

**July 16, 2014**



An interview with:

## **COACH BRET BIELEMA**

KEVIN TRAINOR: We're now joined by Arkansas head coach Coach Bret Bielema.

COACH BIELEMA: Thank you. It's great to be back. Just a couple things up front. I just wanted to say thank you to this room. Obviously you have chosen a profession. You're in this room for a reason. You love your job and what it brings. For me as a head coach, I enjoy working with our media, sometimes a little bit more than others.

The part that I think is truly unique, I feel this way every year I've been a head coach, it's never wavered, anything I can do to make your job a little easier, I try to do. I never try to stand in the way of information or anything but truth. Sometimes you may not want to agree with it or hear it, but I respect what you do and how you do it. It makes our game as great as it can be.

I think all the time about the SEC, especially coming here. I love to coach the game. I know that you report it, you love it. Our players love being a part of it. Our fans love being a part of it. That's what makes it so cool. So appreciate that.

I'll take a minute to talk about last year. That's about all I need to do. During the spring, summer, winter conditioning, I thought we had a group of young men that wanted to get better.

Three young men I brought with me today, Trey Flowers, best thing I could do was to keep him in our program. He's a 3.0-plus student, Academic All-SEC. Probably one of the most tremendous workers. Anything that we ask him to do, selfish, unselfish. If we ask him to rush a passer, drop into zone coverage, he just says, I'll do it. He doesn't ask questions. He represents everything you can ask for.

One of the disadvantages I had as a head coach at Arkansas, I didn't get to go into the home of every young man on our team. I think you learn a lot about a kid when you recruit him when he's

16, 17, 18 years old. You find out what made him who he is. You find out who made him what he was and what can make him better when you get him.

I had never been in Trey's home. I met his mom and dad, a couple of his family members. Last December, I had a chance to go over and visit with Trey and his family in his home about the decision. It was worth its weight in gold for me to find out exactly what it was that made him tick. An honor to have him back with us.

He's a kid that will be done with his degree when his eligibility finishes up in December, hopefully move on to a great NFL career.

Also on the defensive side of the ball, I also brought Alan Turner. Someone that was our leading tackler a year ago. It's never a good sign when your safety is your leader tackler. But it was the truth.

He was a kid that got better every game. He is not a starter at the beginning of the year, but got better every day. Really bought into what we were asking him to do. Tremendous competitor. Plays with a lot of pride. I know to wear that Hog on the side of his helmet means a lot to him. He is a guy that I really think might be posing himself into setting himself up for a special senior year.

Offensively I brought Brey Cook. He's actually got more starts on the offensive side of the football than anybody else on our roster. He's a young man that has continued to fight and get better every day. He was playing tackle when we first got there. We switched him to guard. We ended up bouncing him back out to tackle. He flourished in every game, playing at a level that he just continues to impress us, amaze us. His leadership skills have gone off the charts since we've been there. He does everything that we could actually dream of as coaches.

Honored to have those three guys represent us here. I think you should know I get a kick out of reading certain things. I didn't bring the flashiest, sexiest, cutest. Everybody wants me to bring the quarterback, the pretty boys, the ones that are always popular. I brought three seniors

that represent what Hog Football is all about. They represent all of the things on and off the field. They represent everything I want in my program.

As a head coach, that's all I care about. I don't care about what the outside world perceives I should do, I care about what makes our program better. When you take three seniors to represent our program, and I'll go back and show them footage and video clips, examples of what they say, what they speak to represent our program, speaks volumes and it will continue to grow from there.

About this season, we had some transition on the coaching staff. We lost our defensive coordinator, we lost a defensive line coach, another secondary coach. It allowed me to improve our coaching staff in general.

We stayed status quo on offense. Had some transition on the off-the-field positions with our GAs. Defensively to add Robb Smith, what he brings to the table, couldn't be happier. I think he's going to bring a flavor of defense that is aggressive. Lets our guys play with a simplistic manner. Lets them have a little bit of fun.

To add Rory Segrest as our defensive line coach has been a huge addition. In the back end to bring in Clay Jennings that I brought from TCU has been a huge asset and someone I can't wait to see the results on the football field.

Offensively we bring back a starting quarterback in Brandon Allen that has had probably one of the best, oddest seasons that I've ever seen a positional player have, let alone a quarterback.

He's gotten stronger, he's gotten better mentally. He understands expectations that he needs to fulfill as a quarterback. Around him he's got three runningbacks that I think are exceptional in Jonathan Williams, Alex Collins, Korliss Marshall.

At tightend we have Hunter Henry back who was a freshman sensation. But A.J. Derby, in my opinion, may be one of the surprises of our football team, but one of the best stories in the SEC this year. I think he's shown us in practice what he can be is truly exceptional.

We have an offensive line that lost a couple tremendous players, but overall regained strength. Hopefully will be one of the biggest strengths in our program, not just this year, but for years to come.

Some of you that know my history, you know that I believe in building from the ground up and the offensive line play will continue to get

better. We'll continue to recruit at a high level at that position.

Wide receivers will probably be one of the greatest positions of emphasis during fall camp. Jared Cornelius and Cody Hollister two receivers that we added last year in January were very impressive during the spring drills.

I think Keon Hatcher, Eric Hawkins, a couple other players from a year ago, Demetrius Wilson back for his senior will be great on defense.

It all starts up front again. Have Trey Flowers return. Darius Philon, DeMarcus Hodge, couple of guys that got a little bit of limited role play last year in the middle that really jumped up in the middle.

Brooks Ellis has continued to move forward. Martell Spaight had an incredible spring. A guy that became a play-maker I believe he can be. Braylon Mitchell at the Sam linebacker continues to show great leadership and I think can have a great senior year in the back end.

In addition to Alan Turner, to have Rohan Gaines, really four or five corners that might have been a position of weakness, if you probably talk to our opponents. If you could open up their scouting reports, it would have said expose our corners whenever possible. We took note of that. I would be surprised if that's not one of the most improved positions on our team from a year ago to this year.

In the kicking game, we have a young man that if you get a chance to interview him, you'll definitely want to do him, Sam Irwin-Hill is from Australia. He has the accent, the humor, quotation skills to gain your interest in a short amount of time. He can actually punt with both his right foot and his left foot. If anybody else in here can do that, I beg you to show me [oops]. He's a very talented player and a guy that will be an effective weapon for us.

Our kicking game will be open to John Henson. We signed a freshman, Cole Hedlund, who is one of the most decorated kickers, not only in the state of Texas, but the country.

Excited for those units to work together, excited for the season, and open it up for some questions.

**Q. You were close in a couple of SEC games at the end last year. What kept you from breaking through and how close do you feel you are to your first SEC win?**

COACH BIELEMA: I think that's a great

question. I think the first thing that I have to make our players understand, and our coaches, every game is won or lost, but a lot of teams lose the game before they win it. I mean that. If you don't understand it, it's probably why you don't coach.

There's a lot of times you do things that prevent you from winning more so than the team that execute it. I'm not taking anything away from what the other team does or anything like that. But as a coach, you have to be mindful of what did you do to prevent it. If you don't have any answers, you have a problem.

If we can't do it, don't call it. Don't try to get them to do it. Understand what our players can execute it.

On the flipside, let our players know if our players do something right in the second quarter, do it in the third and fourth.

As close as we are, the proof is going to be in our pudding in every aspect of our program. If you sat down and interviewed my AD, I think he would tell you in every aspect other than wins, or people that are inside our program on a daily basis, you can't do anything but be happy with what we've done. We've increased GPA, accountability, our APR. We were very close too becoming ineligible for bowl activity because of our APR when I took over.

All those things are skyrocketing. Our community service. Our kids aren't getting in trouble. Off-the-field issues. We're doing positive things that lead me to believe they're learning and understanding what we're asking them to do. When that thing comes full circle, we're going to start to win. When we win, it's going to be able to maintain a winning style than this other thing that we've been living through.

**Q. Monday Gus Malzahn said he has respect for you and that the two of you 'communicate'. I was wondering, what do you communicate about? Have you had a face-to-face conversation about player safety?**

COACH BIELEMA: First and foremost, I get what you guys have to do. It's a natural story. I get it. We don't necessarily see eye-to-eye on certain things.

But I think the greatest thing I've learned in life is you respect the opposite of what you believe in more than anything. By that I mean, Gus runs an offensive style and philosophy that is completely opposite of what I believe in, but who can argue with his success. That makes me respect him even more.

As far as communicating, we've talked on the phone a couple different times about different issues. None of them have been player-safety related, I can assure you of that.

We do have conversations within the room, SEC coaches that are very respectful, very true. I think he doesn't hold anything back. I don't hold anything back. I have a tremendous respect for him and his staff, what they did. I think it's a tool to motivate my crew right now, to be a team that a year ago wasn't thought to be able to accomplish much. To be where they are at the end of last year speaks volumes about that staff and those players. Nothing but a tremendous amount of respect.

I can't say that we're breaking bread together and going to dinner when we can, but I'm not throwing bread at him and rocks and everything else. It's just what it is. Greatly respected.

**Q. Your thoughts about the rivalry with Missouri. Obviously you haven't played much. Do you feel like it's being forced a little bit? What do you see as the future prospects for this yearly game?**

COACH BIELEMA: You know what, whatever it is, it is what it is. I think the part I really believe in is no matter what the situation is, you wrap your arms around it, kiss it, hug it, make it great.

We've been told we're going to be playing Missouri. And as our permanent crossover, we've been told it's going to be played on Friday after Thanksgiving. That's awesome. I don't think you could ask for anything better.

For us to be able to play with a team that represented the West, a team that played at the end of the year, a team that a year ago represented the East, nobody else gets to do that. Nobody else gets to have that schedule. It's awesome. Voted number one toughest in the country. That's absolutely awesome.

Last year we were five, we tried to move up, we got number one. That was awesome.

So I think the part that we have to embrace is, it is what it is. I think to play on a Friday, especially being Missouri, a border battle, all that entails, have the recruiting things, all the little things around it, I think it can be built into something special.

**Q. We hear a lot about recruiting players, but we don't hear a lot about recruiting coaches. You mentioned you made some staff changes in the off-season. The process of replacing coaches, tell us a little bit about that. Are there back channels, you know some assistants might be looking to move, recruiting things, that process, how it works.**

COACH BIELEMA: That's a great question.

I think that I learned this one early on. I learned this one from my predecessors, whether it was when I was with Coach Fry, Coach Ferentz, Coach Snyder, Barry Alvarez. I remember being around Coach Ferentz when he took over Iowa. He began to bring in his coaches. I was the only holdover. Chuck Long was there, but he wasn't involved in a lot of the hires.

I would sit in every meeting, watch Coach Ferentz interview the coaches. I would ask, Why are you talking to this guy?

I sat in the car, and Coach Ferentz was interviewing someone, he was talking to Coach Fisher that had been in the Titans, I was psyched I was in the car when that happened. I thought that was cool.

He thinks the world of him, he respects him, I made this phone call. That's how the whole thing started.

When I hired my first staff, I had nine coaches I had to fire. I had a staff I hadn't been a part of, I had to fire seven of them. I kept two from the University of Wisconsin. Paul Chryst and Henry Mason were great assets to my staff. I went and hired seven other coaches. None were my friends.

The only one I knew was Kerry Cooks, now at Notre Dame. I never hired friends. Robb Smith this year. You may not want to tell him he wasn't a friend of mine, just an acquaintance. But he's a guy I'd known for a long time and shared a lot of memories with. I think that's a positive thing.

You have to understand, when I got hired, I was 34 years old. I didn't know a lot of people. I had to rely upon coaches that were older than me that I didn't know. Thankfully we had a lot of success. I learned some things then that really helped me now.

The three I got, Rory Segrest is probably not a sexy hire. He was at Stanford. I first became aware of him because I started watching Stanford, we were getting ready to play them. Their defensive tackles were awesome. They were incredible on special teams.

I do this brilliant thing. I go to the Internet and I look up who their D-tackle and special teams coach is. It's the same guy. I walk up to him after the game, and said, I just think the world of what you coach.

Lo and behold, a couple months later I call him and ask him to apply for a D-line job.

Robb Smith I'd known for a long time because I knew what he was, what he stood for. The reason I hired Robb Smith wasn't because we shared an apartment together for three months, not because I knew his wife, set him up, he still owes me money on that, it's because everywhere he went he got promoted.

He went to Maine. The next year he was coordinator, assistant head coach. He goes to Rutgers, he's a corners coach, then a linebacker coach, then a defensive coordinator. Then they take him to the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, he gets promoted.

You don't promote people that you don't know are good.

Last and foremost, Clay Jennings, who I didn't know at all. I maybe met him once or twice on the recruiting trail, I really wanted the best DB coach in the country. I wanted somebody that coached both the secondary, corner and safety positions. I didn't care what background they were from. Small school, big school, I didn't care, except I wanted the best.

Here comes this guy coaching at TCU, Gary Patterson has great defenses, he's been part of it for six years. Randy Shannon had worked with him. I found him on my own, brought him in for an interview.

Randy Shannon, I don't like to talk about it, but I beat Randy in a bowl game. He was the head coach at Miami. A lot of times that becomes adversarial. It built a friendship between us. That two weeks after the game I needed a position. I called and said, Do you know of anybody that might fit this position? This is what I'm looking for.

He gave me a great coach. I had him for one year and then the NFL took him away from me.

I built a relationship with Randy that has persevered to where we are now that makes that relationship so strong now.

To recruit coaches is a very unique thing if you're going to do it successfully.

**Q. First year in the SEC in the books,**

**what was the biggest culture shock for you switching from coaching in the Big Ten to the SEC?**

COACH BIELEMA: Winning versus losing. It's quite simple. I'd been able to have a tremendous amount of success, won three straight championships. That's why I came here. I didn't come here to lose.

I expect to go 3-9. On the same account, I didn't expect to win it my first year. What I've done is sustain what I believe helps you win. Understand that the only way to change the results of a 3-9 season is to change what you're doing.

We did a wholesale change. We're still a certain type of offense, defense. We're going to put an emphasis on special teams. We're just going to do it a lot better. We've done a lot of little things that are going to affect the big picture.

I get excited because the things we've done have shown they can win in this league. Year two, although we don't know the record yet, my full heart belief is it's going to be better than year one. That's going to be determined on a weekly basis, but I do know it's going to be better.

**Q. Last year was your first year in the SEC. What did you learn not just about your team and the conference, but about yourself?**

COACH BIELEMA: About myself? You know, I think the biggest thing I took away, especially after the season, is you have to be true to who you are, what you've been. Don't flinch. There's a lot of times there's some teams that go through some adversity, you know, for sure a team that doesn't win a game in their conference, they're going to change out philosophy, got a new idea, new this, new that. I believe you have to do what you do better.

You're going to change little things, absolutely. You're going to change personnel, change the way you do things, the way you communicate, but don't change what is the core fundamentals of what you believe in. I'm not going to a no-huddle hurry-up offense, cover-zero defense. We're going to stick to our principles and do it better. As a head coach I need to enforce that daily.

**Q. You made the comments that you weren't looking to have a player come in off of legal issues as a transfer. What kind of standard do you hold for players that transfer to your program?**

COACH BIELEMA: You know what, I think if I could take a moment just to educate that question and just others. The quote that got blown up. I didn't even know the day that I gave an interview, the story that another player had transferred to a different school that we used to recruit. Someone asked me the question about, we took Sebastian Tretola, a junior college transfer -- we actually took Cameron Jefferson, who is a kid from UNLV, that is going to transfer to us as a senior because of certain NCAA rules that allows a team that didn't hit an APR number to transfer.

What I said about it pertaining to Cameron is here is a person that had no social issues. When I take a transfer like in that situation, I'm going to take someone that I believe enhances our program.

Cameron was a junior captain. He's graduated from an undergrad before his senior year. He stands for everything that is right in college football. I'm going to bring him into our program because the people I have to appease more than anything, no media, no administrator, no fan, I have to appease our team.

When you have someone transferring in late in their career, they have to bring in a certain amount of value and a standard that we believe is core to what we are. Everybody is different, has their own philosophy. For me to have success, I need to bring in someone that I can say, Listen, this is what we're talking about, this is the standard we're trying to uphold, can you match it? That's how I go about our business.

**Q. Another coach today said the suggestion that fast-paced offenses pose a health issue. He called that fiction.**

COACH BIELEMA: What was that?

**Q. Another coach said the suggestion that the fast-paced offenses pose a health issue is fiction. Number one, have you softened your position on that at all? You play a lot of teams on your schedule this year that have that style of offense. Have you done anything different in preparation for playing that many teams with that style of play?**

COACH BIELEMA: Not to carry from last year, but I'm probably more of a reality-based movie guy more than fiction, I guess. I think I deal more in what I know, what I see, what I believe.

Have I softened in my view of fast-paced offenses? The only thing I'm going to say to that, if you ask me in that tense, you're asking me have I softened my view on player safety. The answer would be no. If I recruit somebody, bring them into my family, I'm going to do everything in my power to make sure they're the most well-equipped, educated to make player safety a premium in our program.

I really like the fact that last year we made a stance, a big stance in college football about targeting. I sat on the player committee two years ago. We didn't make such a big wave as we did this year when we talked about the 10-second rule. We made a huge statement in the player safety meeting to emphasize targeting. Look at the effect it had. It was very, very positive.

Every week I would show our players clips of players that were hit with targeting fouls and why they happened. It would lead to certain players being ejected from the game.

I firmly believe right now the reason Arkansas never had a call against them is because of the education we gave them as coaches.

So I firmly believe that, yes, our responsibility as coaches is player safety. However that comes about, whether it be a 10-second rule in the future, whether it be a substitution mandatory rule that a committee comes in place and sets in college football, I think the game is going to be a safer one because of it.

As far as playing no-huddle offenses, it is absolutely probably one of the most enjoyable things I can have as a coach. We played Oregon in the Rose Bowl. Lost a heartbreaker at the end. I believe it was a field goal or two-point difference. Whatever it was, it was a back-and-forth game. There's nothing more enjoyable than to see a no-huddle offense sitting on the sideline and can't stand it.

But to do that you have to play really good defense and you have to play well on offense. For my formula to work and complete wins, you have to be able to be good offensively, defensively and on special teams. All three have to work together.

A lot of times no-huddle offenses can play really good offense and bad defense and still win. That's just not how I'm going to work. I have seen a couple good fiction movies, though, so I know good fiction when I see it. Had to give you guys one to run (smiling).

**Q. You mentioned Cameron Jefferson a minute ago. What was it about him that you really liked that caused you to recruit him?**

COACH BIELEMA: I think it's a great question. I tell you what, I was sitting I believe in an airport and got an email from one of my coaches that said, Hey, another school in our conference was having a player from UNLV on the campus visit because of the APR rule that allows seniors to transfer because of the lack of APR that sets this whole thing in place.

I contact Jim Chaney. I said, Hey, just looking at our depth, what we need and what we are, they have a tight end, a couple offensive linemen, a wide receiver, if you want to take a peek, I think they have a middle linebacker, a safety. Take a peek.

Jim is great with personnel. He went through and said, Bret, the one guy I keep coming back to is Cameron Jefferson. I haven't seen an ounce of clip of film on him. I'm going off an offensive coordinator and guys that know personnel. I see him as a captain. I realize his dad played in the NFL. I realize his dad had traveled from Maryland, played in Detroit, ended up in Vegas. The kid was born and raised in Vegas. Wanted to play for his home team.

I said, Let's take a swing at this guy, he seems to represent everything that embodies everything I'm looking for.

I get back on campus. I love his film. Seems to play with an attitude. He plays borderline nasty. The way I think we gotta play. Let's talk to him about what we do with offense linemen. The kid came on campus and just loved what he saw. It was an instant. Our players, I wanted him to meet every offensive player, wanted him to sit down with Brandon Allen, our skill, our offensive linemen. That brought us to the opportunity to offer him a scholarship.

Needless to say it wasn't a popular decision for him back at UNLV. The kid has done nothing but everything we asked him to do and persevered and is an asset to our program.

**Q. How do you feel about opening up against Auburn? In light of the situation with Nick Marshall, will you prepare for the possibility of having to face Jeremy Johnson?**

COACH BIELEMA: I guess that deserves a two-part answer.

I think first and foremost, to play Auburn up

front, to play a team that played in the national championship game, can be nothing but a positive. It's a motivating factor for us year-round, from the time it was announced to where we are today.

You usually practice one through 10, pretty high intensity. 10 through 20, usually falls off a bit. If I show them Auburn in the national championship game, probably get their attention in a hurry. A lot of common ground between us and Auburn. A lot that's motivating between players and coaches, all that involves.

As far as who we're going to play, I have a tremendous amount of respect for Nick and what he did as a quarterback, grew every game. To see him play in the championship game, I think knowing what I know as a head coach, Nick will be there. I think we want to play against the best and I'm sure he'll be there.

Everybody has different rules. A lot of times those situations, even though coaches don't comment on it, a lot of times those things are determined before that ever happens. Right now, sometimes I don't even have to make a decision. The university themselves sometimes have agendas, a checklist, he did this, this is what happens.

If the area gets a little bit gray, you have a chance to be inconsistent and get bad results or inconsistent results. I'm sure it's very clear at Auburn.

**Q. The Texas A&M and Arkansas series goes back to Dallas this year, a recruiting hotbed for Arkansas. Would you like to see that game stay in Dallas or move back to the campuses?**

COACH BIELEMA: Without a doubt, we call them Tex Hogs. We go and try to recruit as many as we can with the state border. You have Jerry Jones who stands for everything in the NFL. He's one of the hugest Hog fans you'll ever meet. I heard him quoted as saying, to have the Super Bowl, to have all these high-profile events in his stadium, but to have Texas A&M play Arkansas is one of the most rewarding in his career. For a guy to say that means we want to stay true to that tradition.

Personally Kevin and I go way back coaching against each other in the Big Ten. To be able to compete against him at that level...

But to go to a kid in the state of Texas and let him know every year you're going to play in Cowboy Stadium, nobody else in the SEC can say that except for the guys at Texas A&M. That's a

huge recruiting advantage and one we'll capitalize on.

Thank you very much. Go Hogs.

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