

July 17, 2014



An interview with:

COACH MARK RICHT

KEVIN TRAINOR: We're joined by Mark Richt from Georgia.

COACH RICHT: It's good to be here this morning. You guys are probably getting used to being worn out. Used to be a three-day event. Anyway, it's an honor to be here for the 14th year in a row at the University of Georgia. It's been a tremendous blessing for me to be the head coach.

Extremely excited about this football team. I think we have a tremendous culture right now for work ethic. I think we have a tremendous culture of guys wanting to lead in the right way.

I think our coaching staff did a super job in the off-season. Meeting prior to the pre-spring conditioning in the springtime just kind of setting the tone, the tempo for the expectations. I think the players are responding extremely well.

I think the camaraderie of our staff is tremendous. I think that's important. It kind of bleeds down to the rest of the team.

I've got a bunch of great coaches that are highly competent, highly competitive, just good men of character that care about young men and care about their families and all that kind of thing. It just makes Georgia a great place to be.

Looking forward to getting started August 1st and the preparation for the season.

With that I'll open it up.

Q. What has it been like without having Aaron Murray around on both a playing and personal level for you?

COACH RICHT: Aaron, obviously a great player, a great leader, just a great person. When you lose a guy like that, it can be tough.

The blessing for us is Hutson Mason being in the program going into his fifth season, a guy that got to watch Aaron's work ethic, to see how he ran the off-season program, how he would organize pass skeleton and those types of things.

Just the fact that Hutson has the respect of his teammates, the confidence of his teammates and coaches, to take on that leadership role.

Not to say we don't miss Aaron because we do, but it was time for him to go. That's just college athletics. After four seasons, you're out of here. We wish him well. We wish his brother well on The Bachelorette, by the way.

But I think Hutson being there, us knowing Hutson is the guy, the team knowing Hutson's the guy, Hutson knowing how everything works, you know. Hutson has been in our system obviously going into his fifth-year. But there's been no change in our system. He has the blessing of being with Coach Bobo the entire time, being in the same system the entire time, seeing Murray doing it and having a chance to start a few games last year as well of the.

I think we'll transition well.

Q. You had a couple of unexpected departures in your secondary. How important is it to have leaders like Ramik and Damian Swann coaching the new guys?

COACH RICHT: The leadership of those guys, Ramik, Amarlo Herrera, Damian Swann, Corey Moore, the young guys are going to play for us. That was kind of the deal a year ago. Now we're kind of in the same boat.

The one thing I think is crucially important is the fact that Jeremy Pruitt, our defensive coordinator, coaches the defensive backfield. I think when a coordinator is in charge of the backfield and understands what it means to play that position, play those positions, I don't think he's going to call anything that those guys can't execute. The worse thing that can happen is give up a big play because somebody blew it, poor communication, whatever it is.

Jeremy is going to make sure that whatever gets called in that game that secondary is going to be able to execute.

The other thing, a year ago when he was at Florida State, I think two of his starters were true freshmen in the backfield, so he's done it before.

He's not afraid to do that.

We feel like we're going to be just fine.

Q. You opened last year against Clemson and lost that close one. What are you expecting out of the game this year?

COACH RICHT: Well, I'm glad to be home. Glad the game is going to be Between the Hedges. Our fans are going to be off the chain, ready for it. I think our players will, coaches will. Tremendous opponent in Clemson. Obviously they got us last year. Hopefully we can turn it around and get 'em.

Q. There's been a lot of talk that this SEC Media Days doesn't have a lot of star power. Todd is obviously a guy that is a star. Do you think with all those guys that are gone to the NFL, it makes this league as wide open as it's ever been?

COACH RICHT: Well, I think the league's wide open every year obviously. Auburn two seasons ago doesn't win a conference game. Auburn plays for the national championship. Auburn wins the league. Even the year before, two years ago, Missouri, 2-6 in league play, they win the East. There were a lot of stars in the league last year.

I think it's wide open every year because there's so many good teams.

Q. Defensive problems you had last year, I wanted you to expand on the addition of Coach Pruitt to the staff and the differences he might bring?

COACH RICHT: I'm not going to talk a lot about last year. But I know this year, Coach Pruitt, he's a proven coach. He's won everywhere he's been. Not only Coach Pruitt, but the rest of our defensive staff. We have brand-new coaches all the way across the board. Tracy Rocker, Mike Ekeler, and Kevin Sherrer coaching our outside linebackers and our star position, along with Jeremy.

They're all brand-new. They all coached high school ball, which I think is great. They know how to take a kid from ground zero. They know how to teach fundamentals extremely well. They've all been on college teams that have won national championships. There's a lot of credibility as they come in.

But I think these guys know what it looks like to win big, and they've put in a system of how we're going to go about our business. The guys

are responding well to that. There's a lot of accountability that goes along with it, as well.

Q. Hutson mason is in that D.J. Shockley situation. Were you ever concerned you would lose him?

COACH RICHT: Hutson and I had had, I don't know if I would say 'many' conversations, but at least three or four different conversations about what he should do.

The thing I appreciate about him is when he came to me, he was like, Hey, coach, if I was your son, what would you tell me?

And I didn't say, Hey, I think you should stay no matter what. But I talked about, If you stay, this could happen. If you go, there's no guarantee of anything good happening for you.

As we just went through the process of what it might look like, as we get to this point now, at one time when he was deciding should he stay, should he go, Murray could have left after his junior year, given him two years a start. That was a possibility.

Also, if you remember, we did redshirt him not this past year, but the year before to guarantee at least one-year separation from Aaron. Even that season was a little bit, you know, crazy because at any given time, if Murray would have got hurt, that was the year we played 'Bama in the SEC championship game. If Murray got hurt, Hutson would have played. He would have burnt that redshirt to play in this game.

He's really sacrificed a lot for this team. He's staying because he loves Georgia and he especially loves his teammates. But he also knew that this season was going to come and he was going to be surrounded by a lot of skill guys, a lot of great backs, receivers, some veteran linemen, a defense that should be matured from a year ago.

I think the stage is set for him to have a tremendous senior year and hopefully have the same success or even better than D.J. had.

Q. A year ago we spent so much time talking about the quarterbacks in this league. Certainly some bigger names at runningbacks. What do you make of the depth at that position in the conference?

COACH RICHT: Some guys are going to have a chance to make a name for themselves. How many seasons start out where you just don't know what a guy's going to do? Even Jameis

Winston, Johnny Football, their first year of starting, all of a sudden they win the Heisman. So anything can happen with a guy who gets his opportunity.

I wouldn't count out the quarterbacks in this league to play great.

It's an unknown quantity of guys. You don't know exactly what's going to happen with these guys. I wouldn't say that the quarterback play is going to be down. We'll just have to wait and see.

Q. I've seen a story or two in the off-season where you mentioned the possibility of Todd Gurley being a three-year player. It's obvious he's a great rusher. Talk about some of the little things that any runningback needs to move on.

COACH RICHT: Well, in our offensive system at Georgia, I don't think there's one thing that any of our backs, when they go to the NFL, I don't think there will be one thing they haven't been exposed to in our system. They obviously must learn how to pass protect, not only just slide and block the in-man on the line. It's complicated how we protect.

We might change who the Mike linebacker is on the line of scrimmage, now he's got to redirect who he's going to protect for the quarterback. Route running, ball protection. Obviously being able to run inside with the zones, the powers, the leads, the things we do, all the gun runs that we do. There's really not a thing that he'll have to do in the league that he hasn't been exposed to at Georgia.

But, you know, whether Todd stays another year or not, I don't know. But if he stays healthy, I think he's one of the better players in America, no doubt about it. Hopefully he stays healthy. I see that he's getting into great condition. If we continue to get him in great condition for this season, I think the sky's the limit for him.

Q. You being at Georgia for coming on 14 years now, bowl games every year, talk about what it means to have that longevity at one program, that much success.

COACH RICHT: Well, I was at Florida State 15 seasons. I'm going onto my 14th season at Georgia. I was mentioning this earlier. I think that happens for two reasons. Obviously you have to win enough games to stick around. But the other thing is you have to choose to stay.

When I was at Florida State, I had many opportunities to go. Even at Georgia, I've had opportunities to leave. But I chose to stay. I chose to stay at Georgia before I even came to Athens. When I accepted the job, my goal was that this would be the last stop for me because there's no greater place than Athens, Georgia. There's no greater program than the University of Georgia in my mind, for me.

I love watching a guy come in as a freshman, go all the way through graduation, watch him grow up. Then it's even more fun five, 10 years later for the guy to come back with his family and talk about all the life lessons he learned while he was at Georgia, and being so thankful for the experience.

I've had guys that were just total hard-heads during the time I had them, but come back and say, Now I see, coach. Now I get it. Thank you for what you did for me, what Georgia did for me.

I wouldn't trade that for anything.

Q. You've said before you don't support a league-wide mandated drug policy. Georgia's is one of the more publicized as being tougher. Is it something you feel creates a competitive disadvantage? Something you talk about with other coaches?

COACH RICHT: No, we're not worried about that part of it. We don't want our guys to do drugs, okay? I don't want my son to do drugs.

We've got policies that are stronger maybe than some when it comes to the punitive part of it. That's kind of what everybody talks about. Georgia ends up suspending their guys a little bit sooner in the policy, which I've got no problems with.

There's other things we have in the policy, too, as far as the ability to educate them about what's happening, giving them counseling, making sure that they're healthy, make sure there's no addiction issue we need to deal with.

It's a lot more than just the punitive part. There's a punitive part, there's an educational part, then we love 'em. You made a mistake. You have these consequences. Now let's turn in the right direction and become a better man for it.

I'd rather them have that type of experience in college rather than being married for four years and got a kid or two and they get fired from their job because of something that never got

nipped in the bud while they were in their college days.

We've got a very good group of young men. The fact that we have our policies as strong as they are, it doesn't bother me.

Q. You've been hit hard by early defections to the NFL. Seems like more players are coming out even if they're picked in the third round. How has that affected the way you handle it? Has it affected what you tell recruits or how you recruit?

COACH RICHT: It hasn't really affected the way I recruit. It really hasn't affected the way that I approach this NFL decision. My goal is for those guys to really just be educated, get good information. Don't just go by what an agent might say. Don't go just by what I might say. Try to use the NFL system.

There's ways of finding out from NFL people where do you really stand and where can you possibly improve your draft status from one year to the next, and still understand the value of your degree, understand the value of your degree.

I think some guys still don't quite get that as they're going through the process.

For example, one thing that we do, when our guys are done playing football, we have a program called the PO Network, and it's designed to help our guys transition from football to life, to learn how to navigate, how to get into the business world.

Hey, son, if you get your degree and you have this great career for Georgia, whether it's great on the field or just were the best scout teamer in America, we're going to be there at the end, help you with your career after your football days are over.

We talk about the value of staying. I mean, there's some guys, when I had Knowshon Moreno, I couldn't sit here and say, If you stay here another year, you're going to get drafted here.

Matthew Stafford, A.J. Green, maybe if you stay, it's to win a championship, a national award, something like that, or you just love the college experience.

From a business decision or where your draft status is, son, I don't think there's anything you can do to improve it.

Matthew Stafford probably would have improved as a quarterback if he stayed another year fundamentally, all those kind of things. But his draft status wasn't going to change. Whether

he was perfectly ready or not, he was going to be the first pick of that draft.

What am I going to tell that guy other than, God bless you and I'm proud of you.

Q. Last year you saw play with injury after injury with your top guys. How hard of a coaching job is it to keep the guys that are injured and the guys that are not injured on the team, their confidence up, and how excited are you to have most of those guys back this year?

COACH RICHT: It's great to have 'em all back. When you're in the heat of the battle, a guy goes down, the next guy goes in, it's just what you prepare for. It's what those second-team, third-team guys prepare for. It's what you prepare for as coaches.

It's kind of a given. If something happens, Hey, let's go. Let's not fret. Let's not cry about it. Let's go.

But the thing that hurts the most is just to see the expression on the player's face who got hurt. The pain of the injury is not even close to the pain of not being able to play anymore. They love playing. They prepared for this moment. Now they can't play and know there's a long road ahead of them in rehab.

It's a crushing blow for those guys. It certainly doesn't help your team when a lot of your better players get hurt.

But, yeah, we're very excited that they're back. I think we did a great job in our off-season. We tweaked it a little bit. We were doing a lot more flexibility. We want to be a leaner team. We're going to be doing a lot more change of direction in the summer, a lot more hard bursts, quick recovery, go do it again type of stuff.

I think the way we trained in the off-season is going to help us, as well.

Q. Your thoughts on the eight-man officiating crew, the fact that not every game is going to have an eight-man officiating crew, the impact on tempo and frequency of penalties.

COACH RICHT: I'm interested to see how it goes. When it comes to tempo, I believe before the ball is snapped, everybody needs to be in position to play. Offensive player, defensive player, every official needs to be where they need to be.

There were times when the ball was snapped, an official was scrambling to get where

they needed to get. Times where defenders were scrambling to get to where they needed to get. It's one thing if a team is doing a poor job of substituting when the ball gets snapped.

I think sometimes defenders are coming in when a sub of the offense, just because they're on the field or close to where they're supposed to be, the ball was allowed to be snapped. I think everybody needs to be in position to play football when the ball is snapped.

But in doing so, I don't think it's going to slow down the tempo much at all. But that would be my suggestion to officiating, tempo and all that.

If there's more penalties, there's more penalties. More eyes, more penalties, that could possibly happen. I wouldn't doubt that.

Q. How is the new summer workout rule? What are your thoughts about the Selection Committee method to pick the four teams for the playoff?

COACH RICHT: I was a strong advocate of mandatory eight hours in the summer. I think it's very important that everybody is being held accountable in the strength and conditioning area in the summer for a lot of reasons. One, it's great for team continuity and team unity and all that kind of thing.

I also think it's important for everybody to be in the best possible shape they can be in. It's a player safety issue to make sure everybody is ready for the season to begin.

The other thing that's very important to us at Georgia is in season, if a guy is late to a class or a mentoring session or misses a class or whatever it may be, part of our consequence or our discipline for that is to get him up early in the morning and do some physical work. Go up and down the stadium steps, whatever it may be, push a sled. Reminder that it's important to go to class, important to be on time, to be prepared. This is your consequence for not doing that.

Back when there was no accountability at all in the summer, we couldn't do that. We weren't allowed to do anything of a physical nature. So I thought it hurt our accountability academically as well. So I'm a big-time advocate of it.

Also our coaches are allowed to spend two hours a week with our players. We really didn't take advantage of that much prior to July 4th. But after July 4th, our coaches now have been spending some time meeting with them and doing the drills that they're allowed to do, agility drills, those types of things.



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You know what, I really don't know for sure how they're going to go about their business with the Playoff. I'm just going to try to win as many games where they don't have a choice but to put us there.

Q. Curious if you had any thoughts at all about being picked second in the East against South Carolina and the importance of that game in September.

COACH RICHT: Obviously, what's important is what happens at the end of the year. Earlier I got asked that question. I said, I'm not happy to be named number two. I'm not going to start cheering that we're number two. I think in the end it's going to be Georgia.

Q. What was your reaction when you learned Tray Matthews was transferring to Auburn? What is it like to know you're going to play him in another year?

COACH RICHT: When guys leave our program, my goal for them is that they continue their career and they continue and realize all their dreams. Life's too short. They're young men that make mistakes. If somewhere along the way you learn from your mistake, you turn it around, finish your career strong, I'm happy for the guy.

Obviously whether we're playing Auburn or Tennessee or Florida or anybody else, we want to win that game. I'm not too concerned about who's over there, did he play for us, all that kind of thing. It doesn't come into my mind.

I have never hindered a transfer from going anywhere that he wants to go. Because, again, I think life's too short. If this kid can get a fresh start and do well, I'm happy for the guy.

Q. In light of what you just said about you want to be number one, the media has only picked the right team to win the overall title four times in 22 years.

COACH RICHT: Now that I think of it, that's good. I don't really care where we're picked. I think the one year, 2005, we were picked fourth or fifth in the East, the year we mentioned D.J. Shockley taking over for David Greene. Almost comes back to your quarterback thing, D.J. left, so Georgia's quarterback situation is probably going to drop off. Murray is leaving, it's probably going to drop off. That's what people think.

When D.J. came in, he played great. Our

quarterback situation was SEC-championship caliber. I'm hoping the same with Hutson.

Q. As long as you've been in the league, you played everywhere. I think this is your first trip to Little Rock.

COACH RICHT: I'm excited about it. I really don't know what to expect. I don't know enough about it. I know it's a special place for Arkansas to play a game. I'm glad to experience one more thing.

The only team I guess now that I've not played as a coach at Georgia would be Texas A&M, and it's going to be a little while before that happens.

Q. You mentioned your concern about the welfare of your players. Can you speak to player stipends, healthcare, trust even after their eligibility is done.

COACH RICHT: Yeah, I'm all for those kind of things. Anything we can do to bless these guys for what they've done for us, I'm all in. I'm all in.

I do believe, though, that how we treat our players at Georgia is the best we could possibly treat 'em. I do believe that the experience of getting their education at Georgia is a huge payment. How we travel, where we stay, how we feed them, the training that they get in the strength and conditioning, the nutritionists, the sports psychologists, the coaching in itself.

I mean, just the experience, 'cause I went through it. You went through it. You know the value of how you grow as a man from 18 to 22. You can't hardly put a price on that.

But anything that we can do that will help them down the road, I mean, that's why we have this PO Network. That's why we have this way to bless them after their days are over, because they're focused so much on football, they don't think about life after football. We got to think about life after football for them.

There's no question, I'm all in for that.

KEVIN TRAINOR: Thank you, coach, for your time.

COACH RICHT: Thank you.

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