

July 24, 2008



An Interview With:

COACH BRET BIELEMA

COACH BIELEMA: Thank you. It's great to be back in Chicago for media day. Missed you guys. I hope everybody is doing well.

We are very excited about Wisconsin. As always, there are high expectations, but those things are based off the premise of what we've done in the past as well as the 17 starters that we have coming back. I know offensively we've got players at the running back, at the tight end position an improvement at the wide receiver and everybody asks about the quarterback position which is open for competition defensively, have a lot of players coming back that have game experience.

But for us to have success this year it's based on what they do in the upcoming weeks in camp as well as the way we attack the non-conference schedule league into the Big Ten. We're excited about things, and I know that as the season unfolds there will be challenges that come up in this conference. As Fitz (Pat Fitzgerald) mentioned, it's a great conference from top to bottom, but it presents challenges every week, and we're excited to get there.

Q. Coach, you've had a lot of injuries, especially in your defense, defensive line and your secondary. Can you update the status of your guys, specifically (Allen) Langford and (Aaron) Henry who both had ACL injuries?

COACH BIELEMA: Absolutely. I'm not a doctor, but I get doctor reports, and everything that they've given me so far -- by rule, as coaches we can't watch workouts per se. But everybody is back in the full swing of things. Everyone has been cleared for fall camp. The only guy that may be limited in a certain fashion is Matt Shaughnessy, our defensive end. But those two guys you asked specifically about, Allen Langford,

who was injured in the Ohio State game, is back and actually was in my office yesterday and felt great and was moving very well.

And then Aaron Henry, injured in Bowl game preparation, is doing very, very well. He's about a month behind Langford and Chappy (Jason Chapman). Both guys have had ACLs, as well, but we're excited about his full return to competition this fall.

Q. You have big back-to-back night games at Camp Randall. Did you have any say at that at all, and what do you think of those?

COACH BIELEMA: As you know, the powers that be determine our game schedules. If they make a certain game a night game before a certain date, there's nothing anybody can say, either home or away. Because three two back-to-back night games, we had to go through some proceedings within our campus.

But we're very excited. We have a great record in night games, and any advantage you can gain on Ohio State and Penn State is a good thing. Hopefully Wisconsin fans if they have a couple more hours to relax in the stadium parking lot, it's a festive environment so we're excited about that opportunity.

Q. As one of the contenders picked by the media, what's it like to not see Michigan up there, kind of a perennial pick for years?

COACH BIELEMA: That's probably a misprint. I think that Michigan because of way they can recruit, because of the way they have recruited under Coach (Lloyd) Carr and the coaches he had there, I've been fortunate enough to get to know Rich (Rodriguez) over the last couple years and know that he's a very, very high quality coach.

And I guess, you know, when people make preseason predictions it's based really on numbers and it's based on who they have coming back. I think a year ago at this time when I was asked by several people who might be a surprise team in the conference I said Illinois over and over again because of what I saw the year prior and of Coach

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(Ron) Zook and the quality things he adds. The preseason publications are great, but I like the postseason publications better.

Q. Coach, back to Michigan a little bit, you kind of knew what you were going to get with Lloyd Carr. It's going to be something a little different this year and it's the Big Ten opener. How do you prepare for what Rich is going to do and what do you think it will be like to face that Michigan team?

COACH BIELEMA: Fortunately for us they have a non-conference game they have to get through before they play us, but we're just going to take one game a time with them. I know Rich has got a certain type of offense obviously he had at West Virginia, but he's ran several type of offenses during his coaching career. Him and Paul Chryst, my offensive coordinator, were together before his GA and share a background, so I think Rich is going to be able to put his players in the best position to have success, and it's good to be at a Michigan press conference.

Q. Coach, can you kind of update us on your quarterback situation and talk about Allan (Evrige) and Dustin (Sherer) and what they bring to the team?

COACH BIELEMA: Well, Allan, as is well-documented, came as a transfer from Kansas State. I got to know him a little bit as a recruiting coordinator there before I came to Wisconsin. He actually ended up starting several games as a freshman at Kansas State and did some good things, so with him transferring in, we knew he came with game experience. And obviously he backed up Tyler (Donovan) a year ago, so the one advantage with Allan is he's been huddle, he's made calls, made adjustments, been hit very hard, if you YouTube him, by Kansas and bounced back from that.

So Allan has game experience, Tyler Donovan, Scott Tolzien, James Stallons, and then Curt Phillips, our incoming freshman who graduated early and came in January. The things those guys have is their last two weeks of spring football were by far their best two weeks. A year ago at this time we had the same quarterback controversy, and I believe competition brings the best out of people. So as those guys go into fall camp they have to perform every day.

I don't know when we're going to name a starter. I do know ten days out from our opener versus Akron we'll release a two deep and have

our starter identified by then. If it happens before then, it happens. I'm not in any hurry. I'm anxious to watch those guys compete.

Q. Some teams in the Big Ten run the spread offense, and what's it like to be one of the few teams putting such a strong emphasis on the run?

COACH BIELEMA: The thing I like about being at Wisconsin right now is we're unique. Five years ago when the spread first started coming into the league, you needed preparation versus those teams. For us now Wisconsin is unique. You line up with a fullback and tailback and have some big ugly guys in front that come downhill. It's a different preparation. So I like that.

I think now people have to go into a certain preparation mode against Wisconsin, which to me is an advantage. Now, we have to make certain adjustments defensively because we go against our offense in fall camp. We're going to set aside certain amounts. We almost doubled the preparation time that we have for our preparation versus the spread. The spread is a unique offense. To me as an old defensive coordinator, the thing people use the spread for is to create spacing; they create one-on-one tackles and make you make plays.

Everybody's spread is different. Illinois' spread is different from Northwestern, Northwestern is different from Indiana, and Indiana is different from Purdue. Michigan is going to be their own variety, Ohio State, whatever they do; everybody's spread is a little bit different, which makes that preparation even more so.

Q. Your out-of-conference schedule includes Akron, Marshall Fresno State and Cal Poly. Isn't this below what's to be expected of a program that's been to 13 Bowl games in the last 13 years and that is a perennial contender for the conference championship?

COACH BIELEMA: We open up with Akron, which is a MAC conference school that has shown over the last two years especially to be strong within their conference. We agreed to the Marshall contract several years ago, and, you know, when that contract was signed you would find Marshall among the top in the country. At that time I was actually at Kansas State when I was ranked No. 4 in the country and was upset by Marshall at that time who was unranked.

And then to go to Fresno State, who if you read the publications in the preseason, is top 25 in almost everything I read yesterday, that puts them in a chance for the BCS game.

So those three games in itself, I think, speak for themselves. And what you have to take into perspective as a reporter or when you're trying the report the news is find out when those games were scheduled. The only game that was scheduled in the last year was Cal Poly.

The reason I scheduled Cal Poly is before we play Michigan, Ohio State and Penn State back-to-back, I was set to play Virginia Tech, and that didn't seem like a good idea for me to have those games before we get rolling into the Big Ten season.

So I got out of the Virginia Tech game to create a bye week. Because of the Big Ten schedule we were unable to have a bye week during any course of that conference schedule thus giving us a buy week before the season starts. I put Cal Poly as one on the few teams that worked for our agreements. And the reason I think we've been successful is because we've had good scheduling.

Q. Coach, listen, Ohio State has had a recent run of dominance in the conference and obviously back to 2002 winning the national title, but they've lost decidedly in both those BCS title games that they've been in back to back. I think some have kind of thought that maybe that reflected on the conference a little bit and maybe kind of tarnishes what they actually accomplished. Is that a fair assessment for both the Buckeyes and the conference do you think?

COACH BIELEMA: No one can argue with Ohio State's past history and tradition. I was at Kansas State when I saw them win a championship in 2002, and they did it with a solid defensive play. They didn't hurt themselves offensively and great on special teams. They put themselves in the national championship game in back to back years.

Obviously things didn't fare well for them in those games, but as a conference we need to have out there that last year we played Tennessee in a heartbreaker, a loss at the end. Two years prior to that we had beaten Arkansas and Auburn, who are huge favorites in our game who as you know are SEC opponents and we were able to win both of those games.

So during my time at Wisconsin we're two and two. I think the great indication of where our conference is at, the next marquee Bowl game outside of the BCS games is actually the Capital One Bowl in Orlando, and you saw Michigan who had all the reasons in the world maybe not to play their sharpest game ever, with all that was going on there, go out and basically defeat the Florida team that was really a heartbeat away from playing in a national championship game, SEC championship game. So if you want to group and gather, make sure you have appeared all the things gathered together because I really believe the Big Ten conference is strong as ever and go out and play anybody on any given day.

Q. Coach you mentioned that last year you were talking up the line and keep your eye on the line. Is there anybody this year that you have an eye on or that you think everybody should keep an eye on?

COACH BIELEMA: You know, in this conference there's so many things that determine your success, being able to stay healthy, being able to do certain things. But there's such a group of coaches that are high quality, that it's just a matter of time before everybody has that year.

And you look at the conference now, Mark Dantonio going into his second year, they had us on the ropes in Madison a year ago. And I know that's going to be a challenging game for us. And I expect within the conference, we don't play Purdue or Northwestern so I don't really have a gauge on them. Indiana, those guys have done a great job. They have a great quarterback. They are probably waiting to jump onto the scene. That's the great part about this conference is anybody can beat anybody on any given day.

I go back to my first year when we were 12 and 1 we were hoping for a break down the stretch there for us to get in the BCS game, and there were a lot of close games going down the stretch between Ohio State and Michigan before they got to that big game at the end of the year.

I'm going to answer the Joe Tiller question before it gets asked. I'm a big Joe Tiller fan because he can walk in here without a tie. If I got up here without a tie, I'd get heckled, so I admire a guy going into his last year and can wear what he wants and no one is going to say anything. I played him one time and I got him. That's all I got.

Q. I was wondering with the quarterbacks, from each guy, what do you want to see out of each guy, an area of improvement, to kind of put them ahead in competition?

COACH BIELEMA: Well, because Allan has the experience, I really want him, if a receiver is open, to hit him. He has to be able to deliver the ball. I think the part that we appreciate at Wisconsin more than anything because of the offense we run, we ask our quarterback to really manage the game well, so if you have a third and eight throw and he's open, you need to make the throw and be able to catch it if you're a receiver. The other guys, we want to see how they're able to handle the huddle, handle adjustments. Being able to read a defense for the first time.

As a former defensive lineman, there's nothing like hitting a quarterback. During fall camp we put all of our quarterbacks, pretty boys in green jerseys, no one can hit them. And that's a great thing. But on the same account, in the game of football, it's a tough sport and you get hit. How they handle that first couple times when they get pressure on them when a guy is coming at them full speed from the blind side, that's going to be a thing we have to measure during the fall camp.

Q. Feelings about the 40-second clock and what was the purpose of the rule change?

COACH BIELEMA: Well, I think it's a great thing. Dave Parry did a great job explaining it to our officials. It's obviously something that the NFL has experienced. I have a couple coaches that had NFL experience. They were for it right away.

What I think it's going to be able to do, and Dave would be a better explainer of this, it's going to make things more consistent. Within each crew in the Big Ten Conference, and we have excellent officials, again excellent officials in the Big Ten Conference, the one part that gets frustrating as coaches, everybody moves at a different pace. And you may get a ref or a crew that really sets the ball in play very, very fast, and it may change even during the course of the game. People get tired.

And it really hopefully is going to make things more consistent and you're going to eliminate the issues with the clock. Basically you get in a rhythm and you get in the way of play calling, and all of a sudden you look up and you're down to five seconds. You may have been set a little bit faster than the previous series or even the

previous quarter. Overall it's to do two things. Everybody wants to cut down the time for the TV, but on the same account, it's good to make things more consistent overall and a better game.

The only clock issue, as a coach you're able to speak up on those things, and as some of you know I have tinkered with clock issues in the past in the kicking game. But the one part that is surprising to me is when you go out of bounds in a game other than in the last two minutes of the first and second half, for that clock to stop and then start again I think is really going to change the game.

That's the only part I have an issue with. If we change the game -- we have a pretty good game as we've got it right now. If I'm a head coach and down by three scores going into fourth quarter that basically takes that away from us and I don't know why we'd want to do that.

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