

July 24, 2006



An Interview With:

KANSAS STATE COACH RON PRINCE

PETER IRWIN: At this time we'd like to welcome Coach Ron Prince to the table. Welcome to the Big 12 and we're happy to have you here. If you'll pull the microphone to you a little bit. If you'd like to make an opening comment or two, and we'll take questions.

COACH RON PRINCE: We've had a good time the last seven months. A lot of hard work. It's been -- some people use words and phrases like "whirlwind" to describe what's happened. We've had a plan to try to put in place. I think we've been pleasantly surprised by the acceptance of our players to really take on roles that in some cases star players or people associated with star players being unwilling to take on.

Coaching staff has been very encouraged by our very best players, people like Brandon Archer and Jordy Nelson not only asking but demanding they have an opportunity to play on special teams, to do some of the jobs of mentoring some of these younger players, and I think that really has given all of us on the coaching staff the indication that these young people really want to have a good season.

And I think that obviously our goals and objectives are to consistently compete for championships. We think that November 1st and that week gives you a clear sense of taking time to look at where you are and see if you're in the hunt, which is what our objective is, to every year find ourselves in the hunt in November. And so we've put our off-season programs and our offense and defense systems into place and have gone back and evaluated the teams in this conference and our competition for the upcoming season to figure out how we can do just that.

It's been people ask often about what it's like to coach at Kansas State following Coach Snyder. I don't use words that many of you will use, such as "replace." I think that's absurd, when

you have someone who did arguably perform the greatest coaching job of this last century.

We don't use those kinds of adjectives, and we're excited about building upon what he has occurred and what he has accomplished there. And we think the future is very, very bright.

So with that, we've gone to the various places to go recruiting and dealt with our team and had some things that standard-wise from an academic standpoint, and other things, performance standards, that we think are important to have the proper conduct of a team. That's what we've concentrated in the last phase and our young people have done a good job with that this last summer.

With that I'll take questions.

Q. Coach, could you talk a little bit about a lot of the love you're not getting from publications, preseason picks and just your thoughts on that?

COACH RON PRINCE: Well, I haven't read any of those, so I'm not sure. Gary informed me where the media picked us, and like I responded to Gary and to many others, we let the pickers pick and the players play.

And I think that's really the approach that we've taken. This is an opportunity for us to really practice what we preach, which is we're not going to allow anybody to set our agenda for us. We came here to win championships and to compete for them.

And so that's what our objective is, and that's what our plan is, and I think our players have been steadfast with that, and we are not going to be distracted. I understand it. I understand the publications and how, you know, popular they are, and as a teenager I read them and was enthralled with them and thought the pictures were cool and all the stories and all that stuff is really great.

But as a coach and as a professional, I think we know our team pretty well and we're pretty excited about our challenge and our opportunity.

Q. Yeah, Ron, can you talk about replacing a guy like Bill Snyder (laughter) and

you've embraced him and not tried to exclude him? Can you talk about why you made that decision to try to include him in the circle?

COACH RON PRINCE: Yes, you know, I think there's a couple things that entered my mind. The first thing I'd have to say is my experience at Virginia. Al Grove was the head coach there. Followed George Welch, Hall of Fame coach who came to Virginia in very similar circumstances. I think Virginia lost 28 games in a row, had not been to a Bowl game. Came from a very strong background with Coach Paterno, went off to Navy, was very successful and he did what some people thought was a seemingly impossible at UVA.

And his tenure created basically the kind of stir that really allowed Virginia to really make a jump up into the top 25 and top 20.

And I think because of that experience in having seen how people and how they invest their lives in a program and turning it around, particularly Coach Welch at Virginia and Coach Snyder at K State, when you're one of the people attempting to do that as an assistant coach, you have a lot of respect for people who accomplish in this business.

And ultimately that's why you coach and that's why you play, because you want to compete and you want to earn respect from yourself and others.

So I think that was the first part of it. Witnessing George Welch and how Coach Grove dealt with that situation. I studied quite a bit when this thing became real. I studied Jeff Immelt and Jack Welch at GE, I think coming out he's the CEO at GE and all of a sudden 9/11 occurs and he needs to run one of the largest companies in the United States and the world and who else knows better how to helping in that transition than Jack Welch.

There's more examples in the football world. I've had a lot of conversations with people surrounding BYU and LaVelle Edwards and studied that and we look at the people who followed Bo Schembechler at Michigan. I think those programs do a very good job in embracing and understanding people who have been successful, I think are going to have a better opportunity, and I think if you try to come in and be the anti whatever or whoever, I think you take a tremendous amount of success and opt to not use it.

And so no one knows more about winning games at Kansas State than Bill Snyder. No one

has a better formula and better plan. That was his plan. It was his formula. And it worked for him. And so as a resource, we're open to that. And we respect people who have had success. And I think really that's maybe what you're referring to, and I think it's the right thing and he's in his rightful place, and we think that it's terrific for what he's accomplished there.

Q. Yeah, Coach, in June you had mentioned about the single wing, and about how that was a trend and how the trend has changed now to three and four wide receiver sets. Can you expound upon that and what you see conference-wise with offenses now?

COACH RON PRINCE: I think my point was stylistically I think what's happened in college football stylistically that the game is changing quite a bit. It's becoming a much wider game, teams recommend embracing three and four wide receiver formations, and what they're accomplishing now is by having a terrific play maker, a dual-threat athlete at quarterback. Now you basically are essentially playing with 12 people on the field.

The last time the game of football took it to this level was the single wing. Now the option was one thing. That was a little bit different, but the single wing, essentially the quarterback was the threat. He was the dual threat player, and he was the player that really won games for you. I think you can see last year in the title game, the player that won that title, the team that was involved, they had a player who was an unbelievable dual threat.

But I think in the entire game of college football, that is now the trend. And so if you don't have enough defensive backs to cover those wide receivers all across the field, and if you don't employ the right tactics while you're chasing those people, then the quarterback can be running down the field because they've been able to destroy the underneath integrity of the defense.

So really that's really been our motto since we arrived. We want to make sure we have enough pass rush to deal with that. Of course we want linebackers to match up against the quarterback is who are very dangerous and obviously defensive backs that can run with the wide receivers.

Everybody in this conference has a superstar wide receiver. If you don't have players who can run with them throughout the course of

the game, they are going to make plays on you. I think that's just the trend and the conference I came from had a similar situation.

I think even at the National Football League with Michael Vick, he's changed certain aspects of that the game because of what he was able to do, unlike a lot of quarterbacks who made the running quarterback that came into the pro game.

So I think it's just an influence that's happening in the entire game right now and you have to respond to it. And we just elected to respond to that immediately when we arrived, because that was obvious from what was happening here in this conference just a little bit. I had seen as a fan on TV and talking to people, professionally, that's what was happening here in the Big 12. And there's great defenses in this league, and I think that the offenses made the adjustment and so now I think it's a very challenging time.

Q. Coach, what do you make of the team the talent level you took over and what's your biggest emphasis here in year number one?

COACH RON PRINCE: I'm very intrigued by the players on our team. We have a lot of returning players. I believe we have the most in the conference from what I've been told. I'm encouraged by the fact that we have players who have been to these stadiums. They're not in awe of going in there and putting on the uniform and going out.

I'd like to make sure that we have the appropriate amount of depth to sustain ourselves through a 12-game and hopefully 14-game season. I think that's a major concern when you look at the physical nature of this conference.

Don't be deceived by all the talk of wide receivers and open formations. Still a very physical league and we believe the tougher the team, the better the team. So I think that's really what we've tried to do is create a fast team that has an opportunity to compete and run with these other teams.

But ultimately we think by having a tough team, we think that goes into a lot of things, not just physical ruggedness but the kind of competitive toughness that allows you to go into these stadiums and perform your task, just as if it was the first game. And so really that's what our

objective has been in trying to make sure that we didn't try to put a coach's head on a player's body.

Q. Baylor's coach talked about the spread offense, three, four wide receiver sets, maybe a feel for the teams that are trying to catch up with more dominant programs. Do you agree with that or does it come down to the talent on the field?

COACH RON PRINCE: I think what's happened by utilizing this system that so many people are utilizing and really our focus is more on how to defend it than trying to emulate it.

But from our standpoint, we believe that what it's allowed, it's allowed greater parody, and it's allowed programs who can -- you know, everybody has at one time one of the six-five drop-back quarterback. So the programs that embrace the quarterback who is a terrific athlete who can run and throw, who has the guts for winning, and has great leadership and all those things, we think that those programs now have an opportunity to really play a faster game. And so that's really -- as we analyze things, I think there's a lot of programs -- I won't mention them -- but have really made themselves fixtures in the top 25 now, because they've had the opportunity to put this kind of system in place. And I still think a lot of people are still trying to figure out the answers to defending it.

Q. Coach, your offense and defensive coordinators come from the NFL, background in NFL, Green Bay and Tampa Bay, is that an indication of the style of play you'll be implementing them or just the fact that you know them as great coaches or what's the thought process there?

COACH RON PRINCE: I think there's both of those involved. I think obviously the influence of the program I think is pronounced in college. I think you can see it. I think a lot of people who make that transition to apply a pro type of game in college make mistakes by trying to do too much, make it too sophisticated.

I made the statement about putting a coach's head on a player's body. We never want to do that. We want to allow the player to play and utilize the talent he has. What I was looking for in the staff was people who could make a connection with young people, coaches and parents, wanted people who could explain to a young person why a

college education is important and how they could better themselves and their lives with it. But most importantly people who were teachers, and I think that's really a missing element in a lot of the descriptions of coaches. People talk about their ability to recruit and so many of these other things, but we were looking for people who can teach young people specifically what we want, make a connection with them.

And obviously the last part of that is coaching, which is demanding performance. And so we felt like we got a great mix in that and we're very proud of the people who joined us, and their background are all very, very different. We've known these people for some time, and we're very excited about having them at Kansas State.

PETER IRWIN: Coach, congratulations in this job and we welcome you to the Big 12.

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