

**July 24, 2013**

**BIG**

An Interview With:

## **MINNESOTA COACH JERRY KILL**

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Jerry Kill.

COACH KILL: We're really, really excited at the University of Minnesota and the direction that we're going. It's a great time for us. I think it all started back when we got the opportunity to go to the Bowl game and play Texas Tech, and we had a great experience there and spent a lot of good time with our student-athletes. And our kids handled their selves well.

And we came up a little short in the game but we played more like we want to play at the University of Minnesota, very physical and hard-nosed football and probably the first time we've been healthy all year.

And I think the kids took the momentum out of the Bowl game, took it on to the off-season, did an outstanding job in the off-season getting bigger, stronger, and faster. And went into spring ball, felt like we had our best spring ball.

We had the largest crowd at our spring scrimmage since Coach Holtz was there. So enthusiasm is great.

And I just think that our kids have come together over the two years.

And we've kind of, as a coaching staff, our coaching staff's been together for a long time. I think we're the longest tenured coaching staff in the country.

Our academic people, our strength program, we've all stayed there over the last two years. That's part of the building blocks or the foundation of our program.

So we're excited about the direction. Our administration has done a great job. We just presented to the Board of Regents a project that's \$190 million to improve our facilities, and we're

moving forward on that. And that's a tremendous thing for our football program.

So the commitment and the direction we're headed at the University of Minnesota is good and we're excited about this season. And I'm looking forward to seeing this team. Each year, each team's different, and this team's approach certainly is different than the past two years.

We got better a year ago, and I look forward to seeing us get better this year. So with that, any questions?

**Q. You look around this conference, a lot of teams have uncertainty at quarterback. Can you just talk about how much you think it will help that Philip Nelson had about half a year last year? I know you're still young at quarterback overall, but how much will that help him?**

COACH KILL: I think we pulled the redshirt off of Philip in the middle of the year. And he certainly played valuable time for us in the last six ball games and did very well. And it was a great growing process for him.

I think it leads us in to this season where we're not trying to break somebody in. Matt Leidner, a young man that we also recruited, is a tremendous athlete.

And I kind of compare our quarterback situation a little bit to what we had at Northern Illinois when I took over that program with Chandler Harnish and Jordan Lynch, and I feel like we're kinda in that area. And also with a young man named Chris Streveler from this area.

So we feel good about our quarterback situation and we feel like that's going to be a strength down the road here.

**Q. Coach, could you just -- more importantly than football, how is your health?**

COACH KILL: I'm doing great. I appreciate you asking. Things are going great for me. And I've got a great doctor that is a specialist in epilepsy. And I've been doing great, looking forward to the season, and I feel like -- I may not

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look like it, but I feel like I'm in the best shape of my life, so I'm looking forward to the season.

**Q. NCAA is under fire about a lawsuit, obviously the Ed O'bannon lawsuit. Now current players are joining, including two from your team. Have you had any interaction with your players about that? Is that something you're going to stay away from? How do you handle that?**

COACH KILL: I've had a little bit of interaction. I'm not -- I get locked in my own little world, and I don't understand all the things that are going on with that case. And right now it's an NCAA issue. And I think each -- we live in a country where everybody's got their rights and so forth. So I think just let the process run its course.

And we've got a lot of things, a lot of discussions in college football right now about a lot of issues. But that's one of them. And it's an NCAA issue, and that's how we're approaching it.

**Q. I know it's not this year, but starting next year, I think for the next three seasons, you guys end the season playing Wisconsin. I know how much that rivalry means to you. Just talk about what it would be like to finish the season playing such a long-time rival with Wisconsin.**

COACH KILL: I think the great thing about our rivalry with Wisconsin is its history. And that's what football's all about. And certainly at the end of the year, it's a tremendous game for both schools and it's an exciting time.

The great thing about the Big Ten is all the rivalry games that we have, and we play a lot of Bowl games within our system, so to speak. So it will be exciting time. And what I'm excited about, I think our football team's getting better. That always makes rivalries a lot more important. So that's where we're at with that.

**Q. Donnell Kirkwood is here. And just wondering what distinguishes him as a running back and how does that mean to you guys to see him emerge last year?**

COACH KILL: I think if you go back through the history of not only where I've coached before but even with the Minnesota Gophers is that we've always had great running backs. And Donnell has certainly emerged with Roderick Williams and big strong physical backs, and that's kind of who we are. And that's who we want to be.

So he's done a great job not only on the field but he's done a great job with leadership with our younger players and has been a part of a group of kids that have really changed the culture and the character in our program.

So I'm very pleased with his efforts and I expect a great year out of Donnell.

**Q. I see you have a very interesting out-of-conference schedule this year. You play three West Coast teams. Just wonder how your kids felt about playing games like that this year. And what are your future out-of-conference plans as far as scheduling goes? How do your kids feel about playing interesting games like that? They're pretty out of the ordinary.**

COACH KILL: I think if you look at our schedule over the next couple of years, our schedule is very difficult. But we really, as a program right now, where we're at, every game's important to us. We try to get better every day, every week, and we're moving forward with our program. So I think with us right now, schedules and nine games and ten games and out-of-season scheduling is we're going to play who is put in front of us. That's pretty much the way it is.

I'm more worried about our football program and our football team just getting better and playing well and the rest will take care of itself.

**Q. Could you talk about Zac Epping and what he's brought to the table, kind of coalescing the offensive line and what the unit might look like this year?**

COACH KILL: Talking about Zac Epping. Zac's a young man that, as I look through my coaching career and the successes we've had as a coaching staff, we've had offensive linemen like Zac. And Zac is a hard-nosed, tough, physical young man, brings intensity every day. I used to talk about he's kind of what I am, a hard-hat lunch pail type of guy that's going to come to work every day. And really when I talk about the foundation of our program, it's kids like that. And that's who we want to be.

And that's why I'm so excited about our season coming up is that I think we're a very young team. We'll probably start maybe one or two seniors on offense, maybe three on defense. But it's a team that I don't think they know a whole lot better. And they've worked very hard and we've

got a lot of kids like Zac Epping that are very similar.

So we're looking forward to that. And I think that will help us get where we want to go.

**Q. I had a question about the facilities at the University of Minnesota. You have a tremendous stadium. We've seen pictures of your locker room there. But how would the practice facilities enhance what you're trying to do with the University of Minnesota's football program?**

COACH KILL: I think the biggest thing in where we're at, you know, and where our program wants to go, there's gotta be a commitment at the top, and we certainly have that with President Kaler and our administration, and we just don't want to be average. We want to be the best and as good as we can be.

And right now we've got a beautiful stadium, a great place to play on Saturdays. But we have to improve our practice facilities, strength training, and academic facilities. And we're doing some great things academically; we're just kind of running out of space.

So this is a critical project for us. And I commend Norwood (Athletic Director Norwood Teague) and his team and our president moving it forward. And we're going to -- our plan's to have one of the best indoor facilities all college football, and we don't want to do it halfway.

We're excited about it. It's great to be moving forward and it certainly helps you in the recruiting process and where we want to go with the football program at the University of Minnesota.

**Q. What was your take on yesterday's scuttlebutt that the Jadeveon Clowney hit might have been illegal he might have been ejected if that were under the new targeting rule?**

COACH KILL: I think the biggest thing, and I think all the coaches and -- I just recently spoke at the State of Alabama. I had a tape of fundamentals and teaching fundamentals. And I think when you have things happen in college football and you have concussions and things of that nature, there's a huge amount of awareness to make sure we teach the fundamentals.

We're all into the safety of the kids and football. We have a great game. It's a game that's physical. We all as coaches have to take our responsibility to make sure that we're teaching the proper fundamentals.

Sometimes things happen. That's part of life and part of anything. But anything we can do to teach it and do a better job for safety is important, because the bottom line is we're in this great profession because of the kids. We want to take care of the players and kids. That's our job as coaches at all times. So that would be my reaction is we've just got to make sure we take care of the kids.

I think college football and all the people around it are doing everything they can. And so I compliment everybody for doing that.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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