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An Interview With:

NEBRASKA COACH BO PELINI

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Coach Bo Pelini.

Coach, an opening statement.

COACH PELINI: Good to be back. I'm here for the next couple of days. Brought with me Ameer Abdullah, obviously a tremendous running back and a great example for really college players across the country in how to conduct yourself both on and off the field; Kenny Bell, who has played a lot of football for us at the wide receiver position; and Corey Cooper, who -- a native Chicagoan who is here, looking forward to coming home, and has really played good football for us.

So those three young men are with me here over the next couple of days.

We're looking forward to the season that's coming up. We've had a good offseason. I would be remiss if I didn't welcome Maryland and Rutgers into the conference, I found myself in that position here a couple of years ago, understanding what they're going through and the challenges that are out in front of those two programs.

But I know that we're excited about what they bring to the conference, how it extends us even further East. All those things are a benefit not only for them, for their institutions, what they bring to the table academically, but also what they're going to be able to do for us for the conference. And I think it's a good fit, and I think everybody associated with the conference is excited to have those two institutions as part of our great conference.

And I think everybody, you get to this time of year, you're looking forward to the upcoming season. The challenges that lay ahead, I think there's going to be great competition with the first year of there being 14 teams, and the new

divisions, all the things that come into play as far as that's concerned.

I think it's going to be an exciting year in the Big Ten. An exciting year for us at Nebraska. I think it's going to be a great challenge for us, but one where we're looking forward to the opportunity to be the best football team we can be.

We have some returning -- key returners coming back. I think we have depth in areas that is really going to help us be a good football team, and also we saw a lot of young guys last year kind of come of age as the season went on, and I'm looking forward to seeing those young men continue to develop into the type of players we feel can win championships at our school.

That's what we're after. We're looking for a championship. I think we have the pieces. We have a lot of potential on our football team, but there's going to be a lot of hard work that needs to be done for that to make that become a reality.

We've tried to turn over every stone in the offseason, look at everything we can do to make ourselves a better football team. I guess you could say a little bit -- what do they say? -- loco as far as not getting too far outside of the box but trying to turn over every stone and trying to look at everything we can do as a football team to make ourselves the type of program we want to have.

And I think we've done that. We're going to make -- institute some changes, some things, different things about how we practice, when we practice. It's a long season. Do everything we can to make sure that we give our players the best opportunity to have success on the field.

Like I said, I think the pieces are there. I think the potential is there. But probably talk to any coach that's here this weekend -- or this Monday here, and they'll tell you the same thing. It's going to be the intangibles, all the little things that come into play as far as allowing you to have success and putting all those pieces together and making you gel as a football team and become a true team.

Those are the people that win championships, when everybody comes together,

checks their egos at the door and does everything on a daily basis to allow yourself to have success.

That's what we're trying to do in our program, that's what we're going to do this year, that's what we're looking forward to, and we're excited for the challenges that lie ahead.

So I'd like to open it up for any questions.

Q. What do you think can be done to stop some of the recruit flipping epidemic that's happening in college football?

COACH PELINI: Well, I said what was it about a month ago, maybe two months ago -- it all kind of runs together for me -- I said publicly I believe it would be a great idea if we would look at maybe getting rid of Signing Day. That's something that I think would make a lot of sense.

As far as, hey, you come to an agreement, somebody commits to your school, you've made a commitment to a young man to come play in your program, why do we have to wait to any certain day? Why don't we just go ahead and let's sign on the dotted line, let's get it over with and move forward.

And obviously that's different than the way things have been for a long time. I think it makes a lot of sense. I think it would change things in a lot of ways. I think it would slow down some of the early offers. I think it would slow down some of the ridiculous things that go on on both ends, on the institution's side of things and as far as the recruit's.

And there's a lot of things that go on that I believe in our program what we try to do is teach kids to do things the right way.

And really I think that goes throughout the Big Ten Conference. I think this conference does things the right way. It's about integrity. You're teaching kids to live up to their word of what it means to be a teammate.

It's not about any individual; it's about a team. There's a bigger picture involved. And I think sometimes the way the recruiting process works is that contradictory to what we're trying to teach these kids and how we're trying to develop these kids in the long run to be successful, not only as football players and as athletes, but beyond, as husbands, as fathers, and their professions, and sometimes we always talk about having to de-recruit kids and some of that has just -- it's made up of kind of the way the process is set up.

And I think there's some things that could be done, and I think that would be a big step in the right direction.

Q. First off, I hope that your cat is doing well. I wanted to ask if you brought the cat with you to Chicago. But, seriously, my real question is about Randy Gregory. He's getting a lot of hype, and I want to know what makes him such a special player.

COACH PELINI: First of all, my cat is -- he's enjoying a nap up in the room. So he is here in Chicago and enjoying the Windy City.

So Randy Gregory is a tremendous talent. He has great instincts. He has great get-off, a guy who can really rush the passer. I think he's only scratched the surface of what he's going to be down the line.

As he continues to grow, he has really good length and athleticism. Very good instincts for the game, good feel for not only in the passing game but in the running game and how kind of the game should be played.

I think the sky's the limit for him for him down the road. I think he's still young. Obviously this is really the first time he's gone through an offseason with us. So I'm looking forward to big things with Randy.

And I always tell him: Don't get caught up. It's not about stats and statistics; it's about developing yourself, playing fundamentally sound, doing the things that you need to be successful on a down end, every down basis.

And I think he understands that. He's more physically developed than he was when we first got him. And he's continuing to grow, get bigger, and put some more meat on his frame. And as that happens, I think you're going to see a guy who becomes an even more well balanced player.

Q. After the fun you had entering the spring game, what kind of feedback did you get from your fans? Do you feel they've seen a different side of your personality now?

COACH PELINI: The fans, I think the fans around Nebraska, they kind of see that side of me probably more often than maybe the national people do. But I was just having some fun.

You gotta keep things light. And I thought as much as anything else, the football team, the players enjoy that. And you've got to -- there's a lot of pressure in college football now, and there's -- sometimes it gets -- things can get a little bit crazy at times, especially during the season.

And when somebody sees me out there on the sideline or in competition and sees me going Veronica on a referee, and you don't want that to happen, but you're going out there, getting upset, they think that's who you are all the time.

That isn't who I am all the time. And as I grow as a football coach, I understand that that's an area that I've needed to make some growth in. And I continue to. You know, you learn things.

I'm going into my seventh season as a head coach. You learn things along the way. You've got to make adjustments and do things to be better.

But my personality is one where I'm not that intense, competitive animal running around all the time. I'm a much different person away from the field. I'm actually pretty laid back off the field and away from my job, when I'm with my family, when I'm with my kids, and really a lot of times when I'm with the football team.

So you just gotta try to do things and look for opportunities to kind of show people that isn't who you are all the time. And hopefully I can do a better job of showing that side of me even during competitions.

Q. You brought up Maryland before. I'm not sure how much of a chance you've had to watch Maryland during the course of the last couple of years or just leading up to the season, but what's your understanding of them as a team? What do you think of some of the players they have, whether it's Stefon Diggs or somebody else, and just how competitive do you think they'll be able to be just based on some of the talent they have going into this first year in the Big Ten?

COACH PELINI: Personnel-wise I'm not familiar with Maryland. They're not on our schedule. I didn't really spend a whole heck of a lot of time looking at them. But I do know this about them. I've seen them in some crossover films. I know they're an extremely well-coached football team. We've recruited against them some. I know they do a good job on the recruiting front, and I believe that they have -- it's a program that is up and coming. It has a very good talent base.

They recruit well. And, like I said, I know a number of their guys on their coaching staff. They do a heck of a job on that as far as how they coach, the detail they coach with, and I think they're a tremendous addition to our conference.

Q. How would you assess the state of the quarterback competition at this point between Tommy Armstrong and Johnny Stanton?

COACH PELINI: Now that you mentioned Johnny Stanton and you mentioned Tommy Armstrong, there's also a walk-on young man, Ryker Fyfe, who I think will have a little bit to say about who our starting quarterback is.

And I would say because of his starting experience, I would say Tommy has a little bit of a leg up going in. But Johnny Stanton and Ryker Fyfe are tremendous talents, the kids who did very well in the spring.

I think it's going to be an open competition. Like I said, I think when we line up day one, it will be Tommy will walk out there take the first snap. Because he has the most experience. He kind of earned that right through the spring. But I think the competition is, gosh, very good. I think it's going to make all three of those guys better.

And like I tell our guys at every single position, nobody has a guaranteed spot ever, and you gotta put it on film every day. You've got to go out there, compete on a daily basis and work hard. And when you have that attitude, that makes everybody around you better. And that's going to make them better.

I think the key is, though, for every kid, and I tell this to our football team all the time, when you're competing at a spot and you're going and trying to win a spot, the worst thing that can happen is you looking at the other guys at your position and comparing yourself to what they're doing. If every guy has the understanding I've just gotta do what I have to do to make myself better, concentrate on what you're doing instead of looking over your shoulder or worrying about what other guys are doing, then that's going to allow you to grow the most as a football player.

The guys who make a mistake of worrying about where they are or who they're repping with how many reps I'm getting or anything like that, a lot of times it leads them to worrying about things other than what they need to control. And that's control what you can control. Be the best football player you can be and trust your coaches that if you earn it, you're going to be the one on that spot.

And I think our guys, there's enough trust in our program between the players and coaches and kind of how we do our business that they understand if you're putting it on film, you're going

to be out there on the field getting reps.

Q. Considering the strength you advocate on defense and the stable of running backs, should we expect to see a more run-oriented offense this year?

COACH PELINI: No, I wouldn't say that at all. First of all, you have to establish the running game. It's always important. To win a championship -- I think it's been shown over a long period of time -- you have to be able to run the football. You look at even a lot of the great teams that have played, have come through this conference, back to Coach Alvarez when he turned around Wisconsin, Coach Tressel when he was at Ohio State and really what Michigan State was able to do last year, Ohio State when they've gone on their runs, you've got to be able to run the football. And that's always a necessity. You've got to be able to do that. You've got to stop the run, but you have to have balance.

We always talk about that. We want to have balance. We've been about a 60/40 run-pass team, and I believe at the end of the day you'd like to get as close to 50/50 as you possibly can. But I think when it comes down to it, you want to be able to do what you want to do when you want to do it. And that means you've got to be able to execute in every phase of the game.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach.
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