

July 15, 2014



An interview with:

COACH BUTCH JONES

KEVIN TRAINOR: We're going to continue with the head coach of the Tennessee Volunteers, Coach Butch Jones.

COACH JONES: Thank you. It's great to see everyone this time of year again. Before I start, I'd first off like to say thank you for all that you do in promoting our student-athletes, promoting the Southeastern Conference, and promoting the University of Tennessee. It's the best game going. Appreciate all your efforts and everything that you do.

Obviously it's an exciting time of year right now. Everyone is extremely optimistic. Everyone starts at 0-0. No two teams are ever the same. That's why we've moved on from team 117 to team 118 at Tennessee.

On average, a third of college football teams change, the dynamics change, you have to reinvent yourselves each and every year. There's new opportunities for everyone in your football program from leadership to the roles of your players.

For us at Tennessee, we're a little bit different. We're not at the norm in terms of having to replace a third of our football. We're having to replace almost half of our football team.

This year half of our roster will be brand-new. With that that has brought a lot of positive energy, excitement, momentum that surrounds Tennessee football. So much momentum, not just from a program standpoint in terms of football, but from facility improvements, from recruiting, just the overall development that's going on at Tennessee.

We've had an influx of young talent and youthfulness. We were very fortunate to sign a signing class of 32, 14 of which were early enrollees, so they were present during spring football. That really helped in the overall development of our football program.

But we are still going through the realities of building a college football program. We're the only school in the country that has to replace both starting interior lines, both offensively and defensively. We have to replace our entire kicking game.

So for us the challenge is going to be to maintain our focus, having consistency in performance, and really understanding what it takes to play winning football week in and week out.

You'll hear me talk about the power of one. The one is very powerful with this football team because being so young we have to focus on the moment. We have to win one moment at a time, one play at the same time, one practice at the same time, one day at the same time, have one unity of purpose, one common commitment, and one mindset.

It's all about our players understanding they have to earn the right to win. There's a difference between earning the right to win and hoping to win. Our players are doing that just right now.

Our veteran players have done a great job of really mentoring our younger players. That's why A.J. Johnson, Curt Maggitt and Mack Crowder are with us today. They've earned the right to represent the University of Tennessee with their consistency and their approach on a day-to-day basis but also their leadership qualities.

We had two freshmen that played for us last year that were freshmen All-Americans in terms of Marquez North and Cam Sutton. We're going to rely on them.

As I talked about the power of one, the whole key for us is how do we manage the natural adversities that a college football season brings about, the daily demands of being a student-athlete, the media, going on the road and winning in hostile environments, to the time management that's required, community service, all that that embodies being a student-athlete. So it's going to be how this football team can manage those natural adversities.

But we have great team chemistry. I like where this football team is right now. Looking forward to starting practice on August 1st. Quite simply, it's going to be how fast can we jump the learning curve. We'll find out in a hurry with a great opponent in Utah State.

But I'll answer any questions you may have at this particular time.

Q. What does it say about Curt? You called him the heart and soul of your team, despite never having coached him during a game. What do you expect from him this upcoming season?

COACH JONES: Well, I think it speaks volumes about Curt Maggitt. He is the leader of our football team. He was the leader last year. Unfortunately he wasn't able to participate on the field.

So being able to get him back on the grass for our football team, he's going to be a presence. He's a very talented football player. He'll add an edge presence to our defense, but also we'll move him around at linebacker. He demands respect. He's accountable to his teammates.

So to be able to have his voice on the field when we're in the battles is going to be critical in us moving forward. I'm looking forward to getting him out on the field and practicing.

Q. This is your second year at Tennessee. For you what's the best part about coaching at Tennessee and in the SEC?

COACH JONES: Well, it's the relevance and magnitude that's the University of Tennessee. We always talk, about in recruiting people, make a place, and we have great people. We have what I feel is one of the best fan bases in the country. We have a great administration led by Chancellor Cheek and Dave Hart. We're all aligned. That's what we sell all the time is being total alignment in your messaging, same principles, same value, same beliefs. It's only a matter of time.

The University of Tennessee has so much to offer a prospective student-athlete. It's an honor and privilege to be the head football coach there. I don't take that lightly.

I love my job and I love being at Tennessee.

Q. The matchup against Florida later in the year is a big one with Muschamp coaching for his job, your young team. How important is that game?

COACH JONES: Well, every game's going to be critical. Again, I'm going to go back to the power of one. I'm concerned about Utah State, then moving forward.

But I believe Florida's going to be an exceptionally talented football team. I think they're going to be one of the teams to beat. Coach Muschamp is a great coach. They have our respect, just like every program in this great conference.

But for us, we can't even look down that path right now. We have to focus on day one of training camp, really worry about ourselves in terms of the process, focusing on the process and the journey that we're about right to embark on.

Q. How well are the incoming freshmen taking to the traditions of the University of Tennessee?

COACH JONES: You know what, they've done a great job. I think the thing where we've been aided and benefited from is we have six legacy players whose fathers played at the University of Tennessee and were great players. We want individuals that have grown up understanding the rivalry with Alabama, with Florida, understanding the traditions that we have at the University of Tennessee. So the legacy players have helped.

But this is a class that wanted to be at the University of Tennessee, and they take great pride and onus in having that upon their shoulders of getting Tennessee football back to its rightful place among the elite of college football.

Q. I know you talked about the rivalry with Alabama. The criticisms of that 6-1-1 format is that it protects those two games. Do you think you would have supported a change in the format if you were a coach of a different school? What was your discussion with other coaches?

COACH JONES: Well, all I can speak on is the University of Tennessee. I feel Coach Saban feels the same way. What makes college football special are the traditions, the rivalries. It's been a traditional rivalry. Now, we have to get back to making these rivalry games relevant again.

It's in our DNA at the University of Tennessee and the University of Alabama. They're very special to us. I think that's what kind of makes up the pageantry of college football.

Every school has their own reasons and all that, but I also think that's one of the great things that separates the Southeastern Conference, is the grind of a long football season and the great teams that play each other week in and week out.

Q. I know it might not have offered much momentum during the season, but how critical in terms of laying the groundwork for the program was it to beat South Carolina last year? How critical is that series in regaining the hierarchy in the SEC East?

COACH JONES: It was a critical win for us. There were so many things that went into that game, so many great illustrations of what it takes to play winning football, making critical plays at critical moments in the game. I think it showed a little bit of some resiliency and perseverance by our seniors.

We started off winning the game, then we fell behind. We found a way to win the football game. It's third and nine, Justin Worley stands in the pocket, Marquez goes up and makes a play in the air. A lot of nuances that go into time management.

A lot of people don't even realize this, but you're sitting there and you're running the clock down for a game-winning field goal, you have no timeouts yet, as a coach you're making the decision, do you spike the ball with 11 seconds left? When you make the field goal, you have to kickoff, are you going to rely on your discipline because we snapped the ball with three seconds left?

If we would have jumped off-sides, 10 seconds run off, we lose the game.

There's all those things we can continue to move forward on and teach lessons that went into that game and having players step up and make critical plays at critical moments of the game.

I have such respect for Coach Spurrier, what he's been able to do at South Carolina. But that was a great, great win for us in moving forward.

Q. What are your thoughts about the new summer workout rules?

COACH JONES: It's really helped us in terms of, you know, being such a young football team. But I also think it's a balancing act. You know, for us, we're trying to get freshmen ready to play so we're trying to develop them mentally and physically. We're trying to get them bigger, stronger and faster.

To take time away from some of your lift sessions to do film study, it's a great balancing act for us.

I also still think there comes a point in time in the summer that they need a break from the coaches and the coaches need a break from them. Kind of reenergize yourself.

It's been a balancing act for us. But it came at the proper time for us just because of trying to get so many freshmen ready to play.

Q. A.J. Johnson made a tough decision in the winter to come back to school. In what ways can that decision benefit him and in what ways can he improve to be the best potential pro that he can be by the end of this season?

COACH JONES: Well, we're excited to have A.J. back. He means so much to our football team, being our middle linebacker. He's the quarterback of our defense.

But he wants to get a college degree. The NFL will be there for him. We try to start that process early on with the NFL education. We actually start seminars when they enroll and they become freshmen not only with our players, our student-athletes, but also with their parents, kind of mentoring them.

Each player has a different nuance or different dynamic of why they choose to leave early and declare themselves eligible for the National Football League draft. But we're excited to have A.J. back. Him and Curt Maggitt are best friends. They kind of play off of each other. They push each other.

It's an opportunity for him to improve his coverage skills, his overall knowledge of the game, and to get bigger and stronger, to be able to play at the next level.

Q. Entering into year two, all your assistant coaches are back, even your equipment manager is back. From your program point of view of bringing back all your coaches, how critical is that for the momentum you obviously want to build upon?

COACH JONES: Well, it's critical. You win with consistency and you win with continuity. For a lot of these individuals, they've had too much change. Some of these individuals, this was their third or fourth defensive coordinator.

To be able to have the same consistent and constant messaging day in and day out, our

players understand the standard and the expectations that has been set forth to play at the University of Tennessee.

So to have that consistency is critical. I think you win with consistency. For us, our coaching staff has been together for a number of years, so we kind of feed off each other, which is very, very important. I believe in morale. I believe in team chemistry. That's what we have at Tennessee.

Q. You mentioned the contact you have with players this off-season. One of the freshman you have, Jalen Hurd, you said he needs to continue to work. Where is he in terms of where you want him to be?

COACH JONES: Well, Jalen continues to progress. We're going to put so much pressure on some 17-, 18-, 19-year-old individuals. They're just like our children, they grow up, they mature differently.

But Jalen has really, really done a great job in the weight room. He's really sacrificed a lot of things in terms of his eating habits, his rest, his recovery. His body has taken off.

For a 6'3" stature of him, he can get the tough yards, but he has the elusiveness to make a defender miss at the second level. He's going to have a great role. That's one of the selling points.

He's being pushed by two other freshmen, Derrell Scott and Treyvon Paulk, along with Marlin Lane. Marlin Lane has been a great success story in our football program of what a difference a year makes in terms of overall maturity, changing his overall life, his life-style. He's been a great mentor to Jalen, as well.

But we expect big things for Jalen down the road.

Q. You touched on earlier you're one of the only teams in the nation that has to rebuild both interior lines. Are there any names on either side of the ball that gives you confidence that you're going to do extremely better this year?

COACH JONES: Well, yeah. We made a decision as a program to redshirt our left guard Marcus Jackson. So to be able to have him back, he's one of the individuals that had started a few games for us in the past. So to have that back, to have his experience back, to be able to garner a redshirt year from him last year is big in moving forward.

Mack Crowder, who is here with us today, it's a tremendous opportunity for Mack. He's waited for this opportunity. He's kind of the quarterback of the offensive line.

Coleman Thomas is a true freshman. Right now he's got the inside track to be the starter at right tackle. I'm excited to see how far he's progressed. He's one of the 14 midyear enrollees. Dontavius Blair, a junior college individual from Anniston, Alabama, also an early enrollee. I'm excited to see how much he's progressed throughout the months of the summer.

This is a group that has worked exceptionally hard and they're going to have a tremendous opportunity in front of them.

Defensively Jordan Williams is an individual who is a senior out of Gainesville, Florida, who has really worked himself into great physical condition. We're going to expect a lot from him. We expect a lot from our seniors. He's had a great off-season. Obviously having Curt Maggitt back on the defensive side of the ball will help us.

Those individuals, just to name a few, we expect big things from.

Q. What stands out to you about the runningbacks across the SEC this year?

COACH JONES: Well, it's going to be an extremely talented group of runningbacks with each team. The thing that's going to make it exceptionally challenging for defenses is all these great runningbacks have different styles of play. They have a uniqueness that's only common to themselves.

You have some individuals who are extremely quick with great make-you-miss, some are more north-and-south runners. It's going to be a great challenge week in and week out preparing for the great runningbacks in this conference.

Q. Yesterday Derek Mason talked about knowing you and having coached against you from your days at Central Michigan. Talk about coaching against him, what you expect out of Vanderbilt.

COACH JONES: Derek Mason is a fine, fine football coach. We've gone together a little bit in terms when he was at Ohio University and I was at Central Michigan University, we were involved in some very good football games. Obviously it followed the football program very closely at

Stanford.

He's done a great job and he has a great reputation. I know that Derek will do a great job there.

Q. During the Orange and White game this past spring, Josh Malone was one of the guys that showed up for the freshmen. What are your plans for him in the fall?

COACH JONES: We expect Josh Malone to continue to develop. Tennessee is the original Wide Receiver U. That's one of the biggest changes in our football team, is the wide receiver position.

Everything in our football program, we talk about the power of the position. It's the responsibility of every player at each position to play to the best of their God-given ability and develop to meet their best potential.

I'm excited about our wide receiver position. It's going to be one that's going to be exceptionally strong. We're going to have great competition there. I'm a former wide receiver coach, so I'm excited where we're going. Zach Azzanni does a great job with that position group with an overall mentality and a pride in the position. I believe that's going to be one of our strengths in moving forward.

Josh is being pushed. Jason Croom has had a great, great off-season. Von Pearson, number two junior college wideout has pushed him. Alton Howard is back on our football team. He's had probably one of the best off-seasons in our football program right now. You look at Marquez North, which we spoke about earlier in the session.

Again, I'm excited of where we're going at that position.

Q. Reflecting on your days with the Bearcats, we know there's an upgrade from the Big East or American, to the SEC, size, speed. Talk about the degree of the upgrade and did it surprise you or was it about what you expected?

COACH JONES: It was about what I expected. The big thing is in the SEC, it's the daily grind of going through a long football season. There are no off-days. Just the overall competitive makeup. It's an unforgiving league. It's extremely competitive no matter what's going on.

I think you see the vision of the SEC, it's like we're one step ahead all the time. We have great coaches, great players. Again, the



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competitive balance and makeup of this league is second to none.

The ability to go on the road, every institution has tremendous passion, loyal fan bases. So the ability to have to go on the road and play in those hostile environments, it takes a mentally tough football team in how you train, the standard and expectation that goes into winning on the road.

I think it's the overall gamut from A to Z that the SEC presents each and every day.

Q. Talk about your quarterback competition, where you're at, how you see that shaking out, your loss of Peterman.

COACH JONES: I'm excited about our overall quarterback competition. I think all three individuals have really, really elevated their game from Justin Worley to Nate Peterman to Josh Dobbs. We've really, really challenged them.

I also think the influx of talent around them at the skill spots, wide receiver, tightend and runningback is also going to increase their overall level of play.

But I'm very, very encouraged by what I've seen. There is no timetable to naming a starter. I want them to compete as much as possible because I think competition is healthy.

They compete against each other each and every day, but also they've maintained that togetherness as a unit, position group.

Peyton Manning is a great resource. I would be remiss if I didn't say congratulations to him to being voted the No. 1 player in the National Football League by his peers. That speaks volumes.

I know he's helped our quarterbacks immensely this off-season, as well.

Q. We've made a lot about the dearth of offensive and defensive linemen. I also notice you have your entire secondary back. Talk about that position group and how much you'll be leaning on those guys.

COACH JONES: We're going to lean on them quite heavily. Again, having Cam Sutton, who was a freshman All-American back, is very big for us. Justin Coleman has played a lot of football for us. We'll move him inside and outside.

The evolution of the game of football defensively, one of the most important positions now to the structure of a defense is the nickel

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position. So really the key for us is finding that fifth defensive back.

Brian Randolph missed all of spring with a shoulder injury, but he's back 100% healthy. He's added about 25 pounds to his physique, to his body. We're excited about that.

We were able to attract a number of recruits, freshmen, at that position as well. So there should be a lot of competition in the back end of our defense. You can never have enough secondary, especially now, which I spoke about, with the evolution of the nickel position, as well.

Q. Back to the defense, can you talk about Curt and A.J.'s friendship. How much did that friendship lead to A.J. coming back, wanting to see Curt compete again on the field?

COACH JONES: Well, I think that had a part in it. They feed off of each other. The players feed off of these two because whether it's in the weight room or on the field, they challenge each other. They have a great chemistry about themselves, and they expect and demand a lot from each other. One individual isn't maybe holding up to what they expect, they let each other know.

The mark of great players is that they elevate the play of others around them. Curt and A.J. will elevate the play of others around them. So I do think that had a part in A.J.'s decision. To what extreme, to what percentage, however you want to term it, I don't know. But I know that their friendship's very special.

But also they're accountable to each other and they demand from each other. That's great. One individual isn't holding their end up, they let each other know. Again, that's extremely healthy.

KEVIN TRAINOR: Coach, thank you very much for your time.

COACH JONES: Thank you.

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