

**July 26, 2006**



**An Interview With:**

## **MISSOURI COACH GARY PINKEL**

**PETER IRWIN:** Why don't you go ahead and make an opening comment, and when they show up, you can introduce them.

**COACH GARY PINKEL:** Certainly. Good morning. Just drove over from Columbia. I like it when we have it here. Works out good. I get back in the office in a little while. Certainly excited about -- like every coach, certainly excited about the season, the players have worked hard. And I think we have a chance to have a good football team.

This is probably the best leadership we've ever had since we've been there, and you know I'm looking forward to getting into two-a-days. I think some of my players are back there. T Rucker back there, tightend, St. Joseph, Missouri. Martin, put your hand up back there. Heck of a player. David Overstreet from Dallas is a safety. And Brian Smith, All Conference defensive end from Denton, Texas. Those are the three players I brought.

As we get -- as we get going, we're certainly looking forward to, you know, hopefully having a real good year, a good season. You know, it's a little bit different for us this year because I think it's the most experienced on both sides of the ball we've had since I've been there. And I think what's going to be real critical for our football team is the experienced players, including those three back there; that if you've got 16 or 17, 18 starters coming back, all those guys play at a higher level than they did before, and that's what's critical.

Obviously we're replacing a quarterback. There's going to be a life after Brad Smith. But that's also good too. We have a lot of players that can touch the ball and do good things in this league. I think you'll be able to see that as the season goes on.

**Q. Gary, Overstreet has successfully now made the switch to defense. Was that at the coaching suggestion or --**

**COACH GARY PINKEL:** When we recruited David Overstreet, he was concerned whether we were going to play him in quarterback or another position. I told him -- I was in his high school and I told him this. I said, You will never ever change position unless you walk in my office and say, I want to go to another position.

And it was not even talked about. And then eventually he came in, said he wanted to switch. I think it's been good for him. Obviously. I mean he's in the best position. But that was an agreement that I had with him in his -- the hall of his high school a few years ago.

**Q. Gary, how has Chase done in spring and putting his stamp?**

**COACH GARY PINKEL:** Chase Daniel, how he's done? First of all, he's very talented player. I think that, you know, without question right now he's clearly number one going in. There's no -- the race is certainly not over.

Chase Patton and Brandon Coleman are competing there. So we'll let that go as it is. But certainly I think he's doing a lot of good things, and I know he wants to be starting quarterback. And he'll work hard. Developing the position is going to be real important. This year with the quarterbacks that we have, we will distribute the football. He'll be distributor of the ball. That's what this offense is about. Our quarterback has to play well. What we ask him to do in our offense. But, you know, I think he's got a lot of good players to distribute the ball to. I think we have a lot of players to make some plays. Our tailbacks, Tony Temple, Marcus Woods are right now the starters, but certainly we have all the other players, we have talented players and players can make things happen with the football.

And so it's, you know -- he's just gotta do his part and get the ball to these people and let them make some plays. And I think we can be a pretty good offensive football team.

**Q. Gary, there's going to be a lot of attention on the quarterback, the offense. But for the defense, how much is going to be on**

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**that group kind of early, solidify the thing? How good can this defense be?**

COACH GARY PINKEL: We certainly want to be better. The year before last year we were a pretty good defensive team, last year our numbers fell off. We did some things obviously in some big games. Certainly played well at times. But, again, get our defensive front back, more depth up there. And that's critical. You know, we all know that's where it starts on both sides of the football. And we expect it to be a better defense. It's the most athletic defense we've had, certainly in the perimeter. And we want to play better defense. If we can do that and do much better in the turnover category, defensively I think we had 24 turnovers, which is pretty good, it's fourth in the league. But offense we turned the ball over way too much, uncharacteristic of what I would like to think our teams do. That I think is going to be critical.

**Q. Coach, you talk about the experience that you guys gave Chase last year in games and how beneficial that's going to be for him going into his first start this year?**

COACH GARY PINKEL: Yeah, we played him in every game. That was something that was real important for us to do that. We all know in the Iowa State game Brad got hurt in the fourth quarter and he engineered a couple drives for field goal and touchdown and a drive in overtime to win the game.

Really, I think a huge statement for a young -- for a kid right out of high school. And I've coached a lot of good quarterbacks over my eight years I've coached and I've never seen a young player do that.

But, you know, you gotta get it done, go out and do it. And I think that's kind of where he's at. And first of all, he's got to, you know, keep getting better, as I think he's doing right now and throwing out throughout the summer. And, you know, he's going to have to perform at a high level, and we'll see also where it goes. You know, our depth at quarterback is important not just for him or whoever wins the job, but to be able to have your backup to be able to play at a high level too. But I think that experience hopefully was huge for him, because he played in absolutely every game.

**Q. Gary, can you address, you've got a couple of guys that almost everybody thought were going to different schools, Rucker had a**

**history at Nebraska; Coffman had a history at K State. In your mind, what were the keys to getting them to break that?**

COACH GARY PINKEL: First of all, Andy Hill recruited -- Andy Hill recruits at Kansas City, and we have to work the numbers. But last year, he's done I think an excellent job. We have a lot of players from the Kansas City area, good players, high-level players. I think T. Rucker -- I think T as a tightend, I think he felt that we were going to throw the football to him. And at the time, you know, where his brother went to school, they -- at that particular time, that's -- they weren't throwing the football. So I think that had a lot to do with it. Probably have to ask him.

And as far as Chase, that was -- I talked to his father. His father said, You can go where you want to go. The father was very involved in the recruiting process because he would ask any and every question that was to be asked because he wanted to make sure Chase had all the information. But when the bottom line came down, he wanted to be a Missouri Tiger. It was a tremendous plus for us.

Last year going into two-a-days, to be honest with you, with T Ruck, we had a freshman All-American before T Ruck, then we had a high school player from the Kansas City area in Chase Coffman. And we said we'll probably red-shirt the guys because we have a real experienced tightend in T Ruck, and we're going through two-a-days, and the guy kept showing up and making the plays. You keep saying, This guy is pretty good, this guy is pretty good.

So finally we made a choice and I called Chase in and said, You know, T Ruck is here, we can do things with two tightends, a lot of different things, and I would suggest as a receiver, as a tightend at this level, played as well as anybody could expect a first-year player to play, made as many big plays as T Ruck does, and he has a great future.

**Q. The model of the quarterback, they came in, they understudied for a while, learned the offense, moved in junior year, maybe at the earliest, is there a shift in the model now to where you want to get young guys in earlier if they've got the qualities to run the team?**

COACH GARY PINKEL: I think always as you record and recruit quarterbacks, if you have a player come in red-shirt a year and then play a little

bit the next year then be a three-year starter at high level in preparing, preparation-wise, that's a pretty good formula to go. When I was in Washington we did that and Toledo quite a bit. But kids want to play more nowadays. Everybody wants to play right away now.

We all understand the difficulty of the position. I think that, you know, as a quarterback, what we do at any position is we're going to play the best guys. And you know Brad Smith beat out a three-year starter. The reason I played him is because he beat him out. So that player has to show us and he's the one that really does it. We have to make a decision. But we did a year ago because, you know, we really would like to have red-shirted Chase a year ago, but it was such that he was the next best player to go in. And that's why we went that route.

**Q. Gary, back to your tightends, can you just explain from a technical matchup standpoint what having two guys like that at that position allows you to do, that a lot of your offenses in the offenses did?**

COACH GARY PINKEL: Our offense allows him to put him anywhere, first of all, at the same time, I think we were second in nation most number of plays run a year ago, but our offense -- and so there's no way we can keep those two on the field all the time. That just can't happen. But certainly in our offense we can put those two guys anywhere we want to put them. And we can pretty much match them up to a certain degree against anybody.

But I think what advantage they have, first of all, they can make big plays. They can make the tough catch that separates any receiver from another receiver and they've proven they can do that.

But they're pretty imposing figures. I mean, I think T Ruck's six-five, he would probably tell you six-seven. Chase Coffman is maybe a little taller. Those guys are big guys. They're out in space. We move them all over the place I think it fits for our offense. It's a real plus for us. It sets us to put them in position so they can make plays and I think without question our offense can do that.

**Q. Gary, can you talk about what it meant to beat a Steve Spurier coached team in the Bowl game, what it meant to you and what it meant maybe to the perception of you in the eyes of some of your critics?**

COACH GARY PINKEL: I don't know. I don't know. I don't do that. I look back at that some day down the road. You know, he was first class with me the whole time when I saw him down at the convention. We talked a little bit down there. But I don't really get caught up in all that.

**Q. Gary, can you talk a little bit about your offensive line situation, specific to Tyler Luellen coming back to a knee injury?**

COACH GARY PINKEL: We expect him to start the first game, doing well. He'll go over. Might have a red pullover. We got the okay the other day that he's 100 percent, got to get his weight back up, about ten more pounds back on. We lost Tony Palmer, All-Conference player a year ago, got everybody to bounce back and we got Joel Clinger and Adam Spieker back and starter Mike Cook and Monte Wyrick.

I think for any football coach if you get most of your offensive line and defensive line back, it's a good feeling, developing depth in both areas. But it all starts there, we all know that. You can have the greatest quarterback, greatest tailbacks, all the greatest people you want. But if you're not good up front on both sides of the ball, it's very difficult to be good as a unit. And I'm encouraged. I just want to stay healthy and get some back-ups ready to play. But if we've got all those guys played better than they did a year ago, then I think that will be a real plus for us offensively.

**Q. Coach, can you address your special teams, how you feel about where you're at in that category?**

COACH GARY PINKEL: Felt good a year ago except we had a couple of punts blocked and obviously that's inexcusable. They were young players that did it but it didn't really matter. One we came out of, and one probably lost the football game for us. And that's -- that's probably the area that, you know, that it kind of burns me, obviously, because you want to be a well-coached football team. So we're working on that.

Adam Crossett punted and also kicked last year. I think he's got the ability to do both, without question. And right now we expect him to do both again. It takes a pretty mature guy to do it, but he's a great competitor. I think that's the consistency probably of the short field goals is probably more so for him than anything else. I mean, our Bowl game, he missed a real short field

goal. I was about ready to choke him. I didn't. Then came back, had a huge kick, high 40s, 50 yards. But he's a great competitor. I think that's why he can do both. And I expect him to get better. He's only going to be a junior.

We have a punt return back, we've got a kick returner back and Marcus Woods was nationally ranked before he got hurt at punt return. Tony Temple was nationally ranked. He was hurt a little bit here and there. But you know we just -- we all want to -- we're just going to work hard to be a good special teams and improve in the areas we need to.

**Q. Gary, you're entering your 6 -- how close are you guys jumping up having the eight or nine or ten-win season?**

COACH GARY PINKEL: You can do it you can talk about it all you want, but you gotta do it. We've had opportunities that's the bottom line, that's what you want to get done. You want to take the next step, and hopefully we can do that. It's not real complex. You gotta go out and win games. We had an eight-win season two years ago. But, you know, that's what we're going to work hard to do.

**Q. Gary, you spoke about excessive number of turnovers last year, what was the common thread and what did you do in the spring to combat it?**

COACH GARY PINKEL: Most of them were fumbles, okay, that was the higher number that went up. And we're going to throw a few picks in what we do, but you still need to be responsible at quarterback. I just think you should be, for games, you should be at single digit as the season goes on. We've turned the ball over eight times in the football season before. We're very young at tailback. Brad a couple times put the ball in the ground, we got hit. That was protection issues generally but he's still got to hold onto them. But you just work at it. Is that coaching? Is that something that you can teach and work on and get better? There's no question about it. It's not a fluke that you don't turn the ball over. You don't turn the ball over because you know what you're doing, you're experienced, you hold onto the ball and you're trained to hold onto the ball and that's what we gotta get done.

PETER IRWIN: Thank you, Coach. Thank you for your comments.

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