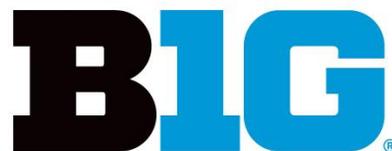


**July 28, 2014**



An Interview With:

## **MICHIGAN STATE COACH MARK DANTONIO**

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Coach Mark Dantonio. Coach an opening statement.

COACH DANTONIO: It's great to be here. It's our eighth year coming here as a head football coach, and our staff is very much intact. It's great to be here again. And I think really, every August that we all come here for is sort of an opportunity for a new beginning. And that's what we challenge our players with every year and our coaches as well. And that's where we're at.

So with that being said, I want to congratulate last year's staff, our players, all the players that have come to Michigan State since 2007, and all the administration that's been so much involved in our run to the Rose Bowl and our Big Ten Championship. And wanted to move on past that.

Our goals really remain the same as we enter this eighth year. It's to have a relationship with our players, our young people. I think if you do that, you have great chemistry.

We have had great leadership among our seniors every year. And I think it's very evident in what we've been able to accomplish.

So the relationships, it's the education. We've graduated I believe 122 or 121 players these last seven years, helping them launch their career, going on to become self-sufficient young people in this society.

Big time football, which the Big Ten gives you that. Rose Bowl. The championships. Those type of things are very evident for us to continue to try and push through.

And then we're constantly trying to give back and be givers and promote giving. I think our players have done a great job with that.

So we're going to remain a very disciplined football team. We've got great enthusiasm this

year. Hard work is going to be, again, things that we emphasize, and we're going to continue to push through it.

We've got a great offense coming back. A lot of our production is back on offense.

Defensively, I mean, we've had tremendous success defensively these last three years, in particular. I think we led the Big Ten in nine categories defensively last year. And nationally we were up there in a number of them as well.

Special teams players are back. Had two excellent specialists and a great long snapper.

And that's where we're at. So I'll take some questions and we'll go from there.

### **Q. How are you adjusting to all the new attention?**

COACH DANTONIO: I think the Big Ten Conference, you've always got attention coming your way. And it's what you do with that and how you handle that. So what we've tried to talk about, really, is how do we handle success now. We've had success. We've gotten to a point where we've done some special things. What's on our agenda next, how do we handle that success, and that's really going to be one of the biggest things we'll have to deal with this year.

I think we're a little bit more of the hunted. That's a good place to be, but it's also a very precarious place to be as well.

### **Q. How did the No-Fly Zone nickname take off? Pun intended. And two members of that unit, Kurtis Drummond, Trae Waynes, what makes those guys so special?**

COACH DANTONIO: Well, it sort of took off -- sort of took off a little bit. Darqueze Dennard came in one day and sort of coined it. Darqueze has gone on now. He's with the Bengals. And it just sort of took. He made up some T-shirts himself for our secondary, for our players in the secondary, and it just sort of took off. And I think we had success in that area, and those are good things.

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**Michigan State Coach Mark  
Dantonio**

Kurtis Drummond, Trae Waynes. We've got other players back that have a lot of game experience as well. So it's going to be interesting to see how we respond. And again, handling success moving forward, but our players did some tremendous things last year.

I don't know how many places I've been where -- I don't think I've ever been in a place where we've had three players in the secondary be first-team All-Big Ten or All-Conference. And then I believe the other one was either honorable mention or second team maybe on one ballot.

So those guys, they were gifted. They knew what to do. They played fast. They made plays on the ball. Tremendous asset.

**Q. Mark, you said it, you're the hunted, not the hunter. Obviously your goals and your message to your team doesn't change, but there could be things that change about how other teams see you. How do you change -- what kinds of things do you expect to see from other teams? And talk a little bit more about the difference between being a team that has a chip on its shoulder to being the favorite.**

COACH DANTONIO: Well, first of all, I termed ourselves one of the hunted. So I think that's important to recognize. Not the hunted.

And secondly, we've always been about just taking care of ourselves. We're not looking for any entitlement, anybody to put us up there. We'll get what we earned. Every game will be a challenge, beginning with our first game. Everything that we do will start fresh and have to be earned.

And I really don't know how to really just to respond any differently. That's who we are. That's what we've done. We've had a knack for winning football games these last couple of years, but we've also taken a step back at times. And it's important that we understand that we've done that and we've stuck our foot in the ground and driven forward when those things have happened.

We found the inches last year, as I said. We have to continue to find those inches and gain even more ground, because, you know, respectability can fly right out the window on us. I understand that. So it's what we've done lately that you're basically judged on, and we continue to build our future as we move forward.

**Q. With the new college football playoff format, there's obviously a lot of talk about where the different conferences stack up.**



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**What do you think the perception is of your division and strength of schedule, and how important do you think that's going to be going forward?**

COACH DANTONIO: I think both divisions are very well represented, great football teams in those divisions. The east where we're at, you know, great conference. Great games and a lot of games, a lot of teams that have built-in rivalries. Obviously our rivalry with Michigan is intense for us, but we've also got a rivalry with Ohio State from the past and Penn State. So those things exist for us. Indiana is a game as well.

We've got two new members in the Big Ten Conference entering that side of the Big Ten. So I think it's going to be a tough division. There's no question about that.

How we enter into the playoff picture, I guess it will be dependent obviously on our success or failures. But we play Oregon obviously the second game. So we're coming with at least a bona fide big game under our belts as we move forward. And we need to gain experience from that game.

One way or the other, win or lose, we need to gain experience from that game and be able to push through and into the conference. We have a great home schedule, so we need to continue to win at home, and that's going to be extremely important.

**Q. What do you expect from R.J. Shelton this year, and how big, I guess, of a recruiting get for your program to kind of steal him out of Wisconsin?**

COACH DANTONIO: R.J. is a tremendous, outstanding football player. I think he can play a lot of positions for us. He came as a tailback, we moved him to wide receiver. He got on the field as a freshman last year, and I think he made a noticeable difference at times.

So extremely competitive. Great person, hard worker. All the things, the intangibles that you look to bring forward and take a guy with great ability to the next step, to the next level. And I think he'll be a factor for the next three years, so it's exciting to have him there.

And I don't look at it as a steal out of Wisconsin. I just see it as a great individual, great football player, great individual coming to Michigan State.

**Michigan State Coach Mark Dantonio**

**Q. In the last couple of years, your program has beaten Stanford, Georgia, Boise State, TCU. Do you get the sense when you're playing those games that you're, among other things, carrying the banner a little bit for the Big Ten, and will that be the case also out at Oregon? Is that added pressure or do you sense that that's part of the job?**

COACH DANTONIO: Well, first of all, there's pressure in every football game that you play. I think that goes along with the position, whether you're a player, head coach, assistant coach, that's just part of the game.

So you need to make sure that you get ready for every single football game. So Oregon will be no different than the game before it, the Jacksonville game. So that's one thing.

As far as representing the Big Ten, I think we all do our very best as we move out of conference and getting involved with the people we play, whether it's bowl games or out-of-conference games, to represent this conference.

It's a great conference. I think there's great football here. I think this is an extremely well-coached conference. It's on the cutting edge in a lot of different things. Great fan bases. Great media coverage. And it's really one of the unique places to play college football in America.

**Q. Did you at all feel a need to address what was going on at Northwestern with the push to unionize with your players?**

COACH DANTONIO: No, I did not address that, because, really, it's about us at this point in time. When it becomes about these other things, then we'll talk about those things. But at this point, I think it was too far into the future to discuss it. When it became a reality for us, we would certainly discuss. And everybody has their different views, but this is about Michigan State.

**Q. You mentioned the intensity of the Michigan rivalry. How do you keep it intense when you've won five out of the last six, and what keeps the fire burning for that rivalry?**

COACH DANTONIO: I continue to live in Michigan. That ought to do it.

**Q. The question I have is: You played Ohio State for the Big Ten Championship last year. Now you're in the same division. In about a week or two they came out and announced that it was going to be a night**

**game. It's very rare that you guys play November night games. Just your thoughts about playing a November night game and the thought process that went into making that game, a rematch of the championship game, a prime time game in that spot.**

COACH DANTONIO: Like so many things, you know, things just come to you. So I was probably on the same -- I found out probably the same time everybody else did, we were going to play at night and it was a quick decision. And we embraced the decisions that were made.

We've had great football games at night at Spartan Stadium. It's an outstanding environment. It will be a national game, so I think it's good for the conference, good for the two teams that are playing in the football game, and we play very well at night, so we're looking forward to a great game.

**Q. Kind of going off of that, a lot of people were labeling that has the de facto east championship game. Obviously you play a lot of big games this year against Oregon and other teams. How do you kind of keep your team focused game to game instead of looking ahead to a game with such magnitude?**

COACH DANTONIO: I think the longer you coach, the more you gain a little bit more wisdom as you move through the process. George Perles is a guy I look up to, and he's a former head coach at Michigan State, and he always talks to me about they all count one.

So that game is just one game. It's what you do the rest of your schedule that's going to make the difference. If we don't take care of the rest of the schedule and we win that game, it really means nothing.

So we'll get ready for that game that week, and we'll be motivated just like we are in all the other games. And as you play through it, and as we found last year, as you play on and when you're successful, the chips get a little bit bigger as you move forward. Obviously if we take care of business beforehand, that's a big chip game. But it's still going to count as one.

**Q. Compared to this time a year ago, you've now got a seasoned quarterback who has won championships and won the Rose Bowl. Just how settling is that for you compared to maybe this time a year ago with Connor Cook back?**



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**Michigan State Coach Mark Dantonio**

COACH DANTONIO: It's very settling. When you have a quarterback coming back with experience, with a lot of game experience, when he's been successful, that's going to pay dividends.

When you look back at our time here, Brian Hoyer's second year in 2008 was successful. Cousins, his second and his third year as a starting quarterback, very successful. Connor Cook's first year of starting quarterback, successful. So it gives him a lot of experience, a lot of confidence moving forward. And I think it's a major factor in where we're at as a football team.

We returned back basically 99 percent of our rushing offense and I think 76 percent of our passing offense. So that should pay dividends.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach.

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