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An interview with:

COACH RODRIGUEZ

COACH RODRIGUEZ: Just a couple brief remarks. Did you all know it was the hundredth anniversary of the Pac-12? Just making sure. It's exciting.

Let's see. I've got two outstanding players here. David Richards, senior wide receiver, and Will Parks, senior safety. That's good. Got some good players returning. Got a quarterback coming back, and that's a good thing. I said this, am I excited to be here? I'd rather be practicing, watching film, golfing or at the lake, but I appreciate you all coming. That's the truth.

We had a pretty good year last year. Really proud of the way the guys competed. Lost some key players on the offensive line, some key players on defense at safety and up front, but we got some good players coming back, and we've got a lot of good skill players, I think.

Our schedule is unique. We have 12 straight games and no open dates. Not happy about that. There's nothing I can do about it, but that's going to be a unique challenge.

Pac-12 is really good. That's true. Pac-12 south is really good. That's true. And University of Arizona is a great school to go to, get a degree, play football at. Tucson, Arizona, great city. If you haven't been there, you need to come visit us. With that said, I'll open it up for questions.

Q. Can you talk about how competitive the Pac-12 South is?

COACH RODRIGUEZ: How competitive it is? Well, the Pac-12 south, I think it's always been good, but what's changed is the commitment to football in our league in general and in the Pac-12 south, in particular is unprecedented. I mean, everybody's putting money into the programs, reinvesting in football, so to speak. I think a lot of the talent that's been out west that maybe had left the western part of the country going somewhere

else is now staying out here because they see that commitment. We're one of them.

But the other schools in our division and in our league are doing it. So I think the Pac-12 south is probably going to be better this year than it's ever been. The Pac-12 will be better than it's ever been, and I think it's going to stay that way into the future.

Q. Do you feel like the Pac-12 is getting the respect nationally it deserves?

COACH RODRIGUEZ: Yeah, I mean, I think there are always some arguments about which league is the best, which division is the best, and that's good for debate. I don't worry about it. Hell, I'm trying to get a first down in a first game. I don't think when you line up middle of the fourth quarter and it's hot and you've played 200 plays already and the guy's worried about crossing the line. Wondering I wonder if we're getting respect as the Pac-12 south? Hell, just try to get the first down and get a stop.

But I think if you look at the non-conference results and you look at the bowl results, I think the conference as a whole stands pretty good.

Q. Did the poll yesterday surprise you?

COACH RODRIGUEZ: Tell me about it. There were several polls.

Q. Pac-12 south came in fourth?

COACH RODRIGUEZ: Fourth? You know, is that where we were picked last year?

Q. I think so, yeah.

COACH RODRIGUEZ: Good, that's a good sign. Somebody told me, maybe you'll know. There was some poll, I don't know, some expert poll that gave us a 2% chance, is that what it was? Hey, it's like that dumb and dumber. What are the chances of me, a guy like me getting with a girl like you, like one in a hundred? One in a million? More like one in a million. So you're telling me there is a chance. So 2% is better than one in a million, right?

Q. Do you like the underdog role?

COACH RODRIGUEZ: Yeah, I guess. I've been in situations where we've been the league favorite to win in situations like last year or this year where nobody would predict you'd win. 2% would be a pretty good T-shirt to make or a hat or something. But if it motivates your guys to run an extra sprint on their own or something, maybe it will be good. But when you're lined up in the fourth quarter and you're hot and tired and you're like, you know, the ESPN media poll picked us to have 2%, I think I'm going to shut her down. I don't think it makes a difference.

Q. Where has Anu Solomon made the biggest strides from last season?

COACH RODRIGUEZ: Probably in the spring. He was a little bigger, little faster, little stronger. Had a better knowledge of the offense. I thought he did really well last year in his first year as a starter, and I said this quite a bit yesterday. I think the other part of it is we know what his strengths and weaknesses are at crunch time as well.

So I think he's not a rah-rah guy. He's a good leader, but he's a little bit more quiet in that respect. But he's worked extremely hard in the off-season, and it's important to him. It's the up with thing I can assure you about Anu Solomon that football's important to him and he's going to be a better player every year.

Q. What are his strengths?

COACH RODRIGUEZ: If I knew, I wouldn't tell you because maybe you're friends with the defensive coordinator from UCLA or ASU or something. Oh, he can throw pretty good. He's a better runner than you think. He's a strong kid. One of the strengths I think he has, which is kind of a new quality is that when we do have an open guy he usually finds him and hits him. I always use the story Shaun King who played for me at Tulane and we went undefeated that year. He had a phenomenal year. Everybody asked what were his greatest strengths?

In that year he never missed an open touchdown throw. In other words, you call a play and it matched up right and the guy's going to be open for the touchdown, and the quarterback missed him or he underthrew it or overthrew it, I think Shaun was a hundred percent that year. And Anu is not a hundred percent, but he's pretty good with that.

Q. Why didn't you bring Scooby?

COACH RODRIGUEZ: Scooby's not a senior. Couple reasons. I always brought seniors and there is nothing wrong with bringing underclassmen. But I thought maybe if I didn't bring him he would want to come here so bad next year that he'd come back for his senior year. Yeah.

Q. Good strategy?

COACH RODRIGUEZ: Yeah, so that's actually Scooby probably is thanking me as we speak that he can be in the weight room right now and doing a few more curls. He might be getting another tattoo. I think he had a two-star Scooby; he might be putting one on that says "Still two-star Scooby." We'll talk about him quite a bit. The legend of Scooby Wright grows, but he's earned every bit of it.

Q. Can his story be repeated? He can't do what he did last year ever again?

COACH RODRIGUEZ: Yeah, kind of out of nowhere, unrecruited guy that nobody knew about and wins all the awards. I think Daniel heard kind of a Scooby Wright story. We had probably the best practice field in the country. Can I get some recruiting in here? We've got the best practice field in the country. Big billboard with all our First Team All-Americans on the picture there. It's not like anywhere else in the country.

Anyway, before spring ball, Scooby who doesn't say a lot anyway, kind of had this look saying, Coach, you're not going to put my picture up on that wall?

I said, yeah, you're First Team All-American. Ka'Deem Carey's up on there, you deserve that. And Scooby said, can you wait until I'm done playing here? Because he knows if you put his picture up on the wall and he misses a tackle at practice or does something wrong we're going to tease him relentlessly like Mr. All-American right there, Scooby Wright, missed his tackle. So I granted his wishes. But what I should have said is if you promise to play two more years at Arizona, then I won't put your picture up on the wall. But Scooby could care a less about that stuff.

Q. So you're not putting it up per his wishes until he leaves?

COACH RODRIGUEZ: That's right. Unless he threatens -- unless he leaves after his junior year, then I'm going to put it up before the season's over. But he may not tell me until then. He's pretty smart.

Q. Do you think the days of defensive players winning the Heisman are over?

COACH RODRIGUEZ: Oh, yes, it's going to be hard. I think with the way offenses can score and put up numbers today just kind of the glamour that they'll get on that side of the ball, it would be extremely hard, no matter what numbers you put up.

I was kind of tickled that Scooby and some of the defensive guys got some recognition last year. He had great numbers because he's a great player, but I don't see a defensive guy get it. You have to be really, really dominant to win that trophy. But I think does a defensive player deserve it sometimes? Probably, but I don't think it's going to happen.

Q. What about a running back? It's happened once in the last 15 years. And you're a guy that's produced it here.

COACH RODRIGUEZ: Yeah, we've had a bunch of thousand yard rushers. I think a running back can. But frankly, this is a team sport, but the most important position in football is quarterback. Let's make no bones about it. I don't think you can win big without quality play at that position at any level, pro, college, high school.

So that being said, that means a quarterback has the most pressure on him. He's going to get the most spotlight. I know my sons. I tell him that all the time. He's a pretty confident fella, so he can handle it.

Q. During games, where will things be different for Scooby Wright?

COACH RODRIGUEZ: I think people said, well, there will be more. I think by the end of last year we moved him around quite a bit. People knew where the number 33 was. I think it will be more so this year. But Scooby's worked hard. In the spring and looking at him I think he's better now than he was a year ago, and he'd probably tell you the same thing when you get a chance to talk to him. But I don't -- because he's a year older in the system. But I don't know. We'll try to do some special things because he's a better athlete than what people maybe have projected. But he's worked hard on his craft. That's the thing I love about Scooby. We call it OKG. He's our kind of guy. He still has the same chip on his shoulder as he did the day we recruited him.

Q. What have you seen from Will Parks in the secondary?

COACH RODRIGUEZ: Yeah, Will's been a good player for us and what we've considered a starter the last couple years. The difference now is that the three seniors we had at safety played a lot of football. They were kind of the leaders back there. Now Will's got to take that role on, and I think he's embraced it. He's a good athlete and good football player. I think he's going to take it upon himself to be the leader of that group and when we need somebody to step up and make a play or keep things calm back there, he can do that.

Q. You've been in the conference now a couple years. What is the biggest challenge recruiting against some of these coaches?

COACH RODRIGUEZ: I think the biggest challenge for us, and we've got a great place and great location, we've just got to get them to come to campus. I've said this many times, if we get them on campus, our rate of getting them is over 60%. It's just convincing them, hey, take a side trip, go to Vegas and take a right. If you're coming from LA, coming from the east and going to Vegas take a left and you're in Tucson, Arizona. Once we've got them on campus, we get a lot of them. So just getting them to visit. You don't pass through Tucson. That's unfortunate because we've got a great place.

Q. Where are your biggest concerns for you with this team?

COACH RODRIGUEZ: It starts with the guys up front on our O-line, both tackles on defense at the safety position. You're losing three guys out of your secondaries that have been multi-year starters. So you can put some talent in there, but the experience part of it is going to be new. That is the same with the quarterback. When we had the quarterback the first two years and Matt Scott, B.J. Denker, they didn't have much experience but they were older guys.

So it's going to be easier for them to handle that situation. When you put a younger guy replacing an experienced guy, it makes you a little more nervous. I think our guys can handle it.

Q. How is Freddie doing for you?

COACH RODRIGUEZ: Freddie will be the first guy off the bus. He can do like Incredible Hulk commercials. If he hit that pinata one time, I think those things hang up -- by the way. I don't know why we bash our own pinata. We should be hitting ASU's or somebody's.

But Freddie will be the guy that it would be

one swing and it would be obliterated. He's a mountain of a man who loves football. I'm excited for him. He's been sitting out a year, so I'm hoping he can perform well over there, and I think he will.

Q. Is it refreshing to have a starting quarterback returning?

COACH RODRIGUEZ: Refreshing? I think a nice cold beer or a Bacardi and Coke, or maybe even a nice iced tea sweetened is refreshing. What was the question again?

Q. Starting quarterback.

COACH RODRIGUEZ: Oh, starting quarterback back, yeah. It's like I tell our players, having a starter return is good if he played well when he started, which Anu did, and if he's better. I thought Anu played well for the most part and I think he's better. So that part makes you excited. And the fact that every year there are more guys in the program that understand how we do things.

So the only guys that need to learn are the freshmen, the newcomers. We have more guys returning that have been in a program in any time I've been there.

Q. The quarterback play, the level of quarterback play in the Pac-12 is so high, how difficult is it to play against all of them?

COACH RODRIGUEZ: That's a good point. I mentioned it earlier. I don't know if you can play well particularly offensively if that guy doesn't play well at quarterback. We had a bunch of return last year. There are a whole bunch of good quarterbacks in the west and they're staying out here now. I think some coaches don't like the influx of 7-on-7 football in the summer and guys playing year round. I think it's fun. I think it's helped improve the quality of play at quarterback, and in our league especially.

Q. Is it geographical? You said there are more quarterbacks out west. Is there anything you can attribute that to?

COACH RODRIGUEZ: Yeah, there are a lot of people. You ever get on the 405? Hell, I don't have to do it every day, but there are a lot of folks. I remember when I lived in West Virginia and you'd fly over the state you'd see more deer stands than you would homes. You fly over LA and just over the 405 or 101 and the amount of people that live here is enormous. So every time I fly over and look at it, I say there's got to be a quarterback somewhere amongst these many thousands of cars and houses, and there is. There are some guys out here.

Q. Is the eighth official going to have any affect?

COACH RODRIGUEZ: We've all gone to it. I don't pay much attention. There is one more guy to yell at that won't listen to you. I quit yelling at officials anyway because one, they're usually right, and two, they can't hear you anyway because of the crowd noise, so it's pointless to do that. I thought it probably appeases the fans if you think it's a bad call and the coach is yelling at them, but I don't do that too much anymore. The 8th official will probably help manage the game a little bit. I don't think some coaches are concerned it will make it overofficialized. There is one more set of eyes that can maybe call a penalty or something. I think it will be managed well, and I think the officials in our league are a pretty good group that will work hard and have a great season.

Q. What have you gotten established with your program and what still remains?

COACH RODRIGUEZ: I think culture is probably not the right word. Maybe the atmosphere that we have, atmosphere and attitude that we have in the program has taken hold and gotten better every year. I thought it was great. I've said this a bunch of times. I was fortunate that the transition when we got here three and a half years ago was really good, because the seniors bought in from day one, and they were coachable and really tried hard. It's been really good every year. But as we go now into the fourth season, I don't see myself having to lecture or tell the guys as much how we practice, how we work out, how we approach things on and off the field. I think they get that.

Again, the only people that have to learn are the incoming, the new guys. That doesn't mean upperclassmen don't make mistakes. That's going to happen with 120 teenagers. But I think as far as how we want to approach things and having a hard edge and playing hard all the time and being coachable is pretty much established now.

Q. Todd Graham at ASU talks about winning a National Championship. That's almost a theme. Do you talk to your team about that?

COACH RODRIGUEZ: Not much. Every coach has their own philosophy. I don't talk about -- at the beginning of the year we don't talk a lot about goals. We'll talk about winning the Pac-12 south, and then winning the Pac-12, and if we do that we should probably be in a playoff and

then go from there. Then that will be easily the last talk I talk about it until the end of the year when you have something on the line. Because like I said, if you're in the middle of the fourth quarter and you've played 200-something plays as a team and it's a tight game and you're tired and sore and lined up against somebody, you're not going to think well, coach said in August that we're going to win a National Championship, that's not going to make a difference. You're like, how do I whip this guy's ass on this play or how do I keep him from whipping mine. So I'm more of a, I guess, in-the-moment-process kind of guy. That doesn't mean other philosophies are wrong or bad, it's just ours is different.

Q. What about the National Championship Game? Does that add any level of motivation?

COACH RODRIGUEZ: No. It could be in Mexico City or, hopefully it's nowhere cold. I don't like to live in the cold anywhere. There are a couple of places I coached. We had two seasons, winter and August. So I wouldn't want to be anywhere cold. No, motivation, you can ask the players, but I don't think that makes a difference. But it's a great city to have it in. I think Tucson would be better. Can we convince them to come down south? We have a better atmosphere.

Q. What's the secret to beating Oregon?

COACH RODRIGUEZ: Well, you've got to play really well, have a little luck. Hope they make a couple mistakes. When we played Oregon and we beat them the two times, we played really well. But in the second game last year, early in the game, early season we played well but we didn't play perfect and they made a couple of mistakes. But our kids believe what Oregon does and they do a great job, they're well-coached, they've got great players, but that's the same world we're in. Somebody going fast and all that, we live in that world too. So that's not anything different or our guys have to adjust to a championship game. We just played really bad and they played well. You've got to have good players play well. It's pretty simple.

Q. Coach, there is supposed to be a decision coming down today about the Ed O'Bannon case, they're going to ban \$5,000 year trust funds?

COACH RODRIGUEZ: Trust funds? We now have trust fund babies in college athletics.

Q. (No microphone)?

COACH RODRIGUEZ: We'll do what everybody else can do. I think the one rule they passed last year, we have unlimited meals, free meals. I think that was long overdo and was great for student-athletes. The cost of attendance varies. Some schools may have \$1,500, some schools may have \$5,000. Even though it's the same sized town, that's kind of unique. But I've also heard rumors that cost of attendance is being paid for years at certain schools, it just wasn't legal. You know what I'm saying? But I don't think it's a big deal.

I'll say this: The life of a college student-athlete on scholarship has never been better, with everything they can do for them now. I think that's a good thing. But paying them, they've got a paid league, and that's called the NFL. If our guys are good enough they can do a three-year internship, getting everything paid for. Don't you think doctors and lawyers are like that? Shoot, I just do three years of schooling and I can go ahead and be a doctor or lawyer? Our guys don't have it that bad.

Q. In your equation, year four wins big?

COACH RODRIGUEZ: You know what? Somebody else -- I should have never said that. I said that one time. Bobby Bowden told me this a long time, and I've been coaching quite a while, he said there are four stages -- let me tell you there, rich. Let me tell you. There are four stages when you become a coach. And at the time I was a young head coach at Glenville State 20 years ago. He said you lose big, then you lose close, then you win close, and then you win big.

So I've repeated it many times. But that was usually when I was in year one, two, or three. Now I'm in year four. What I told you before wasn't the truth. That was a lie.

No, it usually felt that way. We won kind of close the first year, and won kind of close the second year, and then won kind of close last year. So we're probably, if that trend is the same, if we want to win, we're going to have to win close this year.

The one thing I did tell the team in August last year was we're probably going to be in a bunch of close games. We're going to have to play hard every snap to the last minute and then look up and see what happens. We were in a bunch of close games last year, and we won more than we lost. So I hope and think that's going to be the case again this year.

Q. When you survey the roster, could this be the best team you've had at Arizona?

COACH RODRIGUEZ: I don't know. I'll be able to give you an honest answer on Thanksgiving weekend, which we have open by the way, which is kind of strange. We have 12 straight no open dates. Yeah, you probably haven't heard that. We play 12 straight games with no open dates. Every other year there's a short calendar year, right? There's only 13 weeks to play your games in. So somebody in our league is going to get -- two years ago it was Cal. So, okay, I understand that. But then if you're going alphabetically, who is next? A, B, C, oh, we went backwards. So that is going to be a unique challenge.

Yeah, and they chose to play Hawaii. See, they want to go out there to Hawaii. That's a pretty nice place. They get the luau and get some pineapples and stuff like that. But we didn't choose 12 in a row. But as I said, I'm not going to complain about it after today (laughing), unless we're not winning, and then I'm going to complain about it quite a bit.

No, we'll have to make a few adjustments because we've used that open week as a good week to get some of the younger players ready and to get a good four-day rest period. We can't do that now, so we're going to have to, as a coach, coaches, we've got to have a plan in August and the beginning of the season to make sure we're ready for that.

Q. The past quarterbacks you've coached.

COACH RODRIGUEZ: Pat White, Denard Robinson, Woody Dantzler at Clemson.

Q. How have you sort of evolved as a coach?

COACH RODRIGUEZ: I'm softer on them now. Rod Smith, my quarterback coach does a great job, but when I think back about Shaun, and coaching Patrick White and Woody Dantzler and all them, I think I was meaner back then. I must have mellowed with age at times. Honestly, if you ask Anu, when he screws up majorly and I don't say something, he's probably like, what the heck's going on? It's like reverse psychology or something. So, no, I love coaching with those guys. I've got great respect, because I can't throw the ball from here to that screen. Everywhere I've been, I've been very fortunate to have really good quarterbacks. I've been able to recruit really good quarterbacks. Anu is, I'll say it again, you look

back on it what he had last year was a great season for a first-year starter as a freshman, and I think he'll be better this year. He's going to get pushed. I know it sounds like coach speak, why do you have other guys in case he doesn't? But Jerrard Randall has worked his tail off.

Dawkins I think is going to be a really good player. So if Anu is not doing what he's supposed to be doing, we'll put somebody else in. But I think Anu's going to be okay.

Q. Is there a playbook in your mind for what you can give the quarterbacks after each year?

COACH RODRIGUEZ: That's a fair question. It's not so much -- yeah, it all starts with what he can handle. I always say our quarterback has to be like a point guard that can shoot the three and he's leading the fast break every time. It's either 4 on 3, five on 4, two on one, whatever he can handle mentally, he, himself, is probably what we'll add offensively. I do think we can add more, and we wanted to do that anyway. But sometimes as coaches we try to think we're the smartest guys in the room and we do too much.

I always tell our guys, it's checkers not chess. You don't have to think six moves ahead. You only have to think two moves ahead and you'll be okay. So we have to sit back and like hold on a second. We watch a lot of film and all that.

I've said this before, he doesn't call the plays. We call the plays, but he has to make a decision on the play. He said why don't you let your quarterback call the plays? And I said I've got a pretty big mortgage payment, I don't want to let a kid that watches SpongeBob SquarePants on Saturday mornings calling the plays. Are you kidding me? Not that it's SpongeBob SquarePants, but he doesn't have the time to watch the film that I do. So we'll call the plays. He's got to make a decision on 80% of them, and I think he's been pretty good at it.

Q. How early do you start watching film on opponents?

COACH RODRIGUEZ: Yeah, I haven't watched. I watched Josh Rosen in high school; he's a great player. And I saw Jerry play a little bit. They've got pieces on him. In the summer we've watched our summer scouting. Our staff watches all our league opponents and first three opponents, but we don't break them down extensively until the week we play them.

Q. You joked about being picked fourth

in the south.

COACH RODRIGUEZ: I wasn't joking. I was serious.

Q. You were ranked in the national coaches poll.

COACH RODRIGUEZ: That's really important too.

Q. The point is that obviously Utah was fifth.

COACH RODRIGUEZ: Your point is it's a good league and good division, and it is. You worry about respect. No, you talk about respect for your league, and you want that. If nothing else, in recruiting. That is the only part you get frustrated at is there is this perception if I want to go in the NFL I need to go in the SEC. Didn't the Pac-12 have more first rounders picked than the SEC? And there are great players and great coaches and great teams in the SEC, don't get me wrong.

But the SEC is in a better -- or the Pac-12 is in a better spot than it's ever been, but so are the other leagues. I don't think recruiting-wise we have to take a back seat to anybody, and that's what we tell our guys. I think they can see it when they visit camp and visit Tucson, Arizona and see our facility. They'll say, okay, this is big time. That's fun to talk about.

Q. On those two last losses, did those factor into the season?

COACH RODRIGUEZ: Did you see the movie Lion King? There is a point in the movie where the monkey hits the lion over the head. He said, what did do you that for? And the monkey says it, doesn't matter. It's in the past.

Q. I've never heard that.

COACH RODRIGUEZ: You've never heard that? What was your question again? Oh, the last two losses. I was in a good mood. Now I'm pissed.

Q. Does that factor into your off-season motivation?

COACH RODRIGUEZ: Yeah, I was miserable for a month. Usually during the season you have a 24 hour rule. If you lose, you move on. But if it's a bowl game you have like seven months or something, so I was pissed for a month and a half. Then we got over it a little bit. Everybody said I guess they made light of it because I said what did you tell Anu after the game and I didn't talk to him for a month and a half. That wasn't

true. I did send him a text message, and I did talk to him after the game because I love Anu.

But then we went recruiting so we didn't have time to have a little Kumbaya. But we didn't play well. That was a disappointing part. We played awful in the championship game, which is disappointing and didn't play well in the bowl game until the end. But I'm still proud our guys were able to get there.

But is it extra motivation? I would like to think whether you win or lose at the end of the year, the next year you're motivated to be better. I was really pleased with our off-season. What our guys did in the weight room, what they did in spring ball and so far in the summer, I think they've really worked hard. I think our guys, if you ask them, they'll take pride in the way we work.

Q. You have 14 upperclassmen, do you see the state playing a central role in the University of Arizona's success?

COACH RODRIGUEZ: Absolutely. We can't have great success unless we recruit really well in state. And I think we're recruiting well. We get frustrated sometimes when some of the top players in the state look to go outside and don't give us a visit. Now if they choose another school outside, that's fine. But at least come to our campus and give us a shot, give us a look, even as frustrated as we get sometimes, I'm going to keep recruiting them and make them tell us no. It's not like if we don't get them, it's not like we're going to forfeit. There are players everywhere. We'll get them for whatever we've got. But the state of Arizona is our first recruiting base. And we've got some really good players every year. And we've got some walk ons. I think this year we've got 35 new players, and it might be the best group of walk ons that I've ever recruited. Or when I say recruited, ever had coming in. We'll wait to see how that turns out.

I can say in walk-ons you're not going to win a National Championship with just walk-ons. But for us, we can't win it without some. So you'll see some guys on the roster that wind up playing from the state of Arizona that maybe didn't start with a scholarship but wound up getting one like Jared Tevis.

Q. Along those lines last year you said recruiting impact-wise you thought it would pay off more than 16 or 15. Are you finding it easier?

COACH RODRIGUEZ: I hadn't thought much about it. I think there were like two weeks

ago we were -- I don't know. We were sitting like six or seven commitments and people were like, gosh, they won the Pac-12 south and they've got everything going on. Why don't they have more? And I kind of thought, yeah, but at the same time we want to go approach this a little slower. Next thing you know we get seven or eight in one week. I think that's helped. I think more than anything else they see the commitment to the program from the facilities standpoint, from a competitive standpoint, and they like what they see.

Q. How's the in-state rivalry compared to a backyard brawl at Ohio State?

COACH RODRIGUEZ: It's pretty intense. I've been asked a couple times, Pitt-West Virginia, Pitt's still a four-letter word. That was pretty intense. Ohio State, Michigan, that was pretty good. This one's in state. Like Ohio State-Michigan, I remember when I get there, because I don't like to talk a whole lot about the Ann Arbor days.

But I remember when I got there they were like oh, Ohio State-Michigan you won't believe some of the things you'll see when you go down there. The rivalry's so intense and all this kind of stuff. Then we pull into Columbus on the bus, and there are two elderly women probably in their 80s, and they wait for us to get off the bus. Hey, Coach Rod. And they give us the middle finger. So some of the folks are like, see, I told you how intense it was. I said, hell, when we were at West Virginia those same old ladies were mooning us. No, it's all good.

I think ours, because it's in state and in the same division and same conference, it adds to it. Because we've got great respect for them doesn't mean we like them. But we've got great respect for them.

Q. What are you looking for from David Richards this year?

COACH RODRIGUEZ: I think David is poised to have a big year. He was good last year. He was banged up early in his career. David has worked his tail off each year to get better and better. We've played him mostly on the outside at receiver. But he can play tight end, which we've got tight ends now so we don't have to. But he can play at every position at wide out for us. I think he's going to have a big year.

Q. Because of his size, could he become a security blanket?

COACH RODRIGUEZ: Yeah, a security blanket sounds a little too intimate. I don't know

about that. But, yeah, I think Anu at times we don't want him to look at one particular guy. We just want to throw him to the most open guy. But David's size and his strength, and for us to move him around to different positions is going to help. But the good thing, and I think David will tell you too, there are five or six other guys at receiver that have a lot of experience so he doesn't have to be thee guy. But I hope he wants to be.

Q. Talking about receiving coach, what's it mean to have the flexibility as you're touching upon there with all the guys?

COACH RODRIGUEZ: Yeah, Samajie Grant, Nate Phillips, Cayleb Jones, David Richards, Tyrell Johnson, who am I missing? Trey Griffey, a really good player. Trey's a really good player. We have five or six guys that can play. Not only do they have experience, they can play now all four receiver positions. So we've got a little flexibility. Hopefully we can keep them healthy.

Q. Coach, talk about (No microphone)?

COACH RODRIGUEZ: They did. The fighting Larry Cokers. They're good. They play them in the Dome, they had 30-something seniors. They're a well-coached team and an athletic team. We'll have great respect for them. We'll have to play well.

Q. When you start transitioning camp in the first game --

COACH RODRIGUEZ: After two weeks. The first two weeks is all about us. Then after two weeks we start to get into our game plan.

Q. Is there a name on the defense or offense that they talked about, like another Scooby Wright?

COACH RODRIGUEZ: Scooby Wright. Oh, another Scooby?

Q. The next Scooby Wright?

COACH RODRIGUEZ: Oh, we've got a lot of two stars. Too many. I'm going to leave out somebody. But Will Parks, he's a pretty good player and not a lot of people talk about him. I see his name's up on the screen, so you'll want to talk to Will. And David Richards is another one. His name will come up in a minute. There he is, David Richards.

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