intangibles and strong arm and all those things but he's getting whacked from the side of his head half the time, it's going to be hard to be successful. But Bret is a guy that really has grown and matured. He's a

student of the game. We all want to say that. We all hope that our guys are that way. But this is a guy that lives it. You almost have to chase him out of the video room, out of the film rooms, tough meeting rooms, because he always knows no matter how much he's accomplished or how good a day he's had or what positives he's brought to our team, he knows he's got a lot of room to improve. And that's a real mark of a winner and a champion and a guy that you really want to lead your football team.

**Q. Dan, you guys came so close last year. You talked about those three overtime losses to the Bowl winner. How do you get over that hump?**

COACH DAN McCARNEY: That's the key, Tim. It's one of the keys because we make no apologies about coming short, you know, we wanted to play in that championship game. We have had a chance, been on the doorstep the last two years. To me as a head coach, I look at it as we have come a long way. We've put ourselves in a position the last Saturday of the Big 12 Conference race to be in the championship game, came up a play or two short.

We go back and analyze and review and evaluate what we've done and what I can do better as a head coach, what my staff can do a better job of. What my players can do a better job of, because this ain't going to be the last time we're on the doorstep of going to the championship game. I know it won't be. I don't believe it will be. I think there's going to be other opportunities and hopefully it will be again this year. But when we get there and if we put ourselves in a position to get there, what do we need to do to make that play, to make that call together, to put ourselves in a position to be part of history and go to the championship game. And those are things that we analyze and review all the time.

And I look at it as we've come a long ways and we look back at it now and there's certain things we need to do a better job of and we will continue to do that and build on those things.

But I just have a great taste in my mouth about my program, my kids, my staff, going into this season, based on some of the things we've accomplished in recent years.

**Q. Coach, you have a rarity: Five seniors starting in your offensive line. How big**

**a factor is that to your success, do you think?**

COACH DAN McCARNEY: Going to be really important. We want to be more than solid and better than solid, and that's, frankly, what we were last year on the offensive line. Barney Cotton has his fire burning inside him around the clock. He's a tremendous coach and teacher and leader. He doesn't want to be known as having a solid offensive line. Aaron Brant will be a four-year starter; Seth Zehr, three-year starter; Scott Stephenson, an unbelievable success story, never played center. Played defense at Minnesota. We brought him in, red-shirted him. We told him, Hey, Scott, you have a chance to get your hands on the ball whenever you play college football. What a great chance that will be being center. He made the transition, did a great job.

And then we got the two Fisher twins that will be seniors this year that are almost as old as I am. Went on Mormon missions, been around a long time. And we want them to play as good as they look because they're six-seven, six-eight, 325 pounds. And I think they got a chance to have real special senior years.

But hopefully the culmination of those guys playing together, practicing together, the age, the experience, the maturity, the hunker to hopefully be a dominant group this year to help us be successful.

**Q. Dan, obviously I would assume y'all are pretty pumped about the offensive possibilities. Is that defense as big a concern as it just looks glancing at the depth chart?**

COACH DAN McCARNEY: Absolutely, Mike. But we've all been around, you guys have been around a long time. First of all, if you're going to have a good defense you have to have the talent to play in this league. And we can have planning, systems, motivation, teachings, togetherness, chemistry, all these things sound good, and that's part of it. But if you don't have the talent, all the other stuff isn't going to matter a whole lot.

But I think we've got good Big 12 talented kids, but what we do lack in experience and we will in a lot of positions, those things do matter if you have talent. If you play together, if you're tough, if you're united, if you play with energy, if you have a system that's tested through time. I don't think there's any doubt that John Skladany in my mind is one of the most underrated coordinators in college football from where we've started and what we've

accomplished. John had chance to leave me, go to other places he's shown great loyalty to me and Iowa State. Led the Big 12 in takeaways last year. That's two of the most important statistics. Takeaway statistics and defense. We've made major strides under John's leadership.

Our kids know what to expect. And you think I'm going to go into my team meeting and say, You know what, God Bless, I hope we can outscore everybody, because our defense ain't going to be worth a damn, you're crazy. I'm not going to do that. I'm not going to give those kids an excuse for failure. We're going to build on our success in recent years with our defense and know that no matter who is on the field this is the Cyclone helmet, this is the defensive tradition that's been built.

We turned this program around slowly but surely playing good defense. Couldn't stop anybody, couldn't slow anybody down years ago to putting ourselves in a position every year now having a chance every Saturday to have a defense, and I don't expect anything less out of this group.

**Q. Dan, you mentioned a moment ago about the 12 years. I'm just curious if it means much to you being the team now this league?**

COACH DAN McCARNEY: It is meaningful, and my wife will tell you I got bigger bags under my eyes, more wrinkles, less hair. That's part of being the dean. But I'm very, very appreciative of this. I really am. And this is a profession where there's just all kinds of transition, and there's movement. Whether it's coaches that win or they're always worried about the next job or coaches that don't succeed up to the expectations of the administration and they're asked to leave, to bring some stability and going into our 12th year at Iowa State, and hopefully bring some type of respect and honor and success to the program that people can be proud of.

This isn't about popularity contests, but it's about hopefully success and honor and integrity and doing it the right way. And we're going to continue to try and build on that. I just have never been a guy that's worried about any other jobs or the next job. Let's keep taking care of the one we have. Frankly I think it's a mutual thing because through the tough times and adversity and setbacks and some tough years at Iowa State, I think the administration, the fans for the most part

were very, very supportive of me and my staff and then when we had success and we've obviously done that, with Texas, Oklahoma, Iowa State, Nebraska and Texas Tech, the only five teams that have been to five Bowl games in the last six years, this is the only time I've had an opportunity to coach. And I've tried to give back to Iowa State and show my loyalty to Iowa State.

So together I think it's been a pretty special thing and honestly it's a pretty unique thing around college football nowadays.

**Q. You mentioned a minute ago that y'all had analyzed the close losses and you found some things. What did you find to improve upon?**

COACH DAN McCARNEY: Yeah, there's plenty of them and all three of those overtime games that we lost, all three of those teams came back to tie us, to put it into overtime and then to win the game. And I don't know if that happens everywhere. I haven't studied all those places. My concern is Iowa State, but there's no doubt that going into that overtime, because those three teams -- Nebraska, Missouri and Kansas -- came from behind to tie us to put it into overtime. It allowed them, gave them a little bit of an edge because they had so much confidence and momentum going into that overtime.

Is it an excuse, no? But if we give them an excuse this year we got to be good enough and determined enough to make a play. If we get into overtime, if we're the ones tying the team to get into overtime, hopefully we can carry that momentum over. It's been pretty well documented that our kicker has missed kicks. Bret Culbertson the last couple of years, but it's more than one guy missing a kick. Bret's 70 out of 76 for 92% in his first two years in his career at Iowa State. And the first time I'll be paying his bills instead of he paying his own is this fall. He's done it as a walk-on. I'm proud of Bret and what he's done. We could not have had the success and as many wins as we had the last couple years without him.

So it's all those things. We'll continue to emphasize it. The point that we've made and we talk a lot about is obviously we're putting ourselves in a position to win a lot of games, but those things are so important, making the play, having the confidence, making the adjustment, and being good enough and strong enough to outlast that other team and being able to win the game when it goes into overtime.

**Q. Coach, when you look at the North Division, how much has the landscape changed in the last year with two head coaches and Missouri losing Brad Smith?**

COACH DAN McCARNEY: Looking at this 5 and 6 in post-season play, Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska were Bowl champions. Iowa State and Colorado were in Bowls. Kansas State, one of the great programs under Bill Snyder's leadership, the baton has been passed to Ron Prince. They still have 16 starters coming back. Colorado and Iowa State. Colorado, Dan Hawkins is a proven winner. I saw it firsthand when we went out 2002 Humanitarian Bowl. He got to host the Bowl game at his place and beat Iowa State. He's taken over programs and been to the championship game four of the last five years. There's not a lot of repairs that need to be made in a program that's had that much success.

So I just think our part of the north, I don't think there's any question it's going to be a better conference this year, because there's lots and lots of players coming back. And yet with Dan and Ron coming in, with the other four coaches that returned in our conference, I think it makes for a great race and we're hoping to be a part of it and hopefully late in the season a lot of you are still writing about Iowa State.

PETER IRWIN: Coach, thank you very much for your comments.

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