

**July 22, 2010**



An interview with:

## **COACH BOBBY PETRINO**

**THE MODERATOR:** We are ready to officially begin day two of SEC Media Days. We'll start with Coach Bobby Petrino. If you could give us a few statements about the upcoming season, then we'll take some questions.

**COACH PETRINO:** Good morning. It's great to be here with you. We officially start practice two weeks from today, so we're extremely fired up about that.

It's going to be a big camp for us. We have to do a great job of coming close together as a team, improving every day. The thing I'm most excited about is we'll have great competition every day in practice. We've built depth and our players are ready to go.

We've had a very, very good off-season, spring and summer. What I like most is that we have a great work ethic on our team. We've had a very positive attitude as a team. We've had the best leadership from within the team that I've had since I've been at Arkansas. So we are very excited about that.

Expectations are very high. There's no question about that. It starts with our players, which is a good thing. Our players' expectations for the season is high. Our coaches' expectations for the season is high. Our administration's expectations for the season is high. Also our fans. We're fired up just to get started and get going.

We're embracing the expectations. I think that's a good thing. When you have high expectations, it means that you played good football at the end of the year last year and you have a lot of returning players coming back. To me that's what the start of the season is all about.

How you finished the year and who do you have coming back that played for you or started for you a year ago. And we do return a lot of starters.

I have three young men that are with us today that you'll be excited to visit with. They all have great experience and are very fine young men, starting with Jake Bequette. Jake is one of our defensive ends. True leader of our defense. I think he'll have an opportunity to have an outstanding season this year.

D.J. Williams, our tight end. D.J. has been a very good player for us the last two years. His first season, he led our team in receptions, made a commitment to improve his blocking a year ago. Early in the year, I thought we didn't do a great job of getting him the touches and getting him the ball. But as the year went on, his relationship with Ryan, his timing with Ryan, really improved. He started making a lot of plays at the end of the year. We'll expect he'll have a big year for us.

Then we have Ryan Mallett with us, a guy that I'm very, very proud of. He's fought through this injury that he's had. He's done that with a very positive attitude. He got a lot out of spring football without taking a rep just because of his concentration, his attitude, his love for the game. I think the greatest thing about Ryan is when he comes into a room or steps on the practice field, everybody's energy goes up because of the smile that he has and how much he loves competition and loves the game of football.

He's a young man that's a tremendous leader for us, has amazing talent. Every Saturday when you watch the video after the game, he makes two or three throws that you say, Wow, nobody else might be able to make that throw in America. We're excited with the fact that he is healthy, that he has been throwing the last I think three weeks now. We feel like when we step on the field two weeks from now, he'll be 100% healthy and ready to go.

With that I'll just open it up for questions.

**THE MODERATOR:** We'll take questions.

**Q. When you get camp started, what are some questions you have that you want to start seeing answered pretty quick with camp rolling on?**

COACH PETRINO: Well, you know, you don't really approach camp with questions in mind. You know, you approach it with what we want to get done, what our emphasis is and our goals for camp.

Offensively, I think it's real important for us to continue to improve in our running game, in the power of our running game. One of the things that we really need to understand is who is going to be our backup wide receivers. Although we return the four guys that had the most catches last year at wide receiver, they're backups. And guys we relied on, knew how to play the game real well, all three of them graduated. So we're going to need some help from the incoming freshmen.

Defensively we're going to continue to emphasize what we did well a year ago, which was create turnovers and play very good red-zone defense. Then we must learn how to eliminate the big play. There's times we played very, very good defense and got beat by the big play. We started that in spring ball, working on it. We're going to continue to emphasize it.

Special teams-wise, you know, what I'm most excited about special teams, we'll have great competition for the kicker spot and the punter position. We have two freshmen coming in that we think are very good, and two guys returning. I think competition makes everybody better. That's something that I'm going to be really interested in seeing how that plays out.

**Q. You were talking about Ryan Mallett, he's a great quarterback. Talk about Brian Brohm at Louisville. Compare the two. We know you had great luck with Brian Brohm.**

COACH PETRINO: The comparisons with Ryan and Brian start off the field. You know, how much they love the game, how much they are dedicated to being a student of the game, going into the classroom, studying, having great understanding of what our offensive scheme is, what the defensive scheme is, both being tremendous leaders of their football team, and both being very, very competitive. I think that's where they really, really are compared to each other.

They're a little bit style quarterbacks in that Brian was really about timing, about getting the ball out before a receiver was open. Didn't actually have the same arm strength that Ryan has, but his

knowledge and his ability to throw the ball before someone was open and his toughness to stand into the pocket.

Ryan is a little bit different in the fact that he's got the big, strong arm. We actually have to tone him down a little bit and worry about making some touch throws, not throwing the one ball all the time, not throwing the fast ball all the time, which he's done a great job of. I've been very proud how he's worked at that. He can throw the ball very, very deep. We can buy some time and throw it deep.

But they're both very, very good football players.

**Q. You see a lot of acclaimed high school quarterbacks that don't make it at the college level. Given your run of success with QBs, what is the secret to evaluating these guys?**

COACH PETRINO: The first thing we try to do is start with their leadership abilities, start with their competitiveness. I do really believe that those two aspects, two traits of a quarterback, if you're special in those areas, you can work with the ability and put an offense together for them.

I do think it's real important that you're able to have the arm strength to make all the different throws that you have to, the accuracy. It's huge on your toughness. The way you measure a quarterback's toughness is his ability to stand in the pocket, step into his throw, get hit right in the chin. When you have that type of courage at that position, it helps everybody else on your team's toughness. That's something that's real important to us.

With the defensive linemen now, the ability to have mobility is huge. I think one thing that a lot of people think Ryan is 6'7", he's a pocket passer. If you've been able to really study and see the throws he makes when he leaves the pocket, his ability to run our play-action game, he's really, really good at that. He still has that ability to move around.

You have to be a willing runner. Sometimes that willing runner gets you four, five, six yards, which is great. I really like second down and four, second and five. That's much easier than second and 10 or 12. Sometimes a willing runner runs and makes huge plays. But one thing you have to do is be a willing runner.

I enjoy the evaluation process. It's

important to us when we go in and meet with a quarterback, that we gain an idea what their knowledge is, what do they know about defensive fronts, defensive secondaries, how well have they been trained. The young man we took at midyear, Jacoby Walker, that is one of the reasons we took him - not only how he played the game, but how well of an understanding he had of the game of football and the position of quarterback.

**Q. Could you talk about the SEC West and how competitive it is, how the division will stack up this year?**

COACH PETRINO: Just top to bottom. Obviously, Alabama is the team that everybody has to beat. They're coming off a national championship, have not been beat in conference. A great football team. Very good players. Very well-coached.

LSU is a very good football team. It's always very competitive. We've had two really good games against them the last two years. They've come down right to the last play of the game, which is a lot of fun. You like games like that.

Mississippi State is a team like we feel is getting better and better. Ole Miss is always going to play great defense and run the ball.

It's just a very competitive league.

**Q. Last year your team won and lost a few close games. How do you feel like that's going to prepare you for the season as far as overcoming adversity? What has your team learned that will help you win those games this year and make the pivotal plays at the crucial points of the game that you have to make to be a better football team this season?**

COACH PETRINO: I think the first thing that we learned, like I said, we do have a lot of returning starters, that you have to take the field on the road expecting to win the game, really believe in that.

When we played at Alabama last year, we did not execute and play as well as we would like, as well as we're used to playing. I think it really did come down to the fact that deep down we didn't believe we could win the game.

We made a huge step forward when we went to Florida and executed and played very well at Florida. Our players understood that they didn't have to do anything extraordinary. They just had to play Razorback football and we'd have an opportunity to win the game.

In all of the close game we've been in, you go back and watch the video, there's always 10, 12, 14, 18 plays that if you do one thing on that play, it makes the difference, you win the game. You can always go back to that.

I think what we've tried to learn as a football team is you play one game at a time, you execute, you do your job that play, you play as hard as you can, you learn from it immediately. Whether it's good or bad, you put it behind you and move on to the next play.

We know the majority of the games are going to come down to fourth quarter, whether you win or lose in the fourth quarter. That's where the depth comes in. Conditioning and strength really plays a part of it. I think our strength and conditioning staff has done an excellent job. We're much stronger. We're going to be in great condition for the season. We have a lot more depth. We're hoping that helps us a lot.

**Q. Obviously you have a lot of weapons on offense. You mentioned you want to get the ground game improved, especially that power run. Besides it making you tougher to defend by being more balanced on offense, do you think getting the running game going can also help your defense? Is that a point of emphasis as well?**

COACH PETRINO: Most definitely. When you can control the ball and move it on the ground, you're better on third down because you're getting in shorter distances. You can keep your defense on the field. I'm not saying that we're going to come in and be a ball-control team, because I still like to throw it down the field, move it around, score a lot of points. That's one of the ways we've always found a way to win.

What I do really believe is how well you run the ball in the late third quarter and the fourth quarter, how well you stop the run in the third and fourth quarter makes the difference in winning and losing those close games.

We have to be able to get in a position where we have the lead, we're right there in the fourth quarter, and we're powerful, and you wear 'em down. What you find out in football, some of those three-, four-, five-yard gains you're making in the first half turn into the 10-, 12-, 40-yard touchdown runs in the second half because of being able to wear down the defensive safeties.

In football right now, the safeties are the

guys that are relied on to make all the tackles. I like to have big backs that can wear 'em down and make big plays running the ball in the second half.

**Q. The NCAA is proposing legislation that would limit a school's ability to offer a recruit until the summer before his senior year. What are your thoughts on that?**

COACH PETRINO: I think it's a good thing if it truly does happen. I think there has to be a lot of thought into it. Does that mean just a written offer or a verbal offer? I understand if it's a written offer, because that's easy to monitor. You know what goes out of your office. But I'm not sure it does a whole lot if you say you cannot send out a written offer when you call the coach and say, Tell so-and-so we're going to offer him. Or you call the coach and say, Hey, you know we can't offer scholarships right now, but if we could...

I like the legislation. I like the thought of it. I've never liked the early recruiting, the early commitment part of it, the way it's changed here in the last 10 years. I've liked going through the process, going out on the road, getting into the schools, going in the houses, getting to know the players, getting them on campus, allow them to take all their visits, then come signing date, making the decision.

If we knew how to get back to that calendar, I would be great with it. If that's one thing that helps it, I'm all for it.

**Q. There have been a lot of comparisons made between the expectations for Arkansas this year and Ole Miss last year. Have you used Ole Miss as an example with your players of how to handle or not handle expectations?**

COACH PETRINO: No, not at all. We always try to worry about ourselves. I like the high expectations. I think that's why you're in the profession, is you want to have people think that you're gonna be good. You want our players to understand we have an opportunity to be good, and our coaches to really be driven by that.

It's taken us a while to get to the point where we have high expectations as a university and as a fan base and players. I think it's a good thing. I think the one thing we can't do is shy away from it. Let's embrace it, let it motivate us, then let's go out and do everything we can to make 'em come true.

**Q. What went behind the decision to put Ryan Mallett on the press guide cover? It's rare where you see just one player on your cover representing your team. Was that part of the deal, him coming back?**

COACH PETRINO: Yeah, every year you come in and you meet on what we're going to do with the cover this year. The number one thing I wanted to make sure we did with the cover was not have me on it (smiling). Ryan is much better-looking. It's a great picture of him. He's certainly a guy we feel like has an opportunity to lead our football team. That was the decision we decided to go with.

**Q. The agent contact issues have been in the news. What are your thoughts on that? What safeguards do you have in place to prevent that type of thing from happening? Have you had any issues with that type of thing?**

COACH PETRINO: I really thought I would make it through this without getting asked about the agents. Actually, that's not true. I was trying to have a joke there, but you guys are tough. Nobody laughs anymore (smiling).

It's a concern you have every single day as a coach. What we've done is tried to really educate our players. We've got a guy that, thank God, the conference office set us up with. He's come in two times this summer. He meets with our players, the parents. We've brought agents on campus for our seniors to do their interviews on campus with.

The one thing that I try to tell our players is that, you know, when it comes down to making a decision on the agents, you got to understand that you're the one doing the hiring and that they end up working for you. You want to make sure that everything's up front. If you got a guy that's trying to do something outside, behind our back, behind our administration's back, then you're not going to want that guy to represent you anyway when you come down to the decision.

We've tried to take the proactive part of it as far as let's put everything out in the open, okay? Let's try to educate our players, what does an agent actually mean, what does he do for you, how do you go through the selection process.

I think it's really easy when you have parents, young men that have parents that are involved, help them, you know, make the decision.

Unfortunately, in our profession, we don't have everybody on our team that has that kind of guidance in the home. So then it's up to us to help them with it.

We have not had any inquiries or incidents, knock on wood.

**Q. On the coach's pre-season poll, Arkansas didn't have any receivers on their first or second team. I'm wondering if that surprised you?**

COACH PETRINO: Well, I think when you look at the pre-season, even the post-season, first team, second team, all leagues, there's always guys that you feel on your team or other teams, How did that guy not make it on? But the fact of the matter is, when you have that many good players in a conference, you don't know how the voting is going to go.

I know our receivers will take it personal. They're very motivated. They think they're a good group. They think they're good as individuals. It will be a great motivating factor for them.

**Q. Do you think coaches have become more savvy about social media like Facebook and Twitter and things like that, especially as it relates to recruiting? Is there anybody on your staff that's a go-to guy for tech issues?**

COACH PETRINO: It's certainly something that we've learned to pay a lot of attention to, certainly something that we've spent a lot of time in trying to educate our players and understand what the repercussions could be from doing something stupid on Facebook or the Twitter part of it. It's something you try to monitor.

We have our director of football operation, is it "friends" with everybody on Facebook? Okay? Everybody on our team has to allow him to be their "friend." I guess that's how you say it (smiling). It's a little above my head. I have to get to my children to figure out how it really works.

We monitor it. We've had times where we've had to bring young men in and say, You need to take this off your Facebook. We had an incident last year where we had a young man that had to go in and get something done to his thumb. Nothing big. Had to go in and tie it down. We left the office. I get a phone call about 6:30 at night. It says, Hey, Cobi Hamilton put on his Facebook that he's getting his thumb operated on. Not that it's a big deal, but it's nice not to put things like that out there.

It's the new part of the world. I think it's up to us as a staff to do everything we can to educate our players about what's right, what's wrong, continue to work at that. I'm confident that our players know the difference now and choose to do what's right.

**Q. What did you think of Jacoby Walker's spring, since he's had the surgery, his rehab, assuming he's redshirting?**

COACH PETRINO: Jacoby had a real good spring. I'm real excited about him. He's a guy that can make the throws you need to. He can certainly improve on his arm strength. I think he'll have a lot of time to do that. He really understands the game of football. He picked our offense up as quick as anybody I've ever coached as a young kid. He has the ability to use his legs to make plays. He's got a lot going for him.

It's unfortunate that he had the injury. Although we were planning on redshirting him anyway. But when you have a young man that gets injured for the first time, you know, there's certain things that you have to fight through. He's done a nice job of that through the summer. There's a point when depression sets in, you feel bad. He's been able to get help from his teammates, lift his spirits, continue to work through the rehab and get better.

I think it will be a situation where probably six, eight weeks into the season, he gets to get back on the practice field and do everything. But until that, I think the schedule is when we start camp, he'll be able to do some of the throwing drills.

But we'll be real cautious on how we handle the rehab.

**Q. With your brief experience in the NFL, Coach Saban was talking a lot about how he thought the NFL Players Association and the NFL commissioner should get involved in the agent process in regard to the student-athlete. What is your take on that?**

COACH PETRINO: You know, I think that's wishful thinking. I think what we have to do is just do something my mom taught me a long time ago, and that's worry about the things we can control. So it's up to us to control the education, the decision making, to help the young men.

It would be nice if everybody in America was 100% and we all hit it just right. The truth of

the matter is, there's going to be young men that don't make the right decisions all the time.

But we have to worry about what we can control, our educating, our continuing to work on the decision making, the understanding of what's right and what's wrong, not try to think that somebody else is going to handle it for us.

**Q. You talked about defense a little earlier. Can you talk about middle linebacker on defense and cornerback with Isaac coming back with the knee injury.**

COACH PETRINO: We're excited about Isaac coming back. He played almost every snap two years ago for us. In camp last year, he got injured, missed the entire season. He's done an excellent job in his rehab. He was actually full speed in spring football. We made the decision to hold him out of tackling drills just to give him a little more time to get confident in his knee.

I think he'll come back and really help our maturity and our experience in the secondary.

Middle linebacker, Jermaine Love had a good spring at it. We have Jerry Mitchell, who is our starting Will linebacker that has played the Mike spot for us, has the ability to play either one. I want to keep him at the Will linebacker because of his ability to cover and do things in the passing game.

Then we got Freddy Burton, who has played both outside linebacker and inside linebacker in our nickel package.

So really between those three, and maybe a surprise from a freshman or somebody that redshirted, you know, to step up and get a lot of reps in camp. But I think we'll be good there.

**Q. I think you're the only one who has a bye after playing Alabama instead of right before.**

COACH PETRINO: We messed that up, didn't we (laughter)?

**Q. How much of an advantage is it having a bye before playing an opponent? Can you imagine playing six in a row like that?**

COACH PETRINO: It's an advantage. It's an advantage to be able to spend that time in game planning that time, freshening your team up. The good thing about the bye is that you get a couple days away from everybody as a student-athlete. You get to take a breather. You get to spend probably three extra practices preparing for your opponent, extra video time.

There's no question there's an advantage coming off a bye.

I think the key to, when you talk about yourself, is when that bye comes in your schedule. A year ago for us we had a bye after the opening game. That doesn't help you a whole lot. You play 11 straight.

I like where it is this year. After the Alabama game, we get a bye, then we go to Dallas and play Texas A&M. I think when you look at your own team, you say, When does our bye come? Right now I like where ours is.

**Q. You talked a minute ago about receiver depth. Where do you think Marquel Wade fits into that picture? How much do you think he could help as a punt returner?**

COACH PETRINO: I think all four of the young receivers we have in will determine where they fit in. When you watch their video in high school, the reports we get from the weight room, they're a very, very talented group. They're all fast, probably stronger than the group that's playing for us now when they came in as freshmen. It's yet to be seen.

We really do need to find a punt returner that we have confidence in not just catching the ball, but making plays after he catches the ball. We're working harder on our scheme to get more returns.

A year ago, because we didn't feel like we had that back on that end, we pressured punts more. We came after the punter. Coach Smith's philosophy, and I agree with it, is even if we don't block it, force a bad punt, it's like a very good punt return. We had games it helped us, blocked a punt for a touchdown. We did a good job of pressuring the punter. But we do need to improve on our punt return game.

**Q. What do you think of your offensive line? Do you think you're going to be better there this year?**

COACH PETRINO: We'll be better. We're going to miss Mitch Petrus. Mitch was a strong guy, very tough, very physical, good leader for us, really set the tempo with the toughness. But we basically return five starters because you look at Wade Grayson and Grant Cook, and they both shared time last year, sometimes started, sometimes came in the game. Both played a tremendous amount. Plus we have young guys

that have put pressure on 'em in spring ball and want to take their spot. We have a guy by the name of Alvin Bailey that is 6'3", 320 pounds that is going to be a very, very good guards for us. Anthony Oden, who is 6'8", 328 tackle who is going to be very good for us. We got Freeman coming back who has a tremendous amount of experience.

So the competition in practice is going to be much better. I like our new offensive line coach. He's a guy that really motivates them. He's high energy. He's about being more physical. I think that we have made strides there in spring ball.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you.

COACH PETRINO: Thank you.

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