

July 14, 2016



An Interview With:

MIKE LEACH

MIKE LEACH: All right, any questions? Those that have dealt with me before know I don't really do opening remarks, so let's get started.

Q. How different is the game day experience in Pullman going into this season compared to when you first started it?

MIKE LEACH: Well, one thing would be certainly the stadium and the facilities, just the whole complexion of how everything looks is different, and then the other thing is the construction. As we work through construction and that type of thing, kind of the spaces and organization of the student activities, the fans, their involvement. You know, they've kind of taken shape, and they continue to have surprises. And Bill Moos, our athletic director, refers to it as sizzle that surfaces every year.

Yeah, as far as the game day environment, everything is close together. Everything is right there, and it's one of those things that's contagiously exciting for everybody to be involved in.

Q. Can you talk about the loss of Peyton Bender, how that affects your team?

MIKE LEACH: You know, I don't know how much it impacts the depth. He and Tyler Hilinski were really battling it out, and Tyler was doing a really good job, and I also think that was part of what contributed to that. Peyton wants to get on the field. But we got Luke and Tyler and then some other guys, so we're excited about that.

Q. How impactful was the decision of Gabe Marks deciding to come back and play?

MIKE LEACH: I thought it was important. I think one of the biggest aspects of that was just the energy and excitement he brings to our team overall, you know, he's a guy that's very

passionate about football. The other players draw from that, and I think obviously he's a talented guy. No question about that. But the way that his energy reaches the rest of our team I thought was maybe the biggest thing.

Q. What's next in Luke Falk's development?

MIKE LEACH: Steady improvement. I guess one of his best qualities is he doesn't have a glaring weakness, but like anybody, he needs to improve. There's nothing he can't improve on, too. Just overall improvement, and he's pretty diligent about that. He's one of those guys that is always working at it, and I also think that steadiness and dedication helps our team.

Q. Thoughts on the Heisman?

MIKE LEACH: Yeah, I'm in favor of it. Well, I've kind of lost track of what the Heisman is. There was a time when the Heisman went to the guy who had the biggest impact and effect on their team, and if that was the case, he probably would have won it last year or should have. And then so the emphasis has kind of shifted from that, and a lot of guys with Heisman trophies wouldn't have him in this day and age because now they try to finesse it to whoever is the MVP on the National Championship team gets it.

However, the inconvenient fact is the Heisman is issued before the National Championship, so there's a bunch of speculation on that.

So really I think they either need to have two awards or they need to define it. Either you're giving it to the guy that's got the biggest impact on their particular team or it's for the MVP for the team that wins the National Championship, and if that's the case, they need to hand it out at the end of the National Championship along with the other hardware.

Q. There was a lot of talk last year that

...when all is said, we're done.®

ASAP sports

visit our archives at asapsports.com

Leach FB Media Day.docx

McCaffrey was actually hurt by not getting exposure, because of the West Coast stuff, because of the title game being played while other games were going on. Do you believe any of that, that it's so provincial that it's turned into a popularity contest by region?

MIKE LEACH: I don't know. I don't think about it very much. But I guess I'll dedicate these seconds of my life to thinking about it (laughter).

I think that -- well, first of all, I think it always is, because naturally bigger media bases are going to have more writers and they're more familiar with the teams they cover, and that's understandable, and that's difficult to fully control. I think there's that.

In his case, a very good player, but also young, hasn't been on the forefront for as long as some of the other ones, and maybe it's just exposure of how long he's played compared to other people.

But I do think -- I guess I felt like there's pretty good consideration on the West Coast, but there is the fact -- the fact of the matter is our games are played later, too. I mean, I don't know. Who knows what those people -- you know these folks better than I do. You never know what's running through their head, and a lot of times it's not good, so I don't know.

Q. Can you talk a little bit about your offensive line, how hard is it going to be to replace your left tackle?

MIKE LEACH: Well, I think he did a really good job, Joe Dahl, but we've got good quality guys. The biggest thing is depth. I think our first five guys are pretty good, and then after that getting other people behind him and getting -- also getting them the reps to develop their skill so they can be as effective as they can. But I do feel good about our first-level guys. We just -- but definitely want to get more bodies out there.

Andre Dillard I thought did a really good job for us this spring. You know, he's got really good feet. But Joe, for as long as he played, understandably has more experience and more polish. We need to get Dillard and others -- it's kind of like you keep everybody fresh but get them as many reps as you can.

Q. Would you put a game in Australia?

MIKE LEACH: Boy, you have all the tough ones, don't you? Put a game in Australia? Yeah, especially if I could stay for a month, you know. That's what we ought to do, we ought to go have

camp in Australia. We ought to have training camp in Australia, play a game, fly home. That would work for me.

Q. NFL makes a big deal about conditioning concerns, player health, long flights, all that stuff.

MIKE LEACH: Well, if you do it in the middle of the season, I think it's very difficult, and I think it affects both teams negatively with regard to not just the next week but probably the next two weeks. So I think it needs to be a deal where you have a bigger window instead of, all right, hop on the plane, now we're going to Australia. I don't think that's -- I think it would negatively affect both teams, not just -- they play each other, so that part would be somewhat even. But I think it would affect them not just one week but the next two weeks.

Q. You're an active guy, do a lot of stuff outside. On Spurrier's retirement, if you had a chat with him, what would you tell him, some things you would recommend doing in the South?

MIKE LEACH: You know, he's pretty good at that as far as being active. Coach Spurrier is always moving and doing something. Yeah, I mean, just the visual in my mind -- he's always moving. I mean, he's sort of a fidgeter, you know, but he's always coming from something and going to do something. Obviously golf, coming from golf or going to golf. And there's plenty of people that know him better than I do, but I know him.

The handful of times -- I mean, everything from dinner to golf to tennis to swimming to the beach to fishing. I mean, he's always going somewhere. I mean, even the middle of what he's doing, he's going somewhere. I've always kind of been impressed with that.

He truly does get the most out of each day, you know, as far as activity. So I don't think he needs my advice. There may be a day I need his.

Q. What's impressed you most about the evolution of the defense under Coach Grinch?

MIKE LEACH: I think, one, the clarity to which he communicates, and so as a result they trigger wherever they're going quickly. You know, I think the biggest impact that happened the quickest is we became a decisive defense.

Despite the fact that we're young, we went from indecisive to decisive, and then some of the decisiveness allowed us to make plays probably even ahead of what our skills justified. And then the skills continued to develop because he's very specific, can say a little in a short period of time.

But then as we did a better job of getting around the ball, things would happen on our behalf, you know, a lot of times.

And then the other thing, like one example of that, like a specific example would be our secondary, we went from no clear-cut starters in the secondary to a secondary that became very solid, very clearly defined, that at the end of the season was probably playing as well as any secondary in the conference.

Q. How do you get to the point where you decide I have to make a change like that at defensive coordinator?

MIKE LEACH: Yeah, you mean, as far as making a coaching change? You know, the biggest thing is everybody needs to be on the same page and committed to improvement, and I guess the simple answer would be, you know, at that position I didn't think we were -- I didn't think our goals and our communication were as clear as I would have liked, and I didn't think we were coaching our playing with the passion that I would have liked. So that was the biggest thing.

Most people I've dealt with in this business are quality people, but there's a point to where you have to think about everybody. You know, there's a whole program and the people that draw from it, and then the exciting thing about working with Alex is he's at a point in his career where he's really developed his skills over a period of time, and you know, as far as -- now the opportunity to run the whole defense and do it specifically, the chance to do and execute some of the things that he's thought of, learned and drawn from over the years, you know, I think, one, it was time, but two, what's impressive is a lot of times guys try to do too much who are in that role. But I've always been impressed with just how clearly he's got what he does packaged, and that's what we've always tried to do offensively, as well.

Q. Would you say that he's had a bigger impact than you might have imagined in just a year's team?

MIKE LEACH: Probably. Yeah, I would say that's true. Yeah, definitely I'd say that's true. Well, you know, the one thing that was hard to

gauge with us last year is we were an incredibly young team. As you look around, and you can go through the roster and add it up, there were a bunch of people that never even played college football there. They never even played. They had heard about it, they liked it, they had games on their phones and everything else where they pushed a bunch of buttons and they thought about college football, but they never even -- they'd never even played, or unless they knew somebody, they'd never even been on a college sideline. But dedicated hard workers. And as we came together, we improved more and more.

The challenge to us as coaches, and Alex in particular, because he hadn't really been there, but to identify what you have with your roster and what their skills are and how to bring them to the surface and feature it, that was tough with our team because they were moving targets and young guys always improve at a faster rate as they develop their skills. So it was a constant series of trying to pinpoint who could do what now that they couldn't do the day before type of thing.

Q. How good does it make you feel going into a new season knowing that you've got one of the very -- you're one of the few teams that has an established quarterback in the whole conference?

MIKE LEACH: I don't know. I mean, I think the biggest thing is how that affects our team, and the example that it gives others to draw from. So your off-season work tends to accelerate a little bit because you've got a guy that's been in the role that's kind of leading the others, and they follow his lead. So I think that part is very good.

You know, in the end when it comes to quarterback, you just figure out who the best one is and you play him, you know. But no, he does a great job. And as far as managing the unit, he's one of the best I've ever had.

Q. In June and July, when you and your position coaches can't be around the players too much, how much do you find yourself leaning on your strength coaches to kind of be your eyes and ears?

MIKE LEACH: Pretty much exclusively, you know, them and key players. You keep in touch with your players. You talk to your players and make sure everything is going well for them and that everything from academics to -- as far as

...when all is said, we're done.®



visit our archives at asapsports.com

just work.

But yeah, strength coaches, for an extended period, if you think about it carefully, strength coaches are around players more hours, longer than anybody else. And I've always been impressed with our strength staff and their ability to get the most out of these guys.

Q. What do you want to see out of Gabe as far as this season?

MIKE LEACH: Just steady improvement. We try to do this, try to accomplish this. One of the best strengths you can have as a team is no big weaknesses, so we try to do that, and that's one of Gabe's best qualities is he doesn't have any big weaknesses, but he needs to -- what he is able to do, he needs to steadily improve, and he believes the same thing.

One big thing with regard to players is they need to view everything football-related as an opportunity to improve. They don't always look at the world that way when they first start playing, but Gabe clearly embraces that, and then you've got a guy that's accomplished some things like him, and it rubs off on others about the time some freshman guy thinks he's too good to do something, and then Gabe is out there pushing harder than anybody. It doesn't leave a lot of room for that to be accepted as an accurate notion, you know.

Q. Did he and Luke have an unusually strong chemistry on the field?

MIKE LEACH: Yeah, I think so. I think that that evolves over reps and then a reliability that exists. It's like, okay, he'll be here at this point. Well, Luke is going to put it here at this point. And then they get to where they can kind of adjust around one another, like that willing -- or the winning play against UCLA, both of them adjusted, and then I think the familiarity of who's where when, I think they draw from that. And I think that helps because both of them had to move and adjust to spots that weren't exactly how it's drawn up.

Q. Does the Pac-12 North feel a little bit more open to you this year, or where do you see your team competitively?

MIKE LEACH: I don't know, shoot, we won nine games last year, and were upset four times. I mean, I don't know, win one game a week, you know, just try to win one game a week.

Q. What's the one question you hate to answer most at media days?

MIKE LEACH: Well, let me think about this. There's a lot. You know, the whole milestone question stuff. Well, you know, your team did this, it did that, and what does that say, and like everybody is just going to relax, you know, like everybody is -- okay, well, we beat that team, so forget the fact we're playing somebody next week. Now we don't have to do anything. Now all we have to do is just sit here, yeah, yeah, yeah, my, my, my.

You know, I don't know where the media thinks we have time to do all that stuff, you know. Heck, you think that win was fun, the next one might be fun, too, but you've got to invest kind of the time and effort. There's all these -- and you can even just get the goofy like kind of pose in your mind that they're imagining, well, doesn't it feel good, doesn't it mean that you've accomplished this, and he made such a great play, and you did such a good job coaching and your staff. And you're just going, oh, it just feels so good, because now we don't have to do anything. Oh, man, isn't -- let's run through memory lane again. Oh, let's do it some more. I mean, when does everybody got the time to do this? And the thing is even if you get old and start messing with your grandchildren, you only have time to do it a little bit. I mean, I don't know when this happy little space exists, but I mean, this is a business about scratching and clawing, and you're constantly trying to improve and get better and better.

But I'll get asked at least something like that 10 times. But you know, all that -- or the seeing the future questions. The seeing the future. Is your program where you want it to be? No, it's not where I want it to be. It's never where I want it to be. You can always get better.

Q. Do you feel pretty comfortable going into '16?

MIKE LEACH: Yeah, I think we're just fabulous. And here's the other thing. I think 10 years from now we'll be even better.

Q. Is Pokemon big --

MIKE LEACH: Somebody was asking me about that. What is that exactly?

Q. It's like a video game in real time, so if you have your phone in front of you, you

could show this background, and all of a sudden this animated monster pops up. Do you see your football players walking around --

MIKE LEACH: Well, I've seen them doing that for the last 10 years, but nobody talks to people anymore. I mean, there's people won't even talk face to face. They'll go across the room and text each other. I think it's actually kind of disturbing. I think the days before cell phones, when it was dirt clod wars at construction sites, was a lot more wholesome and productive to be perfectly honest.

Q. As you look at your roster, what's your biggest concern heading into the season?

MIKE LEACH: Really getting the next first down, you know. It's always really the same, just steady improvement, constantly improve. You know, just trying to make the most of the next play, and as a coach, trying to -- the constant struggle to honestly evaluate -- everybody wants to view things positively, and you can't view things artificially negative, either. But be able to accurately assess where you are so you can best address it, you know, and I think that's a constant battle to -- that's why we stare at film all the time, to accurately evaluate where we are and how we can get better.

That's all out here. Well, it doesn't do you any good until it's in there, you know.

Q. What are your feelings on the NCAA revisiting the satellite cameras?

MIKE LEACH: Well, I think it was the right thing to do. I think it was the right thing to do. I think that it helps us. It helps student-athletes. And the other thing, I guess the thing that I found most reprehensible was just the dubious motives to eliminate it. I mean, self-serving, selfish disguised in a lie of -- I mean, the whole thing was false. The reason to not have it's a lie is because it benefits certain teams, and then behind everybody else's back they slip this stuff in. I mean, it was sneakier than hell and it was pitiful, I thought. So I'm glad the NCAA came to their senses and did what was best for the game.

Q. This conference obviously has its eye on some sort of global expansion, basketball in China, football in Australia. I know coaches obviously don't get a lot of time to think about that, but do you agree that college athletics in America should be outwardly branded like that?

MIKE LEACH: I do. I do. I did a clinic in Italy in May. Chris Ault, who was a former head coach at Nevada, he was the head coach of the Milan Rhinos who won the Italian Super Bowl, so I was excited for him for that because I went there about mid-season, and then -- has a pretty mobile quarterback, pretty good receiver.

But no, because I would like to see football become a worldwide sport, and so over there -- I guess to generalize it, you could say football over there is like soccer is here to a degree. But, yeah, I would like to see football become fully international instead of just kind of hobbyists overseas. I'd like them fully integrated, no doubt.

Q. What do you think the best football is outside of North America right now?

MIKE LEACH: Outside of North America, best football? Is Samoa North America? Probably Samoa. I'd say Samoa. Germany is certainly up there. You know who's really embraced football is Austria. Austria has really embraced football. And then of course, as far as me personally, well, I've done clinics in Japan. We had a bunch of coaches from Japan come up over the spring, and we've got some from France and Italy coming, so I've done them in France, I've done them in Scotland, I've done them all over England, in Italy. Head coaches from Belgium come one time. I've never done a camp over there in Belgium.

I don't know, it is kind of exciting, and I would like to see it grow as much as possible in all those places.

Q. One of the big narratives is the Pac-12 is the most likely conference to get left out of a playoff because of cannibalism, everybody is going to beat up on each other. What do you think about that?

MIKE LEACH: I think we need a more expanded playoff system. I think we need one that has 16 teams or more, and I think that would mitigate that. Then the -- rather than speculation and selective and projecting and rankings and all this, it would be settled on the field. So I think we need a playoff system that involves 16 teams or more.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

...when all is said, we're done.®

ASAP sports

visit our archives at asapsports.com

Leach FB Media Day.docx