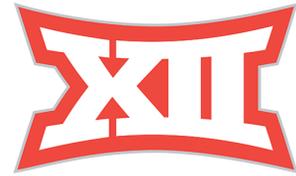


Big 12 Conference Football Media Days

Monday, July 16, 2018

Lincoln Riley

Oklahoma



THE MODERATOR: We are now joined at the podium by Coach Lincoln Riley from the University of Oklahoma. Coach, welcome and your thoughts about the upcoming season?

LINCOLN RILEY: Thank you. It's great to be back. A little bit more notice this time. It's great to be back. It's an exciting time for us. This off-season has certainly felt a lot different in many ways than the previous one did. Excited for our team going forward. We feel like we've got so much recruiting momentum, so much overall momentum behind the program based on what this group has been able to do here for the last few years, it's very exciting.

Going into a season with so many new pieces at critical positions, probably more important than anything, new leadership, experienced players at core positions, especially offensive line, that defensive front seven, so excited to see that.

This is going to be an interesting team, no question. I think it's got a chance to be maybe the most talented team that we've had in the now four years that we will have been at OU, but also probably our most inexperienced team as well. So I think our leadership is going to be a very, very key part of how this team progresses. Should be an entertaining season. Nonconference schedule for us is as challenging as always and all three of them being at home. But three very, very tough opponents, teams that were very successful last year with Army and Florida Atlantic and with Coach Kelly being back at UCLA, they're going to be an intriguing challenge as well. A lot to build on, a lot of excitement around our program and certainly looking forward to getting started.

Q. Lincoln, you recently made comments on the radio about defense and a certain team from the SEC. Were you surprised at how those things were construed maybe nationally and how sort of big it became at least in Oklahoma?

LINCOLN RILEY: Not really. It's a slow time media wise. I get that. I think you had some people that read probably one sentence out of the entire deal and that's what they took from it. When, in fact, my comment had nothing to do about Georgia specifically and everything to do with the Big 12 and the quality of offenses in this

league, and not just last year but in recent history.

I think it's a very fair point that even if you had a, what is a top-5 defense in the country that statistically that would be tough to maintain if you played in the Big 12 conference and played the quality of offenses that we see week-in and week-out. I think if you look at offensively these leagues over the past 10, 15 years, I think that's well supported. There are good offense in every league, there are really good defenses in every league. But the best offenses in the country over the last fifteen years have been in the Big 12 conference and that's what I based my point on.

Q. Lincoln, the off-season where two dozen NFL teams came to Norman to pick your guys' brains about your offensive schemes and stuff. Can you explain what goes into that? Obviously, they've seen the film. They know what the plays are, but what are they trying to get? How much, if anything, does it benefit your staff having those guys come in and see what you're trying to do?

LINCOLN RILEY: Sure. That thing got blown out of proportion a little bit. Both the first two questions did. I think a couple things factored into it. One, we had a lot of players that were obviously on NFL radar that people were studying. I think the NFL has become closer to what the college game is at least offensively, so I think there are more things that you can discuss back and forth that are relevant for both sides. I think that opened it up. Some of these were just, you know, hey, a few minutes here or there or a guy at pro day or these guys coming in to work out a guy and they sit there and talk to you. Some were longer, but we're never going to sit there and talk to somebody that we don't feel like we can't get something from. There has got to be something in it for us. All these guys that we got a chance to talk to it is very helpful for us. There are a lot of things for me to sit down, whether it's offensively, whether it's, you know, more from the head coaching perspective on how you handle different situations or scheduling, you name it.

Is it's been nice to have a few more resources and a few more guys that you can talk to, bounce ideas off of, it's something we've taken advantage of. Listen, we've done some good things, but a lot of people do a lot of good things, too. So we're appreciative to have a chance to visit with those people.

Q. With Kyler Murray being selected ninth overall by the Oakland A's. How will that affect his use on the football field and what will the coaching staff be doing to help his major league aspirations?

LINCOLN RILEY: It won't affect it at all, and I like baseball but I don't know a whole lot about it. So I'm not going to be helping him that way. When he plays I will watch him and cheer for him. I'm going to continue to try to grow him as a competitor and as a young man, help him get ready for the things that are going to be in front of him because that's a big part of my job as well. It's not just about the football field. I don't know that anything I'm going to teach him is going to directly carry over. He's a talented athlete. He's put himself into a position to be able to choose, have a chance to do both and happy for him to be drafted how he was and the opportunity that has been presented to him and his family.

Q. Your offense managed to score 48 points against Georgia, didn't quite get the win. How do you get the defense back to the level it was when Oklahoma last won a national championship?

LINCOLN RILEY: We gotta recruit. We feel like we're in the process of making a pretty good move there. That's the first thing that I've seen is our talent levels needed to increase and I think we're on the way to doing that.

I feel like some of our best talent defensively right now is from our freshmen and sophomore classes. We are probably only going to play with maybe one, maybe two seniors this year, which is alarming in some ways. But it also I think shows you we've been on a nice run recruiting over the last couple of years.

I think that is, to me, our number one issue. We have good players, don't get me wrong. But our talent level has not been the same as some of the other defenses in the country. I think for us it's about consistency. We've had some great moments defensively, one down the road here in the Big 12 Championship game we completely shut down Ohio State in Columbus. We've had some great moments defensively, but we've got to play like that more often. We're building. I know that's something in this period of time having this entire off-season as the head coach as opposed to last year I felt like I've been able to do my job better on that front, because I'm the one that's ultimately responsible for it. I feel great about our staff going in. I love our talent. Even though it's young, we're going to have to grow up in a hurry. But I don't think we're far off from being the kind of defense that we want to be.

Q. Lincoln, saying you may have the most talented team you've had in four years is a mouthful

considering how good y'all have been. I'm assuming by that you mean you should have Final Four capability again this year? What specific phases need to improve to get there?

LINCOLN RILEY: I do think we have that capability. Now, having that capability and getting there are two different things. It takes so many things to go your way. You're going to have to win some tough games, you're going to have to stay healthy. A lot of things factor into that. I do think the talent is there and I do think our leadership is going to be so critical. You asked what has to happen? Our leaders have to step up, and our young, talented players have to grow up in a hurry, maybe even fair to say, ahead of schedule on both accounts. I think that will be the key.

I think if this team reaches its potential then we can play with them and we can beat anybody. It's a long road. There are a lot of teams that I think are capable of doing that and it's hard to do. We've had a chance to get to the playoff twice, have had a chance to win this league three times in a row and it's hard. I mean, I've been in this leg for a long time going back to go my Texas Tech days and I have a lot of respect for it and how hard it is to do. We will have to fight like crazy to give ourselves that chance again.

Q. We all loved watching Baker play the last three years, phenomenal playmaker. But in Kyler, we're looking at a different athlete and maybe a better runner. Will the offense not change at all with Kyler at quarterback?

LINCOLN RILEY: Kyler is not the quarterback yet. There is good competition going on and Kyler is going to have to fight like crazy to win this job. It's a different competition. It's very different, both have been Baker's backups in the last two years and they've been in multiple years and they're both ready to be the starting quarterback at Oklahoma. First things first. He's got to win that job and whoever wins it, whether it's Austin Kendall or Kyler Murray, it will be different, no question. They have different skill sets than Baker, there are some things that Baker did better than these guys and things that these guys do better than Baker did. That's always the job. Once we narrow that job down of tailoring that job to those guys and giving them the best chance for success. I think the most important thing or at least most important thing early for us is let's make sure we get the right guy, put them through this competition and test these guys. Let's really put them through it because we've got two guys that are more than capable of getting this team where we need to be.

Q. Regarding the quarterback competition and the differences you highlighted with Baker that you had last year, some would say you were fortunate for a second-year coach to have such athletic

quarterbacks in your backfield. Can you highlight the differences and similarities more between your quarterbacks and how much tinkering you're going to have to do on the sidelines?

LINCOLN RILEY: Yeah, I mean, they're definitely different. Austin is a great pocket passer, very, very smooth, he's really good with his progressions. He has really progressed in a lot of ways there and he's a sneaky good athlete. He's not as flashy of an athlete as Kyler is, but he's got enough athleticism to hurt people and make people pay. Kyler's athleticism jumps off the screen pretty quickly. You don't see that often in his position, but kind of like Austin, he's a better thrower than he gets credit for. Both guys have the skill set to run it, not only when you talk about tailoring an offense to a quarterback's strengths, sometimes you're talking physical strengths.

But a lot of times it's mental strength. What do they process, what do they like, what is their thought process, their mind-set so there is a lot more that goes into it besides how well do they throw it, how fast do they run.

Q. You talked about inexperience and looking for leaders throughout the spring. Have you been able to find your leaders during spring ball? Is that something you're going to have to find during fall camp?

LINCOLN RILEY: I think we've identified some guys that are potentially those guys. I think Rodney Anderson is definitely one of the first names that comes to mind. I think he's ready for that role and has started to embrace that role. We're going to have to get more leadership from our offensive line because we do have some guys that have been through it, some multiyear starters that are good players, Ben Powers, Dru Samia, Jonathan Alvarez, Bobby Evans, those guys have been through wars with us, so we need them to step out and do that. Defensively, Kenneth Murray, even though he's going to just be a sophomore, he's a "Mike" linebacker and he's ready to do it, even though he is young. I would put Tre Norwood in that category. I feel like he is ready to do it. Amani Bledsoe and Neville Gallimore, guys that have stepped up. So the potential is there, kind of like our team in general, the potential is there, now what are we going to do with it and those guys are going to be key.

Q. Obviously, you want to play everyone. But how much will the new redshirt rule change how you manage players you're considering redshirting?

LINCOLN RILEY: It completely changes it. I don't know if people on the outside or even maybe us on the inside understand how different that rule is. How much the game is going to be different, the strategy behind it. I think it's going to be fun. I think it's a good rule. We

got into some dicey situations last year in the playoff where an injury here or there we would have had to pull a redshirt on a guy.

So it takes that out of the equation, which is good. That's the right thing for the players and it does give you a chance to use those games in the way you best see fit. I think each group will have their own strategy for it and I think it will be interesting to see and I think it will be something we learn from year-to-year and I think it was a good, positive step for college football.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, congratulations and good luck this year.