

**November 18, 2013**

An Interview With:

## **COACH LES MILES**

**COACH MILES:** Good afternoon. Recognizing the fact that Joe Dean has passed, former AD, visionary, if you will. I think the path that we're on here in the athletic department is based on certainly in part his vision and what he saw a major college athletics department consists of.

I can tell you that everybody knows his famous line when calling basketball games: String music. We want to say thanks and remember him.

**Weekend:** I watched my son play on Friday night and watched football that day. I spent the morning at the office working and spent the afternoon watching college football. What an amazing array of games and different styles. If there's anything better than college football, I just haven't found it.

I think I'm really comfortable with the three practices that we got in last week, kind of really just kind of focused on fundamentals and pieces of the A & M game plan, but we're really in much better shape, healthier, and we look forward to really instituting game plan and going this week.

A & M, very talented team, ranked no lower than 10th in the polls. Coach Sumlin has done a great job there in preparing his team, and certainly there's talent there, an offense that's averaging 49 points and total offensive yards of 578.

The Heisman Trophy winner from last year, Johnny Manziel, is bigger, faster, stronger. He's thrown for 3,300 yards, 31 touchdowns. I see him as a much more complete quarterback, a very good player. If there's a better player in college football, I'd like to know who he is. Not only is he beating and preparing statistics to beat last year's total, he's also the leading rusher on his team. Very, very talented guy, and he's not by himself.

They have a number of receivers. Mike Evans has 57 receptions for 1,200 yards and 12 touchdowns, and Malcolm Kennedy, 55 receptions for 600 yards and seven touchdowns. A very good offensive line, very talented tailback, and they're a very formidable offense.

Defense, when you have a marquee player as Manziel, it kind of overshadows some of the defensive accomplishments. But they fit. They're getting 20 turnovers, 17 sacks, and very athletic, run to the ball. And again, a very, very quality scheme and quality athletes playing there.

**Special teams:** The top punter in our conference, averaging 48 yards, Drew Kaser, and the top returner in kickoffs is Trey Williams. Really put it in the end zone if you don't tackle him. Had a nice return against us.

Overall we're looking forward to getting back into Tiger Stadium. It's a big game. The opportunity to play on national television. I think the Game Day crew is here; is that right, Michael? Not all of them? Well, certainly the Game Day crew that's pertinent to our game is going to be here. We'll look forward to playing A & M and hosting them in Tiger Stadium. Haven't been in that stadium in a month. We'll be in there twice to finish the season and looking forward to it very much.

Again, this is the kind of game that you come to LSU to play in. You look forward to playing nationally-ranked teams and the opportunity to play best in front of your friends and family in Tiger Stadium. Can't wait.

Questions?

### **Q. Is this A & M offense better than last year's if that's possible?**

**COACH MILES:** Yeah, I think -- again, I think that Manziel, I think a year ago he was a runner. I think this year he's a much more capable quarterback. I think he steps back in there, understands what to expect, and seems to be stronger in the ability to throw it and just -- yeah, I think they're better. I think conceptually they challenge you with spread, and they have a quality running back and a quarterback that can really throw it, receivers that can catch it.

I think offensively certainly they're better.

### **Q. Compared to other games your defense has played this year where they've struggled, how big a challenge is this, and what's the positive or the upside of facing this game?**

**COACH MILES:** Well, certainly it's a great challenge. I mean, they're a better football team offensively. Some of the things that we did a year

ago we'll be able to use some, some we will not. But it'll be a great match-up. I think our defense is really looking forward to it. These Tigers look forward to a challenge, and this is really going to be one. I think our guys will play well. I think we have a nice scheme in a variety of ways to pressure him, disguise some coverage, get in the backfield, move him when we can.

**Q. Obviously the mindset on offense is to score points every time you touch the ball. Do you have a particular pace that you would like to play a game like this, maybe anticipating a track meet score?**

COACH MILES: Yeah, well, really the way it is is offense, defense and special teams have to complement your team and what's needed. What we're looking to do certainly is maintain the ball and drive the length of the field, but you have to get seven points, too. It's not like you can just go get 1st downs. You have to score. So we're looking forward to that. We think that we can operate our offense in such a manner that it'll give them the equal challenge.

I think that special teams also fit there. We'll put them in a position where we'll challenge their special teams unit, and again, I think it'll be a very interesting match-up.

**Q. Last season LSU was one of the teams that was able to slow Manziel down. What are some of the things you did that other teams couldn't do to slow him down?**

COACH MILES: Well, first of all, I think we played our defense. I think many times there's a lot of change that goes on that is not necessarily right and correct, yet you have to be smart enough to make adjustments so that you advantage your athletes, the guys that you put on the field. We're going to do similar things. We're going to not necessarily do what we did a year ago, but I think some of the principles will be the same.

**Q. This year y'all don't have a lot of takeaways on defense. Some years you have them; some years you don't; is that flukish or is there something a defense can get to get more turnovers?**

COACH MILES: Well, we talk about it, and I think we're focused on it. I think young players don't necessarily recognize the times they have the opportunity to strip or put their helmet on the ball and/or play the ball at the highest point and bring it down. And I think that certain guys have

that penchant and certain guys don't. I think that our guys will kind of pick that up as they go. Again, I think you see some of our veterans, they kind of understand it, but some of those young guys are still kind of figuring it out.

**Q. Could you talk about the match-up problems that Evans creates for a defense?**

COACH MILES: You know, a guy that has extremely quality hands and speed and ability to get open, and you've got a quarterback that really anticipates the break and gets the ball to him. He's going to be a great challenge for us, and I think our guys are looking forward to it.

**Q. With a couple of byes in the last several weeks and the disappointing loss to Alabama, where do you sense your team's morale and energy level is at this point? Do you still feel it's good?**

COACH MILES: Yeah, I think they're looking forward to playing Texas A & M. You play a team and you fall short, certainly there's difficulty. You want it to be heartfelt and not just used to it, okay. But I think in the same vein they're beyond it. I think it's time to go on, and I think they're looking forward to playing A & M. A & M is a challenge in and of itself.

**Q. To best get this team, especially this defense, ready for next year, where are the areas that you have to maybe play some more guys, try some different things the next three games?**

COACH MILES: Yeah, I have to be honest with you, I'm not ready for next year, and I know that sometimes questions can legally effectively take step after step after step and then get to next year. I'm not there, so I apologize, but I'm not going to think that way if you don't mind.

**Q. Odell was named to the Biletnikoff semifinalist award today. What has he done to separate himself from some of the other top receivers, including Evans who is also on the list?**

COACH MILES: Well, you're looking at a guy whose team relies on him in a number of spots and has spectacular hands and speed, impossible to cover him one-on-one, and I think certainly that national award, he's worthy.

**Q. I've seen some teams play Manziel by not over-rushing him. They'll rush him to a point and then kind of hold and hope their defense and secondary covers stuff and they kind of make Manziel come to them. Is that one way to deal with him rather than chase him?**

COACH MILES: Well, that's certainly a consideration. You'd like for him to be pressured not only by a rush lane but by coverage. In other words, not necessarily say hold, but you would push the pocket at him, and hopefully his running opportunities would minimize as his time to throw it grew short, he had to make a decision. And that's what you'd like to have happen.

And then cover during that time. At those other times where you add a guy to the rush, now you'd better cover it very quickly and then you'd better be able to chase.

I think chase is a part of the game, as well.

**Q. Last week Zach said that he had a sprained ankle. What's his status for practices this week? And do you sense, I guess, just from a competitive nature that he rises to the occasion in games where the other side is really elite quarterback, McCarron, Murray, Manziel, that type?**

COACH MILES: Yeah, he's going to practice. He practiced all three practices last week. He feels good. It was a contusion, not necessarily a sprain, and that's healing.

Yeah, I think Zach, I think he could not not come to practice on Tuesday, and the reason is because he is a competitor, and he's wanting to play best. He realizes there's two more games in the regular season, and he wants to compare with the best in the country, and I think that that's his goal, and I think it's our goal for him, and I wouldn't expect it to be any different.

**Q. Can you talk about this game from a recruiting standpoint? Obviously you guys have proven over the years that you can go into eastern Texas and get guys to come to LSU and vice versa. A & M has made some inroads into the state of Louisiana. Can you talk about how important it is for LSU to play a good game to impress some of the high school kids who are talented watching out there?**

COACH MILES: Well, I think each school provides a different opportunity, and I think the in-state player here recognizes playing in Tiger Stadium over a four-year period at 32 times as opposed to visiting it twice, I think the opportunity

to -- once you get your degree and you were to work in the state, you would want to come back to your home, coming back to Louisiana with an LSU degree may be certainly more beneficial than any other degree, and we play the style and brand of football that in my opinion everybody is going to want to play.

We're not asking the in-state player to take anything less. We're asking him to take more. And we'll -- the border state of Texas is certainly something that we get into in recruiting and enjoy being in there routinely. Certainly these games are important. They are important to win.

Our guys, we're looking forward to it and expect to play best.

**Q. I know you're probably not assuming it's going to be a certain type of score, but can the score of a game, if it's high-scoring, dictate the way you might say we need to go for a 4th down here because you have to keep going and get a touchdown or maybe try a trick play or something like that?**

COACH MILES: Yeah, I think that most coaches, as best they can, avoid a 4th down call. These games where you get into a score where you have to score with and hold point really questions how many downs you're going to use. But again, I'm not trying to anticipate a lot of 4th down calls in this game.

**Q. Could you speak to Manziel's ad lib ability, his elusiveness, and the ability to hold onto the ball in those situations where he seems to be running wild?**

COACH MILES: It's an amazing thing, isn't it? The idea that you handle the ball so effectively with one hand. I mean, it's the dangdest thing I've ever seen. He makes the turn, he'll circle the ball with his hand to make that left-hand turn. Again, it's a very special talent, strength and ability to move his feet and control the ball. You know what, it doesn't come out of his hand in the pocket, either. He's a guy that has ball security even though he carries it unusually.

**Q. In terms of defending A & M, forgetting being schematically sound for a second, just what kind of pressure does it put on the stamina of your athletes and the depth of the defense, the way they run their offense and the talents they have?**

COACH MILES: Well, you're going to have to be in shape. That's just the way it is. They'll come up and tempo you, and then obviously get snap after snap. You're going to have to get yourself off the field defensively, and you hope that we can keep the ball some amount of time so that there's not a consistent theme there where the defense is taxed. But we are going to play at least two deep, and in some spots play three deep in a rotation that would allow us to stay fresh.

**Q. Obviously Odell had a really nice freshman year playing opposite of Ruben and he's been great this year. Did he need last year to kind of develop into a No. 1 receiver at this level?**

COACH MILES: Yeah, I think a guy that comes into a year needs to have some experience in some of the bigger games so that he understands what to expect and realizes that he can take his talent to another level and can play with anybody. And I think that once that's achieved, I think there's a confident and a different style of player that emerges. Same talent, same abilities, but just a little bit more confident.

**Q. Do you remember when Johnny Manziel was being recruited, any recollection of him and what he was like in high school?**

COACH MILES: I have to be honest with you; I do not. I don't remember exactly who had that area, but I can tell you that we'd have certainly been interested in that style of quarterback.

**Q. Just keeping at that topic going, you have Anthony Jennings, now Brandon Harris coming on. How much of that style of quarterback do you hope will be in the offense moving forward?**

COACH MILES: Yeah, we look forward to that guy that can throw it and run it. We're also going to certainly hand the ball to that tailback and make sure that he has plenty of touches. There's a spot for that very, very capable slot receiver that is a playmaker where you're throwing screens and getting him touches, as well.

I think the diversity of an offense is important, and I think that a guy that can throw it, certainly get it to the best players, and also has the ability to extend plays with his feet, make plays with his feet, I think that's the future of college football.

**Q. Do you have a general idea where this team could go bowling if they won their last two games?**

COACH MILES: I have a very general idea, and I do not -- I suspect that that is a motivation of sorts. I can tell you right now, you're playing A & M, you're not going to need more motivation than to play in Tiger Stadium and playing a very, very quality opponent. The opportunity to win 10, the opportunity to be at the best bowl certainly factors in there. It's not something that I'm focused on.

**Q. Considering your background and the way things have gone since you've been at LSU, is the possibility of it being a shootout like it might be this Saturday kind of foreign to you? Is that something that your team is used to now this year having had it happen a couple times?**

COACH MILES: Yeah, I'm not looking forward to that style of game. I want the defense to stop them. Certainly we recognize the challenge that an offense like A & M would bring, and it would also then require us at times to match. I've got to be honest with you; I like my defense. I suspect they'll play best in this game. I think that it will be a challenge to A & M, and I think being in Tiger Stadium will be a challenge to A & M. It's a much different environment and a place where the home team generally does pretty good.

**Q. A & M is second in the conference in interceptions but also have allowed the most touchdowns this year. What sort of risk-reward opportunity is there against a secondary like A & M for your wide receivers like Odell and Jarvis?**

COACH MILES: Yeah, I think we're going to be the same style of offense that we've been with balance, and I think run after catch and the opportunity for the deep ball every now and then is something that's certainly there. I think we're better equipped this year to take advantage of it than we were a year ago. So it'll be -- it'll always be a balance, run and pass, and I think the opportunity here may present to go deep now and then.

**Q. You said you watched games on Saturday. Just your thoughts about the end of the Georgia-Auburn game. Sitting there**

**watching it as a coach and maybe as a fan, each part of you watching the end of that game.**

COACH MILES: I can tell you I did the first thing very much like the fan. As the receiver, the Lord blessed that man. It kind of bounced right back into his hands, and he said, oh, my gosh, because I certainly think that once he started heading north and south, after he turned back and realized that the ball had been made a play on, that in fact when he caught it in his periphery about right there, there had to be a wide grin on that man's face.

I can't imagine how the Georgia team must have felt, certainly. But that's college football. Those snaps that you can't quite explain, they happen.

**Q. I think A & M starts five Louisiana guys on defense. Have you seen them on the recruiting trail more since they joined the league a couple years ago?**

COACH MILES: Yeah, we've run across them at times. We recognize some of the guys that they have there, and we wish them the very best. It's an opportunity to play in this league, and we're for that.

**Q. Realizing that it's water under the bridge, I would like to ask a question about the Alabama game. When they faked a punt and you had your regular defense out there, after the game they were interviewing Saban, and he said, the way I heard it, that if you hadn't put your regular defense back out there and had gone with what he called a soft punting unit, they weren't going to fake. So my question is why did they think you were more vulnerable, as you were, and they ran a little counter and gained six yards.**

COACH MILES: Yeah, I watched that play, and I watched it very closely. I wanted to say, I wanted to guess from the sideline that we didn't attack the line of scrimmage, that we didn't contain it, that the linebackers, for instance, went running away with the counter. I can tell you this: We did come off the line of scrimmage. We played hard. We did contain it. There was a very, very fundamental place that that ball was going to break, and there was an LSU defender in position to step right up and make that play. That play was not made, and I've got to be honest with you, I looked at the call and I couldn't argue with the call. What happened was an Alabama guy came right into the line and blocked, and all you had to do at

that point in time was to see that the guy that you had man-to-man had blocked and go forward and make the tackle. And the spot that he needed to take the tackle in was a contained spot, something that was pushed from the interior and something that was contained on the exterior. And really, I would think that any number of guys could have gone in there and made that play.

So if he's telling me he wants to call fake punts against our defensive alignments, I'll certainly listen to that and be ready for that again next time.

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