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An Interview With:

NEBRASKA COACH BO PELINI

PETER IRWIN: I'm joined by Coach Pelini from Nebraska. Coach, welcome. Your comments about the summer and the start of the season.

COACH PELINI: Yes. First I wanted to inform everybody who was with me here today. Defensive tackle, Ndamukong Suh; running back, Roy Helu; and our offensive center, Jacob Hickman. They're three of the guys that we believe are leaders on our football team and guys that who played a lot of football for us and done a lot of good things.

I think you'll hear from them and from myself and really everybody associated with our program. We're excited about the upcoming year and looking forward to the challenges that lie ahead.

We came out of spring ball ahead of where we were a year ago. And we followed up with a really good summer. The kids are excited. I think everybody's -- you know, has a great sense of anticipation for the upcoming year. Everybody is excited about a chance to keep the program moving forward.

We feel that we have an opportunity to be a good football team. We also understand that there's a lot of hard work ahead of us.

I'd like to take any questions you guys have.

PETER IRWIN: Coach, thank you for your comments. We'll take questions.

Q. Coach, going into year two, what's the biggest improvement you've seen from your kids at this point as opposed to this point last year?

COACH PELINI: The sense of accountability to each other, to the program. I think right now our football team now understands what it means to put a good hard day's work in. A

year ago, I thought we were up and down. I thought we were more inconsistent than we are now or weren't exactly where we want to be. Not quite yet.

I believe the program is getting firmer. I just feel better about where we are right at this point.

We're not the finished product yet. I understand that. The players understand that.

I just believe that right now, just the sense of anticipation of where we can -- where we're headed. And the football players, I think right now, they're starting to sense what we can be, what we can become.

And they're working hard at it. You know, I felt when I first got around this group that there was a sense of dread sometimes when they came over to go to workouts, and they were more looking for the easy way out. Now I think they're looking for get better. That's a great thing.

Right now they understand what it means to compete and to go out there and work hard every day. That gives us a chance to be a good football program.

Q. Bo, can you tell us where your quarterback situation is right now and tell us a little bit about Zac Lee.

COACH PELINI: Zac Lee came out in the spring. No one's won a job yet. We still have a whole camp ahead of us before we play the first game. Zac came out as the clear-cut favorite. He'll go into fall camp as a starter.

We feel like he's had a great -- he's followed up his spring with a great summer. I think he's confident. I think he's really looking forward to the upcoming season. He's very talented. He can make all the throws. He's a very athletic young man. He's a natural leader.

I'm excited about what he brings to the table and what he can become as a football player.

Backing him up, we have a number of inexperienced but very talented young man. One being Kody Spano. He got hurt in the spring. He had an ACL injury. Now he's back 100 percent.



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He's had a great summer and he's really worked his tail off to get to this point.

I expect -- he was having a great spring before he had the knee injury. I think that now that he's back to 100 percent, I expect big things out of Kody.

We have a true freshman in Cody Green, who's fairly limited. He had kind of a freak injury during the spring, before spring ball started. Nothing real serious, but it kind of limited him a little bit during spring ball. He's very talented. We're excited about his future in the program and what he can bring.

Just see how fast he can develop and see how quickly we'd see him on the field.

And then a young man we moved back from linebacker last year because of injuries at quarterback, who really surprised us all with some of the things he brought to the table at quarterback in Latravis Washington. We feel real good about the quarterback position, and I know there's enough talent there to get it all done.

Not only are they good football players they're good leaders. They're tremendous character kids. And I believe that the quarterback position is in very good hands.

Q. You mentioned a sense of dread. I guess the opposite of that, the extreme would be, okay, Nebraska's back. On that continuum, where do you -- when you start the first game, where do you want your team's attitude to be?

COACH PELINI: Well, you know, I don't concern myself a lot about -- I know one thing. Our players don't feel like Nebraska's back. I believe that they feel -- because our expectations are very, very high in our football program and what we want it to be and where we're headed.

I tell them all the time it's my job to keep them grounded. I think they're starting to feel the momentum that we had at the end of last year. That's a good thing. I think they're starting to understand what they can become as a football team and where this football program needs to be headed.

They also know there's a lot of work in front of us to get where we want to be. My way of going about it and our staff's way of going about it is to keep them focused on the day-to-day process.

It's something we talk about all the time, about competing every single day. All of the expectations -- that's for the fans. That's for the media. We're worried about putting in a good hard day's work every single day and keep putting that

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money in the bank, money in the bank, so when it comes to Saturday, we're prepared and ready to go.

We understand this. All expectations or people talking about where Nebraska is in the program, all of that will take care of itself in time if we take care of business on the field. Everything is going to be decided between the white lines. We have to prepare ourselves accordingly. That's how we go about it.

Q. Given your background and given the offenses in this conference, for you personally, how frustrating has it been being a defensive minded coach and how much have you altered your expectations or lightened them or whatever you've done?

COACH PELINI: Well, I've only been back in the league for a year. But I don't -- my expectations aren't going to change.

I thought we made some strides on defense, but we're not in the same galaxy of where I want to be defensively. I think we're heading in that direction. I believe we're heading in the right direction. That's for you guys all to talk about whether this is a defensive league or an offensive league. We're going to play good defense in Nebraska.

I'm very confident of that. We made some strides last year, and I believe that we're headed in the right direction in that regards. We're not going to be satisfied until we are a dominant defense.

Q. You guys are a little different than a lot of teams in the conference because you do run the ball as much as you do with two running backs. Just talk about what that gives you. Do you think you guys are going to be able to be successful in a league where passing is such a big part with those two running backs?

COACH PELINI: First of all, I love your running backs. I love the running back position. Roy's had a great year last year, and I believe he's getting ready to take it to another level. Castille is same thing, he kind of stepped up at the end of the year. I feel real good about those guys.

We have some very talented young men coming into the program, a couple of kids from right here in Dallas. We feel real good about the future of our program and where we are at the running back position.

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And my belief, you can talk about throwing the football all you want. If you want to win championships, at some point you have to be physical enough to run the football. Not only it helps your offense but it's going to help you play good defense and play great defense.

You have to be able to do what you want when you want to do it. Part of that is being able to run the ball. I think everybody talks about all the yards that Bradford put up, for instance, at Texas last year. Let me tell you, Oklahoma was able to run the football, and that's what made them the team that they were offensively because they had balance.

You have to have balance in everything you do to have success over a long period of time.

Q. Bo, back to the defense for a second. What areas do you need to see the most improvement in to become the kind of dominant defense you want to be? Second part of that, is that black shirt legacy still very prevalent at Nebraska? Is that still something that's important to those kids?

COACH PELINI: First of all, yes, the blackshirt is something that our kids take a lot of pride in. It's very special tradition in our program and one that will be here forever.

The other aspect of it is I believe that, you know, we were all our own worst -- we didn't execute. Our level of execution on defense over consistently wasn't where it needed to be last year.

Part of that is coaching. Part of that is players being accountable.

To play great defense, you have to execute every play time after time and not have any busts and not give offenses things. You know, defensively last year, we played good, good, good, and then we'd have a bust and might give up an explosive play.

You have to make people earn things, and there were times we were our own worst enemy. I believe as the year went on, we executed more consistently, our technique got better. It wasn't anything magical. We just started doing our job more consistently. If we continue to do that, we'll be able to compete with anybody.

Q. Can you just give kind of a quick thumbnail evaluation of Ndamukong Suh and then talk about his decision to come back. What went into that decision?

COACH PELINI: Well, big Suh is a tremendous football player. He's very big, very

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powerful, extremely athletic. Smart. He has all the tools to be a tremendous player. He's become a tremendous player.

We're very fortunate he elected to come back. I didn't encourage him to go either way. All I did -- you know, my job is to present him with all the information and help other people, both NFL and other college young men, all the other resources, to give them his opinion.

At the end of the day, I think he realized that he could use another year of college. Most kids can. Even the ones that choose to come out and even the ones that have success in the NFL. Another year is going to -- can always help you.

He just felt like he had unfinished business. He felt that he wanted to be instrumental in where the program's headed, and he wants to finish off his career at Nebraska the right way. We're very fortunate to have him back.

I know this. He's a tremendous person and a tremendous football player. He's going to have great success. I think he's looking forward to a big year, and I think that he'll be a high draft pick in the NFL because he has all the tools to get it done at the next level.

Q. I was wondering, you said something about guys aren't quite where you want to be. But how close are you guys to being the Nebraska of old?

COACH PELINI: We'll find out this year. I mean, how close we are? There's a lot that goes into it.

I believe our talent level is better than it was a year ago. I think we're young in some spots. We're not as deep a football team as I'd like to be across the board.

You know, we won't be satisfied until we win them all, until we're playing for a national championship. How close we are to that, I don't know. I'm not into making predictions and saying we're going to do this and do that this coming year.

I believe we have enough resources, enough talent to compete with everybody on our schedule. How that plays out at the end of the year, I think we have a chance to be a better football team. I think we will be a better football team. How that plays into wins and losses, we'll see that in December.

I know this: I'm looking forward to the challenge of the upcoming year as is the rest of the football team. I'm looking to -- we take it week by

week.

If we do what we're supposed to do and we handle our business, and we keep working the way we are, I think good things are ahead of us.

PETER IRWIN: Coach, thank you for your answers.

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