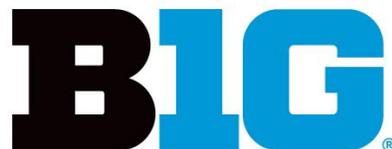


July 28, 2014



An Interview With:

NORTHWESTERN COACH PAT FITZGERALD

THE MODERATOR: Our first coach is Northwestern's Pat Fitzgerald. Enters his ninth year at Northwestern and has led the program to five bowl games in the last six seasons. Return 18 total starters in 2014 including nine on offense and defense.

Coach, an opening statement.

COACH FITZGERALD: Thank you. Good morning, everyone. Great to be here. The unofficial start of the Big Ten football season, and it's a great honor for me to have the opportunity to be here and go first to represent our coaches and have you guys lob all these great questions at me so everybody else that follows can have some fun.

But first and foremost, I want to welcome Maryland and Randy Edsall and Rutgers and Kyle Flood, great universities to the Big Ten. I've known both gentlemen for a while, and it's terrific to have them join our conference. And I'd also like to welcome James Franklin, I've gotten to know quite well, to Penn State here from a conference standpoint.

I want to thank the media for your support. It's been very, very interesting for me in the nine years that I've been in this league to watch the way that our interactions have changed and evolved and grown from a standpoint of college football programs in the media, and really appreciate your support. I know we're on BTN, but to see the influence that BTN has had on our program to really sell our brand nationally has been a great influence to the success of our program. And we're very thankful for our media partners and look forward to working with you here in the future.

Looking at our program in particular, very proud of the staff stability we have. It's really interesting to see that we're one of I think only a handful of programs that have had the same offensive/defensive coordinator for six years or

more, and I believe we're the only program in the country to keep our nine assistants for four straight years.

To have that kind of staff stability has been terrific for the way that we wanted to build the program from a foundational standpoint with the continuity and for our student-athletes to be able to experience a lot of consistency in the way they're being coached and the way that the expectations are for them on a daily basis.

Look in the rearview mirror, the last two years have been interesting. 2012 we were very fortunate, had great success and stayed relatively healthy. Last year we didn't achieve the success that we expected in Evanston, and we hope we have some sort of common ground of the injury standpoint. That's not an excuse, but the reality is we didn't do a good enough job as a coaching staff getting our next level and our depth prepared a year ago, and it really showed up in the mistakes we made down the stretch.

We've all owned that in Evanston, we've taken that challenge on in the offseason, and I believe you'll see a much improved football team this season.

Looking at 2014, my colleague to my right mentioned we've got 18 returning starters. A quarterback in Trevor Siemian that's going to be going back to the way it was my first seven years as a head coach or six years as the head coach with knowing who our quarterback is going into fall camp.

He's thrown for going on 3500 yards and 20 touchdowns. That's more than (Dan) Persa and (Mike) Kafka had going into their senior years. To have that kind of experience at the quarterback position hopefully will be a great jolt for our offense that we all know as Wildcats need to improve.

We weren't where we wanted to be a year ago, and it starts and ends at our quarterback position. We're excited to have Trevor back. We have a daunting home football schedule for our fans and for all of our students.

To be at home for a month to start the season before we go on the road, including our



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Northwestern Coach Pat Fitzgerald

bye week, it will be critically important that we start fast. And we're really proud of our young men. You look at the academic year we had this year, I can argue we've got the best student-athletes in college football.

We've got a cumulative team GPA above a 3.0 for all four classes. That's something special. We don't take that for granted in Evanston, and incredibly proud of our young men with what they're doing in the classroom.

We obviously had quite a bit of distractions this spring and have a team GPA above a 3.0 in the spring quarter. Just as something spectacular to me.

We're committed to developing our young men not only on the field but also off the field. And to see that we had 46 young men have some sort of internship or summer job between the winter and the spring, and then the summer, with just a few companies like Goldman Sachs and Kraft Foods and Mercedes-Benz and Medtronic -- I can keep going on and on -- to name a few, to see how we're developing our guys off the field. Really proud of our staff and the job they've done.

And, lastly, we needed to improve our strength this offseason. We had 176 personal records in the weight room in the three core lifts by our student-athletes. And it's a great job by our strength coach, Jay Hooten, and, most importantly, guys working their tails off to improve in an area we were lacking last year.

This is a line of scrimmage league, like most of the power conferences, and we just weren't good enough up there on the offensive and defensive line last year. Needed to improve our strength. I believe we've done that. Now the challenge is to come together in training camp that we start a week from now.

I'll wrap it up. How about questions?

Q. After all the close losses last year, how do you keep your team to not get down on themselves or you yourself not get down on yourselves?

COACH FITZGERALD: What's fun is at our place is the leadership team. I'll go back to last fall. We were just talking about it as a staff here last week. We went through a stretch that wasn't a lot of fun.

For a number of weeks, the first person we saw in our football office in Sunday was our great athletic director, Jim Phillips. And he's sitting there pumping our tires up as a coaching staff, because we were frustrated in the way we were coaching

our guys and the way we were performing on the field.

So, first of all, we're going to reestablish who we are this year. We're going to get back to what we do and how we do things, and that starts and ends in our locker room. And the guys have really done a terrific job through this offseason really identifying what our standards are in the core of our team, and that's in the locker room.

And now we're going to come together in camp with our freshmen and hopefully get back to where we've been; that's competing for championships.

Q. What's it like going into fall camp with only one starting quarterback as opposed to some previous years?

COACH FITZGERALD: It's kind of going back to the way it was my first five, six years. As I look at the experience that Trevor has, it gives me great confidence. I think the steps he took from a leadership standpoint this offseason, to hear a guy that's pretty much laid back, kind of a Luke Bryan type of personality, to become a very, I think, number one, leader that leads by example but then, number two, really starting to lead from the way he addresses the guys and taking over the complete ownership of our football team.

Like most coaches, if you've got a quarterback, you've got a chance. And we feel like we have not only Trevor but also pretty good depth at that position. I look forward to seeing how that depth competes in camp to see who is 2-3 and moving forward.

I'm excited about that position.

Q. How much of an emotional leader is Venric Mark, how huge is it to have him back this year, and how do you think it emotionally hurt the team last year when he went down?

COACH FITZGERALD: He's a pretty passionate young man. He's not going to be outspoken, pounding his chest in front of the team. But when you watched him in the way he played in a small snapshot that would have been his senior year a year ago, I think you see the passion, number one, that he plays with.

It's the same way we he works every day. We've got solid depth at that position. I think we've been able to turn what's been perceived as a lack of depth in our program into a position of depth right now.

And that's always going to be tested with what we do offensively. And it's great to have him back, and I'm looking forward to watching how that whole group competes.

I think we've got solid depth there. Looking forward to watching it unfold. Great to have him back, no question about that. Dynamic player. To have him back in the fold not only back field but return game is also significant for us.

Q. When you look at the preseason polls, you kind of see the Wisconsin and Iowa and Nebraska. The theme there is old-school grind-it-out football. In the early stages, do you think that's the identity of the West Division at this stage?

COACH FITZGERALD: As I look at maybe to the past, there's been great competition on our side, I think all of us. You look at our games against Nebraska, for instance, and the last three years have been nothing less than entertaining. And you can go across with each one of our common opponents we've had. I think it's a terrific division within college football, well-coached, talented group.

And it's nothing new to us not to be picked to be a part of the preseason hype. We're not a preseason hype-type place, I guess. So hopefully play more consistent than we did a year ago, but it should be challenging and daunting, especially for our fans. I think it's going to be an outstanding side of the conference.

Q. You said you're going to get back to who you are. How did you lose track of who you are and how do you get back to getting that?

COACH FITZGERALD: I think we lost track from, first of all, not sticking to what we value. You look at the way we didn't respond very well from things that were out of our control, and that's been the hallmark of our program. And that's ultimately my responsibility as a leader. And so I took that personally this offseason, and we really worked hard in everything that we did to put our guys in difficult situations to force them to respond.

And that was just disappointing a year ago. And, again, football, 72-degree room or training camp, when everybody's feeling great, it's easy to respond. But when adversity strikes, we didn't do a good enough job of that a year ago.

I look at the way we played up front on both sides of the ball. We were not successful enough to be consistent in this league from

stopping the run, running the ball, protecting the quarterback, knocking the quarterback down defensively, all those types of things.

So I'm not going to bore you with all the minor details, but we've got a lot of work to do. I really like the new rule change we've been able to have this summer where we've been able to have a chance to spend time with our guys.

We know more about our football team today than maybe in the past through going through summer workouts. I think we're in a positive place moving forward, but a lot of work to do here, especially on the defensive line with as many guys we had out in spring practice.

But all those guys I expect to be ready to go when we start practice a week from now, and that's going to be a critical position and critical position battles that we'll need to figure out pretty quickly.

Q. It truly helps that Northwestern in general is a great academic university, but what can you attest the football program's academic success to? Is it the tutors? Is it the academic staff in general? Is it you personally and your coaching staff? Is it guys pinpointing when you are recruiting, make sure they're obviously eligible and that they can carry it through their academics from year one to year four and five?

COACH FITZGERALD: I believe it starts in recruiting. Our young men are great students because of their parents or their family unit at home that made education the number one priority in their life at some point in their life.

Number two, it's a culture in our locker room -- doing the right thing, being not just average at anything you do but being great and driving for excellence in everything that you do is the expectation. And our players own that. And the way that our upperclassmen look after our underclassmen and our younger players, to me it's really impressive to see that kind of really servant leadership and being selfless and teaching the guys how to time manage and how to prioritize their life.

We've got great academic support with Kristin Kane and our assistant coaches and Kristin's staff.

And it's not just football at Northwestern. Quite frankly, it starts at the top with our admissions department, our president in the way

the culture is in our campus. You choose to go to Northwestern for a reason; that's to prepare for the next 40, 50 years, not just the next four or five years.

And you look at the academic success we're having. I believe we've got 15 guys right now bouncing around the NFL. We believe you can do both from our great place. It's to prepare for life and have plan A prepared, and that's being a great student, and prepared for life in plan B, being prepared for the NFL.

Q. What was the mood of the team like the dynamics of the team when the hearing was going on with the union, and did that change at all after the hearing, and is it better today?

COACH FITZGERALD: I'm proud of the maturity our guys demonstrated throughout the whole process that we went through this offseason. As I look back and reflect upon the experiences that our young men went through and our entire football program went through, that's what jumps out to me is their maturity.

As we visited throughout the whole offseason, I believe there's no more unified football program in the country. We've been through more since probably January than most, and it's been nothing but a positive and nothing more than unifying in our locker room and throughout our entire football program. So I think we're a leg up from that standpoint.

And as I look at where we go in the future, hopefully that will just be something that we can draw upon. And it's definitely been able to I think be a springboard from a leadership standpoint for our guys to identify someone like Trevor, to see him come out and say this is my football team and see the way our seniors and leadership council stepped up to say this is what our football team is about right now, to me hopefully will pay dividends as we move in the future as we go through the adversity that I talked about with Pat earlier.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks Coach.

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