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An interview with:

COACH HELFRICH

COACH HELFRICH: All right, good morning. I was just told 12 seconds ago I was going to make an opening statement, so my opening statement is we are excited as everybody else is to get the season kicked off. This is an unbelievable turnout and atmosphere, and I'm really excited to be here to represent the University of Oregon, and even more excited to have Derrick Malone senior linebacker from Colton, California, and Marcus Mariota, a junior. And all of you can remind him he's a junior from Honolulu, Hawaii, with us to answer questions. So thanks for being here and we'll take your questions.

Q. (On being able to relax in the off-season)

COACH HELFRICH: I don't think you ever settle in and just sit down and exhale and relax. There is another coach in this conference that told me when I first got hired that you won't feel comfortable for two and a half years and I was shocked by that. But I kind of understand what he meant. There are just so many different aspects to being a head coach than being in a coordinator position coach that are good, bad and different. Just different. I have a great supporting cast of assistant coaches and obviously our administration and our support and our players have made things a lot easier.

Q. (On what the team is focusing on)

COACH HELFRICH: The importance of preparing for everybody is what I think our biggest focus needs to be. Obviously we've been asked a lot about the media poll that took place, and that is a good thing. It's a good thing for the media and our fans and for everybody to talk about. Looking back to last year, it's a great thing for our players to kind of slap ourselves in the face and go back to process, go back to culture. Go back to taking care of our own. You know, you look around the country, and there is a fine line of being in that

discussion months from now. It might as well be right now.

COACH HELFRICH: Hopefully everything getting better. I think our constant deal in our program is getting better. The one thing we talked about constantly is getting better, and that certainly doesn't end. A player's only deal, that's our nutrition, our academic support, that's everything that these guys are exposed to in our program and our player support angle, and absolutely me. There are things that we've tweaked slightly probably no differently than they would in a normal off-season. Most of those things did not come from the two losses, but from the 11 wins. And anytime you lose one game, now the nit-picking can begin, and we are the greatest nitpickers in the world and we've worked toward that. I think specifically on both fronts we've gotten better throughout the off-season, both our winter conditioning period in spring ball, and hopefully that's carrying over in the summer, and we'll certainly find out in the fall.

COACH HELFRICH: I have no idea what that is. Well, hopefully we're getting better. Again, I just don't think we sit around, and again, if our players are 100% committed to our culture, 100% committed to the process, that's the mark. Whether it's Rich Brooks or Mike Bellotti or Chip Kelly or me, that doesn't matter.

Q. (On how Marcus Mariota returning at QB helps the team)

COACH HELFRICH: A ton. And obviously on the field Marcus's contribution and dynamic nature, and the way he plays kind of speaks for itself. The behind the scenes thing would be deciding to come back and his leadership. He's 100% true. He's 100% dedicated to the team, and 100% credible. A lot of guys talk a good game. Everything that guy does is gospel. If I'm the back-up guard and I see that guy forgo what he could have made, it's not some lip service dream, this is a reality of a ton of money. Then there are certain elements that eliminate that. Like that guy turned down how much? Okay, I'll watch

him. That's huge. I think it speaks to the type of guy he is, the type of team he is, and certainly hopefully to the type of program that we have.

Q. (On how much Derrick Malone contributes to the team)

COACH HELFRICH: A ton. Derrick's a guy that kind of along the lines of Don Cohen. He can walk into every position meeting room and have instant credibility. He can talk to anybody on offense too and throughout our team. He's a guy that kind of walks a walk and always talks the talk.

COACH HELFRICH: As it stands for right now, it is to be determined. I think in general terms, a lot of missed tackles, a lot of times up front we could have done things differently on us as coaches. Part of that is an execution thing where execution falls back on us. We're not those guys that are going to dock our players on execution. Execution is coached, so all of that is kind of combination, part of it is recruiting. It's that cocktail of recruiting, strength and conditioning, and scheme.

COACH HELFRICH: I wouldn't necessarily. It's not that simple. For some guy, it's he didn't hear the call. For another guy it's confidence. There are so many things and so many variables into that other than, we just didn't stop the run in this game.

Q. What is your relationship with Pete?

COACH HELFRICH: It's great. My relationship with Pete will be great forever. I'm going to hate him on certain days and some days he'll hate me. Whether it's recruiting or on game day, but the guy's a lifelong friend of mine and that won't change. I know that's going to make both of our fan bases very unhappy.

Q. How much will you lean on Derrick Malone?

COACH HELFRICH: He's one of several guys. Obviously Coach Pellum leads the charge of who the guy is to do things again, everybody complains like you are indirectly about defensive execution. You know, on teams and offense it's a full-end deal. It's everybody. Their leadership and defense did a great job this spring and from all accounts this summer of kind of raising the bar to a higher standard and just accountability of effort of getting some young guys ready to rock. In fall camp and the playoffs, we'll see how that went.

COACH HELFRICH: Right. And we made a concerted effort to do that on both sides of the ball on both fronts. On the scale, it absolutely made a difference. On the field in spring I think it absolutely made a difference. I think so many times with some guys it's just confidence. You know, if you weigh 12 pounds more than I do or I've seen you bench more than I do, whatever those things are, I'm going to be a little less confident or have a different angle on things. And that showed up.

Right now where we are, we're in great position without having played a game. So we'll see how that all plays out. Again, the infusion of the new guys, of whether it's junior college guys or newcomers we'll see how that plays out as well.

Q. If USC gets invested the full scholarship allotment, how do you think that will affect them?

COACH HELFRICH: It's a slot. So many things in recruiting really come down to a number. Like you're saying from USC's restrictions for whoever else has a smaller class or bigger class, there are always going to be variations of that. But we're going to -- we want to knock on the right doors and hopefully we'll be invited in the right doors.

Q. Does that change your approach at all?

COACH HELFRICH: No.

COACH HELFRICH: Chip Kelly hasn't mentioned that. But that was the other thing I was expecting. That's always an exciting part this time of year. I was talking to Marcus a couple weeks ago, and this guy and that guy. Funny thing in college football, you can't see it yet. So we get out there and open the Christmas presents of the newcomers and there is invariably a guy that you didn't expect. A guy that was maybe dinged up, whatever the case may be Keanon Lowe is a tremendous guy at that position that's done a great job of mentoring our young guys and getting them ready to rock. Then there are a bunch of highly recruited guys that we anticipate will be in the mix with our guys on campus. Devon Allen will take off his Superman cape from the track and come on out and we expect great things from him as well as other guys.

COACH HELFRICH: Yeah, I mean, the biggest thing you're losing with that is just the known guys. You know kind of what to expect with

a guy like Josh. How we practice, which you'll never see, and how we do those things and try to prepare those guys to be in those situations as many times as possible to develop confidence, we'll learn a few more known guys.

COACH HELFRICH: Did I expect it? The guy has been awesome. We've had a couple discussions before the National Championships that, hey, we need to taper this, or we had a team building thing that we were doing that was physically demanding. So I started talking to Jim Radcliffe our strength and conditioning coach and saying well, we should maybe not do this or don't do this, and he did everything. He did more than everything. Then he goes out and runs the fastest time since Nehemiah. It was phenomenal. That day was at Hayward Field, and you could tell he got into a rhythm, and that was really cool to see. I think that will do nothing but bring confidence to the practice field and the football realm.

He did some great things when he was out there in the spring. Now he just needs to do it more.

COACH HELFRICH: I do. And since then I've heard about how he's working and seen how he's working and the evidence of that. Frosty and I, Scott Frost and I were watching the race together and kind of looked at each other after he ran that and said that may have been too fast. That may not have been good. But that was awesome for our university and awesome for everybody all around.

COACH HELFRICH: Leadership, I think. Just because I remember the guy that showed up and he talks to you like this. It wasn't a disrespectful thing. In his culture, that is the respectful thing. Just seeing him grow up, seeing him flourish, and being on the field with him last year and seeing how he interacted with his teammates was awesome, and it's gotten better. I think that along with kind of just some angles we've talked about making lay-ups, make the easy play. He gets to a point I think sometimes guys like that, there are certain elements of it that are easy almost to a fault and you forget about it being fundamentally sound and thrown on balance and all those kind of things. The greatest thing about him is just his commitment to improvement and his commitment to being better. One of the best things in my day was watching that guy practice because he's phenomenal. He cares more about practice rep 13 in period 12 of 7-on-7 than

anybody I've ever been around. That carries over to every single guy in our program.

COACH HELFRICH: I don't know if there was any one in particular, but there were thousands. I think it's something that I don't think you ever, hopefully as a player you don't hit the okay, I've made it. I don't improve anymore realm, and certainly as a coach it's the same way. Yeah, there are so many things that go into it that you deal with or don't deal with that you couldn't have prepared for. Even if you've talked about it and oh, that's totally different.

So from that standpoint I know what we stand for. I know what our program stands for, and working for that and toward that every day, good things will happen.

Q. Do you think you'll be able to be more yourself this year?

COACH HELFRICH: 17% more. No, I don't know.

COACH HELFRICH: Right. Absolutely. I think the product of being around each other, whether it's coaches or the culture or all of these tweaks that happen and things like that, certainly. Certainly that will take place. Or like you said, the comfort of whatever, doing it the second time, hopefully if it's more comfortable, it's better, and that's certainly the angle I'm going for.

COACH HELFRICH: Yeah, that's one of the things that make it so great and one of the things that make it difficult about college football is that kind of perfection area. Marcus goes from the Heisman front-runner and we lose a game and he's the worst player in history. I just don't understand how that is possible, guys in other conferences go .500 in their conference and they're still the greatest player. That doesn't make sense to me. I know the thing that matters to him most and me most is the team. His commitment to the team, again, I think expressed no more simply or better by coming back to his next year is his commitment to that.

I saw a deal the other day, I can't remember, the last six or seven National Championship quarterbacks played every game and started every game. That is a telling deal. So part of it matters. But if it doesn't happen, it doesn't matter to our team.

COACH HELFRICH: Yeah, that was very fortunate for him at the time. I remember watching

that game. It was pressure for Oregon and for Dennis. Dennis is a guy recruited a lot. He's a great man now. And that was very unfortunate.

COACH HELFRICH: Nick will be great. Nick can talk. I'm a little concerned about the viewership. I think we need to go like HBO or Cinemax or something.

COACH HELFRICH: It's been great. I think that NDP is first of all just a great guy, a great person, great communicator and great teacher. The guys that play for him and I'm always hesitant when you say players' coach, he's not a players' coach because, 'here's a lollipop and take this play off,' but because he's disciplined, detail-oriented and guys appreciate that. His players really take to that, and he has a great ability to communicate to every facet of our program. As I think I said earlier, as of right now without playing a game, he's done a fantastic job. Some of the growth and dynamic nature of the things that go on in a season and in a game I think, again, he's more than capable and we have multiple guys on the defensive staff that have done a great job in supporting roles.

Q. (What he expects from the USC on the defensive side of the ball)

COACH HELFRICH: Probably like the old really great SC defenses just staying in scheme and style. There's not really anybody in the Pac-12 today that plays like them or does what they do. But they're outstanding, outstanding in every phase.

COACH HELFRICH: If I was an offensive coordinator still I'd be on your side, but I'd have to think about that. I don't know. I think they've done some good things. Obviously, the change in the targeting deal, and protecting the quarterback is a smart thing. I think for right now we're in decent shape.

COACH HELFRICH: We've talked a lot. Yeah, Pete will be a lifelong friend of mine. As I said earlier, both of our fan bases will not like that. But he's a great family guy, and we'll hate each other a couple days a year, and all else will be fine.

COACH HELFRICH: Yep, in '97. And I had met him a couple times before that kind of in various fashions.

COACH HELFRICH: That is a great question and one I did not anticipate. You'll look at

the pros and cons of every institution in the world. We are not shy about our affection and our relationship with Mr. and Mrs. Knight, and across the campus. We're talking in every phase of the University of Oregon. He's been a great benefactor of athletics as well as our university. Our university is the highest achieving, most diverse, biggest university that's ever been. I think those things are not unrelated. I would ask you of USC and UCLA and Los Angeles. We live in Eugene, Oregon. Just from a recruiting --

COACH HELFRICH: Just from a recruiting -- I'm just saying if we're going to talk about money, we have to talk about everything. You can get in a car and drive two hours from here and recruit for ten football teams. There are a couple universities in this conference that have billion dollar endowments. So that would have to be equal, and according to that or the University of Georgia there is this huge Metroplex of outstanding high school football. There are more prospects out of Texas than most other states. If you are going equitable that would be a tough comparison. It is not as simple as athletic budget.

COACH HELFRICH: You'd have to talk to a lot of foundation people and the development people. It would be a great discussion. Or the size of our stadium compared to others, and there are so many things you'd have to compare.

COACH HELFRICH: I saw Brian came out and worked great and talked. Yeah, he got a little dinged up, but, yeah, he's doing great.

COACH HELFRICH: I like your style. Unfortunately Brian is behind a guy that doesn't come around every year in this type of situation, and Brian is an exceptional player, good guy, and I'm really happy for his future and I'll be a fan of his wherever he ends up.

COACH HELFRICH: Giving me a scouting report on Joe Walker, a lot more hair than me. He's a guy that just plays a hundred Miles an hour in everything that he does. Did a really nice job for us this spring on special teams, which is something we'll need a lot out of him and got better and better as the year went on. Had a couple of growing pains here and there, but a guy that we're going to meet and want and look for production from this year.

COACH HELFRICH: Oh, just little stuff. The biggest thing for a guy coming in in his first year like that is just that instantaneous recognition of everything, both of what he's supposed to be doing, what they're supposed to be doing and being confident in that. That is kind of that confidence chemistry that takes place and somewhere in there as a young player those things happen at different rates for different guys.

COACH HELFRICH: I think he's way ahead of the curve. I think the junior college guys that we've had, it hasn't been the system as far as they're willing to play quickly.

COACH HELFRICH: That was the one he immediately jumped on from a schematic standpoint. They're different than everybody else in our league, so it's hard to say.

COACH HELFRICH: Yeah, he's, as far as I've been around, one of a kind, just the type of player he is. He was taking all these upper division biology, upper division science. He had 20 credits and aiming to get done in time to graduate. It was just impressive. He's managed his media obligations and still doing everything he has in the community, which is substantial by anyone's measure. It's just a guy that continuously amazes me.

COACH HELFRICH: It's been interesting. All the guys that were making fun of us and a bunch of guys that talk a lot about that in a negative way in recruiting have done that for the past several years. So that's always interesting. No, it just goes back to hopefully that's not all we're known for anymore. I think it used to be. It used to be a way to open a door in Southern California. And now it's a way to open a door in Atlanta, Georgia, or South Florida or wherever else we try to get in those doors.

Q. (On the BCS and the CFB Playoff)

COACH HELFRICH: I have no idea. It's a fair question, but I don't know the answer. The BCS was great for getting one and two, and everybody else was yep, always been about three and four. And the back room of the BCS is arguing about we should have been in this game. So a certain element of that will still take place because it's not, however you want to slice it, it's not an equitable path. Fair, unfair, whatever the words you want to use. When we play a nine-game schedule and a Conference Championship Game and other conferences don't on purpose, there is

obviously a reason for that. You've got to stay healthy for another week, be up for another week and all the things that go into that. Those other conferences are voting almost unanimously for a reason. And that I think opens up that kind of credibility issue with that part of the system. Sort of a conference alignment standpoint. There is always going to be an unending argument of this league is better than that league or in the NFL, this conference is better than that conference. That's what makes sports the ultimate reality TV. It's that part of it. But I think we can all agree that's different.

Q. (On recruiting)

COACH HELFRICH: Yeah, I don't want to get into that element of it too much, other than to say we're really excited about how recruiting is going, and anything more than that just gets slippery, but I appreciate your question.

Q. (On the competition and rivalry in the Pac-12)

COACH HELFRICH: The North is especially from our perspective, Washington, Oregon State, we've always hated each other. Then the Stanford element has been at times fun, and all times competitive. They've gotten us the last two years, so we need to do something about that.

COACH HELFRICH: No, I mean, absolutely. It's the only conference where that exists. So that I think could be perceived as a strength and used as a strength when we're talking about tiebreakers. But when you're talking about playing another game or losing that game versus not playing another game, they're not going to take a one-loss Pac-12 team or two-loss Pac-12 team over a one-loss to somebody else team.

COACH HELFRICH: Hopefully that's an issue and there are times when you start talking about that and thinking about that in fall camp of being able to ramp up to kickoff, and you have to keep your edge of physicality, your edge of being able to fundamentally tackle while staying healthy. Special teams can come into a huge way if you don't maintain that edge. But, yeah, hopefully that's something we're definitely planning on.

COACH HELFRICH: I think for the last several years we've been pointed in that direction. We'll hopefully be in a lot of games. We think our plan early is the best path towards playing a lot of

games. On the field we'll stick with it.

COACH HELFRICH: They'll be really good. I think they'll be really good. I think David Shaw has rigged first place voting. I think they have a Stanford engineer in the background rigging the first place voting.

Q. (On the Pac-12)

COACH HELFRICH: I love this league. Period. We've been a part of this league off and on since 1997. I think the overall skill level of this conference is way better than it's ever been, and the trench play is better than it's ever been. That kind of used to be one of the things people said about our league and a couple of the Western leagues where it's past happy and finesse and that kind of stuff. And I think our rushing numbers can speak to that in a different way.

But if you lose a game, that's where the opinions get the weight. You have to take care of business in that last game.

COACH HELFRICH: Sure. Those guys are all outstanding coaches. Chip specifically from most recently from Oregon. He would be a great neurosurgeon. I wouldn't volunteer to be his first patient, but he'll be great at whatever he does. His style, his deal as well as the other guys carries over to whatever it is.

COACH HELFRICH: Not at all. Not at all. I think that the biggest difference was just kind of we talked about it a little bit about how they were able to implement it over the course of the season, and their training camp is different than college. But not at all.

COACH HELFRICH: Again, going back to what we were talking about, if everybody's taking the same path to that playoff, that has some validity. I think there was an element to the BCS and I might be the minority that did it in a playoff, if that playing field did exist.

Q. (On the importance and weight of games under the new CFB playoff system)

COACH HELFRICH: Yeah, and I think college football is great and every single week matters. In basketball you can lose ten games. In other sports it's completely different. You can sneak into the NFL playoffs at just over .500 to win the Super Bowl. That makes it equally frustrating and really hard, which makes them that much more rewarding. So there are all sides of it, I think. I think it will be a good test for that committee. It will

be interesting to watch as that unfolds. Hopefully we're doing our part to be in the mix.

Q. Do you think based on what you see out of their decision, that that will have an effect on how they view that name? How much does it affect the schedule?

COACH HELFRICH: I think the biggest way is how we value strength of schedule. When coaches and ADs are unanimous and not thinking to go for a longer season, I think that shows you the logic part of it. But, yeah, until the logic part of it, like what we were saying, they'll never take a one-loss team.

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