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An interview with:

COACH GARY PINKEL

KEVIN TRAINOR: We're joined by University of Missouri head Coach Gary Pinkel.

COACH PINKEL: Good morning, everybody. I appreciate y'all being here. I know it's day three for you guys. I guess there's day four. If we get league expansion, you'll be here for two weeks (smiling).

Like everybody else, it's been a process of working hard, doing all the right things since we got back in January. Process-oriented. Sounds boring, but that's what we do. Ultimately what we're doing is trying to make our football team better each and every day.

When we go into a different year, as the years change, in '13 to '14, you lose your seniors, you bring new players in, it's a constant transition of the leadership and change of the team. That's what we work on all the time at Mizzou.

We're excited about the year. We've worked very hard. We're honored to be in the SEC. I tell people all the time, it's like being in the NFL. Every time you play a game, you're playing a great team, anybody can beat you.

We focus pretty much at Mizzou on ourselves and us playing our best football game which gives us an opportunity to win and we're going to continue to do that.

KEVIN TRAINOR: We'll continue with questions.

Q. Obviously Maty had a lot of experience or some experience last year. As you start this season with new players around him, is there kind of a feeling-out process the first few weeks to see what he does well with the guys he has?

COACH PINKEL: First of all, the good news/bad news about last year is the bad news is we lost our starting quarterback for four games in the fourth quarter against Georgia. The good

news is we had a redshirt freshman that came in and played at a high level. That experience obviously I think helped him tremendously. I think certainly our players have a lot of confidence in him.

I think you're always kind of feeling yourself out in terms of what personnel you're going to use and how that's going to work out.

We lost quite a few receivers, good ones. We got Darius White coming back, and Bud Sasser, coming back, Jimmie Hunt, three guys that caught a lot of footballs. So we're very fortunate to have some guys back.

In our offense, we can use runningbacks as receivers. We can use tightends more. There's a lot of things we can do.

Our challenge I think is going to be into August, which personnel sets are we going to settle on going in. They worked very hard all summer long. Maty, with his leadership, has done a great job. Also the seniors.

That's really the process we're going to take offensively, at least going into the first week.

Q. You lost two pretty accomplished defensive ends last year in Sam and Ealy. Two guys that are coming back. Doesn't seem that position is taking much of a step back if at all. How would you explain the depth you have at that position?

COACH PINKEL: Shane Ray, Markus Golden both played at a high level a year ago, and alternating with Michael Sam and Kony Ealy. I think you're always trying to build depth. I wish I had that depth at every position.

We've been fortunate on the defensive line for the past eight years, first-round, second-round draft picks, and we've produced at a high level. Craig Kuligowski is our defensive line coach.

We have Marcus Loud and Charles Harris, two redshirt freshmen, and they're both 6'5", 6'6", 250 guys that can potentially be great players.

We like to play more than two players. The depth of those young players, certainly we need them to produce. We have some other guys

competing also.

Q. Without exploring the off-the-field impact, talk about not having Dorial Green-Beckham? How is that going to impact you offensively?

COACH PINKEL: We lost a really great player. I wish Dorial the best.

The most important thing, you make mistakes, you have a chance to learn lessons, and I think he will. The good news is he can do a lot of great things for himself as a person.

I think you can lose a player in the middle of August that you thought was going to be your best player. For us, we knew going into spring football our challenges there.

I mentioned we have three guys that played an awful lot last year, one or two started a few of those games, too. The multiple use of personnel really. We have three high-level runningbacks in our program right now. Guys that I think are high-level SEC runningbacks. They also catch the ball well. Good young tightends.

We don't have to replace a receiver to a receiver necessarily. There are other ways we can go. That's our challenge getting into August, how we're going to handle that.

Q. After playing A&M this year, you don't face them till '21. Are you going to miss the Aggies?

COACH PINKEL: We played them for a long, long time, obviously in the Big 12 also. Great respect for that school, that program.

Things like that just happen. Initially I thought that might be our rival game. Now our rival game is Arkansas, which is going to be a great fit for us also.

But, you know, when you make this transition, things are going to happen till it settles down. The conference thought this was the best direction to go. We certainly support it.

Q. A couple years ago you, like Coach Sumlin, faced questions about whether your team was ready for the SEC. After a rough year the first year with some injuries, this year you came back and won the SEC East. Do you feel there's any vindication in that? How do you think you keep that momentum going given some of the players you're losing this year?

COACH PINKEL: First of all, you keep it going by winning. That's real simple.

I don't really get into that. I don't get into what is said or what's predicted. Someone apologized to me a little while ago the way they voted after this thing. I said, I don't know how you voted for us, I don't really care.

When I became the head football coach at Missouri, I wanted to be respected in the Big 12, and now it's the SEC, and nationally. Not only do you have responsibility to the league and to your school, but to this league we have responsibility. I just want to be respected.

You do that hopefully not just in winning football games. Our graduation rate is one of the best in the country and our APR rankings are in the top 10. Not only in just that, but in other ways, too.

Q. How well has Maty Mauk taken to the leadership role at quarterback?

COACH PINKEL: I think he's a very natural leader. I knew that when he was in high school. He was one of those guys that he loves to play football, loves to compete. I think he's a dual-threat guy. He can run. He's got very good speed. Put a lot of pressure on the defense utilizing both of those things.

His leadership is very non-threatening, too. First of all, he's got a great work ethic. He's a winner. Players know it. He's a remarkable competitor. They know it. They respect the way he leads 'cause he leads in a very, very positive way.

We're very fortunate to have a young player like him. That's why he did so well last year when we threw him in there as a freshman. There's a reason guys are like that. We're very fortunate to have him.

Certainly if you ask him, he's got a lot of things to prove, too. He's the guy now. But I guarantee there's no one more excited about getting going and playing than that guy.

Q. Another Maty question. Physically what is it that makes him a good quarterback for the SEC? Did he surprise you how well he handled things when he got pressed into the starting role?

COACH PINKEL: No, he didn't. How he played in the Georgia game, fourth quarter, two-point lead, then the Florida game how he played. We played him up in Columbia. After the game was over, he came off the field in that game,

I said to him, I said, Great, great game.

He just gave me a smile and said, Thanks, coach.

I said, Guess what, it doesn't surprise me at all. That's the way he was in high school. He was a great player in high school. Highly recruited player. He's just got the 'it' factor.

Obviously you have to block and give him time to throw the football, establish our running game, make plays. It's not all Maty Mauk. But I think he's a player that has great, great potential.

Q. What have you seen so far with Markus Golden, Lucas Vincent and Matt Hoch that tells you you'll be able to equal their output or surpass it?

COACH PINKEL: You always want to be able to do it. Bottom line, it's got to happen. We're going to find out.

I think when you lose good people, it happens in college football all the time, it's not a surprise when you lose people. That's what recruiting is about. That's what player development is about. I'm very pleased with some of the young players that are coming in.

We need those guys to perform at a high level. I saw Marcus Loud and Charles Harris the other day. Two backup defensive ends that I think have the potential to be great players by the time they leave Mizzou.

I said, This isn't about playing well in two or three years, we need you playing well this year. In a very positive way I said it to them.

That's always our challenge in our business is getting your depth, having the players, are they ready to play in a championship in the SEC. We ask that after every practice of every player. Not just the defensive line, but everybody, we talk about our starters. Then I'll be asking about some of the backup players, Are we getting close? Yeah, we're getting close.

Guess what, we got to get them ready to play. That's not only a challenge that goes to the responsibility of the player, but certainly to the assistant coach and myself.

Q. What impact did it have on the program winning the division in only your second year as far as the Missouri brand?

COACH PINKEL: I think it's been tremendously positive. Great respect for the SEC. It was obviously very, very positive, especially coming off the year we had before. It was not the injuries. It was not all those other things. It was

just we weren't very good, we shouldn't be in the SEC.

We stay healthy, it gives us a chance. I'll go back to that year. If I would have coached better, we could have won one more game, could have gone onto a bowl.

It's been very positive for us in terms of recruiting in every way. But this is a new year. Great challenge. We want to continue to compete at a high level. That's our challenge this year as we go into year number three.

Q. What made Missouri such a good turnover team last year? Is 32 forced turnovers reasonable to expect again this year?

COACH PINKEL: Well, our goal is to be in the top 10 in the nation in turnover margin every year. We don't do national goals at all, but that's the one we have. There's no stat that will have an impact on winning or losing more than that stat.

We talk about that all the time, talk about protecting the football. The defense's responsibility is to get the ball back to our offense any way we can get that done.

Obviously, turnovers are a huge impact on winning or losing. Twice in my career I've been number one in the nation in turnover margins. Then we've had years where we work on it just as hard and don't get as many turnovers.

I wish I had the answer for it because I would be in the top 10 every year.

Everybody works hard on it. We have a huge emphasis on it at Mizzou on it. I think we made a lot of progress there. If I had the answers for that, I'd be in a high rise in New York City with a phone talking to every coach in America. Getting that turnover margin on your side is huge.

Q. Are you pleased with the structure of the SEC in terms of the Eastern and Western Division for your team?

COACH PINKEL: Yeah, I think it's great. You look at us on the map, we're in the northwest part of the league. It's a great fit. Our fans have been awesome.

We make a transition as players and coaches, but I tell our fans this is a whole different level here. Our fans got it. I'm proud of them all. They got it. We travel. The SEC fans, they travel big. We travel big.

So as we've learned and matured, I'm very, very proud of our fans. They've done a

remarkable job.

Q. Are you satisfied with the rules regarding early player entry into the NFL? Do you think it needs tweaking or changing? How does it affect your recruiting with the players coming out early?

COACH PINKEL: We've had several players leave early. I think the frustration for all of us as coaches is for players that for the wrong reasons go out early. You see a significantly high percentage of players that don't even get drafted.

What happens is most of those guys are leaving early, and they're giving up school at the time, too. Not that they're not going to get back to it. I don't know.

The good news is I think our commissioner, all the commissioners, but our commissioner does a great job. They're getting together with the NFL, talking a little bit to them about how can we do a better job of making sure that the right guys are leaving a year early or two years early. To me that's what we got to work together on.

I don't think they like it either. They've got guys, a significant number of players, a little bit more than a third, didn't get drafted. I don't know the exact number. But I think we need to tweak it to make it better if we can.

Again, my concern is guys that leave early, don't get drafted, they don't make the team, they haven't graduated. We need to try to help those kids make better decisions.

Q. When you recruit kids, do you tell them that coming to Missouri is a way to get to the NFL?

COACH PINKEL: Well, I think in the last five years, we've been in the top five in first-round picks in the last five years. We talk about the NFL all the time.

What I do, though, is I tell players, If you're ready, all the information we get from the NFL, scouts, everything else, if you're ready, if you want to go, I think it's the right thing to do if you can be a first- or second-round pick. That part of it.

We don't recruit players and say, Listen, you play three years here. We don't take that approach.

What I'm responsible for is graduating all these guys, too. That's as important to me. Obviously I got to keep my job by winning, but that's as important to me as anything I do.

Q. Michael Sam's story this spring transcended college football, a huge cultural moment. For somebody that knew him much better than any of us, what was it like seeing him become a national symbol? Your program received a lot of positive attention. How has that affected the profile of Missouri football?

COACH PINKEL: Well, I hope that's all in a positive way. I think for the most part that's what it's been, from my standpoint. I'm proud of our football program, our athletic department. Infrastructure. I think we talk about respect all the time for people.

So I thought that and a number of things that we do internally with our athletic department and football, gave us an opportunity to be able to handle something like that, maybe different than somebody else would have been able to handle us.

It also tells a lot for the closeness of the team. The next morning after he came out that Sunday night, I was on Mike & Mike that next morning. When I did that interview, I knew that interview was going to be different than any interview I'd ever done before. It was going to be much bigger than football or Mizzou. The societal influence. This is really important in terms of that.

Very proud of everybody, how we handled it. I hope five years from now, you know, there's no discussions about this, that we've moved on, we respect people for what they are and what they do.

Q. There's an emphasis in this league on playing highly rated recruits early at freshmen. You had a lot of success with your offensive line. You're a big proponent of redshirting. Do you think your player development system is different than the rest of the league?

COACH PINKEL: That's a good question. I'm glad you asked that.

In the last seven years, even with our crummy season in 2012, we're the eighth winningest BCS program in the country for those five years. If you took our recruiting, I think our so-called rating, I'd say we're between 28 and 32 average, somewhere like that. Something's wrong there.

All I'm going to say about that, I think our recruiting process is different. I think we have a system that we believe in. That's what we do at

Mizzou. I think our Player Development Program is second to none. We call it 'Mizzou Made.' Not only that, but our APR ranking academically is one of the best in the nation.

First-round draft picks, like I mentioned before. We're doing a lot of good things. How many stars a guy has next to him, we never looked at once in recruiting. I don't care where we're ranked. If we're 13th or 35th, doesn't matter to me. We have a system in place.

I think we do a very good job of developing players. I'm very proud of all the people that make all those things happen.

Q. I know you guys played Toledo last year. You're playing them this year. You're going there. What does it mean to you to be able to play against that team?

COACH PINKEL: Well, I was head football coach at Toledo for 10 years before I came to the University of Missouri. We played them last year in Columbia. We're going to play them in the glass bowl. They have a tradition of beating good football teams. I was part of it and it continues.

As I usually am, I'm scared to death of not only that game, but all the games.

That being said, we've had great experiences there. We won as a program more than anybody has ever won there in a career. Great people. I always tell people, It's not real difficult who I want to win the game. That's kind of easy.

In a guarding way, I'm excited about going back.

Q. In the era of fast-break football, what is your interpretation of the pace of the game and do you think an eighth official is going to slow the game down or get in your way?

COACH PINKEL: We came from the Big 12. The Big 12 has been doing the fast-paced thing for the last seven years. I think most coaches will tell you, they probably play faster in that league than anywhere.

I don't know where all this started with. I just know this, okay: never once in all those years in the fastest league I think that plays football in the Big 12 did I have my team doctor, my trainer, any of my coordinators walk into my office and say, I'm concerned about the health of our football team. It didn't happen ever. Didn't happen last year or the year before.

It's another form of football. I think it's great that that's another component to football and

being creative. But I don't buy the health issue in any way. It's never happened. No one has ever come into me all those years and said, Gosh, I'm really concerned about the health of our teams playing these fast-paced offenses.

I think it's fiction. Fiction based on that. Never even come up before.

Q. Will Muschamp said he received a call from you late last year, you just expressing you could imagine what he was going through. What made you feel the need to reach out to him? What were your thoughts about the year they went through?

COACH PINKEL: Well, I just think, you know, when I see people have experiences similar to what we had, been a part of, I think what happens is I've had people reach out to me before, how important that's been to me.

When I get an opportunity to do those kind of things, that's what I try to do, for those reasons.

Q. You touched earlier on your player development system. How in any way has moving from the Big 12 footprint to the SEC footprint changed your approach on who you recruit, who you target in recruiting?

COACH PINKEL: We always try to recruit and target the best players, and more so the best players with speed potential and strength potential, size potential. We can teach them how to play football. You can't teach a guy to run 4.5 if he runs 4.9. Those things we've always done.

We've not done anything different at all in terms of our selection. We always try to get the best player. We always have. We've not done anything different at all recruiting in this league that we did in the Big 12.

Q. In 2012, at the Kentucky/Missouri game, there was talk of you having a renovation project underway. I was wondering where that stands at the present time.

COACH PINKEL: We have renovation going on right now. It's really just awesome. That's the league. The SEC has had a huge influence on that. We talked about those things prior to getting in the SEC. We have some other things going on with the new indoor facility coming up.

I always tell our alumni, I tell them, If you drive by and you don't see cranes up, then

something is wrong. In this league you better be building, making yourself better all the time. Our administration gets that.

In expressing my opinion of getting in this league several years ago, if you're not committed to investing, don't get in the league because it will swallow you up. You know what an honor it is to coach in the SEC.

Q. I noticed your schedule again is non-conference heavy to begin. With the Big 12 influence that you have in your background, is that something you try to do or, scheduling-wise, does it just pan out the way it is?

COACH PINKEL: That's the way we did it in the Big 12. When you make an adjustment schedule-wise, you change leagues, it takes a while to get it back to kind of the consistency the way the rest of the league is.

I would expect that to change a little bit as the schedules go out.

In the Big 12, for the most part, occasionally there was a game they would move up early. But we played all your non-conference games early generally, not always, then you start all your conference games.

Because we had spots open in those areas before, that's what we had to keep. That I suggest will change and lean more towards how the SEC does.

Certainly TV will have an influence on that in the future.

KEVIN TRAINOR: Coach Pinkel, thank you for your time.

COACH PINKEL: Thank you.

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