July 27, 2009

An interview with:

PURDUE HEAD COACH DANNY HOPE

DANNY HOPE: Thank goodness that football season is almost here and we can bring some sanity to our lives. We're very excited about the upcoming season. I had the good fortune to be on board at Purdue for a year under the direction of Coach Tiller prior to taking over as the head football coach, and that was a great opportunity for our team and our program. We were able to come up with some ideas that I think will enhance the performance of our football team in 2009.

Our guys are excited. We had a lot of players on campus this summer. Had about 90 guys on campus for the bulk of the summer, and they've done a great job and we're excited about the season getting here season soon. Contrary to popular opinion of the experts and some of our peers, I think we can field a very good football team in 2009.

With that I'll open it up for questions.

Q. Some people have made the comparison between your upcoming season and Joe Tiller's first season in '97. Do you see any comparisons there as far as not much was expected from either team as far as personnel or anything like that?

DANNY HOPE: Well, there are a few comparisons. We have a great home schedule for 2009, and we did as well in 1997. From a quarterback standpoint, I think there's some similarities. We had Billy Dicken in 1997, and he's a guy that had not played a whole lot and people didn't know a whole lot about Billy Dicken. Same thing with our quarterback this year in Joey Elliott. He's a guy that the fans and the experts don't know a whole lot about. So there are some similarities.

Q. I just wonder what it's been like for you getting established and recruiting in Big Ten country? What has it been like out there on the trail getting to know kids?

DANNY HOPE: Well, recruiting is recruiting. It's business as usual. I got on board 18, 19 months ago the first year as the associate coach, and that was a great advantage in a lot of ways. I had the opportunity to be on the road full time just like an assistant coach to maximize every recruiting opportunity, selling myself as their future head coach, so that was a great opportunity for myself and for our program.

Recruiting is going very well. One of the areas of our program that I think we can step up in some ways is to increase the pool size of top-of-the-line players that can impact our program in their first two years at Purdue that we have a chance to get. We have a great pool of those guys and feel like we've done very well recruiting last year, this past February. Really excited about the young guys coming in. A lot of the guys will come in and compete to play in 2009.

We have an excellent group of guys we're recruiting right now, and I think we're doing very well.

Q. It's never easy following a very popular or successful coach in any sport. How difficult will it be for you to follow in the footsteps of Joe Tiller when you look at what he meant to the game itself, personality-wise, success-wise? How difficult is that going to be for you?

DANNY HOPE: Well, you've got to be your own man or else you'll never have the players believe 100 percent in what you're doing. But this is not the first time that I've been through a situation like this. My first head coaching job was at the University of Eastern Kentucky. That's my alma mater. Right now, Eastern Kentucky has the longest non-losing streak in all of Division I football. They haven't had losing season in almost 40 years. I followed a legendary coach in Roy Kidd, who's already been inducted into the College

Football Hall of Fame. So it's similar ground in a lot of ways.

I really love Joe Tiller. I worked for him three times: One time at Wyoming and two times at Purdue. I have a lot of respect for Coach Tiller. A lot of the things we're going to do at Purdue in the future will be done the Purdue way, or Joe Tiller way, and then obviously we have some of our other wrinkles.

But I don't see any problem with following a great coach like Joe Tiller. We have our own plan, and again, you have to be your own man.

Q. Can you talk about replacing the very productive quarterback when he's kind of an unknown player? What do you tell him? How do you get him ready? And why do you feel he's ready to be successful?

DANNY HOPE: He's been ready. He was ready last year, and I was fortunate to be on board last year for the 2008 season. I had a lot of opportunity to watch Joey Elliott practice last year, and I thought he was a heck of a quarterback and ready to go last year. Before he got injured he played very well.

We're outside of our comfort zone, if you will, in some ways at Purdue. We're used to having a guy that's thrown for 10 to 12 thousand yards and is up for every award that a quarterback can be up for. That's not the case in 2009. But I'm a big Joey Elliott fan.

Looking back on last season, I thought he was a heck of quarterback, and he competed with our No. 1 quarterback, Curtis Painter, for his job. He legitimately competed with Curtis, and Curtis was a record-setting quarterback at Purdue and a draft pick by the Indianapolis Colts.

I'm a lot more comfortable with the quarterback scenario with Joey Elliott than most people would realize.

Q. I was wondering, despite the results of last season as a whole you had a very good game against Indiana University. What do you expect from that rivalry this year, and how do you see it playing out?

DANNY HOPE: It's a great rivalry. It's one of the great rivalries in college football. I had a lot of fun with that rivalry when I was here last time coaching at Purdue. I don't expect it to change a whole lot. Look forward to playing them again this year. It'll be an exciting game. It always is.

Last year we played our very best football at the beginning of the season and then towards the end of the season. We had a lot of guys that were injured and did not have the availability of their services through the bulk of the season, but we were probably the healthiest at the end of the season. I think that was indicated in our game against Indiana.

But it was an exciting game, and can't wait to play them again in 2009. Always look forward to that game.

Q. Obviously over the years a lot was made about Coach Tiller's offense and the basketball on grass and what that did for the Big Ten. How similar or how different do you expect things to be with you in charge of the offense that you guys are going to try to run there?

DANNY HOPE: There will be a lot of similarities. We had great success with the spread offense the first go around, and when I went to Eastern Kentucky University as the head football coach, we took the Joe Tiller or the Purdue offense down to Eastern Kentucky University. They had been a dive option football team for about 39 years.

We had great success down there with the spread offense. We'll be in the shotgun and we'll spread the field with multiple formations and throw the ball quite a bit.

One of the things that I had the opportunity to do the last couple years that I was at Eastern Kentucky as the head football coach was really to research more of the shotgun run game. I think that can be a real shot in the arm for our program in 2009 if we can have a formal running attack along with the great passing attack that we've had in the past at Purdue.

Q. Can you talk about how possibly the defense is going to have to be kind of the leaders at the beginning of the season until you think maybe the offense can gel out?

DANNY HOPE: Well, I don't think that any one phase of our football team is going to have to carry the rest of us. Our offense did very well in the spring and competed very well against our defense. We have a very good defense coming back in 2009. Don't misunderstand what I'm saying. But our offense did very well in the spring.

Throughout the bulk of the scrimmages when it was all said and done, the offense had won more of the scrimmages than the defense. I don't

anticipate the defense having to carry the offense or the special teams in 2009.

We have eight starters back on defense. I really like our defensive line. I think we have the defensive line that has the potential to disrupt an offensive front. We have our starters back in the secondary. We have some starters back at the linebacker position that last year was their first time playing college football and getting in the game.

So we're excited about our defense, but our offense has great potential as well as our special teams. I don't anticipate our defense having to carry the rest of our football team at the first part of the season.

Q. You may have kind of already addressed this, but Joey is pretty much your guy going forward. Do you anticipate competition at quarterback? And also, talk about the competition at other positions on offense? I know at wide receiver you lose a little bit, and then you had a lot of wide receivers do stuff in the spring.

DANNY HOPE: There is a lot of competition on the offensive side of the ball. There's a lot of competition on our entire football team. I think that's really important.

We ended the spring with the Joey Elliott as the No. 1 quarterback, and I'm comfortable with that. But he does have some competition from the redshirt freshman, Caleb TurBush. Caleb is a heck of a quarterback prospect. He had come to Coach Tiller's quarterback camp, and Coach Tiller did a great job of equal evaluating quarterbacks, and he did a great job evaluating Caleb TerBush. He's about 6-5 or 6-6, about 230 pounds and is an excellent passer and a very good runner. He's a guy that has some confidence.

I don't anticipate him sitting back and waiting his turn. I think he'll compete. I'd be surprised and disappointed if he didn't step it up and try to compete for playing time this year. We'll go into the season wanting to play more than one quarterback, so you can anticipate seeing both quarterbacks, Joey Elliott and Caleb TerBush if they are still one and two when the season opens up.

But there is a lot of competition at the offensive side of the ball, particularly at the running back spot. Last year we lost the services of our top running back, Jaycen Taylor, who's a heck of a football player. Missed all of last season. Missed all of the spring. So we're excited about getting him back, but he has some competition.

Ralph Bolden did a great job in the spring. He played sparingly last year. We had to take the redshirt off of him. He's a guy that 10.5 hundred meters. He's fast. He's physical.

We have a big running back named Frank Halliburton that's played just a little bit of fullback for us. He's trimmed down a little bit. He's doing a great job of finishing his runs, and that's very important when you're a 250-pound running back.

Dan Dierking from right here in Chicagoland is a very complete player. We also have the availability of the services of a really fine fresh running back, Al-Terek McBurse who is on of the top rated running backs in the country. Rushed for 2,300 yards his senior year in high school. He was dealing with some clearinghouse issues in the spring and wasn't able to go through the spring practices, but he's eligible and ready to go. He's a heck of a player and a heck of a competitor.

So there will be a lot of competition at the running back spot. There will be some competition at the quarterback spot. Offensive line-wise we have several players that played and played a lot last year, and towards the end of the year they were getting better and playing well. So I anticipate some competition at the offensive line positions, as well.

Probably the biggest question mark on our football team is what will shake down at the wide receiver spot. We only have two receivers coming back for the 2009 season that played any at all last year in 2008 with Aaron Valentin and Keith Smith. They're both big receivers and good receivers.

We moved Royce Adams from corner. He was our third corner back, and he's a fast guy. He's a physical player. We moved him from corner to receiver to give us a boost at the wide receiver spot. So those are three senior or older veteran players that we anticipate being on the field.

We signed a junior college transfer, Keith Carlos, who was a great player in high school, great player in the junior college ranks. He's well over 200 pounds. Then we have three or four high school receivers that are exceptional athletes that we signed from the state of Florida who we anticipate all competing for playing time in 2009.

So there will be a lot of competition for playing time on the offensive side of the ball at almost every position on the field.

Q. You told my coworker earlier about

the big rivalry between Purdue and IU, and I kind of wanted to lighten it up. I know there's a lot of jokes that go around between IU and Purdue, and I was just wondering what your favorite joke is about the Purdue and IU rivalry.

DANNY HOPE: I'm not foolish enough to say that today. (Laughter)

Q. Do you guys somewhat cherish the role of being an underdog? And how confident are you that your team can surprise this season?

DANNY HOPE: I'm very confident in what we can get done in 2009 just based on the efforts of our staff and our football team. Our guys are excited. We've made a lot of progress as a football team.

And don't misunderstand me, we still have a lot of work to do, but we anticipate having a special season in 2009. A lot of people say, what do you mean by that? Well, we didn't have a winning season in 2008, so a winning season in 2009 would be one way to start off having a special season in 2009.

Postseason play would be a great sign of progress for us in 2009, and then the level of that postseason play would indicate the amount of success that we're having.

I'm confident in the guys just based on their efforts and their attitudes. There are some talented players at Purdue in spite of the Preseason All-Big Ten selections. We have some good football players at Purdue, and we have some guys on our football team that can be the top players in their position in our league if they play to their very best, and tons of players on our football team that can play winning football.

We're going to have to stay healthy, hit hard, minimize our mistakes, and keep swinging for 60 minutes and we'll have a very good season in 2009.

Q. Now that Michael Neal is healthy, will this be the year that he becomes the beast everybody thought he would be on the defensive side of the ball?

DANNY HOPE: I sure hope so, and he was in the spring. I was an offensive line coach at the Division I level for 20 something years, so I spent the majority of my time looking at the big butts of the offensive linemen in front of me and the guys they were lined up against, and I think Michael Neal can be a great player, not only at his position, but in this league.

I think he'll be a premier defensive tackle if he stays healthy and plays up to his potential, maybe the best defensive tackle that's played at Purdue since Jeff Zgonina a few years back. He was from right here in Chicagoland. He's an exceptional player. He's 6'3", about 305 pounds and he benches well over 500 pounds. He's got a good motor and he's usually in a bad mood, and that's usually a good sign for the defensive tackle. He was dominant in the spring, and he has a chance to be dominant in 2009, no question about that.

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