

July 28, 2014

BIG

An Interview With:

**ILLINOIS COACH
TIM BECKMAN**

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Tim Beckman. Coach, opening comments.

COACH BECKMAN: Before I get started talking about the Fighting Illini, I want to talk about a loss that we had this last week from our Fighting Illini family. Shawn Afryl, who graduated from the University of Illinois with one year left to play, would have been a senior for us this year, passed away.

And we would like to, as a football family, tell the Afryls how much we feel for them and know that Shawn was always a Fighting Illini. So I'd like to start off with that, and I wanted to make sure that the Afryls understand the importance of Shawn to the Fighting Illini program. So thank you.

Well, we're very, very excited. The first stat we talk about with our football team is if you look at our depth chart from the end of last year, you take the two deep and you look at your offense, defense, and special teams, and that rounds up to 50 football players. We have 40 of those guys back.

So as we have talked about in years past, we've been a very, very young football team. So that kind of speaks in volumes of what we have and what we have coming back. You watch the tapes, because we were allowed to meet this year with our football team during the summer, and we look at some of the special teams tapes, and you look out and there's 11 starters returning on your special teams. A unique situation, but a situation that we've lived with and had to live with for the last two years. So we're really excited about having those faces back.

If you look at the depth chart again and see the same thing, we'll have 34 of those guys back the following year. So we're still a very young football team, but we're an experienced football team.

Guys that have had to play as freshmen, now as a linebacker, I always use Mason Monheim as one of those guys. He started 10 football games for us as a true freshman. He was weighing 215 and bench pressing 300 pounds. Now Mason Monheim's 235 pounds and he benches around 400 pounds.

So you can see the maturity this football team has progressed through. To me it's exciting. It's very exciting. Our players have been working extremely hard. We've made strides in everything that we've done, from GPAs to community service hours, to actually wins and losses.

So this program is heading in the direction that we are looking for. We want to win more football games. There's no question about that. That's why we play the game.

But our football family understands the importance of being involved with the Fighting Illini and being a part of it. So we're excited as we get the players in on Sunday.

We'll have our first practice, a lot like Gary (Andersen) just talked about. We have always split it up so that we can utilize smaller numbers and more coaching, a little less time on the field, but we'll use that plan for four days and then get together on the fifth day as a whole football team.

So we're very, very excited. Guys are eager to get back together, and they've had an outstanding spring and an outstanding summer.

Q. We didn't see a whole lot of Aaron Bailey last year. Why do you think that is? And could he possibly do a position switch this year? How might he be used? Might we see more of him?

COACH BECKMAN: Well, Aaron Bailey is a quarterback. That's what Aaron Bailey was recruited for. That's what Aaron Bailey wants to do. He wants to line up at quarterback and lead the Fighting Illini.

So he'll be involved in that competition. There's definitely a fight at that position. You've got three state champions.

You sit in your quarterback room there,

ASAP sports
...when all is said, we're done.®

visit our archives at asapsports.com

Illinois Coach Tim Beckman

Coach Cubit does, and they've got eight state championships just in that quarterback room. That's outstanding.

So Aaron Bailey will be competing for us at quarterback, and we'll see how that ends up and how that competition ends up for Aaron's sake.

Q. With Scheelhaase gone, how has the offensive line adjusted to kind of making those adjustments with the new -- possibly a new quarterback?

COACH BECKMAN: Well, Nathan was an outstanding football player for us, and will always be missed. He's a record-setter and a great human being. But I think that our maturity of our offensive line, having four guys back that have played a lot of football together has been -- the spring, we really didn't have issues with that.

Coach Cubit does put a lot in the hands of our quarterbacks, making adjustments on the line of scrimmage. So the communication is very, very important from a quarterback to the offensive line.

But again, I think through the maturity level of the four starters that we have back on the offensive line, we had very few mistakes throughout spring and those guys continue to work by themselves this summer. So we don't have those type of mistakes.

Q. What does it mean for your administration to step up and give Coach Cubit a multi-year deal to help you in that rebuilding by giving multi-year deals out to important staff members?

COACH BECKMAN: I think that's huge. I mean, that just shows commitment. It just doesn't -- it's just not the feeling of -- that it comes from to the person itself. It shows a commitment. It helps in recruiting. It helps in all those types of things, because it does show that they believe and they really feel that we are making strides to make this program better again. And the wins aren't to where we want them at by any means, but we are doing things right in the program.

So the commitment is definitely an advantage.

Q. Just talk about the quarterback battle. You touched on it a little bit with Aaron Bailey. Talk about it with Wes and how you think either of those guys or any of the quarterbacks in the room can replace Nathan and moving forward?

COACH BECKMAN: As a coach and as a football team, you see great competition every day. I mean, it comes from the weight room. It comes from studying film. It comes from on the field. So you as a football coach, I mean, you love that, because that's what the game of football's all about.

All three of them are very, very close friends. So there's not the rivalry, that type of thing going on. They all want each other to be successful, because they realize if -- whoever it might be that will be, that person will make our team better, and how important that is in the game of football. This is, you're talking about 105 of your family members being a part of that.

So it's going to be a great competition. We look forward to it, and I know they look forward to it.

In your question about Nathan, how do you replace a four-year starter and a leader? I mean, he's an outstanding person. I've been around -- I always say this, I've been around football now for 49 years, and there's only one Nathan Scheelhaase that I've ever met. The type of human being he is.

So it was a privilege to coach him for two years, but you know somebody has learned from Nathan to be able to step in those shoes and be a leader for this football team.

Q. Got a couple dozen Chicago area guys on your roster. How important is recruiting the Chicago area to Illinois's success?

COACH BECKMAN: Huge. I'm an in-state guy. I've worked at programs that have competed at a national championship level. If you look at those programs, we've done studies on those programs of teams that compete at that level. The majority of their players are from in-state.

And that's always been our motto in recruiting. It's been our philosophy, is we have to continue to recruit as we've said before the state of Chicago and the state of Illinois to the best of our ability, and I think that comes through relationships and players and families feeling comfortable about that family atmosphere.

So to me, it's very, very important. And we will continue to strive to make that the most important thing that we do recruiting.

Q. How do you handle the pressure that you've been dealing with since day one when you took the job, and what has Mike Thomas told you about his expectations for this year?

COACH BECKMAN: Well, you know, again, I've been around this profession my whole life. I've seen a dad go through it. I've seen family members go through it. I've seen Sam Rutigliano and Marty Schottenheimer and been involved in programs. You know, that's the life of a football coach. If you're not going to have that life, then you shouldn't be in this profession. So it's just a part of it.

I'm a competitive winner, I believe. And I want to win because I want our players to win, not because of me, but I want our players to feel what it's like to be successful on the field and off the field.

So Mike Thomas has asked for our program to continue to get better. And we did. I mean, we won more games. We won more away games. We won more home games. We have made strides to get better. Now, it's not the numbers that we all want, but we did get better.

We've gotten better academically. Our GPA is a 2.96 right now. When I took it over, it was a 2.67. So we're proud of the way that our players have responded and we have gotten better.

But it comes down to the student-athlete. It really does. And those three that are standing back there in the back are like sons to me. And I respect them as individuals and as players.

Q. Can you just talk about your desire to get to a bowl game and how explicitly are you discussing a bowl game, a bowl goal with your players?

COACH BECKMAN: Well, I always joke around and say my wife locks the door in December because she would like to be somewhere a little bit warmer at a bowl game. But it's been a blessing for our family to be involved with a lot of winning, with a lot of bowl opportunities.

And in the long run, it's not about what I want; it's about what those players want. And I want them to be able to experience the opportunities to play in a bowl game. So it's very, very important that these young men have that opportunity and get to just experience an opportunity like they did a couple of years ago going to San Francisco.

A lot of young men on our football team had never been to the West Coast. Well, they had an opportunity because they play the greatest game in the world, in my opinion, and they had that opportunity because they won.

Q. We expect Tim Banks's defense to make significant improvements from last year. I know the corners were especially young, but how much do you think they've grown up? And how many -- what kind of strides will we see in the secondary, do you think?

COACH BECKMAN: Again, if you looked at our offense a year ago and the strides they made offensively, really just losing a couple of guys, we want that to go the same this year with our defense.

We need to make tremendous strides. We didn't play well on defense last year. But again, you've got 18 faces out of the 22 on two deep that are back.

Our corners, you spoke about the corners specifically. Four true freshmen last year that played a lot of football. This was their first spring ball, other than Mosely and Cazley, excuse me, but two of them, it was first spring ball this year.

So you see their game getting better. You see that their bodies are getting bigger and they're getting stronger and more physical. So we want those strides to continue to happen. And we know it's as a defense as a whole, but we are excited about the progress that this group has the capability to be this year.

Q. Tim, do you feel like an old hand in the Big Ten yet, or like you're still kind of finding your way?

COACH BECKMAN: I've been an assistant in the Big Ten. Not for a long time, but been an assistant, been around the Big Ten a lot when your father was involved in it. So I'll never say I'm a hand in it.

But I enjoy being in this conference, because I have always believed and grown up around this conference, and I just love the football that's being played in this conference. It's hard-nosed, physical, very competitive. But being a hand in it yet, no, I don't know if I'm that yet.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.
FastScripts by ASAP Sports