

July 25, 2006



An Interview With:

KANSAS COACH MARK MANGINO

PETER IRWIN: Coach, if you'd like to make a few opening comments.

COACH MARK MANGINO: Thanks, Peter.

Good morning. Good to be with you here today. It's exciting we have Big 12 Media Day here in Kansas City. Makes the trip pretty easy for me. So it's always good to stay in the neighborhood here for this.

As we look forward to this season, you know, I feel like we have a football team that's on a strong foundation. We obviously had some success last year, able to have a winning season and win a Bowl game. And that success has helped tremendously with our program in terms of the confidence that we're building in our players and the direction that we're going.

Everything seems to have picked up a pace. So we're very happy about the fact that we have something to build on. Having been to two Bowl games in three years certainly has helped us.

The way I can best term it right now is our program is on solid footing. And that's the best way to put it. You know, at this point going into our fifth year, you know, things are starting to fall into place. All the systems that we have in place are sort of coming together. The kids know what the expectations are. They know what the work expectations are. They know what the workload is going to be and how to go about it.

So we're very excited going into this season. We've got some young players who are going to play for us, get their first opportunity to start. But they're talented and we're very, very optimistic about the season. Very excited about it, and our kids are approaching it with a great deal of enthusiasm.

Q. Coach, when you talk about young talent that's been in the funnel, maybe people don't necessarily know about it at this point in time, who are a couple or three of the guys who come to the forefront of your mind?

COACH MARK MANGINO: Well, we've got kids, for example, you know, our linebackers, they played on special teams, played a little bit from the line of scrimmage, they're replacing a very good core of linebackers, but Joe Mortensen and Mike Rivera, Eric Washington. Those are guys that have been on the field a lot with special teams. Some of them have been in situational packages on defense, but now those guys will be, you know, expected to step up and they are talented kids. We expect big things from them.

James Holt is another guy. He's a true freshman, played on a lot of our special teams as a linebacker for us. We expect him to step up and play well even though he'll just be a sophomore. And then there are players that are not considered starters like on our defensive unit, but they've played a ton. They've been in the rotation. Guys like Rodney Allen and Paul Como, they've played a ton of football for us, they just haven't been listed as starters.

So I think we've got a lot of young kids on the defensive side of the ball that are going to play very well for us. On the offensive side we're going to have some young kids, too, the quarterback, Kerry Meier, just a red-shirt freshman, but very talented.

He's really got a chance to be a special player. And you know there's several other kids, but those are kids right off the top of my head that we expect to play well.

Q. Coach, how good a trade-off is it in the schedule to get rid of Texas Tech and Oklahoma and Texas?

COACH MARK MANGINO: Well, you know, I'm not going to say anything that would diminish the programs that we've traded out for. There's no question you're talking about elite teams that are powers right now in this country in Oklahoma and Texas.

So any time you can get them off your schedule and just take just about anybody else it's a good trade-off. So but, you know, the three teams that we're picking up, Oklahoma State is going to be better. They've recruited well. Baylor is making great progress on under Guy Morriss and Texas A&M is a talented football team. They've got great looking kids running on the football field.

But to say trading Oklahoma and Texas, those are two elite programs. Most people would take a trade for just about anybody, including me.

Q. Mark, could you talk a little bit more about Kerry Meier and what do you like about him, what are his best attributes as a player?

COACH MARK MANGINO: Yeah, let's keep in mind that Kerry has never played a down of college football, but based on what you see, just being around him, first of all, he has the tools that are necessary, the physical tools. Good arm strength, accuracy. Size. Speed, escapability from the pocket.

He has all the mental things that you're looking for. He's smart. He's perceptive. He's mentally tough. He's a tremendous competitor. He has all the tools. But we've got to bring him along. We want to bring him along and develop him in a way that he doesn't feel rushed, and we're not going to do that to him. But as I said earlier, I've had a good pleasure of being around some very talented quarterbacks. If he stays healthy and everything falls into place, he's got a chance to be among those kind of guys.

I mean he can really be special.

Q. Mark, what are the greatest concerns you have right now going into camp about your team?

COACH MARK MANGINO: Well, I'll be very frank with you. You know, teams that have started out low, down -- I don't want to be disrespectful to anybody, but when you take over a football program that just hasn't been very good, those kids in your first three or four years, they go through all the growing pains. They see all the difficult times, the tough losses, the embarrassing losses. They go through all that.

So when last year's seniors got a chance to finish the season with a Bowl win and a winning season, you know, those kids paid the price. They made the sacrifices to finish their careers as winners.

Our younger kids have to understand the sacrifices that the older kids made before them. And we remind them that it hasn't always been easy. It's not easy now. But things were much tougher before, you know. We took some beatings. We just weren't up to snuff in Big 12 standards.

So these kids now have to understand what the older kids went through. I think that's the biggest challenge. And then, you know, we have challenges. We've got to replace some kids on defense. We're going to have a new quarterback. There's things that we're concerned about from a, you know, X's and O's standpoint, but nothing that can't be taken care of, that's for sure.

Q. Coach, did beating Nebraska mean any more to you guys than any of your other victories?

COACH MARK MANGINO: Yes, 36 years. Since I arrived at Kansas, every week -- every year that we prepared for Nebraska, that game week, all I read about, all I hear about, all anybody wants to talk about, is the streak. And it was really starting to bug me. So from that perspective, yeah, the Nebraska win was a marquee win for us. Not only because we beat a very fine football team, but we finally ended the streak that, you know, was really getting on my nerves.

Q. Mark, you guys finished up last year winning 4 out of 5. What did that run and the Bowl victory do for the confidence of some of the younger players in the program?

COACH MARK MANGINO: Well, it helped immensely. As you know, we, you know, had a run there where we lost four in a row. But as coaches and as players, you know, we thought we were close. I mean, those four games, you know, we had opportunities. We knew what our weaknesses were. We knew where we weren't being productive. We were working so hard to try to get that squared away, and we knew that we were close.

And then, you know, things started to click for us, and our Jason Swanson ended up being the guy he got healthy and ended up being the guy that led the offense, and that made a major difference.

So I would say that, you know, it did wonders for us, you know. The out-of-season programs don't seem so hard when you come off a

strong finish. Spring ball, everybody's got an extra hop in their step. So it helps tremendously.

Q. What needs to be the next progression? You talked about the winning season and the Bowl game, what's next in the program, what needs to be the progression?

COACH MARK MANGINO: Well, you know, despite the fact that, you know, I don't like to talk in cliches, but we want to just keep working at it, take each game one at a time and just kind of stay -- I think the reason why we're having success at Kansas to this point is that we've always focused on the task at hand. The day-to-day business.

If there was something that I could tell you that maybe outside of that philosophy that I have, you know, we've played well on the road. But we haven't won as many games on the road as we would have liked to. And I think that might be another step for the program. Not only play well on the road but get some road victories. That would probably, in my mind, be something that, you know, we need to approach with a lot of vigor.

Q. Coach, seems like before maybe the defense has been better some years, the offense. Do you feel like now that you've developed depth in the program and have enough to kind of have them on an equal par on an upswing?

COACH MARK MANGINO: Yeah, I agree that, you know, we have been back and forth. I feel like our personnel right now, regardless of whether they're veteran players or young kids, I believe we have the best personnel that we've had as a total football team. And the depth, we're not quite where we like to be in some areas on depth. We're not a team that can afford to lose a bunch of front-line guys and still play the same level.

However, our talent pool is higher. It's better on offense and defense probably collectively than at any time since I've been at Kansas. Albeit, some of those kids are a little bit young.

Q. Coach, you've been involved in, you know, a few big (inaudible) Bill Snyder part of Kansas State and (inaudible) Oklahoma and Kansas. Which is harder, the turnaround process or maintaining a level of excellence once you get there?

COACH MARK MANGINO: I think they're both difficult. They're both difficult. That's

probably not the answer you're looking for. But I think trying to get something moving in the right direction is a monumental task. It takes a lot of energy and time. It tests the coaches and the players mentally and emotionally. And then when we get there you have to be able to understand that winning doesn't come automatically. Each season it has to be earned.

You can't live off of what you did the year before. You can get some momentum from it. You can get some energy from it. But you have to perform each and every year. And each and every year is a unique challenge. Everything, you know, is different. You have graduated some players. You have new players. You have different opponents in some cases.

I think they're equally difficult tasks, getting it there and keeping it there.

Q. You mentioned the road struggles, how does a team overcome that? Is that kind of a mindset or what can cause that?

COACH MARK MANGINO: Well, if it was easy to cure it, I'd have done it a long time ago. I think it's just a matter of, you know, believing you can win on the road.

Our kids are extremely confident at home. And they play with confidence on the road. It's just the ability to finish the games on the road. And that comes with a confidence factor, too.

But I think this group of kids, this group of kids we have this year, they really have a swagger to them. They really, you know -- they really think they can -- they believe they can win every time they line up, and I'm not going to disagree with them. So I think this group here has a little bit of that mental edge as a team that you need to get out there and get road victories. I think this team, you know, is a little bit different maybe in its makeup in some respects than we've had in the past.

PETER IRWIN: Okay. Thank you very much. We wish you the best this season.

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