

**November 7, 2012**



An interview with:

## **COACH BRANDS**

### **Q. Coach, talk about the first four weeks of practice?**

COACH BRANDS: We're moving in the right direction, there's no doubt. That's a good thing. That's a good feeling. It's one of those things where it's better moving that way than the other way. We know we have a lot of work ahead of us. Our guys are working out that way, training that way. Our leadership is good. Seems like it's been a little bit better than in the past for whatever reason, and, hence, this guy feels better.

### **Q. What weight has the biggest competition in the room?**

COACH BRANDS: The biggest competition in our room is 41. It's deep, 149 is deep, as well. Mike Kelly returns there, Mark Ballweg at 141. They'll be pushed by some other guys. Josh Dziewa at 41, we like how he's looked recently. He's been hobbled throughout his career but seems to be healthy. We have depth at those weights. At 49, the No. 1 seed in the room is Mike Kelly, based on last year. But he knows he has to do better as well.

Patrick Rhoads is down. He was a 57 and 65 pounder last year. He's down. Good wrestler there with zero distractions. Good student, so on and so forth. We seem to be okay there. You don't want eight or nine guys doing a job. You want 16, or 17 or 18 guys capable of doing the job. And then five or 10 guys doing the job. Then last year we left some points off the board, when you're talking about realizing your full fire power. The formula isn't complicated, it's very simple. Ten weight classes, you want 10 weight classes scoring points.

### **Q. Coach, the Big Ten Conference is really tough. Have you looked at the other teams out there and what they have coming in? Would you say this would be as tough a league as you've been in since you've been in Iowa?**

COACH BRANDS: I'm going to sound like a broken record. It's irrelevant how tough the Big Ten is. You look at the national duels, for instance. You put 16 teams in there, if they go to this format, the ninth place team is probably in the top 16 in the country. So that shows you their depth there teamwise.

I don't know what that means to us, what it means to our guys. They should have certain ideas in their head of who their competition is. When you talk about individuals, now it becomes more relevant; and that was the second part of your question. I think of (Indiscernible), and I think of Ramos right away. I think of Altman and Welsh at Northwestern and St. John. I think of heavyweights with Northwestern and our guy, Bob Telford.

But you don't limit it to those guys that just pop into your head, because if you had a sheet in front of you, there are a lot of things that are relevant. So the Big Ten has always been competitive. There are always competitive individuals.

Our guys, I think, I'll speak for them a little bit, they thrive on that. Even outside the conference as well. Iowa State is competitive. They want to be competitive. They're going to make a big deal out of coming here, and we have to be ready for that.

Oklahoma State, another out-of-conference meet. They have a strong team, and they feel good about their team, from what I'm hearing. I think overall, you're excited. When you get down to specifics, individuals, then you really start to get specifically excited.

### **Q. Talk about at 197?**

COACH BRANDS: Lira and Burak will go, and Burak's a true freshman. Burak's a true freshman and depending on how that match goes, he could see action. We like Burak. Burak's a funny guy if you get to know him.

**Q. Will his time at USA Wrestling serve as a red shirt?**

COACH BRANDS: Yeah, that is basically a red shirt without going to school full-time.

**Q. In terms of development (Indiscernible)?**

COACH BRANDS: Oh, yeah, there are people out there with Zeke Jones and Brandon Slay, and Bill Zadick, he's been out there his whole life, basically, his whole wrestling career pretty much. He grew up and went to high school there. My brother has a relationship with him from way back when Terry worked there. So, a good family. It was a no-brainer to recruit him.

He's got a brother out at Penn, and we had to work on that a little bit. The brother having one year to go out there was to our advantage because it's a tight family. You have to ask Nathan, but I'll speak for him a little bit, I think he's in no way, shape or form sorry that he made the choice to be a Hawkeye, and we're excited about that. He represents our program very well.

**Q. You said your wrestlers have zero distractions. What does zero distractions mean?**

COACH BRANDS: Zero distractions means they have their life in order. They're good socially. They're good students. They come to practice serious. That doesn't mean that they don't have things that work out and they don't have a carrot dangling out in front of them that they're trying to get to. What that means is that there's a lot of common ground.

When there is a lot of common ground, good things happen. Patrick Rhoads is a good student. He's in the engineering department. He's serious about that aspect of his life as well as his wrestling. So we'll see.

It's a deep weight at 49, and Kelly looks to be strong. Mike Kelly, I'll talk about him a little bit. He looks to have -- here's the thing. What do you say at press day? What do you say during the first month of practice? The guy's going to light the world on fire? I'm not saying that.

I'm just saying there are indications that we see as a coaching staff where the guy -- Mike

Kelly is who I'm talking about -- is doing some things that maybe he did maybe right away when he was here and then dropped off a little bit. Seems to be more disciplined with his weight going down to 149. Last year it was maybe not in his head right away to go down, so maybe he wasn't quite as in tune with the weight class getting down there late, et cetera.

You know, these guys that get experience, a year's experience is huge for a freshman. I'm not saying that they can't do it or aren't able to do it. But when they don't have the season they had, which I can tell you that Mike Kelly did not have the season that he wanted, is what I meant to say, you either continue down that path and spiral downward or you get tough and you rectify the things that held you back. He seems to be headed in the right direction. That's always good to see.

**Q. What do you do to keep Matt McDonough hungry?**

COACH BRANDS: He doesn't have to look far right now. Because really the first time, and Matt Gurule has added some depth there at 125, returning roster member. Matt Gurule has been up and down, 125 to 133. But for the first time really there are two true 135 pounders really pushing hm. I'm not saying they're going toe-to-toe with him or it's even in the room with as far as their wrestling is, but they fight him. I'm talking about Thomas Gilman and Cory Clark. So he doesn't have to look far to stay motivated.

Sometimes it's in your nature, maybe when you're a senior with those kind of credentials that McDonough has, to maybe think that things in the room should be a little bit easier. But you don't ever want that to be the case. I think we have some good guys there that are checking him every day he walks in the door which is healthy. It's healthy for our team, healthy for our future.

**Q. Can you talk about Telford and how much he has improved?**

COACH BRANDS: Bob Telford of course the summer is important in all sports in the off-season. He had a good off-season. We put him in touch with Chris Doyle, and Chris Doyle, as you know, I call it world renowned expertise in the strength department. We needed to strengthen some things.

If you watched his wrestling, there were some things left undone. Just because you have

opportunities and you're in in certain holds and then for some reason you're able to complete those holds. You address those things mentally, you address those things technically and positionally. But you also have to address them strength-wise. We like how he has addressed those things. Again, it's not automatic. We're talking summer and into the early season and a month of hard wrestling. From where I sit, all things are good.

**Q. How did the 174 situation play out?**

COACH BRANDS: Very little dialogue and things just seem to work themselves out. I don't think anybody's trying to avoid anybody. In Lofthouse's case he's been in between weights in his head since March. He got big -- when I say big, he's not 220 pounds, but he can either way and be effective. The decision wasn't a hard one to go to 74.

Mike Evans was a 65-pounder last year, and we've just got to get him to complete the three-day tournament at the end of the year. We all know his capabilities there. I'm not going to say it's a no-brainer, but sometimes some of these things have a way to work themselves out. Sometimes there is a little dialogue which there was, more so with maybe Evans than any of the other guys.

I don't think anything is in stone by any means either. We are not in stone in those weight classes. We have three good guys and some depth there as well. I mentioned some names, 84 we've got Jeremy Fahler and two freshmen, Meyer and Brooks. We have a lot of options there. It's about winning and performance, as you know. We'll see how those three do their job and figure it out from there.

**Q. (No Microphone)?**

COACH BRANDS: When you call Midlands and ask. I'm not sure we were headed that way. But I see a guy like Matt McDonough. He's got a pretty good Midlands string going. I'm good friends with Drew Pariano, and I know this stuff is viral, so he'll probably know that I'm asking for his good graces if we go down that path.

But we want to be in Midlands. Let's make that real clear. All this BS and people speaking for me, that really irritates me sometimes. That's one of the cases where I got irritated that people are saying we're protecting our schedule. That's a bunch of hogwash. We've been to Midlands every

year and like the Midlands tournament. It defines your career.

It's one of the most prestigious open tournaments to win going back 50 years. We want to be a part of that in the future. We quit messing with this national duels thing, and then the Big Ten quit moving dates back into early January for Big Ten duels, and maybe we can have it make more sense for the schedule.

I heard one thing that, you know, and I won't get specific, but we were dodging the competition at Midlands this year. I will tell you right now, we have never dodged competition. You're looking at a guy that you just keep saying that stuff, because we like that when you talk like that. It's maybe my bulletin board material for the rest of the world so have at it.

**Q. You mentioned the NCAA. How did that coaches' summit go a couple of weeks ago?**

COACH BRANDS: Very interesting perspective from my standpoint of how parliamentary procedure works and continues to work and work and work and work when you don't get what you want when you're on the side that has the power. I'll just say that. It was very interesting. I know that this agenda is being pushed hard.

The good thing is they know the people opposed are serious about it and fairly intelligent, and I'm not speaking for myself when I say fairly intelligent, I'm speaking for guys like Pariano, Pat Santoro, Lehigh and Cael Sanderson, and a host of smaller schools as well.

When I say smaller schools, that's not belittling them at all, but we're serious. And there are numbers that back that up. Not just a couple of high-powered programs in this thing. There are some very serious dialog from our end that makes sense, you've got to engage us. It's like politics. You've got to reach across the aisle, and I'm not sure that's being done.

It was a good discussion and then from there, they'll push their agenda anyway regardless of how it went down. They can spin it how they want.

**Q. Is Ballweg more of a natural 141 pounder?**

COACH BRANDS: Absolutely. He's a 141 pounder, no doubt. Montell Marion is a good

competitor for us. That made things tough on Mark Ballweg. Sometimes that makes you better. Is there growth there? I see some good things happening there. But we are not in competition and let's wait and see. He has an opportunity now, so grab it and don't look back.

I don't have a favorite there. But when you specifically talk about Geva -- you talk about (Indiscernible). You talk about Mark Ballweg, nothing to make me happier for him or his family. To have the success to put an exclamation mark on his career.

**Q. What does Tony Ramos mean to you as he closes the gap on the season?**

COACH BRANDS: Tony Ramos is more of a lights-is-on type of guy. What needs to do is maybe approach the practice and get his practice room wrestling up to the level of competition even though that will never really happen. But let's approach it. He's done that. But he's always going to be ready to go. I think he's on track. You're talking about things that we could sit down and watch film together and be a long discussion, because there are things that he's done, there are things that he's continuing to do, and there are things that he needs to really focus on and maybe emphasize that we're trying to get him to emphasize maybe a little bit.

But he's a competitor and a team player. He's all in, and we like that leadership. No question about it with him. You know where he stands. His wardrobe is black and gold all the way through.

**Q. Coach, St. John was pretty strong last year after being hurt. Can he keep up at that level?**

COACH BRANDS: Oh, yeah. He's a tough guy. He's one of the toughest guys I've seen just from a rebound from, I call it catastrophe. How he finishes matches and finishes the season, and finishes hard situations. There is a reason why he's relevant and his name is familiar to people.

**Q. This program's standards is so high, how --**

COACH BRANDS: It's not high. This is how the world is. This is how you get ahead in the world. This is how you're successful is when you think like this. The standard is not high. We are not bitter about taking third place. We are not angry and dysfunctional. But we want to coach with the message that these guys that we have in

our room can do the job, number one. Now when I talk to them, believe it, and then work for it and go after it. There is nothing wrong with that. There is nothing dysfunctional with that.

The problem is sometimes people get lazy and they take a year or two off because it might not look good on paper. Those things aren't relevant. Those things aren't relevant to us. They never have been. They weren't relevant to Gable, and they're not relevant to me.

Put me in a straight jacket for saying that, but I'll be kicking and screaming out of here saying that I'm right, because I know I'm right there in that mentality. Who are you going to tell that we shouldn't ask that way? Whose parents?

Are you going to tell Sandy McDonough? Anybody know her? Are you going to tell her we're not going to contend against Penn State because they've got 40 points on us? She'd slap me upside the head with something hard, a wooden something and hard. We better have high level mentality here. So I'm sorry to jump all over your question.

**Q. What kind of an impact has Ryan Morningstar's return to the program had?**

COACH BRANDS: Morningstar is who he is. We love it. We have a situation there where you have a Hawkeye again and familiarity there. He has respect for what you just talked about, the standard in the program and respect for the method to get it done. The other thing is there is no dialogue on, hey, you understand that this is how we get things done or how we do things. There is really no situation there whether there's a misunderstanding. His priorities are in order, and I think he holds guys accountable but in a different way than maybe I do. And that's always healthy too because not everybody should be like the head coach, and that's why you have a good staff around you. We love him.

**Q. How has Luke Lofthouse adjusted to the coaching role?**

COACH BRANDS: He fits in as well. We looked at a couple of different options there. Then settling on him at the time, you didn't know he was unproven. He's kind of a quiet guy, but you put him in that leadership role. Luke Lofthouse has thrived. He's a different guy to me. He'll tell me what he thinks. I'm not sure that before he did so much. He was more kind of a quiet guy.

He was in our club and being a wrestler, he has a respect level. But being on staff, I think the way he looks at it, he puts it that we're on a level playing field where now his input is worthy, maybe. That's really, really good for our program. It's real good for the leadership of a program that the leadership has partner in leadership, and that's what he's brought more than anything is partnership.

**Q. How has the dynamic between Luke and Ethen Lofthouse been?**

COACH BRANDS: With your uncles in the room with you, there's going to be, you know, but it's healthy. Family is good and not maybe always ideal. But they get along just fine.

**Q. Your seniors, along with St. John being your leaders then this year?**

COACH BRANDS: All spring I talked about McDonough, Ramos and St. John. Then adding to that category and getting not just two or three or four other guys which you've got Telford, and Lofthouse and Gambrall and Mike Evans up there as well. But adding Ballweg to that, and Dziwka and Grothus and Kelly, and I mentioned Gambrall, he's up in that category.

But getting him back on track. He was third two years ago. You look at the points, and that's what I started with, you look at the points that we left off the scoreboard, and there's a lot that we can -- it's not a snap of the fingers and correct mentality. It's just there are the points you're looking for right there. There it is. It's there.

Like I said, we like our guys. We like our guys. There is work to be done, but there can be upgrades at the weights we need upgrades at. Gambrall, you know 84, Lofthouse was 7th. 7th doesn't score many points. We've got to be up there scoring more points than seventh place points. Does that put pressure on you? I don't know. I don't know. I don't think so.

**Q. Can you elaborate on the two incoming freshmen?**

COACH BRANDS: True freshman from a year ago. We like our freshman class. I mentioned four names. I can mention a lot more. It's no secret what happened with Nate Skonieczny. We don't like that, but we like the class as a whole. We're moving forward with them. I think I mentioned five now that I think about it. I can mention Burak and Meyer and Brooks and Gilman and Clark, and Connor Ryan

and Topher Carton, and I mentioned the guy that left. We liked that class.

They're respectful, they're in tune with things. They're full of P & V. Anybody not know what that is?

**Q. Piss and vinegar.**

COACH BRANDS: Anybody not know what P and V is? See, I didn't say it this time. My language has been good P & V we like that. They're full of P & V the right way. They're serious about wrestling. They really upgrade our room. I talked about McDonough with Clark and Gilman. But I can talk about the upper weights with Lofthouse, with Brooks and Burak. I can talk about how those guys impacted those upper weights as well. So we have a good class, and we've got to keep them good.

**Q. What kind of numbers do you expect from next year's recruiting class?**

COACH BRANDS: I'll see in a week from today. Magic, they'll just materialize.

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