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An Interview With:

BIG TEN NETWORK PRESIDENT MARK SILVERMAN

MARK SILVERMAN: Hello everybody. I hope you're doing well. We'll be starting our eighth year on the air this coming fall. Yes, it's only eight years since the network has launched, which seems a little incredible.

But as you look back, we had an incredibly successful last year. We produced over a thousand events. We continued to grow our list of advertisers, our advertising revenue, and we began that process of integrating Maryland Rutgers into the Big Ten. And obviously that should be a big theme for the network this coming year.

This year we're really excited. Our prime time schedule, which you just saw on the clip, it's by leaps and bounds our best prime time schedule ever.

Five key conference matchups and games that are going to have more relevancy to our Big Ten fans than we've really ever had before. These prime time games are really important. These are our opportunities to bring viewers to understand more aspects about the network, to watch our shows, to understand our digital properties, and the fact we can launch with such a strong conference schedule, something we're really happy about.

To that extent, for the Penn State/Rutgers game week three, we're going to be traveling, our studio show, with Gerry, Dave and Howard. Two Rutgers are going to be there before the game, after the game. We'll have some special guests showing up on set. It's really a great opportunity to take advantage of all the buzz going on in the northeast.

With Rutgers and Maryland joining and all the Big Ten fans in that part of the country, we're so excited about the Big Ten expanding to that

area. So we're really happy and it's a great opportunity for us with the prime time schedule.

Integrating Maryland and Rutgers into the network is a major, major initiative of ours. And the thing we're very happy to say today is that we've gotten our distribution deals done in advance with Cablevision and Time Warner and Comcast. And all the Rutgers and Maryland fans that live D.C., Maryland, New York, New Jersey, are going to be able to enjoy their teams in the Big Ten games just like the other fans in the Big Ten are.

So the fact that we're sitting on this stage in July being able to say that, we're way ahead of where we thought we'd be at this point. So we're thrilled to be able to offer that type of distribution, and now that it's for us to start working on programming.

To that end, we announced last week some new hires for both our studio and for games with people with Rutgers and Maryland, ties that we've never really had before.

And we really need to treat our two schools as full-fledged Big Ten members. We need to educate all the rest of the Big Ten community on what these two schools' histories and traditions are, and it's something that we think hiring some of the localized talent can help us achieve that going forward.

We've also built out our on-campus studios. You'll be seeing interviews with student-athletes and coaches from two new schools, just as much as you will from the existing Big Ten universities.

And having seen the schools, it really helps us grow the BTN brand. You remember a few years ago we moved from the Big Ten Network to focus on the BTN brand. To that end, we really focused on launching big events, growing this affinity Big Ten fans and college sports fans can have with BTN.

To that end, we had an event at Rutgers last month, as well as New York City at Cipriani's, and 1,000 Big Ten alums show up. We had the largest group of Heisman Trophy winners outside of the actual Heisman Trophy ceremony show up



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BTN President Mark Silverman

in New York to entertain fans, and over 1,000 fans show up at that event.

We also had an event with Maryland and Baltimore. We had a big Big Ten day at the Nationals Park in DC. Commissioner Delany and myself, along with all the Big Ten mascots were there.

And you're seeing this effort with the network and the conference to really treat New York, New Jersey, and Maryland/D.C. area like they are part of the Big Ten. This is not a fly-in add schools and that's not really part of the Big Ten geography.

The Big Ten geography has expanded. All of our states are contiguous. All are similar in what our goals are, what our aspirations are. We're really going out of our way to make sure these new territories and all the fans and alums there are treated the same way.

And back here in Chicago, I don't know if any of you were here on Saturday, but we had our Big 10K. We had 15,000 runners participate right here by Soldier Field, not far from where the hotel is. This event, when we launched this two years ago, we had 5,000 runners. We had 15,000 on Saturday.

It is now one of the top 10 10k races in the country. Had to slow down when I said that so I didn't trip over my words, which I'm glad I didn't do. And it's something that we're really proud of.

And the fact that we could bring Big Ten fans together and we could show our unification and really leads ourselves to this national relevancy of a conference.

Our 10k had 47 states represented who ran in this race. There's people from countries abroad flew in so they could run in this race. And the fact that we're expanding geographically just kind of only embellishes the Big Ten as a national conference. We're a national network, and we're able to reach fans all over the country in something we really aspire to do as a network.

Another one of our big initiatives this year is just to improve on behalf of programming. Our studio shows continue to grow in our ratings every year. We have got to keep doing more of it, keep getting better at what we do.

BTNLive moved to five days a week last year, and BTNLive will start on Monday. On Tuesday, Gerry, Dave and Howard will take a tour bus out. We'll start visiting all the Big Ten schools. Indiana will be on starting next Tuesday. The show will actually start on Monday.

In addition to BTNLive, Big Ten Football and Beyond - moving to five days a week, we'll look at the overall college football scene, how the Big Ten fits into the overall national scene, something that our fans have been asking for, to show more of this kind of programming.

Our BTN Originals group has probably been an area that's been the most awarded element within BTN. We received our second Emmy award nomination for The Journey. We're going to do The Journey for football and for basketball this year.

We're adding a couple new Big Ten Elites to our staple of shows and we're adding a documentary. Last year we did the Tiebreaker between Ohio State and Michigan. This year we're going to focus on Brook Berringer, former Nebraska quarterback who died tragically in a plane crash. That'll be later on in the fall.

And we're doing a different kind of show as well, trying to broaden our programming and expand our appeal. We're going to do a show a little bit different called Big Ten Treasure Hunter where we follow a Chicago memorabilia expert who travels around the Big Ten area, meets crazy fans with wonderful unique collection, and then tries to purchase some items from them, as you drop in and see some of the most dynamic fans that are out there.

And finally our BTN2Go product is something we're going to continue to enhance. It will be available on more platforms this year. It's the third-most downloaded free TV sports app that's out there, which is a very crowded sports landscape. It's a great testimony for our team back here.

And we're going to continue to make it better. You can watch our live games on your phone, on your iPad, on your other device. More and more youngsters, and older people as well who are out doing things on weekends, are able to follow their teams, follow the conference, and it's something you need to do.

So to sum it all up, it's a big year. We're thrilled to have Maryland Rutgers to join the Big Ten. We're going to continue to grow the network. The future looks bright for us. We're going to continue to do all we can to push the ball forward. With that, I'll take your questions.

THE MODERATOR: Questions?

Q. Is there going to be any kind of

discussion of either a second effort or going to be a big push to make sure that those games, especially on the basketball side, get aired?

MARK SILVERMAN: Yes. There's definitely been an increase -- especially basketball. I think it's really the relevant question.

We're evaluating all of our options. We do have a digital product. We have our Big Ten Digital Network and BTN2Go, which will be merged into BTN2Go this coming year.

I don't see a second linear network in our future. I do see digital being the answer to taking care of a lot of those issues that we'll have when we have seven, eight non-conference basketball games at the same time. We do have the opportunity to offer those games, not only for one game on the linear network, but it's something that we're well aware of and we're working with our distribution partners to try and figure out the best way to do that.

We'll have more of an answer to that as we get closer to basketball season this year. There will be more volume of games than we've ever had in November and December.

Q. (Indiscernible). Do you think that that problem may not present in the conference you've seen and you would like it seen?

MARK SILVERMAN: My first thought is it's great that a writer Tennessee is watching the Big Ten Network. When I first saw that, I thought that kind of gives credit to a lot of what we're talking about, that our programming really has national relevancy.

I think our coverage is quite candid. I think that we do a really impressive job of balancing the fact that we are a conference-branded network with the need to be candid and credible with our audience. And I think as we've gone forward now, seven years in, we've gotten better at how we do that.

And I think our goal is we need to talk respectfully. We're not a bunch of people that are just going to sound off and throw statements out there without a lot of support.

We obviously want our schools to do well. We root for our schools to do well, but that doesn't always happen. And when things happen that are not positive, we need to cover it and we need to be credible in how we do that.

So I feel that we actually did quite a good job of doing that, given what we're charged to do as a network.

Q. Curious from the football standpoint, now that you have 14 schools, kind of questions a little bit about the number of non-conference games you have to show. At what point do you guys work with the other TV partners so that one doesn't cannibalize the other and televise against each other at prime time and things like that? So go over maybe what those discussions are like in terms of who gets what game, what week.

MARK SILVERMAN: Yeah, there's definitely a desire on BTN's standpoint not to have our games go up against extremely popular games on other networks. So it's not so much that there's a discussion between ABC and ESPN and ourselves as to how this works. ABC has the first pick, and they'll set their game time each week.

Other than that, ESPN and BTN have a selection process. Whoever has that second pick after ABC will determine what time that game starts. And most often we will see what games we have and we'll try to schedule them around the most attractive games on ABC and ESPN. For prime time, it's definitely consideration, and we have to weigh, and ABC and ESPN, they select their prime time games first. And then we select our prime time games.

So when we pick our games, we're trying to evaluate a variety of different circumstances. We're trying to pick a game that could bring enough high viewership. We're trying to pick a game that will feature teams that will provide a competitive theme. We'll try to spread it a little. We don't want to be overly dependent on only a couple of schools that will be on our air. We are going to try to pick games where the schools actually have lights so we don't have to deal with bringing lights to a stadium. So we kind of are balancing a lot of different initiatives.

Sometimes for a good enough game, if we can get a good enough game, but it's going to have to go up against a game on ABC or ESPN, we'll decide, okay, we'd rather get that game and have that competition than not get that game. And other times we'll think, you know what, this is just too loaded a schedule.

Week two this year, you have Michigan State/Oregon, you have Michigan/Notre Dame, you have Ohio State and Virginia Tech. You're a Big Ten Network, that's not a week you are looking to put a primetime game against those three. Right? So those things do play into how we think about

these things. Very evolved.

Frankly, it's one of the more fun parts of the job as I do kind of enjoy that aspect, but it's something we have to be very smart about because it is primetime football, and football selections really play a large part with indicating how many people are going to watch the network for the months ahead. So it's an important aspect of what we do.

Q. (Indiscernible)?

MARK SILVERMAN: You know, we change -- we continually evaluate what we do each year, and we try to make it better. And how we go about deciding that is a combination of factors. We do look at ratings.

We look at the production and see, is it compelling television? We gauge the schools. Is this something that they like having us there? Is it working well?

And one of the things, because there was never really a network doing what we've been doing the last seven years, we've just really tried to be candid in our analysis. And the last thing I want to do is just kind of roll out the playbook and replicate what we did the year before. It means we didn't learn a thing.

What we have to do is evaluate our program and our shows, make changes where they need to be, and there should need to be changes every year because we're surely not bringing all the viewers I know we can.

So just like all of our other programming production, we're going to watch all of our BTNLive shows starting next week. We're going to see how the show with our traveling on studio hosts works on campus.

We changed this around quite a bit, and the reason we're doing it way this year is we often found we'd be at a campus and we'd be focusing a half hour or an hour on that one school and news was happening somewhere else at another campus that we weren't really equipped to be able to cover.

So having the show originate from Chicago, go to our studio guys and talk about what's going on on each campus that they're at, but then having an ability to report if there's other news, what else is going on in college sports, that gives us, I think, an ability to deliver a better product to our Big Ten fans.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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