

July 23, 2008



An Interview With:

IOWA STATE COACH GENE CHIZIK

PETER IRWIN: Coach Chizik is now joining us at the dais and we appreciate you being here. If you'd identify your players that you brought with you and then an opening comment or two.

COACH CHIZIK: Today we've got two young men with us. When I think of these two young guys, I think of the word "solid," and just two great young men.

We've got Jason Scales, one of our running backs. Jason is a senior. He's going to graduate this December. Again, when I think of Jason, I think of the word "solid." Great, just a phenomenal young man. Great representative of our program. He's played a lot of football at Iowa State in his previous three years and we look forward to a lot of great leadership for him. Kind of a silent leader, just leads by example. Just a great young man. He's going to be so successful in whatever he does.

Jesse Smith, I say the word "solid." He was a walk-on for us when I got to Iowa State a few years ago, he was not on scholarship. Worked his rear end off to become a starter for us at middle linebacker on defense. We put him on scholarship. We never looked back. Has really emerged into what we feel like is a great team leader on defense. Jesse will be a junior. So he'll have two years left. But, again, both very solid young men and just great, what we feel is great representatives of our program.

What a difference a year makes for me personally, for our staff. I think for our players as well. A year ago I sat up here and obviously answered a lot of questions and they were all really hypotheticals for me because I really didn't know what we had.

I didn't know what our football team was going to be like on Saturdays. Everything was an educated guess. But we're excited. We really are. As a coaching staff, I think our players, we're just really excited to get 2008 season underway.

We feel like the foundation has been laid for what we're trying to do down the road. If you go back to 2007, we had a lot of ups and a lot of downs. And I think we saw some improvement at the end of the year in our football team. But in a certain degree, that's a lot of window dressing, a lot of feel-good stuff. Because at the end of the day, you have to look back and say you had a 3-9 season.

And us as coaches, we're very aware of that. Us as players, we're very aware of that. And that is unacceptable. That's unacceptable to our coaches. It's unacceptable to our players. It's unacceptable for our fans who come out and watch us every week who are some of the greatest fans in the country.

So our last eight months have been very driven to erase a 3-9 year and to show progress. So, again, we feel like everything's on the right track. We will have more growing pains. We don't have a lot of players that "add water, instant player." We don't have that. So we've got to do a lot of developing.

It's going to be this year in a lot of positions where we're trying to replace a lot of experience. You know, it's one thing where you're saying that we just can't replace that athletic ability. We can't replace that great player. That's not what we're trying to do. We're trying to replace a lot of players that left that have a lot of experience. And that's the key to us here at Iowa State is trying to replace those players. You can start on offense and you can look at so many players that left our football team that had four or five years of experience under their belt.

You can do the same thing on defense. Special teams. We've started a complete overhaul of our special teams from deep snappers to kick-off guys to extra-point field goal guys. I mean, it's a complete overhaul. So we definitely know that we

have growing pains left and we know that.

What we want to see and what our main focus over the last eight months was to right what was wrong last year. And in our opinion as a coaching staff, as we went back and looked at it, there was times when we played well and there was times when we didn't play well.

And when we didn't play well we couldn't compete. And when we did play well, we did compete. You gotta go back and ask yourself what is the difference? And when you're inconsistent, which we were, I think it's usually a lack of confidence. I think it's a lack of attention to detail. I think it's a lack of focus. Because you can't be one guy one week and another guy another week. And that's who I felt like we were.

So I think the expectations and the standard has been set. We set a standard at Iowa State and we're not coming down to anybody else's standards. The players have to come up to what we expect. And, again, in the name of consistency, that's what we're looking to do for the upcoming year.

But we're excited. Again, the players know us. We know them. We know what they're good at. We know what they're not so good at and that's why they pay us to coach. So we have to figure out how to get it done.

PETER IRWIN: Questions.

Q. Talk about how much thought do you put into the momentum of the end of last year, where, with the Oklahoma and Missouri winning K-State, Colorado, is it too easy? Do you think you can carry it over into the beginning of this year?

COACH CHIZIK: You know, obviously it certainly helps more than if we would have lost those two. It's always great to get quality wins. If you beat anybody in the Big 12, it's a quality win. I picked a bad year to come into the Big 12 North. When you can beat a Colorado and when you can beat a Kansas State, certainly that helps. You'd like to parlay that into something that down the road helps you, but again this is a brand-new year, and I promise you when we line up on August 28th not one player will remember that Colorado game.

So, yes, we would like to say that certainly helps, but at the end of the day we're not hanging our hat on any of that. We're starting all over and we've got to start August 28th and we've got to be a better football team than we were last year and play with more confidence and do the little things that we think makes a difference.



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Q. How do you deal with the perception from outside, the negativity? A lot of people are used to Iowa State not being very good and they pick on this last in the Big 12 North. How do you deal with that inside with the team?

COACH CHIZIK: To be honest, I don't pay any attention to it. What we try to do is focus our players on us. And it's kind of about growing up. You're always worried about what everybody thinks, and you're going to do what everybody else wants you to do. I don't subscribe to that theory. I subscribe to the theory of this is who we are and this is who we're want to be and let's go out there and let's let people look at us and be impressed with who we are and what we do.

Again, that's how you change the mentality. We've got to change the mentality of the people that do think that way. And, you know, I don't go into anybody's home when I recruit, and I don't go into any football game with my hat in my hand and say, boy, I hope we can just hold on. That's not how I feel.

Again, in the name of trying to change the culture, that's the direction that we've got to head our football players into. So when you ask how do we deal with that negativity, I just try to keep my team focused on us. Because at the end of the day, right now when you play a football game, it doesn't really matter about your opponent; it really only matters about you. That sounds cliché-ish, that sounds however you want to make it sound, but in the end of the day, it's true. In my opinion.

Q. Can you talk about the overhaul you had to make? Is it more important entering a camp when you have to make an overhaul like that? Does the camp mean more, and for you to say this is a successful camp, what do the players need to do?

COACH CHIZIK: When I say complete overhaul, we're really talking about special teams unit. That's what I was referring to. But camp is important for many reasons. But certainly when -- we've got a lot of young guys, as I mentioned earlier. We're just going to go out there and throw them out in the arena and say here you go.

And so when you've got that many young people and that much inexperience on your roster, two-a-days are obviously invaluable. And the film work you put in. The walk-throughs that you do, there's so much involved. And on our football

team, as everybody across the country, us not any different than anybody else, it's going to be a very critical part of how we progress and how we develop our football team in the 29 practices you get before you play.

And there's some means to the madness now. Some people want to go down there and beat them all the way down and by the time you get to your first game, your team's tired and beat up. So there's a great management process to that. That will be very critical for us opening our first game.

Q. You kind of alluded to this a little bit earlier. But after working in the South when you were on Mack's staff in Texas, do you think maybe now the North is caught up with the South as far as the overall strength of the conference goes?

COACH CHIZIK: You know, that's a great question. I've been asked that many times. I would say there's just great parity in the league, period. And this league has become one of the elite leagues, if not the elite league in the country.

And it's a different way. You see more offensive football that might be a little more unconventional than you may see in some leagues, but the Big 12 just overall -- I mean, it's upped its game. It doesn't matter who you're playing, North team, South team, pick your poison, because they're going to be good.

And obviously spending two years in the South and playing in that league, I was blessed enough to be able to see pretty much every team in the league, but is one better than the other? You know, they're all good. They're really all good. But I think if there was ever a separation, then certainly it would be hard to argue that it hasn't been closed somewhat. But I just think overall as a league it's just a phenomenal league.

Q. You mentioned how that first year it's always the coaches learning what they can expect from their players and the players learning what the coaches want from them. When you went through that journey last year, what did you like most that you saw and what concerned you?

COACH CHIZIK: I'd say early on in the year, I was concerned because I didn't know if our football team really understood or believed that when things got bad that they could respond. And that's huge. And I'll be honest with you, going up through -- we had a lot of bad happen. And we

didn't respond very well. But the Colorado game was a turning point, down 21 at halftime, we were able to scratch and claw our way back and actually win the ball game. That's hard to do in this league.

But I think players understand now when we talk about taking every play, play-by-play, and you fight and you claw and you scratch and you don't look at the scoreboard and you keep going, that small victories can turn into big victories, and we always talk about that.

I mean, you've got to take small victories. You've got to take small victories on each play. Take small victories in each game. Even in that particular game it might not have parlayed itself into a victory that eventually that would happen, and I think now that our football team understands, we can be behind and come back and win.

We can play against teams that on the outside looking in people would say we don't have a chance, and we do have a chance. Now, if we go there and we focus and we do the little things, if we don't do the little things it takes to win, then we get embarrassed and we did. We got embarrassed last year more than once. I think our football team, and they've had eight months to hear it or nine months to hear it, they've heard it a lot, and, again, I think that they understand where we're at now.

Q. You have a big stable of running backs coming back this season, can you talk about them individually and what you plan on adding to the offense with each of them because they all have great experience on the field?

COACH CHIZIK: I hesitate to talk about individual guys. And the reason I do is because this is the ultimate team game. And I don't think that one running back that I will talk about means any more to our football team than another. I think this is a team game. We've got to take a collection of running backs that we feel good about.

Last year we had five or six, I think, five or six 100-yard rush games I think with three different backs that actually rushed for 100 yards or more. That being said, you know, it just depends. All of them work hard. We don't know who any of the starters are going to be.

Again, we're opening the whole thing up. And we're not into inheritance. I don't believe that you inherit a position because that's who you were the year before. You've got to go back there every

year and you have to re-earn it. And so we feel good about our running back position, but, again, I don't feel good about individually talking about them. Collectively as a group we're happy with them.

Q. Has the summer kind of given you some clarity as far as what you may want to do with the quarterback position and playing both Phil and Austen?

COACH CHIZIK: No, to be honest with you. I think it's going to be a work in progress. I think both of those guys, and then we have a new guy coming in, too, Jerome Tiller, who has been here for the last six weeks, a freshman out of San Antonio who's a very good athlete, and there's three quarterbacks in the mix there, and obviously Jerome will be behind, but still in his own right, a very good quarterback.

That position is what everybody wants to ask about. Certainly both of the guys in the spring made great strides. Both of them understand the position hadn't been won yet. But to say that we would play with two different quarterbacks, I'm not throwing that out. I'll never back myself in the corner and say never. But we're looking for a starter. And then once we decide who that would be, then we'll decide if two quarterbacks going in and alternating or whatever the case may be would be an option. Right now we're not even up that road yet. We're trying to find one guy.

Q. Another position is the interior of your defensive line, are you going to look for two guys to anchor that or would you rather platoon maybe four kids to those spots?

COACH CHIZIK: We'll look for our four best. And our defense and offense right now, philosophically, we look for our 11 best, then we look for our 15 best, and then we look for our 22 best. So with our defensive line where I believe in my opinion defense starts, because if you don't have a defensive line, you're going to have issues.

So we're looking for our first four right now. And we had some great battles going on in the spring, but as you know, we lost two interior guys, one to the NFL and one that was a four-year player for us, that you can't substitute for experience. And that concerns me. I mean, the defensive line is an area that concerns me and we're going to have to get guys that are playing down there that haven't played either at all or played much.

So one of the two will be true, that they will have either played very little or not played at all.

And that's always a concern with your inside defensive line. But, again, in the name of trying to find starters, that's what we'll be doing with our defensive line.

PETER IRWIN: Thank you, Coach.

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