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An interview with:

COACH WHITTINGHAM

COACH WHITTINGHAM: Year five for us going into the conference as a member of the Pac-12 Conference. We've got very few players on our roster now who are with us when we were in the Mountain West, so virtually the entire football team now has been recruited to play in the Pac-12. Coming off a fairly good showing last year, 9-4. More of what we're used to. A bowl game, bowl win for us.

So looking to build on that. That's our challenge this year coming up in 2015 is to build on the positive step that we took last year, the positive step forward. We've got a lot of returning starters. We've got 17 in all when you count our two specialists, first-team all Pac-12 guys, Tom Hackett and Andy Phillips.

So a lot of optimism in our camp. Pac-12 south, very tough division obviously, ultra competitive. Maybe the most competitive division in college football, certainly one of the most. Big game in our opener. Michigan coming to our place, and I think that speaks a lot as to where our program is, being able to get a home at home with Michigan. Five or six years ago that would have never happened. So a lot of good things have happened to our program because of our affiliation with the Pac-12.

Brought two players with me today. Devontae Booker, our terrific running back, ran for over 1500 yards last year. We're expecting a big year out of Devontae. If he does the things we think he's capable of doing this year, he could well be in the Heisman conversation. That's our take on it. He's going to have to do it on the field, obviously.

Back in the other corner is Jared Norris. Fifth-year player in our program. He's been with us a long time. Middle linebacker. Great skillset. All the tools you need to excel at the position, size, speed, toughness, instincts, out of Bakersfield, California. Devontae's out of Northern California as well, so glad to have those guys back with us this year. Devontae had the opportunity to

potentially enter the draft last year. To our delight he decided to stay and finish his degree, which he'll get in December and join us and be with us for his senior year.

Q. Special teams obviously, was that sort of the great equalizer for you guys in the first couple years of the conference as you tried to get up to pace with everyone in terms of speed, athleticism and that sort of thing or was it something you could balance out?

COACH WHITTINGHAM: It was certainly a big factor for us, yeah. That and the physicality of which we play in the front with the offense and defensive line. That's what allowed us to transition into the league and be fairly competitive right out of the gate. I think that special teams last year in particular was a huge reason why we were able to win nine ballgames in a field position game that Tom Hackett allowed us to play with his exceptional punting and pinning people inside the 10-yard line. Anyway, with Tom Hackett being able to flip the field and pin opponents inside 10, and Phillips with his uncanny accuracy in field goals, to answer your question, that's been a big part of our transition into the Pac-12 and being able to get to where we are now.

Q. In terms of finding returners that came last year against Reggie, you guys always seem to find those guys. What are you looking for in the return game?

COACH WHITTINGHAM: Our return game was in great hands last year with Kaelin Clay. He obviously graduated and probably be returning kicks for the Tampa Bay Buccaneers this fall. But we've had a good run of returners. Reggie Dunn, Shaky Smithson, Kaelin as we mentioned, so that is probably the missing piece to the special teams equation this year is finding that guy or guys. Maybe one guy will do kickoffs, one guy will do punts. But we've got to find a guy or guys that make you dynamic and what you look for in that role is a guy that first of all takes care of the football and catch it, and secure it, and not turn it over.

But secondly is be dynamic, make people

miss and make a play there when there is nothing there to be made. Anybody can return a kickoff or a punt when it's all blocked up. It's the guy that's can make people miss and still make something out of not a very good situation there, the guys that really are special at that.

Q. You touched on how joining the Pac-12 has helped. What are the challenges involved with recruiting joining the conference?

COACH WHITTINGHAM: We joined the Pac-12 recruiting instantly spiked. I'm going to tell you right now probably two thirds of the players we've signed since we've been in the Pac-12 we would not have been able to sign had we not had the Pac-12 affiliation, so it definitely was a big plus for us there. Along with that comes increased competition. When you're going after the higher profile player, everybody else is as well. So you've got to win some of those battles. We feel like won our fair share. We don't come away with the five star guys or four star guys. I don't know if we've ever had a five star guy, but the four star guys are few and far between.

So we have to be great evaluators and predictors of talent. We have to develop that talent. We rarely get the ready-made guy, so we have to get the guy and develop them and have a great eye of where is this guy going to be in two or three years, not necessarily where is he now as a player.

Q. Despite not having the five star or four star players you've been putting guys through the NFL like crazy. How does that happen?

COACH WHITTINGHAM: I think the reason for that is the ability of our assistant coaches to project the talent as I've mentioned. We've got recruit, develop, manage. You recruit the raw material, develop it, and manage it along the way, make sure they're going to class, staying out of trouble. I think our assistant coaches deserve the vast majority of the credit for the success we've had in putting guys in the NFL, and that is by finding those guys that they believe have the raw material to develop into very good players that maybe someone else is missing on.

Q. You're going into year five in the Pac-12. What's changed since 2011?

COACH WHITTINGHAM: What's changed in year five going in is I can tell you without a doubt the conference is markedly better now than it was four years ago. There is no question. It's

improved by leaps and bounds overall. So even though we feel this might be our best football team since we've been in the Pac-12, time will tell. Everything's been a moving target and everything's gotten better at the same time.

Q. Can talk about the fact that this is the eighth coordinator?

COACH WHITTINGHAM: Yeah, that's not ideal, is it? We'd rather not have that be the same case, but for one reason or another we've had some coordinators that we've lost. We put Jim Harding and Aaron Roderick in place as the offensive coordinators. We felt it was imperative to not go outside with this hire and have a smoother transition. Our players are excited about the scheme we have in place. Didn't want to force the players to learn a new set of terminology and plays and that type of thing. So job one was making sure that we kept the scheme intact, and that's not to take anything away from Jim and Aaron. It's not like they were an after thought. Those guys are excellent coaches. Both very bright, very organized. So I don't want to make it sound like we've promoted them by default. But we needed to make sure we hung on to the scheme. We did the same thing on defense, essentially.

We brought in John Pease who worked with us in 2009 and 2010, knows our scheme inside and out. Very little has changed there. But there are not going to be any wholesale changes on either side of the ball because of that.

Q. You showed marked improvement in 2014. What are you looking to build upon in 2015?

COACH WHITTINGHAM: Well, that is exactly what the whole emphasis is this year, is continuing to take strides forward. Continuing to develop as a program. We thought we were a lot better in '13 than we were in '12. Even though the record didn't say that. We were 5-7 both years, we knew inside the program we had made progress. Last year, fortunately, the record manifest that progress, so we need to continue on that trend and on that climb.

Now it's very difficult in the Pac-12, especially the south because it's so competitive, like I mentioned. So the margin of error or the margin between winning and losing most weeks is very thin. We were in three overtime games last year and came out on the right side of it twice. But we've got to make sure that we don't back off in any way, shape or form as coaches or as players, and that we continue to press forward and build on

last year rather than take a backwards step.

Q. Obviously you guys are leaning heavily on Booker offensively. Who else are you looking towards to carry some weight that maybe nobody's thinking about at the moment?

COACH WHITTINGHAM: We're very high on our offensive line. That's a group that doesn't get a lot of praise. We've got four or five of our offensive line starters returning. Maybe as good as we've been in a lot of years on the offensive line. Kenneth Scott, him and Tim Patrick are the only two receivers that have extensive experience as a receiver.

Bubba Poole moved out there, but he was a receiver up until this past year. The biggest question mark on our team, and maybe the most critical aspect of our team and the successor lack there of that we're going to have is the development of the receivers and their ability to make plays. Because Devontae, as good a back as he is, it will be tough for him if we can't stretch the defense and loosen them up more effectively.

Q. When you have a 240 pound guard?

COACH WHITTINGHAM: Great case in point. We found a 240 pound guy that everyone thinks is too skinny and not big enough. We see a big frame and say, in two years he can be 290 or three years. That's how we made our living is finding those big frames that haven't necessarily filled out yet. When we get them in the program, developing those frames, and Jay Jay deal man is a prime example of that. I don't know if that was your question.

Q. Back to the staff and the offensive coordinators coaches Harding and Roderick, they're listed as co-coordinators, but play-calling, will they split that too?

COACH WHITTINGHAM: Aaron Roderick will be the play caller up in the booth. Harding will be on the sidelines. Jim Harding is the lead coordinator, any decisions, anything there's got to be an ultimate final say on things. Jim Harding is the lead coordinator, and Aaron is next.

Q. Schedule question, you've got Utah State back out this year. But BYU I know is an important game for you too. Where do you sit with that and what will happen in the future if you make a couple back?

COACH WHITTINGHAM: I know we play them again in '16. We took '14 and '15 off. We have them in our place in 2016. What throws a

wrench into that is the nine conference games that we play in the Pac-12 doesn't leave you a whole lot of latitude with those three non-conference games, particularly the years where you play nine conference games obviously five's going to be away, and four at home. When we're in the year that we have four at home, we need to make sure two of the three non-conference games are home contests. When you lock into a home at home with a non-conference opponent, sometimes that can make that pretty tricky because we never want a situation where we only play five home games, never. We want to play seven ideally, and at least six every year. That is in the equation as well.

Q. Is Utah State out in 2016 too?

COACH WHITTINGHAM: I honestly couldn't tell you. I know we play Michigan first. That is all I know for sure right now. I couldn't tell you whether or not the Aggies are on the schedule next year.

Q. Does having that opener help prevent the players from looking past the season?

COACH WHITTINGHAM: Without a doubt. It gets their attention really quick. They have their attention since January. As a coach, some years you'd like to have a lesser opponent to ease into the season and kind of determine and decide what you've got with your team. If there was ever a year to play an opener like that, it would be this year with a lot of returning experience. It's a very veteran team. So the timing worked out. Worked out in that respect.

Q. In the Pac-12 south, five teams with nine wins. How can you even account for that? It just seems so bizarre?

COACH WHITTINGHAM: It's bizarre, and I don't have a great answer for it. All I know is you better bring your A-game every week because there are no weeks off. Will this year be the same? All indications are early on it probably will be, but who knows. One game could be the difference between second place or fifth place or third place or fourth place. That's how tight it was last year, and it very well could repeat itself.

Q. The stakes are always high. They don't get much higher for you guys. Does it feel like the stakes are higher now that there is so much competition there? It just seems almost overwhelming?

COACH WHITTINGHAM: I don't think so.

We go about our business and our preparation process the same every year. We just know, like I said, I think you can count on one hand the guys on our roster that played outside the Pac-12 on our football team. So they fully understand exactly what the situation is in the conference, how competitive it is, and how you better be ready every single week.

Q. Some people attribute the difference between USC's domination in 2000 and what's going on now with distinctions of not all the talent can pool in one spot. Do you see the talent disbursing throughout the conference?

COACH WHITTINGHAM: Well, instead of 85 five star guys, they've got 65. That's still a pretty good situation. So I'm not crying the blues for those guys. But I don't have a good answer. You'd have to ask the SC guys. I'm not sure.

Q. From your perspective is the talent disbursed?

COACH WHITTINGHAM: Well, it's 85, it used when there were no scholarship limits, you probably weren't even born when that was going on. Then it was 105, and they went to 90. By the time they got to 85, that gives opportunities. One school can't horde everybody because they don't have enough scholarships to go around. I think that has brought, I hate the word parity, but it may have brought a little parity to Division I football, at least in the Power Five conferences because of the scholarship limitations.

Q. Do you think a defensive player will win the Heisman again?

COACH WHITTINGHAM: That's a great question. He's going to have to be a special player, and he's going to have to make a big impact early as a freshman or sophomore to gain steam in that Heisman campaign. So I'm going to say the odds, you never say never, but within the next five, six, seven years, a defensive guy winning the Heisman, I'd say the odds are slim to none.

Q. Does that bother you?

COACH WHITTINGHAM: As a defensive guy, yeah. The thing is as a defender, if you're really good, offense would just go away from you. If you're good on offense, everything's geared to getting you the ball. So it's much easier to put an offensive player in position to make plays because, like I said, if you're a defensive player, nobody's going to run at the great player. You're going to throw it the other side of the field or run it,

whatever you've got to do to stay away from that guy. So it's a lot harder to feature and make a defensive player prominent like it is on offense, because you can dictate who has the ball in their hands on offense.

Q. Is the door opened or closed on hat field?

COACH WHITTINGHAM: Hatfield right now is still no longer a part of our team. I guess you say never in that respect as well. Where there is a chance if he works through some issues. He was thankfully exonerated from the issues in the paper. There are still a few more things that he's working through internally in our own program, and it's unlikely he'll be with us this fall. But I guess there is that slim chance.

Q. The Michigan game last year, you went back there and beat them. But now your staff and first game, I'm just wondering were you comparing to Michigan last year or what Coach Harbaugh did?

COACH WHITTINGHAM: We're come preparing personnel-wise for what we saw last year, match-ups and that kind of thing. Coach Harbaugh, what he did at Stanford and what he did at the 49ers is more of what we're looking for. Our offensive guys really study coordinators and where they've been and what they've done in different places any time you have a new staff assembled.

Q. What's it like for you to see a guy like Booker who is academically ineligible at three different schools go on to be on track to earn his degree?

COACH WHITTINGHAM: It's great to see him get everything in in order. We waited on him an extra year. Signed him two years ago. Didn't make the grades the first year, so he red-shirted. We waited on him. He finally got himself to the point where he got everything taken care of. So we got him in January of 2014. We're elated that we have him, and it's great to see perseverance pay off. He stuck with it. He could have thrown in the towel many times and he refused to do it. He kept fighting and scrapping, and I think the future is very bright because of it for him.

Q. Could you expand a little bit by what you mean for Jim Harding being the lead coordinator?

COACH WHITTINGHAM: If you're at an impasse in the room, somebody has to make a final decision, and you need someone that has that

authority, and Jim Harding makes the final decision. If there's not a consensus by the staff or something that has to be determined that isn't black and white or there is a gray area, then he's the guy that makes the final call.

Q. When was it decided that it would be that way?

COACH WHITTINGHAM: Right out of the gate when we first made the hires.

Q. On game day will Aaron call?

COACH WHITTINGHAM: Aaron's up in the box. He's got vast experience, relatively speaking of play calling, and that's probably his strong suit, and being able to see things from the box, so that's why we made that determination.

Q. So those final decisions would be sort of a strategy going into a game?

COACH WHITTINGHAM: Yeah, game plan decisions, personnel decisions that may have to be made. And obviously I can go in and trump everything and let those guys do their job. You hire good guys for a reason, and that's to let them do their jobs.

Q. I heard you're related via marriage with USC linebacker?

COACH WHITTINGHAM: Yeah, first of all, he's a heck of a player. I wish he was in our program because he's an impact player and a difference maker. Yeah, my sister, my brother-in-law is brothers with his dad. So I'm not sure what that makes him to me, but there is some tie there. I can't say enough good things about him. I've known him since he was 7 years old. But he's come a long ways in his development as an athlete, and he's poised to have a big year.

Q. Do you talk a lot of football?

COACH WHITTINGHAM: When I see him, yeah. But I don't see him that often. We don't cross paths that often. He's in California, I'm in Utah. So there is not an open line of communication there.

Q. Any game week conversation?

COACH WHITTINGHAM: No, wouldn't be that close. We had his older brother on our team, Siaki Cravens. He was on our team. He transferred out later on because he thought he had a better opportunity somewhere else. He's got another brother I can't talk about because it's illegal in recruiting. But it's a very good football family.

Q. Could you talk about Nick Nowakowski how he came in as a walk-on and worked his way up? Is he in the mix to get snaps here?

COACH WHITTINGHAM: Yeah, Nick is a self-made guy. He came in with no expectations. All he does is put his head down and work his tail off. Came to the point last year where he was moving up the depth chart and was just too good of a worker, too valuable a guy on the team to not award a scholarship. So that was the first step in his evolution or progression at Utah was to earn a scholarship. Last spring he was running a bunch with the ones. Now there were some injured guys, so he's going to have to work hard to hang on to that being in the rotation. But Nick has done such a great job of working his butt off in our program and just making himself into a good player. Very proud of him. That is the most rewarding part of my job is awarding walk-on scholarships. Guys that have paid their dues and worked hard enough to earn a scholarship.

Q. Jared Norris was kind of unheralded a couple years ago and now here he is. What's his development been like?

COACH WHITTINGHAM: Jared is another guy with a great work ethic. I think he was maybe the most underrated defender in the Pac-12 last year. I'm sure every coach has a couple guys they think is in the same boat. But Jared is a fifth-year senior. He's a weight room warrior. He works his tail off in the weight room, and he's competitive. I would be shocked if he's not voted team captain this fall in training camp. He's a team leader. Can't say enough good things about him and how far he's come in his career in Utah.

Q. He's a skater off the field. Is he that laid back?

COACH WHITTINGHAM: On the field he's intense. He's competitive and intense. He's also a wakeboarder -- not wakeboarder, snowboarder. I know he snowboards. So he's a very good athlete. Bottom line, he's capable of doing a lot of things. He's a good golfer and a natural athlete. His real home where he feels most comfortable is on the football field.

Q. You really need a couple of quarterbacks knees these days?

COACH WHITTINGHAM: You do. I think it was less than half the teams in the country started and finished with the same guys.

Q. How's Kendal Thompson?

COACH WHITTINGHAM: He was cleared to play. He's a hundred percent. He was limited in spring. He was able to do someone on ones and pass skeleton drills, but nothing beyond that. Anything with a pass rush he was not able to be involved with. So be given the opportunity this fall to challenge Travis for the job. He's going to get as many reps as Travis during fall camp. May the best man win. Travis is the guy and it's his job to lose, but Kendal is the guy that's going to give him the competition.

Q. I was wondering if maybe you could talk a little bit about -- Devontae was talking about his ambitions to maybe help out his hometown of Sacramento and build a Boys & Girls Club eventually. Have you seen some of his ambitions to help kids play out?

COACH WHITTINGHAM: Oh, yeah. Devontae's got a big heart. He's humble. That is another thing. There are some guys you can talk about being a Heisman candidate and this and that and it would go to their head and mess them up. Devontae's not one of those guys. He's down to earth and grounded, cares about people. If he has the type of year we think he is and the opportunity to play at the next level, without a doubt I'm sure he'll do some of those things as far as giving back. He's a guy that loves to give back to the community and people that have helped him along the way.

Q. What were some of the context of that situation you had with him when you were saying, hey, maybe you'd like to come back?

COACH WHITTINGHAM: I told him my take. I told him my perspective. I told him to do his homework. We applied to the NFL for the evaluation. We went through everything, talked to scouts, talked to agents about what they thought as far as his draft stock. So it was an educated decision. It wasn't based on emotion. It wasn't based on a seat of your pants decision. He did all the research. I gave him my input. As a coach you never want to say, hey, you've got to come back, please come back, and then if he does and things don't work out, you're the bad guy. It's got to be his decision. He asked for my advice, and I certainly gave it to him. The opportunity for him to come back and get a college degree is huge in the equation. That is something that was important to me and it was important to him.

But I just told him what I thought. I thought the pros and cons and the risk of coming back, and

there is risk in leaving. There is risk on both sides. Neither alternative was a sure thing. But after weighing everything out, he felt his best opportunity and best interest was to come back, which we're glad he decided that because that's what I thought as well.

Q. What do you make of Jared's tattoos?

COACH WHITTINGHAM: I just noticed that today. I think it's pretty sweet. It looked like it was painful to get. But he's going to shave his head, I guess, in fall camp so it will be more pronounced.

Q. Is that kind of fun to see that stuff among seniors?

COACH WHITTINGHAM: Yeah, yeah, Jared's a passionate kid, and his enthusiasm for the game is infectious with his teammates. That kind of personifies who he is, a tattoo up here on his head.

Q. What was your favorite part of the Warner Bros. Studio tours?

COACH WHITTINGHAM: I still haven't seen Blazing Saddles set. That's good going to be my favorite part. I've got to go see the Blazing Saddles set and maybe borrow something to put in my office. We'll see. It's one of my all-time favorite shows. You're probably too young to know it.

Q. That's a classic.

COACH WHITTINGHAM: Yeah, timeless. Like Caddyshack, Animal House, Stripes.

Q. I'm sensing a theme.

COACH WHITTINGHAM: Yeah, Dumb and Dumber.

Q. Coach, we're carrying your game with Michigan on Sports USA Network.

COACH WHITTINGHAM: All right.

Q. To me it's like a bowl game in September with the two opponents.

COACH WHITTINGHAM: It's got that flavor, yeah.

Q. How big a game is this potentially?

COACH WHITTINGHAM: Every game is big playing in the Pac-12. But it's certainly one of our most high-profile openers we've ever had. I don't get into the drama of the most high profile opener in Utah football history or any of that stuff.

But it's certainly important. They're going to be out for revenge. We've gotten them the last couple times in Ann Arbor in '08 and then last year. But it's Michigan. They're going to be talented. They're going to be physical. They're well-coached. You've got a fantastic head coach they've just hired. So it's going to be all we can do to try to find a way to win.

Q. Coach, how far has this conference come the last couple years?

COACH WHITTINGHAM: It's come miles. From when we joined the conference in '11 compared to where it is now, it's not even close. It's almost like it's not even the same conference because things have improved so dramatically. We feel like we've improved a ton as a football team. But everything's a moving target. Everyone in the league has done the same thing. Everyone's gotten better. It's ultra competitive. Like I've said many times, you've got to be ready to play every week.

Q. I know your first game you kind of took it from Urban. But what is it about a coach who has his first game. It must be a unique experience?

COACH WHITTINGHAM: I'm sure it is, but Coach Harbaugh has been a head coach before. I think your first game as a head coach is a lot more of a milestone in your first game than in a new program. So there is no doubt they'll have that team ready and they'll be prepared, tough and physical. That is his style of play. We've got to be ready to strap it on for the full 60 minutes.

Q. When we first visited and you came out of the conference, we talked about you're going to see the impact in recruiting. And this is an indication of how far your program has come?

COACH WHITTINGHAM: Yeah, five or six years ago there was no chance that Michigan would have done a home at home deal with the university of Utah. But now that we're in the Pac-12 and evolved as a program, we have an opportunity to get programs like this.

Q. What makes Devontae so good?

COACH WHITTINGHAM: Devontae Booker is good for a lot of reasons. Number one, he's great with the ball in his hands. He's got great balance, great vision. He can run inside, he can run outside. He's just a natural. Some guys have it with the ball in their hands. Some guys don't. He's got it. He can catch the ball out of the back

field. He caught 43 balls for us last year. May catch more this year. He's got great hands. Probably the best of any running back I've been around. And he can block. He can pass protect and do the things he needs to do in the blocking game. So he is a complete back. When you're a complete back, you have a chance to play a lot of years at the next level. He's going to have a great career.

Q. What did you think about his decision to stay? Did that surprise you?

COACH WHITTINGHAM: Yes and no. There were pros and cons on both sides of the issue. He did his homework. There was nothing left to motion or to chance. He did all the research. We helped him with that research as far as applying to the NFL for a draft evaluation, getting in touch with scouts to give us their direct opinion, agents and so forth. So it came as a consensus. We were all in the same camp. We all believed that coming back, getting his degree and playing his senior year, particularly with the offensive line, we have four of our five starters returning on the offensive line. So he's positioned to go from potential third or fourth round draft pick to maybe a high first round draft pick, if he has a good year.

Now there is obviously risk of injury. But if you left early, there is down side to that too. After weighing everything, he decided to up can back was the best thing.

Q. He seems like a special guy too.

COACH WHITTINGHAM: He is.

Q. He seems to want to help kids in the neighborhood and get his sociology degree and things like that.

COACH WHITTINGHAM: Yeah, he's a deep thinker. He ponders things and thinks things through completely. He did that very thing with this decision as well.

Q. Think he has a chance at the Heisman?

COACH WHITTINGHAM: He sure does. If he has the type of year we hope he can have, which is in the 2000 yard range, he's got to at least be in the conversation.

Q. The team has to be performing as well?

COACH WHITTINGHAM: Oh, yeah, that's part of the deal. Without being on a successful team it's difficult to win the Heisman. Everybody's

got to do their part in helping him out with that.

Q. What do you think your odds are to win at least the south?

COACH WHITTINGHAM: Good question. I think I don't know if you can say anybody is the odds on favorite. I know they picked USC. But something's going to surprise us along the way. Every year some surprise team will emerge. I can't even venture a guess on that.

Q. What is the one thing you've got to step up or do better at?

COACH WHITTINGHAM: Throwing game. You've got to throw the ball better. If we're going to have the chance to have the type of year we want to have, our throwing game has to be much more productive, effective and proficient.

Q. I don't know the history of your openers, but how would you characterize the difference between Michigan at home, and Harbaugh?

COACH WHITTINGHAM: Yeah, it's a big opener for us. Haven't looked at the schedule, but we've had Pitt. Who else have we had? We've had quite a few opening games that are high profile games. So it's got our players' attention, I can tell you that. They've been thinking about this game since January. If there was ever a year to have an opener of this magnitude with our veteran team coming back, this is probably the year to do it. It matches up. You'd hate for a young inexperienced team to have a game like that for the opener. But we have 17 returning starters, so I think our guys will handle it pretty well.

Q. Oh, yeah, storied program like that to open the season, that would be a great springboard into the season to be able to do that. Without a doubt. Have you ever met Harbaugh?

COACH WHITTINGHAM: I've met him on the recruiting trail when he was at Stanford, but never faced him in a game and never have sat down and spent any significant time with him. No, his first year out was my first year in in the Pac-12. So we never crossed paths in that respect.

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