

July 25, 2006



An Interview With:

OKLAHOMA STATE COACH MIKE GUNDY

PETER IRWIN: Coach, a few opening comments?

COACH MIKE GUNDY: I made an opening comment last year. I think that obviously I was new. Some of the writers outside of Oklahoma and Texas get an opportunity to know me and I think most probably everybody is pretty familiar with me. And we're looking forward to the season. As the staff and as the players and everybody involved with Oklahoma State football, when you sit at home over the holidays, you don't have an opportunity to play in a Bowl game, it's not very fun. And when you have to wait nine months to get back and get started, it seems like an eternity.

So we're looking forward to start in a week or so, and players have had a good off-season. I think everybody is very familiar with what summers are like for a college football player. Very demanding. We've had -- it's only been 105 or so in Stillwater. Players have been out there working hard and give a lot of credit to them. We're just looking forward to the season, getting started in a week.

Q. Mike, how much more confident are you of the big picture and as yourself as a head football coach now than say a year ago, or even at the end of last season?

COACH MIKE GUNDY: I think I went through a learning process. I was fairly confident last year. I've had a really good feel for who we were as a team. Some of the concerns I had last year fortunately came true. I was concerned about being young at quarterback. I was concerned about playing a freshman at center, so on and so forth. It's a nonfactor at this point.

But I've been asked that question several times today. I'm much more comfortable in the overall scheme of things that you asked. I think I'm doing a better job now of handling the time

demand, people pulling me so many different directions on a daily basis.

I'm focusing a little bit more on football. Obviously we've had a lot of success recruiting. So we're focusing a lot on recruiting. But I am more comfortable now. I don't think there's any coaching school that prepares you to be a head coach. I think you learn on the run.

And hopefully I've learned to delegate and to handle things time-wise more efficiently. I think that's where I've gotten better as a coach in the last 12 months.

Q. Do you like where this team is headed?

COACH MIKE GUNDY: Oh, yeah, I'm very excited about our football team. We're a better football team than we were at the end of the season. We're more mature in areas that I think make a big difference. We have terminology in place on both sides of the ball. Should be more efficient in handling game situations.

The players and coaches have developed relationships. We've got quality young people in our program that have worked hard and been involved with our strength-conditioning program for a year now, and just makes a big difference. I think everybody is familiar. We kept our staff intact. We didn't have anybody on our staff interviewing at other jobs. Happy where they are. It helps us in a lot of different areas, so I think everybody is more comfortable now.

Q. Mike, is there a situation now in the Big 12 South where some programs have to rebuild and some can just reload from year to year?

COACH MIKE GUNDY: I think there are schools in the Big 12 South that have been very tradition-rich for the last 30 years. And there's probably some schools that are working hard to get to that level.

I've said this before, and everybody has their opinion, but I think that we play in the toughest division in football. They talk about your conference, but when we're in the Big 12 South,

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we're competing against very tradition-rich schools, and Guy Morriss has done a great job at Baylor and what Coach Leach has done at Texas Tech. So we're playing probably the best division in football.

So to answer your question, we're somewhat in a rebuilding process at Oklahoma State. We're working hard in recruiting and everything we do on a daily basis to build our program and gain enough depth to where a few injuries in certain areas don't affect us as much as they do now. We have work ahead of us, but we're very confident we'll get there and we feel good about the direction we're going.

Q. When you got a program that maybe doesn't have that history, is it more difficult to maintain that level of success than it is if you could -- than if you've had a program that originally has been powerful over the years, is it easier for you to get back to that level than it is for, say, a team coming up to stay up?

COACH MIKE GUNDY: I think the question you're asking is once you get to that level, is it harder to maintain it. If you look back at the history of Oklahoma State football, there's been years that we were as competitive as anybody in the country and then we would drop off a little bit. And we would have a good run. For example, just look in the '80s, early in the '80s, the middle part of the '80s, you're looking at some 9- and 10-win seasons looking at Heisman Trophy winners, defense ranked in the top two and three in the country and offenses that put up numbers that will go down in history as top five teams and offensive teams in the country. And then you drop off and then you play well for a few years and win six or seven games and then you drop off again.

So in answer to your question, it kind of goes back to what I said earlier, that we're recruiting and building and doing things in our program now to get to that level and try to maintain it. I can't answer is it harder, because I as an off-season head coach haven't been there.

Now we've had a pretty good run when Coach Niles was the head coach, but we fell off, for whatever reason, it's not important. But we're looking forward to getting to that level and the plan that we have with our recruiting, what we're trying to accomplish is to maintain.

Q. Mike, can you talk a little bit about the trial by fire Bobby Reid went through last year and how you felt like he dealt with it?

COACH MIKE GUNDY: The one thing we've talked about as a staff and with our team at Oklahoma State is not to make excuses. We accept responsibility for everything that we do. But to be up front and honest about Bobby Reid, we played him as a red-shirt freshman, played average the first couple of games. And he had a very serious injury. I believe it was the fourth game of the year, maybe, and that injury prevented him from practicing for about six weeks.

When you're a freshman, trying to learn your way and develop yourself as a quarterback and you're not allowed or you don't have the opportunity to practice for six weeks, made it very difficult for him to continue to develop.

We put him back in at the end of the year because we felt like he gave us the best chance to win and didn't play very well and lost his confidence. So the thing that we worked on this spring was putting him in a situation where he could have success doing some things, we thought really gave him an opportunity to play well in live scrimmages to start to develop some of the confidence. He's a better player now than when he ended the season last year.

He needs to have success early in the season to develop that confidence, play in that position with a lot of confidence makes you a much better player. So we're bringing him along. We expect him to play earlier in the season.

Q. Mike, I wondered last year as a first-year head coach, you had some guys in your staff with experience around you, how much of a difference did that make and how much did you rely on them?

COACH MIKE GUNDY: One thing I thought I did a good job of was delegating. I have a lot of faith in the guys that are on our staff. Our coordinators are experienced. And we all know that when you spend time working with your peers, it doesn't take long for you to get a feel for who they are, what their habits are and what kind of workers they are. And so I've delegated even more this year. The only thing that's different for me is I'm coaching more than I was because I missed not coaching football. I missed the relationship between a player and a coach. I'd done that for 15 years. I enjoyed that part of it. So

I'm a little more involved in that area. But not calling plays or anything.

But to answer your question, it did help a lot having some experience there. Those guys did a good job. We just, you know, had to overcome some mistakes. Probably did a little bit too much. But you learn from it and move on.

Q. Coach, you mentioned a couple questions ago you're doing things in recruiting and you're doing things to get to the top of the division, what are these things, because after a four-win season these things are going to have to be pretty powerful?

COACH MIKE GUNDY: Well, we're having a lot of success in recruiting right now. We had a top-20 class last year. We're off to a great start this year. The things that contribute to that are: Providing players that are looking in our program and the players currently in our program with the best everyday lifestyle, better than anybody in the country. I think if you talk to some of our players today or if you come to Stillwater or visit with some of our players, you'll come to find the fact that we're maximizing the opportunity to improve in three areas: the classroom, what they do in society, and how they handle themselves on the football field on game day.

And there's a lot of things in recruiting that people talk about, and at times don't follow through on. We're following through on what we say, and giving our players an opportunity to be successful in those areas. And I think if you ask those players that are here and the players that you ask that question, they can give you a better answer, because we take good care of our players and we play within the rules and they enjoy that. That's what's attracting more people.

Q. What are some of the things you're trying to fine tune here in the second year here with your offense?

COACH MIKE GUNDY: Offensively it's very simple: We turned the ball over too many times. Almost everybody we played, we moved the football. We just turned it over, gave ourselves a chance to win. Eliminate turnovers and find ways to make big plays, on the flip side of that, defensively, force turnovers and eliminate chunk plays which are tackling plays.

Q. Coach, at times last year it was very evident that your team lacked play makers with

the addition of Adarius Bowman, how much is that going to help with your offense?

COACH MIKE GUNDY: I think Adarius will show up a lot this season. Six-foot-three, 230 pounds, runs fast, got good hands. He's had a great off-season. And when you have skilled players that can make plays when things don't go right all the time, when it's not blocked exactly the way you want it or the throw may not be exactly where it's supposed to be, when there's guys that make plays with the ball in their hand, like you said, makes you look a lot better, and he's the guy that can contribute to that.

You have Michael Hamilton coming back at tailback, year of experience, freshman last year, almost rushed for a thousand yards. Dantrell Savage, junior college player that is coming in we think can do some things with the ball in his hands. We have Woods and Bowman and Ricky Price played as a freshman last year at receiver for us, true freshman, he'll be a sophomore. We're confident we have more guys that can make plays with the ball in their hands.

Q. Coach, you said last year at this time your concerns (inaudible) what are your concerns going into this season?

COACH MIKE GUNDY: A little concerned about playing with freshman offensive guards. We were experienced at the two tackle positions. We're somewhat experienced now with the center position with David Washington who played last year as a freshman. Now a sophomore. Little more experienced at quarterback. Obviously we're experienced at tailback, experienced at tightend, but we're going to have to play with guys at the two guard spots that haven't played at this level. And I'm a little concerned about that.

Defensively, we've got guys coming back on the defense line that have been there and have played. I'm very encouraged about that. I feel like we're more athletic at linebacker in the secondary, but we're going to play with some guys that haven't played. Jacob Lacey is playing corner for us. Didn't play very much last year. He's just a sophomore. Andre Sexton is a red-shirt freshman that didn't play, is going to start at safety for us. At linebacker position you have Rod Johnson, played a little bit last year. Should be improved and more experienced. You've got Chris Collins, freshman, hadn't played. And you have Jeremy Nethon that moved from the safety spot to linebacker that

hasn't played that position. More athletic, but not as experienced as we were.

So those are some of my concerns, but I'm more excited about them being more athletic.

Q. Mike, I assume you're working with quarterbacks, and how do you balance, you know, working with them and then, you know, assuming -- still doing your head coaching duties and everything?

COACH MIKE GUNDY: I'm in a little bit of a learning process there. But I made a decision that prior to spring ball the one thing that I miss as I mentioned earlier was working with the players on a daily basis, and I'm not coordinating the offense. I'm not calling the plays, but I went back to coaching so I'm working with the quarterbacks in practice and I enjoy that part of it. It can be difficult at times. There's some things that are going to have to give. And it's unfortunately it will take some time away from me at home and it will take away from some of my media obligations. I'll have to delegate.

But I enjoy that part of it and I just feel confident that I'll feel much better as a person, being able to coach on a daily basis.

PETER IRWIN: Coach, we appreciate your comments.

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