

December 18, 2013



An interview with:

Todd Graham

Coach Graham: Well, on behalf of Arizona State University and our football team we're awful proud and grateful to be here, I want to thank the committee, the Holiday Bowl, it's exciting for us and our fan base. Obviously San Diego is a great destination for our fans and short travel over and I'm very, very proud of our football team, I want to congratulate Kliff Kingsbury and Texas Tech, looking forward to competing, I think we're going to have two very exciting football teams, two explosive offense and an exciting brand of football to watch so I think everybody here will enjoy that.

Just talk about our team, probably the best football team that I've ever coached in regards to what type of young men that we have at Arizona State University. Our senior class is very, very special. Obviously we have some great individual players, but just collectively these guys, what they have done in the classroom, what they do on and off the field and what they have done in the two short years that I've been there, just very grateful to them. I think you guys will enjoy 'em, first-class group of young men.

We have had obviously a good season. I know a lot of people will say we have had a great season. We were one short of having a great season but proud of our guys and the schedule that we played, and really proud of the character from which they play the game. We're excited to come to the Holiday Bowl. I can tell you our fans, players, staff, very excited. I know my 11 year old son is very excited about going to Sea World and we're excited and I'm honored and privileged to lead such a great team at a great university that has been -- had the tremendous commitment over the last couple of years and moving forward. We have a great history, obviously, with the Holiday Bowl.

To come to a bowl that has such great heritage, had some incredible games and a great history with it is something we're very proud of and our team is very honored to be here. We're looking forward to coming and seeing the hospitality of San Diego and getting an opportunity to compete against a great football team in Texas Tech.

Q. Coach, tell us the status of Marion Grice and is he going to be able to play in the game?

Coach Graham: We're very hopeful. It was probably a three to four-week injury. We will know more Thursday. He has a doctor's appointment and x-rays and things there. That would be three and a half weeks. We'll see. I know he's been in great spirits and obviously wants to play, 4 yards from a thousand yards so that's a little bit of motivation for him. A young man that has been tremendous for us. He's a guy that we expect to play but you know how that is. We're not going to obviously take any chances with him as well. He's expecting to play, we're expecting to play him. We will know more on Thursday. Right now that's about all I can tell you.

Q. Would you talk about the quarterback, Taylor Kelly and how important he has been to your team?

Coach Graham: Really proud of Taylor. Obviously I'm a defensive-minded head coach and our Coach nor very well our offensive coordinator does a tremendous job of developing Taylor and one of the things we like to have, being a fast paced, No. 1 in huddle is you've got to have a commander commanding the troops and he's the hardest working guy in our program, he's got the best character of any guy in our program. He's like having an offensive coordinator on the field. That's really -- you hate to always -- hate to draw too much attention to one person, but you gotta have a quarterback to compete for a change-up and he's what's allowed us to have the success that we have had. Great manager of the ball, got a lot of

talented guys around him and he does a great job of dispersing the ball. Just the intangibles are things that make him special. You guys get an opportunity to meet him, you'll see what I'm talking about. I tell him all the time I want my daughter to marry him! He's that kinda guy. My daughter is 21 so we're still working on that. He's just a tremendous young man that, you know, quarterback, you guys know how important that position is, and he's been -- it's been great to have such a great leader and a great young man leadin' our team.

Q. You talk about having a lot of tremendous men on your team and talk about being a defensive-minded coach. You've got a tremendous defensive player in Will Sutton, two-time Pac-12 player of the year, consensus first team All-American, talk about what having him on your "D" line has meant to your team this year.

Coach Graham: He about runs me over when we come out of the tunnel, probably all the years that I've been coaching, 28 years, he's the best football player that I've ever coached. I don't think I've seen a guy, a great player mature as much as he did this year. What I mean is he got double teamed a lot. They slid the protection to him a lot, those type of things and he truly became a leader. Obviously it was not about his individual stats or anything like that and to play at that high of a level and what's amazing to me is to be a guy that's 3 -- I think he says he's 305, I think he's 315 but to have a guy that's 315 pounds, play every snap, he plays ever snap. To be such an intense competitor, probably one of the most intense competitors I've ever been around and this season their class is special, and I think Will is the guy that is kinda the passion behind our team and a guy that really has done just a tremendous job of maturing.

I'm really proud of him. He made a commitment to come back and most people didn't expect him to do that. He promised his mom he would finish his degree, just walked across the stage yesterday, really proud of that. Two-time Pat Tillman defensive player of the year award. That's an award that we want to come to an Arizona State football player ever year and to have it two years in a row is big. Consensus All-American two years in a row.

More importantly, I think he would stand up here and tell you that he has the respect of his

teammates because of the leadership that he displayed this year. Really proud of him and, you know, did it benefit him? So many times there are new stories about everybody coming out early and all that and every situation is different but this young man truly benefited -- and I think in most cases they do, just being able to mature -- he's going to have a great NFL career and I think coming back this year and that maturity level and how he grew on our team and obviously I was excited to have him come back because it made us a better football team. I think that speaks volumes for guys maybe out there in the country that are making that decision to see a guy -- in most cases that's how it works out. They don't usually drop-in their status and I think he's matured and he's going to have a great year ahead of him and we're looking forward to competing for our 11th win. We got a chance to be one of six teams in our school history to win 11 football games. That's something I know when you talk to him and he gets here and you get an opportunity to visit with him, you ask him about all these awards and stuff that's all he talks about is winning that 11th game, so really proud of Will and the type of young man he is.

Q. Holiday Bowl games are usually very exciting. You expect anything different? Second question, what have you seen in Texas Tech so far?

Coach Graham: I can tell you this, we were talking about this in the hallway just before, I think there are a lot of similarities between their league and our league. The diverseness and the offenses. It's probably a nightmare to be a defensive coordinator in the Pac 12 or the Big 12. I can tell you I call our defenses for our team and it's not fun because week to week you're facing diversity and scheme and personnel and explosiveness and obviously the fast paced no huddle has changed the game and I think makes it exciting. They've got an offense that's putting up over 500 yards a game, play makers all over the field, as good of a tight end as there is in the country, phenomenal, their outside players can stretch the field vertically, propose a lot of challenges for us, and so obviously I'm expecting an explosive game and a game that will be fun for fans to watch. Going to be a lot of great athletes on the field and I think it will be exciting.

I can tell you, looking at the film and we have tremendous respect for the Coach and the

job that they've done there and you look at their schedule, their team started off 7-1 and you look at the teams they have competed, top-25, Baylor, Oklahoma State, Oklahoma and Texas are teams that -- games that were very, very close. It's going to be an exciting game. I think it will be a fun game. They won't want their money back, it will be an exciting game to watch, no question about it. We obviously have our hands full.

Q. Coach Graham good to see you from the days in Tulsa. How have you grown as a coach from Rice, Tulsa, and now Arizona State?

Coach Graham: Very blessed. Already in 2000 I was a high school football coach in Allen, Texas, proud of that, spent 7 years there, 10 years as a high school football coach in Texas so to be standing here 13 years later and competing at the Holiday Bowl against Texas Tech and leading a program at Arizona State, building a stadium there, building a commitment and a program there, I'm humbled as a teacher to be in the place that I am and made that move as to go to college and I wanted to have an opportunity to be at a place and I'm competitive and an opportunity to win a national championship and conference championship and to compete at the highest level.

I'm humbled to be in the position that I am and be surrounded by the staff that I have. It's great. Today, we made an announcement our offensive coordinator Mike well, we made a long-term commitment to him, been with me 8 years, never worked for anything else, strength coach has been with me for 10, co-defensive coordinator has been with me 10 so kinda to have that journey with them is something that's been special for me and I'm just very -- I don't go to work a day in my life. I love what I do and honored and blessed to be doing what I'm doing.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach Graham.

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