

**July 20, 2011**



An interview with:

## **COACH PETRINO**

**THE MODERATOR:** Again, welcome to SEC Football Media Days. Without any further ado, we'll begin with Arkansas head football coach, Bobby Petrino.

**COACH PETRINO:** Thank you and good afternoon. It's good to be here in Birmingham again for Media Days. I always wonder when I say that how to keep a straight face, but more so this year really because today is actually my anniversary. So the first thing I have to do is wish my wife Becky a happy anniversary. It's our 26th anniversary.

Doesn't seem like that long ago when we were driving down the highway to go on our honeymoon singing 'Put me in, coach.' Got that out of the way, means I can get back in the house tonight (laughter).

Really excited to get started. Report August 3rd, start practicing August 4th. Looking forward to this football team coming back and seeing what our identity is going to be.

We obviously will try to build on last year. Very proud of last year, the football team we had. But we do understand that this is a new team. It will have new players on it. We have to find out a lot about ourselves as we get started practicing here and find out what is going to make us the type of football team that we were a year ago.

I like a lot of things about this team coming back. Certainly three areas that I feel like will really help us, give us an opportunity to be a good football team.

Number one, would be our experience and depth. We have a group of guys that will be seniors that came in four years ago that had to play a lot at true freshmen. Had to go through a lot

of battles, early in the season in particular, and didn't play real well, or didn't come out on the right side of the game.

But that group of young men stuck together, had a great attitude, kept getting better as freshmen, finished out the season with a big win at the end of the season, and have all matured and grown up and done a great job in leading our program.

So I'm excited for our senior class, to see how they lead and what type of attitude and leadership they have for our football team.

But certainly our experience and our depth will give us an opportunity to win games when you need to in this conference, on the road and in the fourth quarter. I'm hoping that will help us a lot there.

I really feel like we're a fast football team. The speed we have at our skilled positions, particularly on offense, at wide receiver and running back, give us an opportunity to be a special offense.

Defensively, our speed on the edges at defensive end and linebacker and in the secondary is where it needs to be. Through recruiting and through development, a lot of these guys worked extremely hard to continue to get more flexible, faster as the years have gone on. I feel like we're at the speed where we need to be.

I'm very impressed with our football team's mindset. I think that's the thing we need to carry over from a year ago, is the experience that we have, we have a bunch of guys that really understand what it means to prepare, to prepare for practice and to prepare for a game, go in the meeting room, work hard, concentrate and get better.

We also have a group of young men that know what it means to practice, to practice hard, practice physical, practice safe, practice with a purpose. I'm really hoping that that helps us a lot with our preparation for this upcoming season.

Got three young men with us today that I know you'll enjoy visiting with. Tenarius Wright,

who is a defensive end for us, did an excellent job last year playing for us. He's a redshirt junior, been with us all four years. In fact, he was going to play his freshman year. Got a high ankle sprain I think the week before our opening game. We ended up redshirting him. Now we're real happy we were able to do that.

We have Jarius Wright here, one of our wide receivers. Jarius has been a four-year starter for us. He's really grown up and developed over the four years. He's a big leader for our football team by example. He's the guy that goes out and works hard every day, leads that receiver crew, coming to practice prepared, has made a lot of big plays for us in the previous three years.

We also have Knile Davis with us, a young man that came to us, graduated early why high school. We got him in January. He was only 16 years old. We all know that last year, about halfway through the year, we lost Dennis Johnson, and Knile said, I'm going to show everybody I'm the starting running back just by the way I practice.

He really started practicing hard, fast, got to his speed quicker, and became a guy that we ran the offense through the last six games of the year, had a tremendous year for us. Just turned 18 last year in October and is still just a youngster, but a great young man and a great football player.

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

THE MODERATOR: We'll take questions for coach.

**Q. Coach, with the experience you have in the skill positions, receiver, running back, the great receiving core that you have, talk a little bit about how that helps the transition with a new quarterback, your thoughts about that group possibly being one of the best in the SEC.**

COACH PETRINO: Well, I think it will really help our new quarterback, with Tyler or Brandon, whoever it is. I have to distribute the ball according to what the defense is doing. There have been years where in your offense, you know who your No. 1 receiver is, your No. 2 receiver is. Sometimes, particularly when you're inexperienced, you'll try to force the ball into that guy. I think our quarterbacks understand that we're very talented.

I have to read the defense, understand what's going on, and distribute the ball, get it to my players, let them make plays for me. I think that's something that we will rely on.

It will really help us if you can turn it around and hand it to Knile 20, 25 times a game and be able to get to the proper third downs. I think that's what really helps there.

**Q. You've had many quarterbacks in the past. What allows you to plug in a quarterback into your system and just get statistics that help you win ballgames? Do you think Tyler Wilson is a nice plug-in this year for you?**

COACH PETRINO: Well, certainly I do. I think Tyler has an opportunity to do a very, very good job for us. He's been in the offense for four years now. He's done a good job when he's come in in games. We all saw what he did in the Auburn game last year.

But also the next week, when we had that marathon game with Ole Miss, the two lightning delays, Tyler came in and finished the game and converted some tough third downs and helped us win the ballgame. Been very impressed with the way he's prepared in the off-season, the leadership role that he's working to take over.

I think when you look at our success in coaching quarterbacks, one thing I really believe in is that it's our job to find out what they do well and then ask them to do that. So we'll take our offense. We install the whole thing. We try to do it three times. We do it in the spring twice, then we come back here in August and do it again.

Then it's our coaches' job, my job, to say, Okay, this is what our quarterback does best, now let's take this nice, fancy playbook we have, set it over to the side, and develop the offense around the quarterback, give him a chance to be successful.

I think the other thing that helps a lot is when you get the other 10 guys to play real well around him. You get your offensive line to be able to run, block and pass protect, that really helps your quarterback play.

So we focus a lot on the other 10 guys also.

**Q. You lost your two starting tackles last year. Can you assess those two positions going into the season.**

COACH PETRINO: Yeah, we lost two guys that started for three years for us and were very, very experienced. When you go back and watch all the video from a year ago, they didn't

make many mistakes. There were times where they might have got beat physically, but they understood the offense and knew what they were doing. They're tough to replace.

We went through spring ball and we rotated a number of guys in there. I'm real happy with Brey Cook, a true freshman that came and enrolled in school in January. He's big, physical, was very, very well-coached in high school, utilized the same techniques and fundamentals that we teach which really helped him make that transition.

Jason Peacock was a junior college transfer that came in this spring. Everything was new to him. He didn't really understand the offense, but he showed tremendous ability. His ability to kick, slide, run block, utilize his hands. Hopefully he had a great summer and worked really hard studying and understanding the offense and what it is he has to do in the offense that he'll come out and compete for a starting job.

Brey Cook has been with us for all four years that I've been there. He's a young man that came in as a tight end, continued to get bigger and stronger. Hopefully will be one of those guys that has a great fifth-year senior year.

**Q. Coach Petrino, spring football prior to the 2010 season, did Tyler Wilson take reps with the ones in that spring? If so, do you feel those extra reps will be a great benefit coming into 2011?**

COACH PETRINO: At the time I didn't think it was a good thing. When Ryan was standing on the sideline, standing behind the huddle, Tyler and Brandon were the two guys taking the reps with the ones. It certainly helped our spring football this year because that's what they did the previous year.

I really believe that those reps, they really tried to take advantage of them. I think Tyler also understood that, I just needed to settle down, relax, play the game the way I know how to play the game, not try to be Ryan Mallett. In that previous spring, he at times tried to do things that were out of his element. I thought this spring that was something he really understood was, Hey, this is what I do well, this is what I have to work on, and I'm going to continue to do what I know how to do to move the ball.

**Q. I know how much you like to reveal company secrets. Ryan Mallett went on the Gruden show and did a couple of hand signals. Does that mean an overhaul there?**



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COACH PETRINO: Yeah, they're changed. We already changed them. I wasn't real happy with him, by the way, when I was informed that he did that. He called me up and apologized. He gave us a few ideas for some new hand signals, so that always helps (smiling).

**Q. Bobby, talk about Knile Davis, what it means to an offense to have a runningback like that that you can count on going into a season.**

COACH PETRINO: I think the first thing, when you look at Knile Davis, you look at his work ethic. Here is a young man that in the weight room has continued to get stronger and faster. In fact, he just did a great job in the weight room this past week I understand from our strength coaches in the testing that we did.

He also is a young man that in the winter, when we had our testing days, he went in there with every group, the group that was ahead of him. He didn't have to be there. He was in there cheering them on, spotting guys. The offensive line came in after the runningbacks. He stayed and spent time with the offensive linemen. It's become extremely important for him to show how much he cares and how much he encourages his teammates.

As far as his ability to run the football, what you see is he can run with power, with speed, and has very, very good vision. I'm excited to see him take a step forward and make improvements in what he did from a year ago. He understands I think what he needs to do to do that.

I think when he first started getting on the field last year, it was because he learned how to run his tracks, get to his speed right now, and he broke a lot of big runs for us. When you're running the ball, you try to run it with consistency. But when you can get chunk plays, big plays running the football, it takes a lot of pressure off the rest of your offense.

**Q. Bobby, you were talking about Knile Davis. There's others around the league. People are talking about it being the year of the running back. Do you as a coach look around impressed by the overall talent at that position? Does that name fit to you?**

COACH PETRINO: Yeah, there's a lot of talent there, there's no question about it. Somebody asked me I guess last week, What did

you think about Knile getting picked to second team? You looked at who there was on the first team. You say, Well, I feel like he should be a first team player, but there's a lot of other guys that feel like their running backs should be, too.

That's something that throughout all the positions in this conference, everybody has good players. That's something that we learned as a football team a year ago is that it takes a team to win games. We'll be as good as our team chemistry and our leadership from within our team because everyone we compete with is going to have very, very good football players, too.

**Q. Coach, one of the most striking differences between last year's team and the teams your first two years at Arkansas is how much better the defense was in 2010. Could you talk about what you think happened that kind of brought that improvement about and what the prospects are for keeping that going into 2011.**

COACH PETRINO: I think there's two things that really played into that.

Number one is our experience. Those guys that played last year, most of them played the previous two years. They've all grown up, got stronger, faster, really understood what our scheme is and what we want to do defensively.

I think the second thing that really contributed to that was the strong beliefs and the courage and confidence our defensive staff showed in, hey, we know what we're doing, we're real young, let's just keep improving, keep getting better, keep putting in the work, the effort in teaching these young men, and the results will show off. Our staff did a real nice job of doing that.

I'm excited for our defense this year because I really feel like it's the first time when we're physically where we need to be on the defensive front. Our inside guys will be big and physical and athletic. We've got speed on the edges which matches what we see every week in the conference.

**Q. Coach, you've always been known for being a great offensive mind. How do you balance that with a strong defense knowing that the SEC has always been kind of a defensive league in the trenches? Do you try to focus on getting key defensive stops at key times? What is your philosophy on defense and how involved do you get in your defense?**

COACH PETRINO: I spend a lot of time in the defense, particularly in the off-season, in spring, what we want to do in playing the principles of good defense. I think that's one of the biggest keys, is your ability to shed blocks, run full speed to the ball, tackle, strip the ball, and hit the quarterback, cause turnovers. I think those are the things that, when you look at what we're doing on defense, the fundamentals, the techniques, are things you have to make sure you constantly work on every day in practice.

But we also work hard in showing the defense what we're going to see throughout the year. That changes all the time. In spring ball, you know, we don't consider ourselves a spread offense, but we're going to show the defense those aspects of offense so they have them on tape to teach with for the teams we're going to play the next year that do that.

We're not a big power team in running power-play on offense, about we work all the time running that against our defense so they understand the fits, how you play it.

What I guess I'm really saying is we work it together as a team: offense, defense and special teams.

**Q. Bobby, when you look at the five straight national titles that the SEC has won, what would you say defensive line play, athleticism, speed up front ranks in what this conference has been able to do in that run?**

COACH PETRINO: Well, I've always believed, since I was in the conference as an assistant, then coached in another conference as a head coach, that the thing that separated the SEC from everybody else in America was the defensive front, the speed, athleticism on the edges, athleticism inside. I found that out when I came back as a head coach in the league that that was true.

That is one of the big differences in the SEC, is just those defensive front guys, how talented they are, and how hard it is to be an offensive lineman. To be an offensive lineman you have to back up, work yourself backward, have some of the best athletes in the world coming at you going forward full speed.

There's no question it separates our conference from a lot of others in the United States.

**Q. Bobby, how much from a recruiting perspective does having a solid quarterback situation help you, to have that rock on your team?**

COACH PETRINO: Well, I think it helps us a lot, particularly when guys look at what we have at wide receiver. They see we have three senior wide receivers there, a quarterback that's very good coming back that's a junior, another one that's a sophomore. Good incoming freshman.

You try to sell that we're going to throw the ball, we're going to be good at quarterback. The scheme that we run is going to be something that helps you out and prepare for your career in this profession.

**Q. Bobby, when you took the job at Arkansas, did you expect to make this much progress this fast?**

COACH PETRINO: Well, I did. I thought maybe we could do it quicker than this. That's something that I always believed.

I'm not afraid of high expectations. I'm excited with the fact that two years in a row now we have very high expectations. Number one, our players have high expectations. Certainly our coaching staff does. Our fans in the state of Arkansas do. Our administration does.

It's fun to approach the year that way, that, hey, we're going to go out and be a contender, be a good football team, see what we can do to win ourselves a championship. I think it motivates you throughout the off-season, throughout spring ball, throughout the summertime.

Once we get started here in August, it's about one practice, improving, focusing on how do I get better in this one practice and prepare one game at a time.

**Q. Tailback Wingo had a good spring. How can you get him some carries, mix things up, get all your tailbacks some work?**

COACH PETRINO: I've always believed that you have to have depth at tailback. It's real important throughout the season that you continue to work that depth, you always try to get certain guys a number of touches. But as the year goes on, the runningbacks are the guys that take all the big hits.

Generally the way it works out is you have a runningback that's hot, he has a couple big games, maybe three big games, he gets dinged up a little bit. You have to put the next guy in there, not miss a beat.

With Ronnie Wingo coming back, who did have a very good spring, I think Ronnie took a lot from Knile in how do I get to my speed, utilize my talent within the scheme. With Dennis coming back we have depth at the running back spot so we can be fresh, make sure we utilize all their abilities. Both Ronnie and Dennis catch the ball well out of the backfield and can run after the catch.

You look at let's get Knile to the fourth quarter and be very fresh and strong and healthy.

**Q. Coach, this past season you had strong kicking specialists, but a consistent problem through the year might have been your kickoff coverage in 2010. Was that due to the personnel you had to place on the kick coverage team? How do you envision approaching that this season?**

COACH PETRINO: Well, when you break it down and look at it in kickoff coverage, it's due to the entire squad. You have to do two things: you have to kick the ball correctly, whether you're placing it, get the hang time, be nice to kick it in the end zone, and then you have to be able to cover with full speed with discipline and tackle well.

At times we broke down in areas, in different areas. Sometimes we didn't kick the ball right. Sometimes we got out of our lane. Sometimes we did everything right till right at the end, we didn't tackle well and the guy broke a tackle and made a big play against us.

It's an area we have to improve on. We spent a lot of time in spring ball working on it, which I usually never do. I usually like to just work on punt and punt return in spring ball. We did try to address our kickoff coverage.

**Q. Bobby, your answer about you always have high expectations. A generation ago, programs needed three years to get up to national prominence. Now y'all are doing it in two years. You get to 10 wins in your second year. What has changed that you can come in and so quickly turn a program around?**

COACH PETRINO: Well, it was actually the third year that we got the 10 wins.

I think one of the things that has changed a lot in college football is the fact you get to bring the freshmen in in the summertime. They're there. They go through that process of getting out of their comfort zone. They always come in, they're out of

their comfort zone. They look around, they question themselves. They're used to doing things. All of a sudden they're awkward, they're off balance, they can't do it.

But now what happens, because they come in in either late May or June, they're around the players, they're working out with them, pretty soon they get all that behind them say, I'm good enough, I can play here. A little bit after that, they say, I'm just like these guys.

Then once you start practice, you're not going through that, Let's learn what it's all about to be a college football player. That has helped a lot.

Certainly the recruiting in this conference, you know, has made it where you can replenish and get great players quickly.

**Q. Bobby, do you refer to last year as a 10-win season or because of the Ohio State forfeit, do you call it a 11-win season?**

COACH PETRINO: It's a 10-win season. We were 10-3. We had every chance in the world to win that game. We got beat on the field. We had a very, very good season. I don't know a lot about giving up wins, what that means. But it has zero effect on our football team and how we go forward, how we approach our business.

**Q. Bobby, I don't know if you heard it, but as far as the Commissioner's suggestion to toughen some high school eligibility requirements, in general what are your thoughts on that? Are you aware of that?**

COACH PETRINO: I heard a little bit about it on the way in. You know, I kind of agree with the thought of, Let's toughen the college requirements. Let's make these guys all take the same classes their freshman year. Let's take care of our business in college.

It's hard to graduate sometimes in this conference 'cause guys leave early and go into the NFL. I agree a lot with the Commissioner, Let's find a way to bring them back and get their degrees, open that up that avenue, which I think is really good.

I've never felt like, Let's put things back on the high schools. Let's make sure we do it on the college level. To me it's hard to justify you need a 2.0 or a 2.5 coming out of high school, but to be eligible after your first year of college it's a 1.8. That's where I struggle a little bit.

**Q. Coach, if you could talk about your schedule and how tough it is playing in the SEC West.**

COACH PETRINO: Well, it's tough. You're going against guys that are very, very good players, tremendous coaching staffs. I think that's what makes it hard is you know everybody is going to be well-prepared, understand how you play the game, and has the talent to win the game.

So I think it's real important for us that we're disciplined, we understand how to play on the road, and we know how to find a way to win in the fourth quarter.

I think that's something we tried to build on from last year, is you go back and you look at the fourth quarters, the big games we won in the fourth quarter, take something from that - not only as a player, but the coaching staff.

What made the difference? What gave us the opportunity to win that fourth quarter? Then you look at the ones you didn't. We were winning the Alabama game in the fourth quarter as well as the Auburn at one time, then found a way to lose the game.

I think that's the thing you have to concentrate on and work on.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you very much, coach.

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