

December 5, 2008



An Interview With:

OKLAHOMA COACH BOB STOOPS

THE MODERATOR: Coach, opening comments. Congratulations on the season.

COACH STOOPS: Thank you, Peter. Just, of course, teams preparing to come up here shortly, and excited about the opportunity to compete for another Big 12 championship. Really, as always, excited to play a great Missouri team. Gary Pinkel and his staff have done a great job building that program. A bunch of great players, Chase Daniel through Jeremy Maclin, and Coffman, and even on defense they've got a bunch of excellent players, veteran players. So we recognize it as another major challenge through the season, but an exciting one at that.

So we're -- we've had a good week of preparation, and just excited for the game tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: Coach is going to take all the questions from the floor as soon as he finishes Coach Pinkel should be here.

Questions for Coach.

Q. Your comments on your offensive Player of the Year, Sam Bradford, what he's meant to this football team, and you and your ten years at Oklahoma?

COACH STOOPS: The guy's just absolutely amazing. The poise, the precision he plays with. The talent he has. The guy is just special. I don't know any other way to say it.

You just look at his production in the last couple of weeks and couple of games against ranked team that's we had to have, you know, he's accounted for probably nine or more touchdowns, 77 percent completions, no turnovers. He's just been -- the guy's been outstanding, and continues to do it week in and week out.

I said it this past week, the guy is just amazing and probably the best we've had.

Q. Just about the injury to his non-throwing hand?

COACH STOOPS: Yeah, he's due to have surgery Sunday morning after the game. But working through it this week, we have a splint prepared for him that he's operated with throughout the week wonderfully. Haven't had any issues with it. He feels good with it, and should be even better than a week ago in that we have a plan for it, and he has something to brace it. Our trainers did a great job taping him up last weekend, but this will give him more support. But he's able to operate under center and do everything that we normally do.

Q. Why have you guys been so successful on this stage, you're 5-1?

COACH STOOPS: You know, there's -- you have to give the players the credit. They've played well in this situation, and have executed well. And I think we have focused on sometimes you come into this game in a lot of different ways. It's like I said other years where we've been undefeated or not, you have nothing without this game. Regardless of what your record may be in conference, you have to win this game to be presented the trophy. That's who the Big 12 champion is.

So I think our guys have done a really good job of focusing on that regardless of what you've done to this point, this is what matters. Let's make sure we play our best.

Q. It seems like a lot of people nationally are discounting the offensive statistics in this league, saying there is no defense being played, it's kind of a fluke or whatever. Just your thoughts on that? Is it just that the offenses are so good, including yours, obviously, and you really can't gauge defense because the offenses are so good?

COACH STOOPS: Well, again, I think, too, it's easy to look good defensively when you're playing average offenses. So you can throw it back at them the other way if you choose to. That's up to you. In the end, that's the way it is.

You know, as a defense when you're playing against an average quarterback or a team that doesn't have a whole bunch of skill around, it's easy to look good defensively. When you start playing some of the teams like we're going to play tomorrow night, when you look they've got a great tight end, great receivers, a great running game, and they have an excellent quarterback running the whole show and they're no-huddling. So it all adds up.

And the skill in this league, again, everybody's got their opinion, but, hey, again, which is it? Is it the offense or, again, it's pretty good to look good defensively when you're playing average offenses.

Q. You guys have a terrific plus-minus ratio with turnovers. Can you just talk about how much you emphasize that and maybe how big a part of that is what you do?

COACH STOOPS: It's a major part in really being successful. It is something that we constantly talk about, focus on. We want to take the ball away defensively, and we've done that really well this year. We've forced a lot of turnovers. And offensively we've taken great pride in really being secure with the football. I appreciate our players, you know, just attention to that because it makes a difference. We've been very responsible with the football.

Q. I was wondering if any planes have been flying around your house this week at all? And if it turned out it was a Texas-OU rematch in the BCS Championship, how would you feel about it?

COACH STOOPS: I'd be fine with whatever, as long as we had a chance to be in it, we'll play whoever. It's always our attitude. In the end, I haven't seen any planes but I've heard about some, so our Oklahoma people can fly planes, too, I'm sure. You can think of whatever banners you want to put on them.

Q. Auston English's status for this game?

COACH STOOPS: He's practiced more and more all through the week. So we're optimistic that Auston will be able to give us, you know,

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maybe anywhere between 20 to, you know, 25 snaps, something like that.

But we'll see. We just want to make sure he feels good about it tomorrow and that as he goes in there he's comfortable.

Q. How's his condition?

COACH STOOPS: It will be fine for 25, 30 snaps, you know. Auston stays in pretty good shape.

Q. What did you think of the field, the playing conditions from what you saw last week? Is it a concern for you?

COACH STOOPS: It's not a concern because we're playing on the same field as Missouri. So in the end you deal with it. So doesn't much matter, does it, for us. I don't look at it that way because they're going to be playing on the same field. So we'll just see how it is.

I've heard they've done a lot of work on it this week, so we're optimistic it will be whatever you need it to be.

Q. You guys have a chance tomorrow to win a third straight Big 12 championship, no one else has done that in 12 years. What does that mean, and what does it say about your program to be able to have that opportunity?

COACH STOOPS: Well, I look at them all individually. Whatever you've done in the past, to me, it doesn't enter into what you have to do now. So I guess, in the end, you could look at it as a level of consistency. Overall as a program you do take pride in that, being consistent in how you play and perform and how you work.

So it's a positive, for sure. You do take pride in that consistency.

Q. Are you confident with a victory tomorrow you'll get to go to Miami no matter what kind of victory it is? Or do you think style points might play a factor again?

COACH STOOPS: I don't ever look at anything other than doing your best to win, and that's what we're focused on. Whatever is going to be will be from there.

But as a team and as a program, that's what you have to focus on. We need to play well to beat a really good team and have a chance to be the Big 12 champion, so that's all we've focused on, and that's all I'm thinking about.

B. Stoops - 12.05.08

Q. So much talk about this Big 12 championship game being played permanently in Dallas; is that something you'd be in favor of? Is?

COACH STOOPS: I'm in favor of whatever our commissioner and presidents, athletic directors feel is best for the league. If it's best for the league to continue to travel around, I'm good with it. If they feel it's better to have a location that everyone can point to every year, I'm good with it that way, too.

Whatever is best for the league and everyone else, I'll hopefully bring our team and go compete.

Q. Along those lines, in your opinion if you were asked about it, how much would weather and field conditions play a part in making it a permanent place or coming back to Kansas City?

COACH STOOPS: I would imagine it would be a factor to discuss. How much of a factor, I couldn't tell you, but it's something to consider. Not only are you talking about travel plans for thousands of people as well, and teams. So it's something that is always considered or should be considered.

Q. A few years ago y'all lost this game up here and still got to play for the Championship, the national championship. Do you think that's a luxury you have this year?

COACH STOOPS: I would guess not (laughing). That's pretty simple.

Q. With the struggles in the kicking game, how much of a factor is Jeremy Maclin in your planning for this game?

COACH STOOPS: Oh, Jeremy, he's a major factor in our game planning. The guy is an excellent player, everyone realizes that, we do. So we've emphasized it, we've worked it. But you have to do it. If we're kicking off, he's going to have his hands on it some. We've got to do a great job of squeezing it and staying in front of him and tackling him. But it isn't easy. He's an excellent -- very explosive player.

Q. Is there an unsung guy, I know you think everybody's good, but has there been one guy, two guys that have come through this year maybe a Travis Lewis or somebody like that that you've really been, I won't use the

word surprised, but pleased with that you didn't know would develop this way?

COACH STOOPS: Yeah, some guys that really stuck out. As you said, Travis Lewis is a red shirt freshman. And the big plays he's created and the consistency he's played with. Another guy, Frank Alexander at defensive end with the injuries we've had at defensive end. Frank has played just outstanding. You know, week in and week out, he has stepped up in an area that we're incredibly thin. Really both those guys at backer and defensive end.

Then offensively I think some guys up front maybe aren't talked about a lot. Brandon Walker has had a huge year and consistently. Last year, this year has been a really consistent player in the offensive line that maybe isn't talked about a lot.

Q. I know the coaches don't get into this, but certainly players and obviously fans do, revenge factor. You're the only team that beat Missouri last year, they haven't forgotten that.

COACH STOOPS: Yeah, but in the end we're both after a championship. As I said, none of us have anything until tomorrow night around 11:30, 11:45 they're going to hand out a trophy. So that's a lot to go after. Our players understand that.

Like I said, one year to the next doesn't much matter. It's what you have to do now to get that trophy.

Q. I'm just curious with all the talk of the BCS all week, how have your players kind of dealt with that as far as staying away from that and being focused on this game? And also, why has your defense been so good against Missouri and Texas Tech and teams that have played that way the last several years?

COACH STOOPS: What we have done as a team is focus on our preparation. What works for you every week and having an opportunity to win. There's a lot of opinions out there and a lot of voices, but in the end what you do Saturday is all that matters.

Again, I don't think it's been pleasing to anybody, to any of the players. But the situation -- we're in the situation because there's a three-way tie. We understand that. So let's get ourselves prepared to play as well as we can.

We've been able to play these teams fairly well. I think we operate in space well. We're athletic, to be able to spread out, tackle in space and cover people. We've got a good front four that we usually have a chance to get decent pressure without having to blitz all the time, which I think also helps us. I think those are the biggest reasons in being able to spread out and be athletic in space and make plays.

Q. Can you talk about why you gave up your vote in the coaches' poll and do you have any regrets doing that?

COACH STOOPS: You know, I'm not going to speak about it. I just don't feel that it's going to take away from -- it's just going to be a story, and I don't think that's right. I had my reasons. Do I wish I'd had it back? I don't know. I felt I didn't do it for certain principles, so I got to stick by that and trust my gut that that's the right thing to do.

Q. You said you didn't think the weather would necessarily be a factor, but are there any special considerations for Sam with his splint on his hand and this cold weather? I would think he couldn't wear a glove?

COACH STOOPS: No, he wouldn't wear a glove anyway. So I don't think it's -- it's not like it's going to be zero. I don't think it's going to be that cold. It's not a big deal. We operated all week out in cold and wind and didn't have any troubles. So I just don't think it's going to be that big of an issue.

Q. We haven't had a Big 12 game without you. You've been here for every one of them.

COACH STOOPS: Not every one, but a few, anyway.

Q. Well, can you just talk about Kansas City and coming here, and Arrowhead?

COACH STOOPS: I see, all the ones up here.

Q. Yeah, we're provincial here, in Kansas City. Can you just talk about Kansas City and the setting at Arrowhead?

COACH STOOPS: Yeah, listen, I appreciate you asking. I love Kansas City not just because of the Big 12 championship, of course. But I think it's a great city. I spent seven years in Manhattan, Kansas, so we come here often and love it.

I will say this, too, because someone or I think the Chiefs organization from Carl Peterson all the way down through ownership to Coach Herm Edwards are the best. I think they're classy, wonderful people. There could not be better hosts. Everything they do is first class and helping you and being there for you and putting on a great game.

We've had some exciting and great games here. And atmospheres here. So the only thing, again, anything that I brought up is they can't control the weather, and that isn't their fault. So that's my only concern with ever being here. Other than being with great people and associating with Kansas City and the Chiefs organization, and playing at Arrowhead, couldn't be better. They're fabulous and first class in every way.

Q. Your players really like playing here?

COACH STOOPS: Absolutely. The environment, the atmosphere, it's exciting.

Q. You have a quarterback who is being considered very strongly for the Heisman Trophy. Can you describe anything that changed either in your system or in him in the last 12 months that's allowed him to elevate his game to the level that it's at right now?

COACH STOOPS: I think just maturity and growth. I would say a year ago statistically he was there with every other quarterback that they were talking about for the Heisman, and set a freshman efficiency record in passing efficiency.

So last year he was really good as well. This year he's just a little stronger, little bigger, and obviously having the experience from a year ago is just a little more polished in his motion, in his reads. He's quicker getting the ball out.

I think overall we have stepped up with the no-huddle, and the way Coach Wilson, our offensive coordinator, Kevin Wilson, and Josh Heupel, our quarterback coach, in what we're asking him to do, we've put more on his plate and given him more and he's handled it. So there is increased production as well with the style and way we're playing offensively.

Q. How meaningful would it be for you to have one of your players win that award?

COACH STOOPS: It's exciting. But as an individual award, I think more than anything, the team would be proud of Sam. I think it's always a

reflection of the overall team and how those guys play. I think as players that Sam's obviously one of the more popular guys. I mean, he's a great teammate. So I think the team would take great pride in seeing him, a guy that's so humble and quiet to be in that kind of a position.

Q. After seeing it in practice this week, how do you feel about your linebacker situation?

COACH STOOPS: I feel good. We're obviously incredibly thin with all the injuries. But I do feel that we'll be in good shape. Mike Balogun has had a lot more work through the week. And then the equation of also using Nic Harris in at Will back, using Travis Lewis as the Mike backer has looked good as well as we've gone through the week. So I feel that we'll be good overall. Again, barring injuries.

Q. Is there any depth behind Balogun?

COACH STOOPS: Travis Lewis. You know, you've just got to start working your pieces around.

Q. Going back to the question about Kansas City, you've been here four times in Big 12 title games, any certain moment or memory stick out in terms of the atmosphere or the fans or anything in your four previous trips here?

COACH STOOPS: They're always exciting. Probably because it's the first time, it's the 2000 year in playing Kansas State. The first time is probably -- it's hard. It's like anything, your first time is always the best, maybe. But I think that that one, probably more than anything because it got things started, and the situation we were in at the time.

Q. This Missouri defense has had some struggles at times this year. What do you see from them when you watch them on tape?

COACH STOOPS: They're very consistent in their discipline and how they play, their structure. And I appreciate that because you see them and they've got a lot of good players, a veteran group. You know, they make you work to beat them. They don't break down as far as, you know, busting alignments and assignments and those kinds of things. So they're very disciplined in how they play in their structure. And very solid in how they do it. So they make you really execute to work the ball better.

Q. The way this game has come down over the years, the two teams with the best records have not usually met in this game. I know there is a rule if you've got 12 teams you've got to have divisions and all of that. But do you think that the conference would be better served, the top teams in the conference would be better served if the teams with the two best records met for the Championship?

COACH STOOPS: Not if -- then you'd have to get rid of the divisions. So I just don't see how that would work. Then the other part of that equation would be then you also have probably more of an opportunity to knock one of those teams out of a BCS bowl which is also lucrative for the conference to have two teams at a BCS bowl. Now you have all of those issues.

So all together, I don't see how that's -- no one else does that. Other teams that don't have the Championship game, they have co-championship or tri-championship.

Q. Obviously it's a different team, different year. But is there an advantage to having played in this game so many times in the past with your guys and just knowing what the experience is about?

COACH STOOPS: I think that's maybe just a small degree of it. I don't see that being a really big issue. In that what you've done in the past really still doesn't matter, they're all different teams, different situations. So you've got to go do it again.

Maybe to a small degree, but overall I still think -- I don't think it's a big difference.

Q. You've been asked during this past week to compare your team's body of work with Texas' body of work. Do questions like that bother you? Does it bother you the possibility that you maybe asked them until the last minute of your season?

COACH STOOPS: I guess. I wouldn't be answering fairly, to some degree it does. I just wonder why Texas Tech's win over head-to-head to Texas has not been mentioned or mentioned so slightly. Why is Texas Tech not in the conversation, I would ask you?

Q. If they were in the conversation, too?

COACH STOOPS: They should be. They

head-to-head and beat Texas. So in the end, it's really not that difficult. Texas Tech deserves -- they have the identical record of us in Texas, 7-1 in the league, and 11-1 overall. If head-to-head is your reasoning, then head-to-head, Texas Tech beat Texas.

Q. So the only thing that bothers you is that Texas Tech is being left out of the conversation?

COACH STOOPS: Yeah, and for some reason they have not been a part of the issue when they are a part of the issue. We all agree whatever rules were put in place, were put in place before the year and you go play.

Q. But it's not about defending your team's body of work?

COACH STOOPS: Well, our body of work I think is speaking. No one else -- you look at the four ranked teams that we've beaten, and I don't think anyone else, if we're able to win tomorrow, has beaten five. So that's where Joe Castiglione and I are very aware when we schedule that that matters. There are a lot of other teams I would have rather played early in the year than Cincinnati and TCU. I'm not real excited to go to Miami next year to play Miami in the Orange Bowl or in Dolphin Stadium.

So those kind of issues are factors, and they're good for college football, those early games. They're exciting for you guys to go write about and follow, they're exciting to fans and challenging to our program. They do enter into the equation. Or, again, you guys at least early in the year act like they should. Then late in the year seem to forget about it.

So, same thing. Same thing. If Texas Tech isn't part of the issue, you're going to disadvantage them because of how bad we beat them, but not give us -- not advantageous for doing so.

So, again, it's just what you choose to emphasize.

Q. A lot of the talk around this game nationally and locally here is that Missouri doesn't stand much of a shot in this game against Oklahoma. Does that start to creep in? Can that creep into a player's mind?

COACH STOOPS: I would think not, not when you watch them play as much as we have all week and how well they play. Again, the quality of players that they have. We've got great respect for

Missouri. And as a team, we're the ones that have to go play and try to win. So we recognize the challenge of it, because we studied them all week and through the year and have seen how well they play.

Q. I know in the past you've at least mentioned other games, though do you bring up Kansas State the year they beat you 35-7 when you were the overwhelming favorite?

COACH STOOPS: We've talked about it as a team of that situation in the past, a little history lesson that, you know, that's 2003. That's what happened.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach.
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