

July 15, 2014



An interview with:

COACH KEVIN SUMLIN

KEVIN TRAINOR: We're pleased to be joined by the head coach of the Texas A&M Aggies, Coach Kevin Sumlin.

COACH SUMLIN: Good afternoon. You guys are awful quiet (smiling).

Just like everybody else who's come up and will come up, I think every coach is going to talk about how excited they are about the season. We are, too. We're excited about a lot of things.

Many people have read, as we left this morning from College Station, about our stadium redevelopment which is second to none. It's going to be an unbelievable facility. For those of you who have seen the pictures, they don't do it justice.

I think we'll be ready to go, everything that we've been told points to the whole project being on time for this season. Then at the end of the season working on the west side stands and finishing the project for 2015. That's one part of the puzzle.

We pride ourselves and look at ourselves as a player-developmental program. Since we've been here at Texas A&M, the Davis Center, which is our new weight room, which is an absolutely beautiful facility; R.C. Slocum Nutrition Center, has given us the opportunity to give our players, our student-athlete across the board, quality nutrition.

Now the stadium has been one phase. I think underneath the stadium is where our student-athletes currently and future prospects have started to notice with the addition of new locker rooms, a new athletic training facility, new meeting rooms, things that bring us up to par and really set us aside I think from where we were facility-wise and really put us on a level playing field with the best programs in the country. I think our current players appreciate that.

I think that speaks to the commitment that Texas A&M has for our program. I think future student-athletes are recognizing that. I can't tell

you how much we appreciate that as a football staff. It's a little bit of a commercial, but it's a big deal.

I think moving forward, being a part of this league, this being my third year into it, understanding a little bit more about the culture, about the recruiting process, about the facilities, and about the level of play. I think we're headed in the right direction.

We haven't accomplished everything we've wanted to accomplish over the last couple years, but I think there's no doubt that we're headed in the right direction. Our university is giving us the opportunity, the means and the support to put us on that track to be extremely successful.

I think offensively I didn't come here today to tell you who the quarterback was going to be, so we can eliminate those questions. That will play itself out. I think we're looking at a couple weeks before we play South Carolina that we'll name a starter.

The good news is that we've got four of our five offensive linemen back, a really good tightend in Cam Clear, a lot of great players around him on the perimeter, and three exceptional runningbacks.

Our focus in the off-season has been with our offense just to talk to them about, number one, it's incumbent on the other 10 guys who are on the field to make the offense quarterback friendly. Our guys understand that because whoever that is, is going to be a young guy going into a very hostile situation in Columbia the first game of the year on the SEC Network.

Defensively I think we will have, believe it or not, more depth in our front seven, particularly in our front four. We ended the year rotating five D-line men out of the four spots. That took its toll. As anybody will tell you in this league, it's a line of scrimmage league.

We've recruited and have more depth. Those guys are one year older. Jordan Mastrogiovanni moves into linebacker, which is his natural position. He's 240 now. He probably should have redshirted last year, but we didn't



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have the luxury of doing that.

I think the key to our defense will be the rotation up front, the maturity of the guys who played last year, and getting better safety play.

We'll challenge those guys who played last year at safety early in camp, and we've got some young guys that we brought in and we'll see what happens there. We'll have great competition across the board.

Special teams-wise, we bring everybody back. Drew Kaser, I brought him today, our punter. Some of you guys gave me grief about that. I hope you all saw him. I hope you don't see him a bunch this year. We had to petition last year to get him into the Ray Guy Award because we didn't have a lot of opportunities to punt. He's a real weapon for us when we have to use him.

Josh Lambo earned the field goal kicking rights, place kicking rights last year. You may have remembered him in the Ole Miss game. Guys didn't even know who he was. I tell the story all the time that when we got him, he came from FC Dallas, he's a soccer player, enrolled in school. I said, Great, we got a place kicker that's a soccer player. What I didn't tell the media after he kicked the winning field goal at Ole Miss was that he was a goalkeeper.

A little bit nervous, but he's been very, very good for us. Taylor Bertolet has been a factor for us kicking the ball out of the end zone and really starting drives off, not giving people opportunities to return it.

We've got pieces in place to work with. We've got a lot of young guys we're going to have to integrate and figure out where they fit right away.

Obviously we start with the first game of college football, doing the schedule a couple weeks ago, our first meeting is July 31st. Our first practice is August 1st. We're looking forward to it and we're ready to go.

Questions.

Q. What is it like not coaching Johnny Manziel? Do you miss him? Whoever your quarterback is, how confident are you he'll be a play-maker for you?

COACH SUMLIN: Let me get this straight, the question was, What's it like not coaching Johnny Manziel (laughter)?

I'll say this. College football is a lot different than the NFL. You know, really great NFL teams and organizations have a core group of

players that they keep, then a satellite group that kind of bounces in and out and they keep winning.

The difference is, in college football every two, three years you're going to have turnover, and you have to have a plan for that. Whether it's quarterback, whether it's a great defender, whatever it is. To me that's what's exciting about college football.

You wouldn't be so excited if you hadn't recruited the Gatorade Player of the Year out of the state of Texas at quarterback and the number one quarterback in the country behind him.

The ability to go out and match talent. We understand, I understand there's not going to be another Johnny Manziel, the way he played the game, that's all part of it.

Now, does that mean that we change offensively? Maybe. Does that mean that we changed offensively for him? That might be the case, too.

What we have done is we've gone out and been able to recruit very, very well to a system that we believe in.

With that being said, your first question to me is irrelevant.

The second question is, What do you do now? I think we've laid the groundwork in recruiting to still be successful.

Q. What are the early returns on defensive end Myles Garrett and how important is he to establishing a much needed pass-rush?

COACH SUMLIN: I think one of the best rule changes has been for our coaches to be a part of player meetings and discussion in the summertime, particularly for young players. I think the NCAA, the rule that changed, we have eight hours in the summer, eight hours a week, six of which you can use for conditioning, two hours you can utilize for meeting time and interaction.

I think it's given our coaches, myself, a lot of time to interact with players, to go through film, to go through installations. We're ahead of the game right now instead of the just going through two-a-days or having players talk about it or having players come up and watch film.

Because of that, we're able to interact and also able to talk with other players on the team. I had a coach tell me a long time ago, A lot of times the players know before the coaches do.

Your ability to talk to other players, see

what's going on when you're not around, when they have the captain workouts, when they have seven-on-sevens, Myles has really, really impressed a lot of other players on the team, which is hard to do when you come in as a true freshman.

I know he's impressed Coach Jackson in the weight room. Walking in the door, one of the strongest guys on the football team.

He's explosive. He's going through a tough time right now. His grandmother passed away a couple days ago so he had to go back home. Our thoughts and prayers are with the family. But we've texted each other and talked a little bit over the last couple days. Taking a little time to himself, which he needs to do.

But all signs point to him being as advertised. As I said, we don't go off of lists, ratings. I know you don't like to hear that, the stars and everything else.

When they rank guys number one, they usually don't screw that up. I don't think they screwed this one up this year.

Q. Ever since the party photos and whatnot have kind of emerged from Johnny, have you had a chance to visit him? If so, what have you shared with him and what advice have you given him? Also, how do you approach that with the young quarterbacks looking to replace him? Do you talk about off-field behavior with the young guys?

COACH SUMLIN: Is this the SEC Media Days (smiling)?

No, that's a great question about the Cleveland Browns. Anybody else got something (laughter)?

Q. I wanted to ask you about the new SEC Network. What does that mean for recruiting and the program's profile?

COACH SUMLIN: I don't know what it means for those companies. I can tell you what it means for the SEC. There's such a focus on football. But as I talk to the other coaches in our programs, I look at the programming that's available, women's basketball, baseball, volleyball, all the things that every other program, every other sports program in our athletic department wants, they want exposure. They want the same type of exposure that football gets, or maybe men's basketball.

So I think what the SEC Network does, yeah, it's great for us, it's great for content from our

schools. You're able to put your story out probably a little bit more than you could have over a network or over the Internet. But I think the big positive is the ability for our other sports to be shown nationally, to get their brand out, for them to be able to recruit nationally, which they do.

To keep our league strong, I think commissioner said it best yesterday when he was talking about the number of championships across the board that the SEC has competed in.

I think the SEC Network brings that kind of strength, that kind of value across the board, not just for football, but for every sport. I know our coaches across the board in our athletic department are excited about it.

Q. When you first came here, I think you had six questions the first year about how in the world this program would ever compete in the SEC. After that it was criticism inside of Texas that because you were playing in the SEC, you would somehow be hurt with in-state recruiting in the state of Texas. Through every objective measurement you're dominating in the state of Texas. Similar to your last answer, have you found that kids have magically discovered the SEC in Texas?

COACH SUMLIN: I think it's a combination of a lot of things. I think it was the right time. I think the combination, as you said, with the questions we had the first year, they've changed.

Moving to the SEC is one thing. But if we had got our brains beat out like everybody thought, I don't think recruiting would be going as well anyway if we're in the SEC. You've got to come in this league and compete.

With that being said, like I said before, we haven't accomplished what we wanted to accomplish. We've got a ways to go.

You look at where we are, particularly in the West, in terms of depth, that's what we're recruiting to. We had Thursday night in York, it was a great night. We had three guys drafted in the first round. Now, that's the good news. Bad news, that's the only three guys we had drafted.

Friday, Saturday and Sunday went by, we didn't have another guy drafted. You look at the top of our league, LSU, Alabama have nine and eight guys drafted, that speaks to depth across the board, whether they're seniors, juniors, underclassmen or not.



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For us to be where we need to be, we need to be talented but we need to increase our depth. That comes from the only two ways I know how to do it, player development like I talked about before. I think our staff is doing a great job of that right now. We're going to have to do that because this league is as tough Sunday through Friday and the rest of the year as it is on Saturday.

You look up in recruiting, there's really, really talented players playing in this league and they're well-coached.

I think that's not just a statement you're making out of air, because there are more guys drafted out of this league than any other league in the country.

Q. Can you talk about when you go into a season with a quarterback, then in the early games as lights are bright, the adjustments you have to make and what you find out about that quarterback as that goes along?

COACH SUMLIN: Well, it depends on the guy. You've got a couple different guys as you get into it over the course of time. Some guys can handle more than others. You guys have heard me say I was guilty of not giving Johnny enough that first Florida game.

Now, it's one thing to be able to adjust as a coach, but I'm not big on just drawing stuff up in the dirt on Saturday afternoon if a guy hadn't practiced it.

You have to really have a feel for what a guy can handle and you really don't have that feel until you get in an environment. Fortunately that game at home, a fabulous environment with Game Day being there. But this will be different. We'll be at South Carolina, a night game, on the road. Probably whoever the quarterback is, I'll be his only friend at that point.

We'll get to know each other probably really well in that locker room before we go out there and a lot during the game.

You don't know. Some guys handle that, some guys thrive off of that, some guys don't. We'll put guys in some situations where we'll try to keep the pressure on them a little bit during fall camp. But with the two guys we have, you know, some people would argue, McElroy is here, if you're the quarterback at Southlake Carroll, you've been through pressure because you're supposed to win the state every year. Kyle Allen has been through a lot, Elite 11, recruiting.

Both these guys have shown the ability to be resilient. Both have been through it a little bit

as high school and younger players. Certainly none of them have been through what they're going to face that day.

It's our job to try to give them a plan that they can execute, number one, but number two gets back to what I talked about earlier, about the other guys on the field. The other guys on the field making the offense quarterback friendly, and the quarterback not having to do everything on his own.

Q. You've been in the Texas corridor, the Big 12 at Oklahoma, Houston a long time, recruiting that area. Are you surprised to any extent at how quickly you've been able to gain a foothold as the number one recruiter in the Texas area over UT?

COACH SUMLIN: If I was surprised, I wouldn't have taken the job. How is that (smiling)?

No, I've been around, like you said, for a long time. Not just there, but I was recruiting Texas when I was at Purdue. We've got a lot of ties there, know a lot of people.

Being at the University of Houston for four years was a great transition for me from Oklahoma from recruiting Houston. Knowing people in the state, knowing how things are done, what the high school coaches expect.

We've got great high school football in the state of Texas. There's a lot of pride, and high school coaches take a lot of pride in how they approach the game. I understand that. We get that. Because of that, I think the transition for me from a recruiting standpoint, not as a head coach, just X's and O's, dealing with everything else, but from a recruiting standpoint, the transition has been probably easier than it would be for most.

Q. With so much youth and a new quarterback, would you call this almost a transitional year, a year away from being a serious SEC contender, or could it happen this year?

COACH SUMLIN: I don't know. We have our own expectations, I'll put it that way. We have to because year one, nobody expected anything out of us. Last year, we were expected to beat the Green Bay Packers.

I have to have a reasonable expectation for what we try to do. We try to talk about things. We don't have a whole lot of signs around our place. One of them is, No excuses. The other

thing is, It's about us.

What we try to do is be the very, very best team that we can be on Saturday. That's from a developmental standpoint, from a practice standpoint.

The buy-in factor that first year was, Listen, we've got enough talent. If we're playing the best we can play, we're going to be good enough to play with anybody, and we'll see what happens at the end.

Even though these guys are young, on some parts of the team, some parts we're not, but in some phases we're young, they're talented players. It's our job to get them in the right place, to have them playing at a high level.

Our expectations are not going to change. We don't have in this business, and you know this, we don't have time for a bunch of rebuilding years. There would be another guy standing up here real quick.

We're going to try to go out there, win every game, put our guys in a position to do so, with the mentality that we are here to win. Just to say, you know, this is just one of those years, I don't think I've ever done that as a coach, as a head coach or as an assistant.

Q. Steve Spurrier was in earlier and he complimented you on your coaching record and skills, then he really complimented you on your salary negotiating skills. What thoughts do you have about matching up against him in the opening game?

COACH SURLIN: The question didn't have anything to do with your comment. Just had to get that out there, didn't you, right (smiling)? See you guys stirring the pot, trying to bring me in. It's year three, you're not going to get me on that (laughter).

No, I consider him and Jerry great family friends. I think you guys know we went on a trip a year and a half ago, two years ago, with Bob Stoops, went to Southern Ireland, played some golf, hung out and talked some football.

But as a young coach growing up, it's hard to say he wasn't the standard. He is the standard. You look at what he's done at South Carolina, three 11-win seasons. That's incredible in this league. South Carolina, the recruiting that has gone on, playing in a championship game, no matter where you are in the country, what conference you're in, whatever it is, you cannot deny his accomplishments as a head coach.

You know, like I said the other day, he's been awful quiet. That means he must think they're pretty good. We're going to have our work cut out for us going there the first game.

You know what, I'll say this, too. I've been a part of a couple different scenarios. It's a little bit easier to get your team's attention. When you turn that tape on, they know where they're going. When it gets 100-some degrees in Texas, it's about practice 17, guys don't want to do anything, it's a little bit easier to get guys' attention when they know they're going on the road to play South Carolina on the SEC Network for the world to watch.

I think it helps our sense of urgency to prepare. I kind of like playing games like that early in the season.

Q. What are some of the things you saw over the spring and off-season that might give you some optimism that your defense has improved? Along with that, has Daeshon Hall developed to the point you feel he can be an everyday player?

COACH SURLIN: Daeshon, for those of you who don't know, is a defensive end. Played in the bowl game. Had both shoulders operated on at the end of the year. Had no business being out there.

Very, very athletic pass-rusher. One of the few guys we had that could do that. He's around 260 now. He's a guy that came in around 225, 228. Another guy that shouldn't have played last year. Put him on the field.

He's 260, ready to go. We'll have some guys which we didn't have last year that can get their own pass-rush instead of trying to create pressure with blitzes and different situations.

So, you know, guys like he and Myles Garrett, some of the other, Julien Obioha, who has been starting since he was a freshman, those guys that can create their own pass-rush, which will give us a chance to keep our secondary intact, instead of bringing guys out of the back end, all that makes your defense a lot better. The ability to rotate those guys so they can stay fresh.

We signed a number of defensive ends last year as freshmen. A couple of them are going to have to play. But Daeshon Hall I think has the ability to be a real breakout player in this league.

Q. When you began your remarks, you

said something about understanding more about the culture, the recruiting process here. Can you give us an example of what you mean?

COACH SUMLIN: I told you before the first year everybody was hooting and hollering, were excited about our recruiting class. Before I go downstairs to the press conference, we were ranked 10th or whatever it was, 9th, I don't know, I go down to the press conference, and we're fourth in our own league and third in our own division.

You understand real quickly what recruiting's like in this league. That's why the level of play is so high. The combination of the coaching, the commitment facility-wise, the player development situations on our campuses and the level of student-athlete is incredible.

You go through the first couple years and you try to understand where you are as a program, what holes you need to fill, number one; then number two, as I said, I spoke about the big thing here is not only is this a line-of-scrimmage league, but the teams that win consistently have depth in that line of scrimmage on both sides, particularly on defense.

So what we've set out to do over the course of the last couple years is to catch up in that race and put ourselves in a position where we have that kind of depth, size and speed, particularly in the front on defense.

I think obviously we have a plan for that. But we're headed down that path right now. The key is to try to develop your young players, keep developing them, and win games, because everybody likes to go places where you win.

So what we've done is we've given our program the best chance to win over the course of the last two years with what we've done offensively, maybe in the kicking game also.

Does that mean we're going to continue down that path? Maybe, maybe not. As we become more of a complete team, you know, we might evolve into a little bit different offense, a little bit different defense.

Does that mean we're going to huddle and do that? Probably not. But we might change up a little bit as time goes on.

KEVIN TRAINOR: Thank you, Coach Sumlin, for your time.

COACH SUMLIN: Thank you.

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