

January 9, 2011



An interview with:

AUBURN COACH GENE CHIZIK

THE MODERATOR: We have been joined by Coach Gene Chizik.

COACH CHIZIK: Well, I guess there really is a game that's going to be played here soon. We're excited about it obviously tomorrow. All of our preparation is done. It has been a great week. It has been a great week for our coaches, our football team. The weather has been awesome. The facilities have been great.

Our preparation and our focus from our football team, I feel very good about where we're at, and we're looking forward to a great game tomorrow night.

Q. Two years ago when you applied for the job I know you presented a plan. How were you able to achieve that plan so quickly?

COACH CHIZIK: You know, we just stayed on track. We set out a blueprint for what we wanted to do, how we wanted to proceed from the top to the bottom of this program.

Our main concern two years ago was building a foundation that we felt would be conducive to building a program that would have longevity and it would give us an opportunity to really start from the ground up and kind of redo, restart the program the way we felt like it needed to be built.

No time lines, no ideas about when we would have an opportunity to win a championship, but be very clear that that was our goal from day one. And so two years later here we are. Obviously the timing is great. But we just stuck to the plan that we laid down from day one and haven't come off it and won't.

Q. Talk about if Auburn is to win this game, what are just -- what are a few keys that you are going to need to do?

COACH CHIZIK: Are you asking me what the keys are to winning the game?

Q. Yes, sir.

COACH CHIZIK: I think it is real simple. It is probably 200 years old. Offensively, protecting the football. And with our offense, we've been -- we've done a good job of that. On the offensive side of the football, we know that we have an explosive offense. We know that we have the capability of scoring a lot of points.

What we'd like to do offensively is keep the football and eat some clock, get some first downs. Obviously scoring is the number one objective. However, we know we can't go into the game and turn the ball over. There is no question about that. We have to protect the football.

Defensively, we think it is very simple. Again, that's 200 years old. We've got to definitely stop the run first. We cannot give up the big plays in the secondary. You know, you can see as you look through all of their previous games that they do such a great job of running the football. Obviously with the tempo, they have an opportunity to get behind their secondary, off their play-action game. That's going to be critical that we are able to keep that in check.

I think one of the things that's probably been overlooked more than anything is the special teams units and being able to do a great job on our coverage units. Field position issues in there are going to be huge.

So, you know, the special teams are a big part of what's going to be a success out there, too. Our coverage units and our return units, those are called hidden yards. And we're going to have to do a great job with winning the field position battle.

Q. Your team has eight come-from-behind wins this season. What does that say about the resiliency? And what

are the characteristics of your team that it has been able to come back that many times this season?

COACH CHIZIK: I said it a lot after our games. There is a lot of love and a lot of trust in our locker room. That's between players and players, coaches and coaches, coaches and players.

I think one of the things that's been remarkable about being a part of a team as I've just watched them grow for 13 weeks is watching them never panic. And we've been in some situations where arguably you could panic, there is no question about it, both on the road, both at home, starting early in the season.

And we've found different ways to win games. But through all of that, whatever the circumstances were, we never -- you can look at our sideline. You can see there is just never that element of panic in there. That's because our guys, they trust each other. They trust the coaches to make adjustments. The coaches trust the players to do what we ask them to do. And we've just been able to adjust on the move.

A lot of trust, a lot of love on our football team. And I think that's a huge part of the chemistry and why we have been able to do that.

Q. There's been some controversy this bowl season over officiating, specifically excessive celebration. I know when you first got there, you mandated your kids hand the ball to an official right after a score. But in light of some of the calls that have been made, what's your concern level? And how much have you spoken to your kids about that this week?

COACH CHIZIK: Well, not necessarily this week. That's an ongoing discussion with our guys. And, you know, there is a fine line in there between excessive celebration and not.

I think the officials, for the most part, do a great job. They do the best job they can. But we talk to our guys about the simplicity of you make a big play, put the ball in the official's hands. We're not into "look at me." We have done that to the best of our ability this year. Hasn't always been perfect. They know when it's not perfect, and they know that's not the Auburn way, that that's not acceptable.

So we stress on a continuous basis celebrate with your teammates. That's not hard. We are not into "look at me, I did this, I did that, boy, I'm the guy." That's just not who we are.

And so we try really on a continuous basis to educate them on this is a team game. Act like -- when you do something good, act like you did it with your teammates.

Q. If I understand the rule correctly, if they sub on offense, the ref has to give you the time to sub on defense. Is that correct? The ref has to stand over the ball?

COACH CHIZIK: That is correct.

Q. Have you made that a point of emphasis considering their offense in your meetings with officials?

COACH CHIZIK: We haven't had the meetings with the officials yet. But the officials meet with us before every game. And that will be a very big discussion.

Q. Across college football we have seen when you bring in junior college players sometimes it is a little bit hit or miss. I wonder, based on your career, to get two guys over a two-year span, to hit it like you guys did with Cam and Nick, how rare that is and their obvious impact on your team.

COACH CHIZIK: I feel really good. I will give our assistant coaches a lot of credit. We actually have four junior college young men on our football team and we don't recruit junior colleges as a general rule unless there's a dire need at that position for a junior college player, for whatever the reasons.

But obviously Cam and Nick are two guys that are extremely talented. They had what we needed at Auburn not just as players, but all the way around in terms of fitting into our football team. We've got Demond Washington, who has done the same thing, and we have got Brandon Mosley, our starting right tackle, who has done the same thing.

And I'm going there because I think our assistant coaches -- I think we've done a great job of evaluating those guys. And, you know, you never know what you may get. It is kind of a hard -- it is a little bit of a different dynamic when you are dealing with junior college players, simply because there is a lot of circumstances out there.

So you got to get the right guy, not just the right player. He has got to be the right guy. And my staff has done a great job of evaluating the right people and bringing them in to help our football team win.

Q. Your school's been on both sides of this issue. The fact that you are sitting here today, can you say the BCS works?

COACH CHIZIK: I've answered this several times. I think arguably if you look back over the years for the most part -- and I'm saying this when I was a part of a 2004 team and we felt like we were good enough to play for it and we didn't get a chance. I'm not sitting here from any other aspect because I have been on both sides, but usually if you go back more times than not, the BCS formula has been right on.

Am I saying there is a better way out there to do it? I don't know. I think there are so many different speculations on how to do it with a playoff system and how many teams do we use and how long does the season last and how many playoff games are there. There's always kinds of ideas on there of how to get that done. But I don't think there's that one perfect idea yet that everybody can come to great agreement that this is the way you do it until.

Until you do that, I feel like the BCS has, again, more times than not, got it down the right way.

Q. What kind of an effect does a tremendous year like you're having have on your recruiting class?

COACH CHIZIK: I think the kind of effect you would think it would. We feel great about our recruiting class. We feel one of the things that we're going to do is we are going to be relentless in the pursuit of recruiting not only great athletes but great students and the right type of fit for Auburn.

One of the things that I can be extremely proud of sitting up here two years later is we've had very few off-the-field incidents. And that goes back to the mark of the man that we are trying to recruit as well as trying to get the best player out there.

And so I feel really good about where we're at. But we will be relentless in the pursuit of that and continue to be. I think this game obviously and the publicity that Auburn's gotten over the last month is invaluable. And I think recruits have definitely taken notice.

And it's helping as you would think it would help.

Q. 6-0 as assistant or head coach in bowl games, other than maybe hoping to have

the best team, is there one single biggest factor as far as getting a team ready to have success in the bowl game?

COACH CHIZIK: I think there is. I think it's the actual plan and idea that you have laid out on preparing them. And it is the question that's been asked 30-some-odd days ago, what do you do with all this time?

And I think it's how you use your time. I think it is time management with your team. What we can't forget right now is that these are 18- to 22-year-old guys. They're very good at what they do. You have to have a great balance in there, in my opinion, on the time that you're giving them to actually be a 18- to 22-year-old away from football.

And when it is time to go to work, we go to work. That's when -- that's been a great -- that's one of the things that I have been the most proud with with our football team. They know when it is time to work. They know when it is time to watch film. They know when it is time to turn it on and be willing and ready to prepare to win a huge game.

And I think the time line in there of that much time off, when you start the process, you know, 30-some-odd days ago, I think that the timing on how you do things and when you do things to get your team ready on that night is huge.

And I don't know exactly what the right formula is. You got to know your team. You got to know the variables of your team. You got to know your injuries. You got to know are they tired, are they not tired; when to back off, when to pour it on; when to bang them up, when not to bang them up. I think there is a delicate balance in there somewhere.

So we've tried to do it -- in my opinion over the years and in the bowl games that I have been involved in, what I thought was the right thing. And that's the way we proceeded.

So I feel good about where we're at. But I think that's extremely important on the procedure that you use for that month or five weeks or whatever the case may be.

Q. I'm sure you are aware of that rule next year where points are going to be taken off the board for excessive celebration going in. I wonder what you thought about that. Is that going too far? The first time that happens, somebody might freak out somewhere.

COACH CHIZIK: I think it changes the complexion of the rule. There is no question about

it.

It is going to have a huge impact. There is no question about it. I don't want to give my opinion about whether I think it's right or wrong or whatever. It is what it is. So my opinion doesn't matter.

I just know that it will certainly starting next year be a huge point of emphasis obviously for everybody across the country. So, you know, I'm sure 120 or 119 Division I coaches are emphasizing that now in terms of "don't look at me. Somebody else was responsible for me scoring." But next year I think that will be heightened -- it will be a huge heightened awareness of that.

Q. When it happens, what kind of pro do you think Cam will be?

COACH CHIZIK: When it happens, Cameron is an unbelievably gifted young man that's going to bring -- he is going to bring a lot to the table to somebody. And I think he's got all of the things that it takes to be a great player at the next level. I said that before. And there is no question in my mind that that is the case.

Q. The SEC has had a lot of success in this game obviously. Do you feel pressure to keep that success going, and are you aware of the success the SEC has had in this game?

COACH CHIZIK: Yeah, I think that, you know, obviously the SEC has fared very well in this game. I think everybody has been made aware of that. It doesn't add any pressure to me and the way we proceed. We are going to do what we do for Auburn University. We are going to do what we do for our players and coaches and fans and administration and alumni. That's important to me.

The pressure of this game comes from so many different directions, if you let it. There's no more pressure than the pressure that we feel as a responsibility to Auburn and our people and our family. It doesn't get any greater than that. That's where our pressure is at.

Everything else is out there and everybody can make a point that there is other pressures that may come into play. But there's not. We got one pressure, we want to win this one game for ourselves.

Q. The last time you coached in a national championship game, everyone remembers Vince Young's performance against USC. But there was also a huge defensive play when you stopped them on fourth and two.

What do you recall about that play? And do you anticipate having to make that kind of a call in this game?

COACH CHIZIK: You know, you never know how the games are going to unfold. Obviously that was a huge play that will always, for me personally, be one that I will remember. I think that might have been the only time we stopped them on that drive in the second half, if I can remember correctly. But it was probably the most important.

But in these games, there's always two or three plays that are going to stand out that everybody is going to remember. That was one of them at the time. You know, this game coming up could come down to the exact same thing, a couple of plays here, a couple of plays there, a turning point here, a turning point there.

Arguably I think everybody would agree that this is going to be a great game. And in any football game, people will point out one or two or three things. But, as we know, every play makes a difference. We tell our guys that. You never know what you're going to do on that single play to change the game.

And if there's 80 plays on offense or 80 plays on defense, your play can be one of those 80. You never know which one it is.

Will it come down to one or two that people remember forever? Maybe. But at the end of the day, there's going to be a lot of plays that are going to make a difference.

Q. You said you want to win for yourselves. Do you feel like you are also playing for 1983 and '93 and '04 Auburn teams that may have been able to do this but didn't get the opportunity?

COACH CHIZIK: Yes. That's really what I was mentioning. When I say ourselves, I'm talking about the Auburn family. I'm talking about those teams that you just mentioned. I'm talking about the people that decided to travel and come out here that don't have a ticket. I'm talking about the people that have followed Auburn football and they come up to you and say, I haven't missed a game in 55 years. I'm talking about all the people that pour so much -- our place is full of love and passion and excitement for Auburn. And that's the whole family.

And so when I say for us, I don't mean just. I mean the Auburn family and everybody that

cares to carry the flag.

So as I tell our players all the time, this game is not about you. It will be about you 20 years from now. But today, tomorrow, this game is not about you. It is about us and it is about a family and you are playing for more people than yourselves.

Q. I'm curious about the off-the-bat, right at the beginning of the game, given there have been five weeks to prepare and given just the tempo and the pace of the game, do you expect adjustments to be made any differently than you would in a normal game?

COACH CHIZIK: We've got a very good game plan defensively. We won't know the true speed of everything until we actually get out there and we see how fast the ball is spotted.

We're anticipating it being very quick obviously from the things that we've heard. But we're prepared for that. We're prepared to make substitutions. We've thought through everything extremely thoroughly. And we've got a good plan.

So, you know, it's hard to simulate what it's really going to be like until the officials get involved with spotting the ball, not spotting the ball. As somebody asked early earlier, is there a substitution, the umpire stands over the ball until you have time to match up. You just got to see how the game flows. But we're prepared for it.

Q. You talked earlier about the Auburn family and how important this game was for them. I'm wondering about this ticket market. This has been called the most difficult ticket in the history of American sports by some writers. And I have heard from a lot of Auburn people, I'm sure you have, I'm wondering if the players, coaches and everybody else have had difficulties trying to figure out who has tickets, who doesn't have tickets and whether that has been a distraction for you all.

COACH CHIZIK: That's a great question. For our football team in particular, it has not been a distraction. It is probably a distraction for everybody but our team. But that's the great thing about this game. How cool is that, that this game has become that big? I mean, this is great for college sports. It is awesome for college football. It is great for Auburn University. It is great for Oregon.

So that's a cool thing. That's a great thing. But as far as a distraction for our team and getting our guys off track, that certainly has not been the

case for our guys. And because they've dealt with distractions all year, and certainly tickets won't be one of them that would cause a distraction for our guys now.

Q. Kind of dovetailing on what was just mentioned, in your experience in bowl games, you mentioned 18- to 22-year-old kids. They have been waiting for 30-something days to play this game. When does the emotion settle down? Is it the first series? Is it one play? And how do you account for that in your game plan?

COACH CHIZIK: Well, what we've told our guys and I just know it all too well. They're going to be so hyped, the adrenaline is going to be flowing. I don't know that they settle down until after the first series when they really see the speed of the game, they understand the dynamics of the actual opponent they're playing against down in and down out. The game will take a minute to slow down.

And as we tell our players all the time, when the game slows down for you, okay, then you can play football. And I just think early in the game it will be moving really fast for a lot of people. I don't just mean the tempo of the game. I'm just talking about with the layoff and haven't played in so long, I think the game will most fast for them. But I think it will slow down after the first series.

And I think in a lot of the big -- a lot of the huge games we've played in this year, I think that's been the case. Our guys get excited. They love to play football, as does everybody. But I think it will take a minute for it to slow down. Once the game slows down, I think that we will be back -- we will be on track.

Q. Ted Roof said earlier in the week you were getting plays off -- nine seconds was the best in practice. Is that accurate or how close did you come?

COACH CHIZIK: We had to do it two ways. We had to give our best attempt with our scout team, which wasn't quite so fast. But when we go against our offense, which we did quite a bit as well, we could rattle them off pretty quick simply because that's what they do. That's who they are.

We try to have a balance between the two for the last month. When we were clicking and when we were humming, yes, it was probably anywhere between nine and eleven seconds is

where we were getting the plays off of. And that's warp speed. It really is. It's smoking out there. But we were able to do that for a good period of time.

Whether it is that fast, I don't know. If it is obviously slower than that, then that will be a good thing. But we've definitely worked pretty much every angle we can work.

Q. Since halftime in the Alabama game, the defense has played really well. Does that give you guys some confidence going into this game on defense?

COACH CHIZIK: We've got confidence in our defense, period. Have we played exactly the way we want to play all year? No. We've made some mistakes.

We got some young guys playing out there, certainly in the back seven. We've had some injuries that have dictated that. But we feel really good about our defense. They are playing with confidence. They feel really great about the plan. They've had a great month of practice and we feel really good about it. There's no question about it. They are going to have to play well to give us a chance to win. But I think mentally and physically, they're prepared and they're ready to play well.

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