

August 25, 2014



An Interview With:

COACH LES MILES

COACH MILES: Glad to be up here. Glad the season is getting ready to start. Ted, very glad to see you. Know that you had an eventful summer and fought through some difficulty and we're glad to see you here, you here me? One time, round of applause for Ted, one time. (Applause).

Now, really need to recognize the investment that Cox and CST has made in our network; the idea that Jacqui Vines really went out of her way to make sure that SEC Network was in our lineup. The idea that our viewers, the people in this state can catch us, is very, very important. Rod Mickler, thanks for all you do at CST and to help promote LSU and the ability to add to the lineup Kevin Mawae, Jacob Hester, really gives us off the field football credibility that's pretty dag special.

So if at any point in time I need a short yardage carry, or a center that could make the calls, I'm going to turn to those two men and have those ex-Tigers come to the field.

Now, Gordy Rush, Emily Dixon, the recently married Emily Dixon, and Victor Howell, you guys will not be called to the field in any way. But again, it takes I team to produce what we do here and I look to all of those people as part of that team.

Finally we're in game week. Ask any player that's on any team that ever played football, game week: The hard work is done and the grueling task of getting through camp is over. It's now about preparing for that team, and certainly the feel of excitement and the energy in our building is very good.

We're all looking forward to getting to Houston, Houston being a great alumni base for us and we're going to recruit in that area. So it's a great place for us to be, an NFL venue, home of the Houston Texans. And then to line up against a very quality opponent in Wisconsin, a team from

my background, we're really looking forward to playing.

Fall camp update. Again, very good camp. We came out of it without injury and feel like we're in pretty good shape as we go into this game. We had a purpose in this summer. We recognized that we were taking on a very, very quality opponent and we prepared this summer hard, came in in shape and I think it carried over in the football end of it. So the goal is to get better in each practice. I thought they did that. I like our team. I like our leadership.

So we will play both quarterbacks. Who goes on to the field first is significant, but who comes off the field, and it's really going to be their best play, and we are looking forward to that happening.

We have a tremendous stable of running backs. Kenny Hilliard, Terrence Magee in the veteran group, and certainly Leonard Fournette and Darrel Williams, looking forward to seeing them on the field. We will not hesitate to call their numbers. Offensive line is veteran. The leadership there is very, very good.

The defense is a fast, physical group and they have quality depth at every position. I feel like they performed extremely well against us in summer camp and at scrimmages. We look forward to them playing.

The special teams, Jamie Keehn had as good a camp as he's capable of having and we look forward to him punting. Delahoussaye is going to be a guy that will figure in on national awards, and either Trent Dominique or Cameron Gamble will kick off for us, both of which have very strong legs. Our specialists are going to be very good.

Wisconsin, a Big Ten team with tremendous size. They were 9-4 a year ago. Head coach Gary Andersen has done a great job in his second year at Wisconsin. In their past, they have won three Big Ten titles in the last four years. They have 12 straight consecutive Bowl games, tremendously proud tradition.

I remember being recruited there. Mike

Webster was the center on that team; that's how long ago it was, and it was very obvious that they carried very deeply about their teams and that certainly, that tradition is there. I was fortunate to be at Michigan as a player and a coach and watch that. It was always difficult to play those guys, and we recognize the challenge.

They return nine starters, six on offense, three on defense. Their running back, Melvin Gordon is an all-Big Ten player from a year ago. They are preparing to play again, two quarterbacks, Joel Stave is their starter from a year ago who was a walk-on, won the job, started the last 13 games.

And then Tanner McEvoy, who was a receiver and a safety, but had always been a quarterback, really moved from that position, I think it was safety in the winter of the year and went back to quarterback, and has really competed extremely well there. He's a guy that's got mobility to him and the ability to throw.

So we are really preparing for both guys. But I think somebody said that Tanner McEvoy may well be the starter. Doesn't make any difference at this point. We're preparing for what is Wisconsin's best.

So they are a big offensive line, quality tailbacks and they will push the ball at you on the ground. Defensively, a veteran secondary and they are big up front. All of their guys really have been playing ability; in other words, you see them in backups all of last year, even if they didn't start. And so even though there's not a lot of starters in that defensive line, they really are a talented group.

In summary, we look forward to going to Houston, playing our best. It's a great challenge. We are looking forward to it. Again, it's game week, and we get to play against somebody else, not LSU.

Q. Can you give us an update on Jalen Mills?

COACH MILES: He is healthy and preparing to play.

Q. Okay. And then another update on this depth chart you've given us, you have Elliott Porter listed as starting center. Where is that battle between he and Pocic?

COACH MILES: I didn't give you that. That was given to you by somebody else and that would not be -- I would think that if I had to make

that decision today, that Ethan Pocic would be our center.

Q. Why has he become such an effective safety and what are the nuances or things that a guy has to learn going from offense to defense like he did?

COACH MILES: Rickey Jefferson always been a very physical player, very fast, great ball skills. But those nuances are coverages and general and coverage lanes, run support lanes and fits that have to be understood by the safeties and I think Rickey is becoming that. I would think that he would be as talented as any of our safeties; so we had Matt (ph), Garrett, just minus some experience.

Q. You mentioned both quarterbacks will play, especially this Saturday; is it your hope that as the season goes on that one will become your starter or your main guy, or do you see advantages into playing both obviously?

COACH MILES: Well, right now, if there was one quarterback that gave us all the advantages to play, then at some point in time, that guy would be our starter after he determined that it was an advantage to his team to play him in all situations from start to finish. That separation has not occurred. We are preparing to play both guys. If those things happen, it will certainly play out in front of us, but competition will make that work.

Q. You had a battle all fall camp at right guard. Do you expect Hoko to start Saturday or is that battle not --

COACH MILES: I think Hoko has really improved and I think the back end of camp, he has come on. I would think that he would start. I think that Washington might still play in spots. Not only at the guard spot or one of the tackles.

Q. With so many new players that you may be counting on this year, is it a bit of a mystery how they will perform until you get them in a game situation, or do you feel practice has reflected what to expect?

COACH MILES: You look at our young players, and you think about our quarterbacks, certainly the one that's been with us for a year plus, and the other one really came in in the spring of the year.

So I would expect that both of those guys would play like we've seen them play. I wouldn't suggest that it should be a mystery to us. I think we would expect that those guys would play that way well.

I think our young receivers, kind of behind Diarse, a veteran, and kind of kind Travin Dural, but our young receivers all can play. They are talented guys; Malachi Dupre can line up and do certain things. I think you'll find that Trey Quinn can play in a variety of spots for us. Chark will also play in a variety of spots for us.

So you're looking at three young, very talented receivers that will go to the field and play and will look forward to it. I think that kind of athlete that would require maybe double coverage and that opportunity to throw them the ball is certainly there.

Q. You mentioned the wide receivers over here. Curious as head coach, you don't have any more input on the depth chart than that? You can't get your way?

COACH MILES: No, I can get my way. I think this is my way. (Smiling).

So I have -- it's going exactly how I would script it to be honest.

Q. So you can veto this depth chart that we have?

COACH MILES: Absolutely. But I guess what I'm saying is, is that was probably a great guess, you know, maybe until Monday.

Q. Okay. About that depth chart, as touted as this freshman class is, there are not a lot of them on here, and you mentioned the wide receivers. If you had to guess, how many true freshmen do you think will play and how many will play really, really key roles?

COACH MILES: Six to 12, and I think six will play key roles.

Don't ask me to name those guys --

Q. That was my follow.

COACH MILES: Go ahead.

Q. You said neither quarterback has distinguished themselves. Are you still looking this week for some daylight there, and does it ever become a concern that for them or for the team that it becomes a distraction or a problem not knowing who is going to be the guy?

COACH MILES: Well, we are going to play the best player that gives us the best chance at victory ever when that is. I think the distraction is and can only be brought in by other people. Because the only opinion that's worth a damn is that opinion that's derived in our building. So that opinion will play those guys and everybody in that building will understand that's the reason why.

So if at some point in time it's one guy; if at some point in time it's almost a full game of one guy. I think our team understands that we have talented quarterbacks and we have guys that can play. But right now they have not separated themselves, and we are not certain. If we were certain, then I promise you, we would play the one guy that would give us all the advantage.

But, if two guys can give us greater advantage than one guy, then let's certainly play two.

Q. You said you were preparing to play Jalen Mills. Does that mean you're going to play him the whole game or you'll sit him for a half --

COACH MILES: Any of those thoughts would be something that I carry with me, and I would -- we are preparing him to play early and late.

Q. Going back to what Scott said, do you know today who your starting quarterback is for this week? Do you know now who it is but you're not going to say until Thursday?

COACH MILES: Correct.

Q. You know who it is?

COACH MILES: Yes.

Q. Okay.

COACH MILES: Is either going to be? One guy or the other.

Q. This Wisconsin game, how does that challenge compare to the ones you've taken to Dallas playing Oregon and TCU in years past? How does this team force you to prepare differently this off-season?

COACH MILES: It's a big, powerful, very physical Big Ten team. And I think our preparation has been conditioning, strength development and speed. That's not really changed. Not in the summertime. But in camp, certainly we're

prepared for a different style of offense than we've seen out of a North Carolina and Oregon and some other teams that we've played in the first game. These guys are talented and in a different way.

Q. Following on that, do you really enjoy this kind of game? Obviously with your roots, Big Ten run game expected from both sides of the ball, smash mouth, are you excited about coaching in this kind of game?

COACH MILES: Yeah, I think it's a great challenge to our team. I recognize the advantages of having this kind of test early on in the season. Yeah, I look forward to competitive games and this is going to be -- you're going to be prepared to play 60 minutes.

Q. Leonard Fournette, how much has he improved since the start of camp? How well does he take to coaching, considering the reputation he came in with, and whatnot?

COACH MILES: Very humble guy. Takes coaching all the time. Wants to be a very good player. A real quality teammate, everything I have -- he would fall right in line with some of the great teammates we've had. And I think in this room, Kenny Hilliard, Terrence Magee, certainly real examples of being a real quality teammate and he's every bit of that.

Q. First off, thanks for the acknowledgment. When you were at Michigan, did you play Notre Dame and what did you think of the discontinuation of that series, and maybe you could work it in, an anecdote that you told with a coaches clinic in the summer, high school coaches?

COACH MILES: Here's what's happening, Ted, in this game. It's so difficult to continue to increase rivalry opportunities, you got it? In other words, there's Michigan with an opportunity to play Ohio State every year and a very rigorous Big Ten schedule.

And the idea that they would go out of their way to play a national power on an annual basis with great interest, it's certainly not a Michigan avoidance. It's just the -- what's best for them in relationship to the view of the playoffs, what's best for them in view of going through a Big Ten season and seeing the opportunity to win the championship there.

And then, see that Notre Dame, if, in fact, they are capable of getting to the playoffs. I think that that thought process is real.

If you think of this, it was not possible for me to think that Nebraska would not play Oklahoma every year. Just think about that rivalry lost, okay. And the Michigan - Ohio rivalry is not lost and certainly the LSU versus a number of our rivals is not lost. But some of those go by the wayside based on TV sets.

Now that anecdote that I told, I certainly don't remember, but it would have been one that revolved around the wonderful contribution that a high school coach and a youth football coach could make on my family; and what would be my indebtedness to the experiences that my kids are having in the State of Louisiana based on the coaching that they received.

I have a specific story about when we just arrived and no one knew my son's last names, and it was not that important that this high school coach or this youth coach would find anything interesting in the guy at all. And in reality, he turned an opportunity to make a goat of a son into making an example of what somebody goes through to achieve above adversity. It just made the difference.

So that was not the anecdote and certainly it's not something that has great humor to it, but that was the piece or one of the pieces I offered, I promise. Thank you.

Q. Have you found the time to talk to Leonard about expectations now that the season is upon him and upon you all? There's been a lot of buildup, some of it from your own mouth I guess. But do you talk to him about, you may not play this game and that's not a bad thing; or you may play outstanding, and that's not necessarily a great thing, either.

COACH MILES: He's going to want the opportunity to do everything that he can do. And certainly he'll play a role in this game.

So we practice like we're going to play. There's not going to be any surprise or shock that, you know, oh my gosh, I didn't know that play. You know, if he didn't know that play, he'll never get that one in the game, I promise.

And so he'll be able to do things that he's capable of doing and the great thing about a guy like Leonard is he's humble, which allows him to answer questions, really incrementally, as we get

closer and we practice prior to the game.

And so when he gets to the game, he'll translate those hundred yards just like he translated the high school hundred yards. There will be better players on the field. Certainly it's going to not be the same. He'll be hit by a college player as opposed to a high school player. But it would be my suggestion that he's one of those guys that have taken hits against pretty good defense, and he's ready for that.

So no reason for him to think about winning the Heisman tomorrow, okay, or certainly Thursday or for that matter Friday before the game. Just make a contribution, do the things that you're slated to do, and you know, let's go play and let's enjoy yourself. Expectations are really limited to what is the opinion of our room and our building and as long as he does the things he's done, we're really good with him.

Q. Is your plan still to tell the starting quarterback that he's starting on Thursday, like you said earlier, or have you already told him?

COACH MILES: Yeah, we'll communicate. Those communications will be held kind of close to the vest in how we communicate that to our quarterbacks.

Q. Seems like everybody who talks about No. 7 wants to compare him to somebody, throw out some name. Who does he remind you of?

COACH MILES: Leonard Fournette. Looks just like him.

I'm good with that. I'm really, at this point, he's a great teammate, he's competing like heck and he wants the opportunity to contribute, and I'm for him. I don't want to preempt a performance by saying something that, frankly, he'll probably exceed.

If he gets two carries and he gets seven yards and they are great runs and he did the things he was supposed to do, I'm very likely to give him an A plus. And then if he does some other things, you know, again, in his first contest, I guess my point is, is I'm going to let him define who he is.

Q. Do you find beyond just preparing for the season-opening game, where you have an opponent like this, like you've had a lot in the past, that really catches your attention, do you think that helps the whole August practice stay focused? And what else would you credit

your success in these fairly high-profile opening games to?

COACH MILES: I think it gets our attention. I think it gets our players' attention a long time ago. I think it happens in the summer when they run 1:10s and when they lift. I think there's a comfort of saying, you know, Wisconsin; this is about the opener, this is about Wisconsin.

I think that our guys enjoy that. I think it motivates them and I think getting into game week, it will be a little even more heightened.

Q. Thinking back to the year you played Oregon, you certainly had a thousand distractions that August. Do you think that that in particular, such a really good opponent coming up, kept those distractions from being a huge problem that year?

COACH MILES: I think the distraction certainly qualified some of the leadership in that room. I think the leadership is very sound and had a lot of character to it and really kind of resented the position that they were in and played over the top of it.

Ultimately I don't know that that incident was the key factor but I think our leadership maybe was. The fact that they were in position to lead, and I think they did a great job, and I think they had have done a great job prior to that, anyway. If that event had not occurred, I think our team would have -- I think the outcome would have been very similar.

Q. Talking about your three primary running backs, what do you think separates each one from the other and how you want to use them this weekend?

COACH MILES: I think that we have three talented guys. I don't know that we are going to separate their use. I think Kenny Hilliard is lighter and faster than he's ever been. I think he's going to be his best back. Terrence Magee, again, had a spectacular fall. Leonard Fournette, very, very, very accomplished and Darrel Williams, for that matter, ran hard, ball security.

We're not looking at three; we're going to have fresh legs and we are going to let those guys play.

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