

July 24, 2013



An Interview With:

NEBRASKA COACH BO PELINI

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Coach Pelini.

COACH PELINI: It's great to be back here in Chicago. It seems like a long time since last year. A lot of things have happened since then. I know as a program we're excited about the upcoming season. The kids have really worked hard.

We've had a tremendous off-season, starting way back after the Bowl game in January and going on through spring practice. And our kids are excited. They've worked their butts off this summer and camp's right around the corner.

We like where we are as a football program right now. I'm proud of our football team. I'm proud of the kids in it, how they represent our program and what we've been able to do not only on the field but more importantly in the classroom and in the community, and there's a lot of positive things going on with our program.

And that goes to the character and the type of young men that we have on our football team. And I'm proud of all those guys and what they've done for our football program. And football-wise we're looking forward to the upcoming season. We know it's going to be a tremendous challenge as it always is.

The interesting schedule for us, the way it sets up, with the extra home game and we're looking forward to that, because we always feel it's an advantage playing at home. And so we're looking forward to all the challenges that are going to come up.

But first and foremost, we've gotta have a great fall camp. We've gotta come out and work hard, and we've gotta improve us. We've gotta work to get better each and every day.

We're going to get what we earn. We understand that. We understand that the challenges are going to be there from the first week, all right on through, and we're looking forward to everything that lies ahead.

Seems like a long time since spring practice. We moved practice up from last year. I think that really worked for us, but, boy, it seems like it was a long time ago that we practiced football. So we're looking forward to getting together and getting a football team out on the field and getting ready to go.

It's about going to work now. It's about getting out there and improving as a football team and, as they say, trying to find our power line, as Amy Ramsey would like to say.

But looking forward to it, and would like to open it up for any questions.

Q. The losses that you guys had last year were kind of shock-you-to-the-core-type losses with what you gave up defensively these kinds of things in these games. You're known as a defensive coach. What are the things that you and your staff did this off-season, the soul searching, the studying, whatever it was, to improve scheme-wise, whatever it needed to be, to work on those things that happened in those games?

COACH PELINI: It's nothing magical. It's about getting better. It's about tackling better, executing better.

It's not a scheme thing. It's not a -- at the end of the day you have to execute. And when those things happen, they happen for a reason. We've studied it. We've addressed it. Going to continue to work and we need to be better, more consistent than we were last year.

You look at the wins we had and where we rank nationally in total defense in total wins and obviously a couple of the losses that we had, especially ones where we gave up a lot of points and a lot of yards.

And there's not much -- the room for error isn't there anymore. Utah was playing the spread

out teams and you play some good football teams and when some things -- you face some adversity early on you can't let it turn the other way on you.

Like I said, fundamentally, technique-wise and execution-wise, we need to be better. We need to be better consistently because when you're not, those bad things can happen to you.

Q. Why was Thomas Brown dismissed from the team?

COACH PELINI: Violation of team rules. I don't speak in specifics about it. But I wish him luck at his next school.

Q. Rutgers and Maryland went to the Big Ten next year, you just made that transition. What advice would you have for them as to how to what to do, what to prepare for going through that transition to the Big Ten?

COACH PELINI: Everybody's going to have their different approach on how they're going to go through to transition. I think the support you have here with the Big Ten Conference and the other member institutions and for that matter even the hospitality of the other coaches, that was tremendous for us.

And there's always going to be an adjustment period for teams going through, going into a conference for the first time. And that's going to be there. There's no hiding from that.

And it's going to require some extra work in the off-season. But it's a transition that you just have to spend a little bit more time familiarizing yourself with teams that you haven't seen for a while, coaches you might not have coached against, and it just adds a little more to your off-season to try become familiar with it before it's staring you in the face in a game week.

So the more preparation you're able to do in the off-season makes that transition that much easier. But it's still going to be difficult. There's one thing about seeing things on film and watching it on your laptop, but there's a whole other thing going through it, and over time you'll become more and more familiar and things become a little bit easier for you.

Plus you have your football players who are also going through a transition time, and they're going into stadiums they've never been in. There's a lot to it. But the better preparation they can do in the off-season, the better.

Q. How have you already talked to your team about targeting rules, how will you talk to them about the new targeting rule, and what, if any, concerns do you have about the application of that rule?

COACH PELINI: Well, we talked to them about it in spring knowing it was coming, right around the corner. And you look for examples that you're going to see, different things that came up during practice and said, hey, that's the time where you're probably going to get thrown out of the game.

But the scary thing to me is just what you said: It's the application part of it. And it's going to be pretty subjective. And I don't think it's an easy thing to call. And in my opinion it's going a little bit overboard right now. And some things I've seen on TV and different examples that they've shown, you know, like even as a coach watching it on TV, I haven't quite agreed with some of the things they've talked about.

But I understand where it's coming from. It's about the safety of the players, and we're all for that. We just have to make sure that we're not messing with the integrity of the game or the sport and how it's supposed to be played.

Q. What are your thoughts on your offense? I would think you have to be pretty excited about what you bring back and the possibilities on that side of the ball.

COACH PELINI: Yeah, I really like our offense. It's coming back, and obviously it starts with the quarterback position, having a four-year starter at quarterback and some really dynamic weapons around them.

I think we have the opportunity to have probably the best offensive line on paper, potentially, that we've had since I've been here, not only the starters but some of the backups and the depth that we have really across the board.

If we can get a couple young kids, incoming guys, that can come in and provide us with some extra depth at a couple of positions, it's a pretty potent -- potentially a very potent offense. And I feel really good about it.

I feel good about where our guys are scheme-wise and their knowledge of Coach Beck's (Offensive Coordinator Tim Beck) offense and what he wants to do. And I'm looking forward to our offense. I think they have -- I wouldn't trade our offense for anybody. I really like what we're

doing.

Q. What's it like just opening with Illinois five straight years for Big Ten play?

COACH PELINI: Excuse me?

Q. Just opening with Illinois for five straight years in Big Ten play, just what's that like?

COACH PELINI: Well, actually until you said that, I wasn't even aware of that. But I knew they were our opener this year. And that's all I'm concerned with right now. And we have a lot of respect for the Illinois program.

Obviously coming from the Big Ten and I played Illinois a lot over the years, from my playing days and understanding the type of tradition they have and the type of potential they have. Coach Beckman and his staff are doing a good job and getting things going in the right direction, and we know it will be a challenge for us right off the bat to start Big Ten play.

Q. The Big Ten's going to the nine-game schedule in a few years. The excitement of that is you're in a different division than Ohio State and your alma mater and Michigan State and other schools when this happens, but going to nine games you'll be able to play those schools maybe a little bit more regularly, which I think the fans were looking forward to. Just your thoughts about going to the nine-game schedule?

COACH PELINI: It's going to be a little bit different in that probably the biggest -- it creates some different scheduling issues as far as games we might have had scheduled or planning on scheduling for the future.

But having the five and four format as far as in your division and out of your division, home games and not home games, it changes some of the dynamics. But I think it will be good.

It was inevitable that's where it was heading with the nine conference games, with the expansion of the conference, and I think it will be a good thing in the end. It will be a little bit of -- obviously you're down to three out-of-conference games which changes your dynamics a little bit, but I think in time most of the conferences, especially the ones that are expanding past 10, 11 teams, you know, 12 and up, are going to start going to nine conference games.

That's going to I think be pretty uniform throughout college football in short order.

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Q. With so much inexperience in the front seven, as a defensive coach, are there unique challenges, any challenges in particular to get those guys ready to play the level of football you expect?

COACH PELINI: Well, there's challenges in every situation. Everyone's a little bit different each year. And we're going to have some inexperience. But we have some experienced guys kind of mixed through there.

And I think it's going to be a great competition. We might be fairly inexperienced, especially to start off the year, you know.

But I think our depth is going to be there. And there's going to be great competition, which I think is -- and we're athletic. It's going to be an athletic group and a talented group and I'll take that any day of the week.

It's just going to require a lot of hard work on our part as coaches, our players' parts, and I like the potential of the group. I like the way we finished spring. I like the development we've had. And I'm excited about the incoming guys that are going to add to the mix. And we're doing a couple different things to add to what we've been doing defensively.

I think we're going to be a little bit more multiple even than we have been even though we're going to be younger.

And so I'm looking forward to it. And I really like the potential of our group.

Q. The question is in regard to Taylor. And we saw a pretty dramatic change from a mechanics standpoint from 11 to 12. And I know he has a coach in California that he's been working with. My question to you is your level of comfort with having external coaches coaching Taylor or any other player and whether the specialization of some of these coaches is an area that you're going to move to in the future.

COACH PELINI: Taylor is being coached by Coach Beck. He's the one who -- believe me, Taylor works with -- he has his coach at home that helps him on his breaks, but he's at the university most of the year and Coach Beck does a great job with them.

It's nice to have some reinforcement, some guys that he works with, you know, away from when he's in Lincoln and when he's at home. And

Taylor's made great strides. I think he had a tremendous year last year.

And I expect him -- there's still a lot of room for improvement there. He's not even close to what his potential is. And I look forward to what he's going to bring to the table this year.

He had an improved spring. And being a great quarterback comes back to not just the talent thing, it's not just the fundamentals and the technique issues, but it comes down to decision-making and efficiency at the quarterback position and making the offense work for you, and I think he's understanding that.

I think he grew in that area last year and there's still a lot more room for growth. And like you said, he made some big changes in his throwing motion and really his footwork and shoulder angle.

Once he got that corrected, he has the arm strength. He can make any throw there is. And he has tremendous talent. He just needed to refine some things and he's gotta continue to work on that because it's the little things that allow you to have success.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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