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An interview with:

COACH CLINT BOWEN

COACH BOWEN: All right. Obviously, finished up the Oklahoma State game. I thought our players did a nice job of recovering, showing up ready to work. Right now at Kansas we are going into our fall break which gives us a unique opportunity to recap the game on Sunday, but gives us a chance to get back on the practice field on Monday, which is usually our players' day off.

Had a productive practice yesterday. We'll pick up today, tomorrow and Thursday as well for our Texas Tech prep and get ready to go. So our players are ready, and it's all Texas Tech from here.

Any questions?

Q. Last week just the personnel, do you see that continuing over the next few weeks or just kind of maybe mix it up and it will settle down maybe from here?

COACH BOWEN: From this point on I think it will probably settle down a little bit, and it won't be as drastic a change. Because we did move some guys into some new roles and some guys stepped up the last couple weeks and played. We were fortunate last week Derrick Neal came along as a DB pretty good. We got some reps out of him. Ronnie Davis resurfaced. Got some nice work out of Ronnie. Ended up playing 20-plus snaps in that game and performed well. Tyler Holmes went in for significant action at the nose and did a nice job, which gives us one more big body on the inside which is important for us to have with what we do.

So on that side of the ball, we've got three guys, a lot more reps than they've had. So that added some depth to us.

Q. How long has the deal been in the works and why did it come about?

COACH BOWEN: It came about that we're kind of hitting that Big 12 part of the season, and you get into these teams that are four and five wides like we're going to see this week. We're going to see against Baylor and those type of teams. Probably a little more depth at DB. He was a young man who we had used already, and hadn't red-shirted. Wasn't really factoring in on the offensive side of the ball, but a guy that is extremely athletic and quick and fast. Played DB in high school and had some experience with it, so we moved him over there, took a look at him, and had he some pretty natural skills.

Q. Is this a permanent move for Derrick Neal?

COACH BOWEN: I think probably too soon to say. But we are fortunate he's a versatile athlete. He has a bright future in the returning game for sure. Punts and kicks, and he does have such good quickness and vision. But I can see him doing a few things for us.

Q. It's been a while since the team has won on the road, is that something you address with the players?

COACH BOWEN: Yeah, I would like to talk to our guys. It's not that long-term stuff. It's day-to-day. It's taking care of whatever is six inches in front of your face and getting that part of it done. If you keep doing things right and keep doing them right over and over and over, then usually success follows.

Q. What scares you most about Tech?

COACH BOWEN: They run an offensive system that can put you in some stressful positions as a defense on that side of the ball. They've done a nice job developing a system that creates space for the players. They have good athletes at wide receiver. They have a good athlete at running back. They run the ball as much as they throw it.

Throwing is probably what they do best.

But I think it's the space that they create, the way that they force you to defend the entire field. The quarterback makes a really good decisions. They don't take sacks. They have a great system in recognizing pressures and blitzes, and the kid gets it out of his hands, it's hard to hit the quarterback. So they get the ball out. But offensively, they're pretty tough on that part of it.

Q. Kliff Kingsbury has said they have struggled with finishing in games, is that what you see from them?

COACH BOWEN: Yeah, in each of these games, you take their last game against West Virginia, and right before the half, they drive all the way down there and end up throwing an interception and losing points.

At the end that was a competitive game. Both teams were going back and forth at the end. West Virginia came up with the drive after they punted on that last one. Texas Tech had gotten down there close this morning driving to the point ending on 4th and 3. You know, I guess he knows better than I do what his team's got to do.

Q. You talked about the day-to-day and all that stuff. But when you took this thing over, did you think in advance that this thing has gone as you hoped it would have? In terms of just the progress and moving forward, is that what you thought at all?

COACH BOWEN: When we did take it over, the first thing I felt that this team needed was an identity. We needed something, as I said to our guys, what are we going to be known for? When people leave the stadium after watching us play, what are they going to say about us? What is going to be the Kansas football identity?

And I believe our players have bought into what we talked about. Are we there yet? No. We're still a long ways away. But in terms of creating a product on the field that we know each and every week is what Kansas football is going to represent, that's where we're headed.

That is part of what I keep talking about. When you leave, I won't be able to say this. Those guys played extremely hard. They're going to fight until the end of the game. They're going to be tough. Can't win football games without being physical and being tough. At the same time, they look like they know what they're doing. They're smart. They're don't beat themselves. That's got to be our trademark.

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Q. Are you seeing the progress you would have hoped for at this point?

COACH BOWEN: We are a team in progress. I believe if you come to our practices, we're still not urgent enough. But our practices, I feel, our kids are understanding the importance of urgency more. It has to continue to improve. I think on the field we've been able to go out and put back-to-back games where we played hard and got more physical this last game. I think there is progress going on.

Q. How did Michael (Cummings) grade out on Saturday?

COACH BOWEN: He did nicely. We named him offensive player of the game. Had some production on that. I think the thing that Mike did well, he made good decisions, made decisive decisions. Had leadership amongst the offense. He's a competitive guy and was able to, one, by example displaying the toughness he displayed in the game leading, and Mike's not afraid to be vocal. I thought he did a nice job.

Q. Does it give you more freedom or flexibility or advantage to be able to work with him and maybe give him more to do offensively just because he's got this extra time and extra knowledge that hey, I'm the guy now?

COACH BOWEN: Yeah, I think he'll be in there with the ones and going, and he's earned that right. I think the way he played and what he displayed here he earned the right to be a starter. Hopefully he truly can take control of that offense.

Q. Does that help Coach Reagan in his game preparation also?

COACH BOWEN: I think Michael's skill set is different than maybe Montell's is a little bit, the things that he does well and vice versa. So obviously they have a plan that takes advantage of what he does best.

Q. Can you talk about the production and the number of touches you're hoping to get for Tony (Pierson) in there?

COACH BOWEN: Yeah, we do. We have to continue to find ways to get him the ball. He's one of those guys that can go the distance any play. He's an explosive player. So he did that number of touches probably about where he should be and we have to do that.

We're also happy with what Coach Reagan did with getting our other guys. Nick (Harwell) had his most touches, we got Jimmay (Mundine) involved and some of those other guys capable of making plays got the ball in their hands as well.

Q. Was that a game plan for you?

COACH BOWEN: I think it was a conscious game plan decision on those. Obviously, Mike had to go execute it. But when you look at every team we play I look at it, and the best player seems to get the ball a lot. Their second best player gets the ball second most. It makes sense if you have good players, get them the ball. And offensive coaches are able to come up with a plan to do that.

Q. Can you talk about how Michael Reynolds has been playing lately?

COACH BOWEN: Yeah, he is a talented guy. He's one of the guys on our team that has the ability to rush the quarterback and win match-ups against offensive tackles in this league and get pressure on the QB. It's critical that we do that because we don't have a ton of pure pass/rush guys, so his ability to get pressure changes a lot of things. If we can get pressure before it helps us in coverage to do things. And Michael stepping up has been big for us.

Q. Is he one of those guys where you don't have to do anything defensively to get pressure?

COACH BOWEN: Yeah, he is. This last game. The two sacks he ended up getting were really just effort and winning type sacks. He beat the guy over him.

Q. Have you seen progress with Andrew Bolton?

COACH BOWEN: He is. Andrew's starting to play a little bit. He's getting comfortable, playing a lot faster. His production hasn't shown up. I think he got the most missed sacks on our team. He's getting there, he just kind of gets the fly by going a little bit, which is his progress getting there. It's still disruptive. I think he's missed three on the year. It frustrates him, but he has been bolting and doing good, improving every week.

Q. Is Dexter (McDonald) healthy?

COACH BOWEN: Yeah, he's fine.

Q. What about any other health issues?

COACH BOWEN: Yeah, we're -- knock on wood -- staying pretty healthy.

Q. Did you get a chance after the game on Saturday to talk to any of your old teammates? Any familiar faces?

COACH BOWEN: I did. That was pretty special to see some of those guys coming back. Some I hadn't seen for several years. I hadn't seen my old college roommate since we had moved down in the Insight Bowl. He came over that day. That was the last time I had seen him. I don't want to call it one guy, but Kwame Lassiter, we kind of go back a little bit. There were a lot of great faces, some real surprise guys. It was good to see.

You lose touch from those guys over the years, and for those guys to come back and support the team was pretty special.

Q. Does it die down for you? You obviously have your hands full being a head coach and trying to figure out a game plan, but it seems like whether it's just around the community or for the KU Nation or whatever it is, the love and support for this team just keeps coming. Has that died down? Have you been able to put the blinders on and not really get into that too much? Is that hard to avoid? What is the mentality with all of that?

COACH BOWEN: My mentality is that it's about Kansas football. I don't want to sound cliché. It's about the young men in this program that commit so much of their time and effort and energy into representing Kansas football well, and it always remains about the team, and that's what it is. It's for these players that do so much to have success. It's to give them the best chance to stay focused on the task at hand. That's what we all have to do as professionals in this business.

Q. What are some of the things you can do to improve the running game?

COACH BOWEN: I think the biggest thing, and Coach Reagan will probably emphasize it when you talk to him, it's finishing blocks. We get a hand on a hat, we're doing a nice job of doing that, but we're not finishing. Playing against D-line men, they don't finish and they make plays. I think our running backs are executing well and running hard downhill. We just need to up front start to

finish some people off.

Q. Going into that fourth quarter, the team gathered and everybody was jumping up and down and hollering and screaming. What was going through your mind? Was there anything that you were thinking at that time?

COACH BOWEN: Yeah, there was. The big thing that I thought was that was them. That was the players only. I coached it, organized it. Someone didn't tell them to do it. It was the players going together on their own. That's something that we talked about earlier, and what we talked about with these players is we are our team.

Nothing is more important than our team. If we're going to be good, you guys are going to have to learn to play together, stay together, and truly care about one another. So to see those guys when things got exciting to group up on their own, get excited on their own and start to take some ownership, it kind of reinforced some of the things that we've been talking about that maybe were starting to take place.

Q. A few of your players have mentioned that you are running sprints with them at the end of practices and you also chest bump them after good plays in the game, what is the source of that youthful coaching for you?

COACH BOWEN: I guess the real part of it is I don't work out at lunch anymore because I have these press conferences, so I figure I've got to get it in at the end of practice. They're going to run all together, they have to do it together. So that's part of the philosophy of that, and the chest bumping, and celebrating, you know, you work really hard in this business to put those guys in position to have success and play, and when you see one of your guys have success, it just kind of becomes your reaction. That is the fun part of it.

Q. As far as your secondary goes, you knew what you would get with them, but have they been a little better than you thought?

COACH BOWEN: JaCorey (Shepherd) and Dexter (McDonald), where they are, definitely so. JaCorey I think has put together an All-Conference type season. I think Dexter's right behind him. They've picked up and learned just so much in the couple of years of what we're doing defensively, and it's helping them out. They're able to take advantage of it. They're out there playing really well.

I think Cassius (Sendish) and Isaiah (Johnson), I think there is better in them. I think they both do too. Not that they're playing bad. They're playing good. It's just my expectations for both of those guys are a little higher than where they are.

I think JaCorey and Dexter are up there, and I'm happy with Cassius and Isaiah. They're unbelievable kids that work hard. I just really think that there are some special games in store for those guys.

The big surprise for us, the guys that has really come along is Fish (Smithson). That guy's playing equal reps out there, and he's a pretty good player.

Q. You talk about being physical and being tough. Why is that so important for this team to have that?

COACH BOWEN: Well, we play in a grown-man's conference, and there are guys in this conference that are playing for real. If you can't match their intensity and level of physicality, it gets ugly in a hurry, and you can't overcome it. Once a team can knock you around, knock you off the ball, it doesn't matter what you do schematically. It doesn't matter anything else. Once a team beats you up and there are guys in this conference that have the intent of doing that. If you can't match it, you never have a chance.

Q. What about Fish? What is it about him that stands out?

COACH BOWEN: The thing about Fish, he's a very instinctual football player. He's one of those guys that understands the game very well. He's a reaction, instinctual type player, and those are the best kind to have at safety because that's what they do. They see things and they react. So he's been pretty natural from the beginning. I think he's just got some God-given talents to play safety.

Q. It seems a lot of these guys say to you the players coach and the guy they love because he's been in their shoes. Do you start to see that? Are you starting to see these guys, hey, so and so is looking a little more comfortable or being more himself now? Do those things show up on an individual basis?

COACH BOWEN: Yeah, I think it's important that these guys show up here and they understand that when they do show up it's time to

work. We're going to work extremely hard. But at the same time, they're going to be themselves and let their personalities show. Everyone has a different personality, and whatever that is, they need to go express that because they're a guy that likes to talk and that makes them play, they play it. If they don't want to talk, they don't have to talk.

But letting them be themselves and giving them the freedom to do that, I think that's important, and our kids are taking to it.

Q. Do you feel the momentum changing a little bit?

COACH BOWEN: I think so. We try to create energy. We try to do a lot of things and create energy and enthusiasm. When we walk into this meeting room, it's never quiet. We always have music blaring, videos playing, there is always something going on. We try, with everything we do, to keep it going.

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