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An interview with:

WISCONSIN HEAD COACH BRET BIELEMA

BRET BIELEMA: This is always a special time, kind of like Fitz had mentioned. I came here as a player in 1992 with Hayden Fry as a senior captain at Iowa, and to return now as a head coach going into my fourth year is always a special time, because this is also, for a lot of the coaches, it's a sign that the season is right around the corner.

Our guys return to full office duty. Our players have one more week of summer workouts. Joining me this week in Chicago I have three players that kind of have a special story. Garrett Graham at tight end who's come in, and everyone remembers Travis Beckum from a year ago. And I'm really excited for Garrett to come into his own. Kind of embodies all the things we like about Wisconsin. Just developed year-end, red-shirted he came in and began to make noise a little bit a year ago. I think he is really set for a special season.

And then on the defensive side of the ball we have Jaeverly McFadden. He comes to us from West Palm Beach, Florida. Jaeverly came in as a tight end, and he wasn't really into the mix as early as we wanted, so we moved to him linebacker. He played middle linebacker for us a year ago, and is working at the outside linebacker for us coming into this year.

For him last year playing in the middle, he actually played the entire season with a broken hand, with a club on his hand, which as a linebacker is very, very important to try to shed blocks. So we're excited to have him. And O'Brien Schofield from right here in the Chicago area joins us as a two-year starter now at defensive end.

Those three guys kind of embody what this year's team is going to be all about.

We don't have a lot of high profile names, a lot of guys that will be starting for the first time, some underclassmen that are going to come into the mix. We're excited about the freshman class we have coming in.

A year ago at this time we were predicted to do some special things. The ball didn't go the right way all the way, and I think our guys have really taken a year to recover from that and have a hunger in them that's burning pretty intense and excited about the opportunity in front of us.

It's always a challenging season. The non-conference schedule that we have is kind of unique with three games up front. And then we play at the end of the year, December 5th. Some discussions with TV, it looks like we might actually be the last game on television of college football against Hawaii. So we have a unique nonconference schedule in addition to a challenging Big Ten Conference. That is always going to be tough, and we're excited about the opportunity.

With that I'll open it up for questions.

Q. You talked a little bit about tight ends, Garrett Graham. With Beckum and Owen Daniels, Wisconsin has had a string of strong tight ends. This year the guy is Graham. What do you think Garrett Graham brings to the team both on and off the field?

BRET BIELEMA: Well, Garrett has developed. He's gone through some injuries. I'll never forget, I think it was my first year. He had a routine play coming out of bounds where he got tangled up in some chains and he came up and had a huge three-inch cut where his arm was hanging open with muscle exposed. He went inside and had it stitched up and was playing a quarter later. They originally told me he wasn't going to play at all. That kind of gives a little synopsis of what he's all about.

In addition to Garrett, I believe as a group our tight ends are going to be a very unique

package to defend. In addition to Garrett, we have a young man by the name of Mickey Turner who is in his fourth year playing who plays not only on the line of scrimmage, but we'll move him around and use him in the fullback position.

And then a guy that's really exciting to watch. He was coming into his own a year ago when we lost Travis to a lower leg injury in the Illinois game actually. Lance Kendricks had a great week of preparation. Was going into the Michigan State game. We had a nice little package. He probably runs just as well as Travis, catches the ball very well, and is a very intense young man. But he broke his leg the fourth play of the Michigan State game, so he really hasn't exposed himself the way we are looking to do this year.

So those three guys in addition to a couple underclassmen I think are going to give us a nice little package at tight end.

Q. Can you talk a little bit about your defensive line group, how you see them shaping?

BRET BIELEMA: Newkirk, Shaughnessy, and Chapman. We lost three defensive linemen a year ago. The thing that I saw during spring ball is a group of guys who were very determined to prove their worth. O'Brien Schofield who joins us here today; also Jeff Stehle, who will be a senior for us who comes in from Connecticut and has really developed and turned himself into a nice player. We also have a young man by the name of Dan Moore who is from a junior college here in Chicago that I think is going to put himself in a position to play good for us inside. And Patrick Butrym, a local Wisconsin product from Catholic Memorial over in Milwaukee. His dad played on the National Championship basketball team at Marquette. His dad is like seven foot plus, so we're hoping he continues to grow like his father. He is going to give us some added depth there.

The other defensive end kind of by committee. Don't really know who's going to pan out. We have guys like Louis Nzegwu, J.J. Watt who transferred in from Central Michigan who has shown his worth. So it's going to be an interesting fall camp to see exactly who pans out at that position.

Q. Ron mentioned that he was playing a later -- Illinois is playing a later game this year. Playing that last date, does that maybe help even things out for you guys a little bit?

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BRET BIELEMA: You know what, I think that bowl games, a lot of it depends on obviously your preparation and what you put into it. But a lot of it is what happens that day. I go back to my last year as defensive coordinator. We beat Auburn in the Capital One Bowl to give Coach Alvarez his final game and beat a team in the SEC in Auburn. No one really expected us to do that.

But then a couple days later was the National Championship game, so it all got diminished. My first year as a head coach, we go 12-1, 11-1 at the time, and we go and we beat another SEC opponent in Arkansas and have an opportunity to prove our worth in that game.

And then the next two years, you know, losing to Tennessee and we actually -- my first year we lost to Georgia. So in my five-year tenure at Wisconsin, we're 2 and 2 against the SEC. That's where it's at. We didn't play well in last year's bowl game.

Fortunately for us, that game ended at the end of regulation and it's done and it's behind us and we move on. So that's what we have to do ourselves as a team.

Because of the late schedule date, we actually moved it. It was set for a week earlier, but never in my research at Wisconsin they had never played Hawaii at Hawaii without a bye week in between there, and that's why we moved that.

Q. Wisconsin obviously runs a very traditional offense, and you're an Iowa guy...

BRET BIELEMA: Illinois originally.

Q. We saw Minnesota kind of transitioning back to a more traditional offense rather than the spread. Can you talk about the difference between the traditional offense and the spread offense?

BRET BIELEMA: You know, I think the part that intrigued me, I grew up in this conference. I played at Iowa, coached there for a long time. I went to Kansas State and had the opportunity to work in the Big 12 for a couple years and saw the dynamics that go into some of the spread offenses. But everyone's spread is difference.

I love to read what people say about us. When I'm playing a certain opponent, I love to read the coaches' and the players' comments during the course of the week about preparing to defend us or preparing to play us on any given Saturday.

One of the things that jumped out at me

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my first year was every coach talked about the difficulties in preparing and playing against a Wisconsin offense, because there's a fullback in the game, there might be two tight ends. It's very unique, because a lot of schools we play against don't even have a fullback.

Last year we had two guys 240-plus playing fullback, and it's hard to get one guy to do that, let alone two guys. It's also that we feel like we can recruit at Wisconsin.

Probably our last three quarterbacks that we've signed from a national recruiting scale chose Wisconsin because of the type of offense we ran. They didn't want to go to a school where they were the second tailback. They wanted to go to a school that lined up, threw the football like NFL teams do within the league, and have an opportunity to showcase their skills.

Our last two running backs we went out and recruited, same story. Montee Ball who's a freshman for us on campus just went through summer workouts. He'll join us this fall as a true freshman. He had a number of offers within the Midwest. He's from St. Louis, all-time leading rusher in the state of Missouri. He came to Wisconsin because of what we do.

I think that's a recruiting advantage for us, which hopefully turns into a playing advantage, as well.

Q. Is there a toughest place to play in the Big Ten? And if so, where and why?

BRET BIELEMA: You know what, I'm a little biased, but I think Wisconsin. One of the difficult challenges that I've had as a head coach is to try and get a grasp on scheduling. It's been brought to my attention over the last five years, we've only lost three games in five years. When we have recruits come in and they sit in my office and they're overlooking the stadium, I'll ask the question. Hey, in the last five years, which is a career. College football players have a career of four to five years. Some are cut short because of injury or maybe they were good enough to go on to the NFL.

In that five-year tenure, we've lost three games in five years, and that really becomes evident when we try to schedule nonconference opponents and we try to go after a certain level or certain caliber of opponents. In the beginning, they start to get intrigued and interested in coming. But when we start talking about home and home -- I'll go play you in your backyard if you come and play me, all of a sudden it's not as good a deal as

they maybe thought. I think it's that record and history that has shown us. That's a positive for us.

I think in this league everywhere, Penn State, you can ask Coach Paterno when he comes. You go play at Penn State, you beat them, you don't get hot water, I guarantee it. He's got a little switch right by his locker, I swear. We've gone out there and had success a couple times. If you win, you've got no hot water. If they win, it's written down, guaranteed. Michigan is tough.

Iowa, I graduated from there. I've got a tattoo of a Hawkeye on my calf. It was a great idea when I was 19. The part that -- their fans are right on top of you. They're coming at you and calling me names I've never heard before, so it's a difficult place to play, as well.

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