

**July 17, 2014**



An interview with:

## **COACH MARK STOOPS**

KEVIN TRAINOR: We're joined by the University of Kentucky Wildcats, Mark Stoops.

COACH STOOPS: Well, I'd like to start by thanking the SEC for saving the best for last (smiling). All of you I think deserve some kind of an award for enduring four days of this, so God bless you.

But I do thank you for all you do for the conference and all you do for the University of Kentucky.

It's a great time to be in the SEC. It's a great time to be at the University of Kentucky.

We have an awful lot of good things going on at Kentucky. We're in the midst of construction on a \$120 million renovation in our stadium. We're in the design phase of designing a brand-new, start-of-the-art almost 100,000 square-foot football-only building that will be done in 2016. Our president, Dr. Capilouto, has hundreds of millions of dollars going on in renovations, infrastructure, student housing. So it's a great time to be there.

I feel very blessed to be the head coach at Kentucky. I feel well-supported by our administration and appreciate everything they're doing. Not only are we building big fancy buildings and all that, we're also building a football program.

I'm excited about this team. This team has worked extremely hard. They've done everything we've asked them to do. It's been a short 18 months, but the players have worked hard.

I think the area where we need to improve the most was leadership. I feel like our players have worked hard to be better leaders, to be more accountable, to be more dependable to their teammates and to the program.

I think the other area is physically. We constantly talk about our program about recruiting and development. We're certainly recruiting at a very high level. I've been very pleased with the

way things have gone in recruiting the past two recruiting classes. Now I think you're going to start to see the fruits of our labor when it comes to physical development.

Our players have put in the time. Our training staff has done a great job getting them prepared. We're physically better. Hopefully that will translate to more wins.

So we played eight true freshmen last year, four first-year junior college players. We have 15 returning starters and 36 guys in our program that have started at least one game. So we're starting to build a little bit of depth.

We're still a little young. We have roughly 60% of our team has been a part of our program since January 2013 when I arrived.

With that being said, we're excited.

I think offensively you're going to see a big improvement. I know everybody's asked a lot about our quarterback situation. We're still unsettled on who the starter is going to be. But I'm very confident that we're going to improve at that position. It starts with the players around him.

Our wide receivers will be better. Four of our top-five pass catchers were first-year guys in our program a year ago, three true freshmen and one junior college transfer. Our leading rusher was a true freshman. Those guys being a little older, a little stronger, more experienced is going to help the quarterbacks as well.

Defensively it starts with two of the guys that I have here, Bud Dupree and Za'Darius Smith, two extremely talented defensive ends, great leaders. Very proud of those two that are with us, along with Jordan Swindle, junior offensive lineman, that has been exceptional this off-season in taking leadership and pushing the offensive guys. So very proud of those three players that are here with us today.

With that being said, I'll open it up to questions at this time.

**Q. You said earlier you wouldn't put a number on success. How will you measure success in year two?**



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COACH STOOPS: How we measure success is how we prepare. Our players are paying the price. They're working extremely hard this off-season. What we do in preparation for our games. Our coaches are putting them in a position to be successful. We're doing everything we can. That's everybody in our program, starting with myself, to do everything we can to put ourselves in a position to win each game.

**Q. Does your brother Bob treat you any differently now that you are coaching in the SEC?**

COACH STOOPS: No. No different. It's been great to bounce ideas off of Bob. He's been a very successful head coach for a long time there at Oklahoma. It's great to have that resource to bounce ideas off Bob. Mike, as well. Spent a lot of quality years, spent six years with Mike at Arizona. Learned an awful lot from both of those guys.

We just got off of vacation. We actually spent a week at the beach, played a little golf. It was the four brothers, Bob, Mike, Ron and myself. So that got a little competitive.

**Q. Fran Kersey once said about his roster, We've got Ohio to the north, Tennessee to the south, they love basketball in my state, so I have to go to New Jersey to get my kids. That was the '70s. The SEC, bit of a different era. You have been able to go to your old stomping grounds and steal kids out of Ohio. Are you finding the SEC to be an easier sell?**

COACH STOOPS: It only makes sense for us to go to Ohio with my ties to Ohio, my roots to Ohio, but also the proximity. Southern Ohio, we're so close to. It only makes sense to go there. There's quality football players there.

The SEC is strong everywhere right now. So, yes, it does help us when we go recruit Ohio and represent the SEC and the University of Kentucky.

It's been good. We're very excited about the way things are going in Kentucky and in Ohio. We need to stay close to home first, then of course branch out from there.

**Q. You talked about your quarterback situation. Specifically with Reese Phillips, what have you liked from him?**

COACH STOOPS: I've been very pleased with Reese. He was a guy throughout spring that may have been the most consistent. He was a guy that just did a nice job of managing the offense and

staying away from negative plays. Very impressed with Reese. He's got a good chance to win the battle. We'll see where it goes, but he's right in the thick of things.

**Q. I hope you won't take it as a denigration to suggest that at the University of Kentucky, basketball is certainly quite a big deal. At the same time the economics are increasingly such that football, having a good program, is very important. Have you felt that at all?**

COACH STOOPS: I get asked that question often. The truth is, you know, since I've arrived at Kentucky, people have been nothing but good to me and passionate about football.

We know they love their basketball, as they should. That program has been good for a long, long time. So we have deep tradition in basketball. We embrace that. Coach Cal has been nothing but good to me, very supportive in what we do recruiting, and always visible to our team and to our recruits. So we embrace that. It's been nothing but helpful.

Our fan base is passionate about a lot of sports. I don't know how close you follow it, but the Big Blue Nation is very passionate about football.

**Q. You mentioned your defensive ends Dupree and Smith. What kind of development have you seen from last year to this year?**

COACH STOOPS: They're bigger, as you would expect. They're very good-looking players. You'll get a chance to see them here in a minute. Very physical guys. They're what you want your defensive ends to look like in the SEC.

But Bud is extremely versatile. He's very good with his hand in the dirt playing defensive end, but you can also stand him up and move him around a little bit in the 3-4 and play some linebacker. Very versatile player. Very instinctual.

Za'Darius is just a big, strong, tough guy that is getting better and better each and every day. I think both of them had a chance to go to the NFL last year. They looked at it and both chose to come back. Very thankful we have those guys this year.

**Q. Six-win bowl-eligibility is one of those hallmarks that a coach talks about when they're rebuilding a program. You're in a**



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**similar situation right now. Coach Saban said he would get rid of that, that it wouldn't be an influence in the way that teams scheduled. What is your opinion on a six-win minimum? How would you change that, if you would?**

COACH STOOPS: With the six games, obviously it's important to us. But I won't put that mark on it because I don't want to give up the other six. You know, we're going out to compete, to win each and every game.

I think it's important, as I talked about earlier, to stay the course, to go, to compete, to put yourself in a position to work to win each and every game.

I'd like to see them amend that a little bit. Maybe we got some pull here in the SEC. Maybe if we could win four or five, we could get bowl-eligibility. I'd take that.

But, no, we're out to win each game and win as many games as we can.

**Q. Did you follow Florida State at all last year? Was there any part of you that missed out being on that ride with that team?**

COACH STOOPS: I did not miss being there, but I was very proud of Florida State. I was very proud of the work that I put in there with Coach Fisher, being on his staff from day one, laying the foundation, seeing the hard work that we put in to lay that foundation. Was very close to a lot of players there.

When I had a chance to follow them and watch their games, could not be more excited for them. Of course, watched the national championship game. I know this is SEC country. Believe me, I'm all for this conference 100%. But in that case I was tied too close to the Florida State program.

Very happy for them. It was fun to watch. They're a special group. They've worked extremely hard. They paid the price. So very happy for Florida State.

**Q. You mentioned a few minutes ago you'll judge your progress this year on how you guys prepare. When it comes to guys that have been there last year and two years ago, they've gone 2-10 two years in a row, do you tell them to draw motivation from that, or do you tell them, We can only focus on the future?**

COACH STOOPS: We don't dwell on anything that's gone on in the past, anything certainly before I arrived at Kentucky we really don't talk about much. We all take accountability in

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wins and losses. We all accept that. Again, we got to do whatever we can to put ourselves in a position to win.

**Q. I was looking at the schedule. You had a really close game against South Carolina. Were you able to use any of that as motivation going into this season against them?**

COACH STOOPS: Well, I don't know if we use that as motivation for them next year. But I think, you know, we just look at it as, again, we put ourselves in a position to win that game. We came up short. That's not a good feeling. We're never going to accept losing.

But I was proud of the effort that our team played with that day. There's always times for us through a 12-game season where you're going to play some good games and some games not so well.

I was proud of the effort that we gave in that game, but we came up short.

**Q. Looking at the schedule, I noticed Louisville is now at the end. Is that a permanent switch?**

COACH STOOPS: Yeah, it's my understanding that's a permanent switch. It will fall in line with some of the other rivalries with the SEC and the ACC on that weekend. We're looking forward to it.

I just left Florida State where there was a great rivalry at the end of the year with Florida and Florida State.

We'll play Louisville there. I said it before, you know, it really doesn't much matter to me which place we play them, we're looking forward to the challenge.

**Q. What's the key to having a top-25 recruiting class when you're coming off 0-8 in the SEC? What would a contract extension mean to you?**

COACH STOOPS: The recruiting, you know, it's awfully important to us. That's where it starts. You've got to have great players. Our staff has worked extremely hard. I think most of our prospects we were recruiting knew we were in for a rebuild, had a little bit of work to do. There was no mystery there.

The contract extension meant a lot to me because I think it shows the administration believes in the plan that we have in place and the

work we've been doing and laying the foundation and good things are happening at Kentucky.

**Q. You had a tough year last year, your brother had a big bowl win over Alabama. What advice has he given you to build your confidence?**

COACH STOOPS: He doesn't need to give me advice in that area. You may follow Bob or know Bob. He's been around a long time. But, you know, that's not something we talk about.

We discuss, you know, areas in our program where we can improve. We certainly talk about scheme and things like that. But he knows I have what it takes. He knows I've got a plan in place. Just stay the course.

I don't need to talk to him too much about that.

**Q. What do you think about the new summer workout rules? How have you been able to take advantage of that?**

COACH STOOPS: I feel very good about that. I think that's a wise choice by the NCAA to let us spend some time with our players. It's certainly helpful. Those players are out there working their tail off through the summer, sweating and working out and everything. And it's good for us just to be out there and be around them and support them and certainly spend some time with them in the meeting room getting them acclimated, especially for the younger guys.

**Q. What excites you about getting up in the morning, saying, I get to coach University of Kentucky football?**

COACH STOOPS: Well, there's a lot of things. First of all, it's a great challenge to be here and to be in this league. You better wake up in the morning getting it. You better wake up getting going and recruiting great players and developing the players you have. So that's motivation enough for me right there.

**Q. Looking at the schedule, your second game of the year you're playing Ohio. Can you talk about the meaning for that with recruiting roots there.**

COACH STOOPS: Yeah, it will be a fun game for us. Coach Solich has been around for a long time, won an awful lot of big games. At Miami, we played him in the national championship game when he was the head coach at Nebraska.

Lot of respect for coach and that program. They won a lot of games.

Them being from Ohio, it will be fun.

KEVIN TRAINOR: Coach, thank you for your time.

COACH STOOPS: Thank you.

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