

July 14, 2014



An interview with:

COACH WILL MUSCHAMP

KEVIN TRAINOR: We're joined by Coach Will Muschamp.

COACH MUSCHAMP: Great to be here. A sign of summer being over, football season starting.

I want to thank all of you for what you do for the University of Florida, the Southeastern Conference. I've gotten to know most of you over the years coaching in this league and I appreciate most of you for what you guys have done.

Excited about August 3rd. That's when our guys come in. Start practice on August 4th, 20 days from now after a very disappointing, frustrating season last year at the University of Florida. Falls on my shoulders. Going through it, very difficult year for us. Certainly not our expectation.

There will be a lot of chatter about hot seat business. That's part of it. The way you combat that is having a winning football team and winning football games, which is what we're going to do.

I got a lot of confidence in this team and staff. This is probably the most complete team we've had since I've been at the University of Florida in all three phases. Looking forward to getting this thing going.

After three years, after evaluating last season, like you do after every year, looking at what you need to do to improve to take steps forward, we played consistently well on defense. We were very inconsistent the latter part of last season, which is disappointing. I feel like the things that went wrong certainly were fixable in our organization.

Special teams, our coverage and return units have been outstanding. Our specialists did not perform as well as we thought they could have last year. I think we've made some amends there. Kyle Christy and Johnny Townsend both have NFL

legs. Their competition will make each other better.

Austin Hardin had an outstanding spring. Four for four in the spring game. A guy that I think continues to improve after going through a rough season.

Frankie Velez and Brooks Abbott, a walk-on that's kicked at Virginia Tech. Certainly some guys that possibly can help us in that situation.

I feel like we can make some amends there. We needed to make some changes on offense. I felt like our kids had lost confidence in some things we were doing offensively. I went back and looked at our numbers from 2012 when we were in the shotgun as opposed to being under center. When Jeff was in the shotgun our yards were better, our explosive plays were better in both the run and pass game.

He was recruited to Florida to be a gun quarterback. In making that change, I felt like Kurt Roper was a great hire for us from a standpoint of a guy that philosophically is on the same page with me as what we want to be, that's a balanced offense.

Last year at Duke University, he had over 20 rushing touchdowns, over 20 passing touchdowns. That's the type of balance I think we'll need in our league. You can't get one-dimensional in this league or you're really going to struggle, in my opinion. We've been too one-dimensional on offense.

Really pleased with Kurt. His development at the quarterback position speaks for itself. Eli Manning, Thaddeus Lewis, Sean Renfro, all guys playing in the National Football League, been a play-caller for 11 years. When I called Coach Cutcliffe about Kurt, he wasn't happy I was calling about Kurt, but he certainly endorsed him as a football coach and a man.

There's nothing different of what I've seen of what Coach Cutcliffe described to me in their offseason program.

In our 15 days of springs, we got a lot more done than I thought we would. He's an

outstanding fundamental football coach. Very positive. It was good to see our offensive kids having fun again on the field. Really excited about that.

Probably what excites me the most is this is probably the most talent we've had on offense in my four years at Florida. Starts with our quarterback Jeff Driskel. He graduated this past spring, going to go into sports management here in the fall after finishing up an internship this summer.

I think this offense fits him better as opposed to what we may have been doing before. To utilize his athleticism and space, some of the things he's able to do athletically is going to benefit him and us.

We need to develop a backup behind him. I don't know who that would be right now. But I would plan on playing that person early in the season, talking about the first game, just like we did with Jeff his freshman year when John Brantley was our quarterback because of the lack of experience behind Jeff. We need to develop that guy and be ready for a situation where we might have to play him.

I feel very good about our offensive line. You take our first five to seven guys, all guys that have played and played well for us. We missed Chaz Green last year, he was out the entire season. Back at right tackle and played well for us in 2012.

D.J. Humphries only played five games for us last year. He's up to 295. Back at the left tackle position. Both of those guys are very athletic and have played extremely well for us at times. Both guys had outstanding springs.

We've moved Max Garcia to center. He's more natural as an inside player as opposed to playing on the edge which we had to last year. As spring progressed, he made some positive moves at the center position. Certainly is an outstanding leader for us.

You take a combination of Trenton Brown, Trip Thurman, Tyler Moore are all guys that played, certainly capable of playing championship football for us up front.

After that we don't have as much experience, but I really like our talent level. I like the new NCAA rule to be able to go in the summer and see your guys workout. Was there this morning at 6:00 a.m. To see Rod Johnson, Antonio Riles, and some of those guys moving around excites you about the athleticism and the future of our offensive line.

Deep and talented at receiver and runningback, Kelvin Taylor had a great year for us. Mack Brown is going into his senior year. Matt Jones missed most of last year and missed all of camp with a viral infection, I think the fifth game against LSU, he tore his meniscus. He's up over 230 pounds now, carried it extremely well watching him this morning.

Receiver Quinton Dunbar has been a steady player for us. Andre Debose who missed all of last year with an ACL, to get him back, a guy that can really play in space. I think this offense benefits Andre as well.

We played three true freshmen last year, receiver Chris Thompson, DeMarcus Robinson, and Ahmad Fulwood, all guys that are a year older, a year more mature, stronger, faster, a little bit more savvy about the game of college football. I think those guys will all make jumps going into this second season.

Latroy Pittman and Valdez Showers, two young men as well that have done some nice things for us.

So again we've improved our talent level there. Then I think the addition of Jake McGee at the tightend position can be big for us. Jake is an outstanding athlete, had over 40 catches last year at the University of Virginia. That's a pleasant addition for us.

Defensively I think we have a good mix of talent. We do lack some experience in some areas. I take talent over experience any day. It starts up front, we have senior inside players, Darious Cummings, Leon Orr, both guys have played good football for us. Jon Bullard has played well for us, going into his junior season. Dante Fowler, who is with me today, is an explosive rusher, a guy you have to account for in the protection. We need to create as many one-on-ones for Dante as we can. I think he has a chance to have a great year.

Past those guys, I really like our talent. I don't know that we've got a lot of experience in those situations but I feel good about getting accommodation of eight to ten guys up front. You would like to have four or five inside and four or five outside that can play. I think we'll be able to come up with that number as we move closer to the season playing against Idaho.

At linebacker we have four experienced players, Mike Taylor, Antonio Morrison, Jarrad Davis, and Neiron Ball. Neiron can add some

pass-rush for us on third down in one-minute situations. Matt Rolin and Alex Anzalone are coming off injuries from last year. Matt missed the entire season. Daniel McMillian is a young player we're excited about as well at the linebacker position. I think we have enough players there that can be very productive.

In the secondary we're led by Vernon Hargreaves who had an outstanding freshman year, a guy who came in and earned his opportunity. He's a joy to recruit in the recruiting process. He never asked me about depth charts or anything. He only asked for an opportunity to play. If he had that opportunity, he'd be a starter. His first two games in the Southeastern Conference, he had two interceptions. That tells you the type of player he is. Outstanding young man, represents us in all the right ways. We will be young opposite him.

Brian Poole, Jalen Tabor, Duke Dawson are three guys that went through spring. I think they're capable of being very good corners in our league. We have young guys coming in, J.C. Jackson, Deiondre Porter, Quincy Wilson, again, all capable guys. I've always played young guys in the secondary and had great success with all of them. I think we'll be fine there.

At the safety position, Jabari Gorman is a senior. Then we have four younger guys, Marcus Maye needs to be a more consistent player, which he was throughout spring. He needs to continue to make those strides. Marcell Harris, Keanu Neal, and Nick Washington.

Again, I think the talent is there. We just got to get those guys, may have to narrow some things down for them early in the year especially to get them playing fast, but the talent certain is there.

Injury situation for our team right now, we only have two guys hitting fall camp that won't be full speed. Nolan Kelleher is a young man we signed out of South Carolina. I don't know when he'll be cleared for contact. It was a preexisting injury from high school that we discovered in his physical when he came to Florida midyear. I can update you further in the fall there.

Then J.C. Jackson had a shoulder injury this past spring back Immokalee, had surgery in April. Usually a four- to six-month deal until you find out exactly how quickly a guy can heal.

I was at the 6 a.m. run this morning. He looked pretty good to me. He'll be cleared for non-contact in August and should be cleared for contact shortly thereafter, I don't know when.

I'm really pleased with our football team as far as our offseason was concerned. We put them through a hard one. We had a really good spring. Excited about what Kurt brought to the table offensively and what we were able to do and accomplish there and have been very pleased with the summer workouts.

I'll open it up for any questions.

KEVIN TRAINOR: We'll open it up for questions.

Q. Even though all the injuries last year obviously affected your season, any point last year where you didn't think you'd be retained for this year? Now that you're back, how do you handle the hot seat talk?

COACH MUSCHAMP: Well, I think you combat the hot seat talk with having a good team and winning games. Control the controllable is always what I've said. Control the things you can control. I haven't always practiced it, but try and just control the things I can control. That's coaching our football team, developing our football team.

There was never any time in my mind that I didn't think I would be retained.

It's the great thing about having an athletic director like Jeremy Foley that has a strong pulse on not only our program, but every program in the athletic department.

At the end of the day he understood circumstances we dealt with looking forward to getting them amended this year.

Q. In recent years Florida has really dominated the series against Tennessee. Under the leadership of Butch Jones, can you sense the return of a rivalry between these two schools?

COACH MUSCHAMP: Well, I didn't know that the rivalry ever didn't exist. I know how guys get excited to play Tennessee every year. Certainly I know they get excited to play us.

Butch is an outstanding football coach and has done an outstanding job recruiting and continues to do so.

I think it's a great rivalry, one of the great things about our league.

Q. Jeff was saying how he might have been a little over zealous during his rehab. Talk about what steps you could take to ensure

he can limit himself from running too hard or too far outside the pocket?

COACH MUSCHAMP: Well, I think the great thing about Jeff, he's a great competitor. That's also the bad thing about Jeff. At the end of the day you got to be smart, get yourself down in some situations. Two years ago against Louisiana, he got caught in a pile, cost him a game and a half.

We got to do a good job of coaching him in situations, putting him in situations when we need to use his legs, when we don't, and be smart about getting down.

Q. Even though you have a new offensive coordinator, will you open some practices to the public like you did in the spring?

COACH MUSCHAMP: Yeah, actually I had a plan to do that. I think Steve Mclean is releasing that as we're speaking. I think we have seven or eight practices open in August. Look forward to seeing you there.

Q. You've coached a lot of great defensive backs over your career. How good is Vernon Hargreaves and how good can he be?

COACH MUSCHAMP: I think one of Vernon's best qualities, he's very coachable. You can coach him hard. He coaches himself. He's very intelligent. He has a very good feel for the game. He gets that from his mom.

But his dad is a coach.

It doesn't always equate to your dad being a coach and you understanding football just because you've been around it. I've coached coach's kids that didn't grasp the game as well as others.

He's a guy that's got a burning desire to be really, really good. He's in the film room constantly. He's correcting himself. He's coachable. All the intangible things you want a player to be he possesses.

I don't mind bringing him here because he's a guy that's going to handle it the right way. All this is going to do is motivate him and make him hungrier for the next success he's going to have in his life.

That's why he's a successful person. God blessed him with a lot of ability. We'd like the coaches to take a lot of credit for him. At the end of the day he has some natural instincts that others of us don't have.

Q. On your third offense in three seasons, what have you and Coach Roper talked about in terms of the limited amount of time to install another offense? What have you learned these last three years about building a coaching staff?

COACH MUSCHAMP: Again, it's always difficult in a situation to maintain a staff from the standpoint of guys get promotions, guys get opportunities to be a head coach. You want that to happen for all of your guys. That's part of it. That's something you deal with.

But we're at the University of Florida. When we have an opening, we have a bunch of people that want to come, I can tell you that.

As far as being able to install and get done what we need to get done, that's what we need to judge through fall camp. We got a lot more done than I thought we would in the spring. That's a credit to Kurt and our staff and our players to being receptive to what we're trying to do, having enthusiasm at practice, taking advantage of the defense, doing some really nice things, in my opinion.

But we'll judge that through fall camp and see who can handle what. As we move forward, we'll make sure we're executing very well in the first game.

Q. A year after so many quarterbacks departed, how big of a deal is it for you to have Jeff back after so many years? Do you anticipate the personality of the league changing a little bit with so many quarterbacks departing and so much youth at the position?

COACH MUSCHAMP: Well, again, I think having a quarterback back that's played well and is an experienced guy, understands some of the venues we're going to walk into is a little more relieving for me personally and certainly for our offensive coordinator.

But, you know, as far as the new quarterbacks in the league, people are going to do what they do schematically. They may dress some things down to make sure they can execute more, be a little bit more simple.

At the end of the day, there's still good skill people in this league, still good offensive lines. No different than what we did in 2012 with Jeff.

Q. As a player and assistant coach, you've had fairly good success every place

you've been. How difficult was last season for you personally and was there anybody you sort of reached out to to sort of talk things out or communicate with?

COACH MUSCHAMP: Well, unfortunately all the guys I know real well will lie to me now so I can't really talk to them.

I really draw from within. I think we have a very strong staff at the University of Florida for the things we need to do to be successful moving forward. In most situations, even when I was a defensive coordinator, making difficult decisions, go with my gut and do what we need to do to be successful.

Q. Arkansas was the last team you beat in early October. At that point you were 4-1. Could you have ever envisioned a seven-game losing streak? How much hunger and motivation does that drive the team?

COACH MUSCHAMP: There's no question, it's very frustrating and disappointing. It's not what we're about at the University of Florida. I think as a competitor you want to get back out on the field, play as soon as you can. That's why I'm really looking forward to getting to football and practicing and developing this football team.

Q. I wanted your thoughts now with Missouri, South Carolina, Georgia and Florida being so competitive in the SEC East, what gets you excited about this coming season competing for the SEC West and a trip to Atlanta?

COACH MUSCHAMP: We're going to compete in the East, but we have to compete against two really good teams in the West.

It's a new season and we're looking forward to going out and competing against some of the best competition in the country. Our schedule is difficult. It's difficult every year. We look forward to the opportunity that we have in front of us.

Q. Just in your brief comments, the injuries that you faced last year, had you ever encountered something like that? Was there a rock-bottom moment as you're trying to prepare your team and manage that situation?

COACH MUSCHAMP: Well, again, no, I haven't ever faced anything like that. Rock-bottom moments, we're getting ready to play, late in the season, I don't remember the week, on a Tuesday night. It was about 9:30, 10:00 at night. I'm in the

defensive staff room preparing third down for the next day. Our trainer Paul knocks on the door. I come to the door. He's usually not there at 10:00 at night.

What do you want?

Tyler Moore just wrecked on his scooter and broke his elbow.

I can't tell you exactly what I said, but it wasn't good (smiling).

That was at a point where, you know, I asked him, You got to be kidding? That was a point where, you know, it was just very frustrating.

The last ballgame of the year Clay Burton, a great Gator, great career at the University of Florida, splits the power up the middle there for about 40, hurts his shoulder. We had a package for the wildcat that game.

Injuries are what they are. Next guy has to move forward, step up and play. That's the mentality you've got to have.

Q. Obviously you talked about the two opponents out of the West, one being Alabama. How do you feel about that challenge?

COACH MUSCHAMP: They have an outstanding football team. Everybody knows I got great respect for Nick and his entire staff. I've worked with a bunch of them. They recruit extremely well. They develop their players extremely well. We look forward to our trip to Tuscaloosa.

Q. When you see Auburn go from an 0-8 team to the national championship game, do you dwell on that, talk to your players about that?

COACH MUSCHAMP: We totally focus on the University of Florida and what we need to do to be successful, how somebody else does something. Gus and them had a great year, happy for them. We try to put all of our focus on what we need to do to be successful, have a singular focus on our football team, offense, defense, special teams, each player, each unit, what we need to do to be successful.

Since I've been coaching, that's what I've tried to do.

Q. Given the number of underclassmen that continue to come out each year, how difficult is that process? Is it becoming more difficult? Is it simply a reality or is it a

problem?

COACH MUSCHAMP: Well, I think it's both. I think it's an issue. The frustrating part that I have is a young man has been in your program for three years, you've been coaching him for three years, you recruited him, you're giving him advice that you've talked to NFL general managers that I know personally, NFL head coaches that I know personally. You're telling him exactly where they are on the board. And instead of the young man listening to you, you're really trying to help the young man in making a very good decision.

My philosophy, if he's going to be a first-round pick, he needs to pack his bag and go. I told Matty Elam and Sharrif Floyd, both of them, if you're going to be a first-round pick, go. If you're not going to be a first-round pick, you can come back and improve yourself your senior year. If you can come back and improve yourself your senior year, if you're willing to work to do the things you need to do to improve yourself, you need to come back.

Now some of those young men aren't listening to people that have been part of their lives. They're listening to somebody on the street, Well, Coach Muschamp is telling you what's best for Florida and what's best for Will Muschamp and that's not always best for you. That's the frustrating part for me.

I had a situation at Auburn. Jerraud Powers, played corner for us. Jerraud come out early. Jerraud had already graduated. He called me, I was at Texas. I said, Jerraud, you're not going to be a first-round pick, you need to come out.

Coach, I already graduated.

I said, Great, you start working on a master's degree.

He said, Coach, the issue that I've got is I'm 5'9" and you know what I'm going to be next year, I'm going to be 5'9".

I said, Well, you got a point.

He goes, I can't improve on that and I know what you're going to say.

There are some situations where a guy has graduated, I believe he was going through a coaching change. I can't remember exactly if Tommy was there at the time or not. I don't know if Jerraud made a good decision. He's still playing in the National Football League. He's smart and he's a good player.

It's something that they're trying to address in the National Football League. They don't want these guys coming out early. Football is a

developmental game. You have to develop yourself to be ready for that league. That's a hard league now. I've been there. It's a marathon. It's a grown man's league. A lot of the guys that are coming out aren't ready for that.

Q. Dante Fowler has had a chance to play behind a lot of good guys, get a lot of experience. What has his progression been and do you feel he's ready to step in and become a leader?

COACH MUSCHAMP: I think so. He's a guy that's matured over the years. I think in order to be a leader, number one, you've got to be a productive player. He's going to be a productive player and he has been a productive player for us. He has really good work habits. He's a really good teammate from the standpoint he has a very positive attitude in our locker room and he affects people in a very positive manner.

He also motivates people by the way he works and the way he is.

As far as being a leader, he has what I think the key components are to being a good leader. Certainly we will need his leadership moving into this year.

Q. You talked about Alabama a little bit, that matchup. How important is it to get into a groove offensively with those first three games?

COACH MUSCHAMP: Well, we just need to win the first three games is what we're really worried about. Certainly playing well offensively is part of that. Playing defensively and special teams.

But there's no question we need to be able to go out and execute very well offensively. Whether that means narrowing down what we do so we play fast and our kids aren't thinking. Those are all things we need to make those decisions while we're working through camp.

Q. We've touched on Dante Fowler. At Florida it's always been known for the linebacking core. Who is the big linebacker for Florida this year?

COACH MUSCHAMP: We have four guys that are capable. Antonio Morrison came in as a freshman and played extremely well. When he got some injuries up front, he didn't play as well as the year rolled on last year. He knows that.

Mike Taylor has been a guy that's made a bunch of plays for us. Neiron Ball will be a guy that will play some outside linebacker, will also be involved in some pass-rush situations.

Jarrad Davis played for us and played outstanding football for us and a guy that I'm really excited about moving forward.

KEVIN TRAINOR: Coach, thank you for your time.

COACH MUSCHAMP: Appreciate it.

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