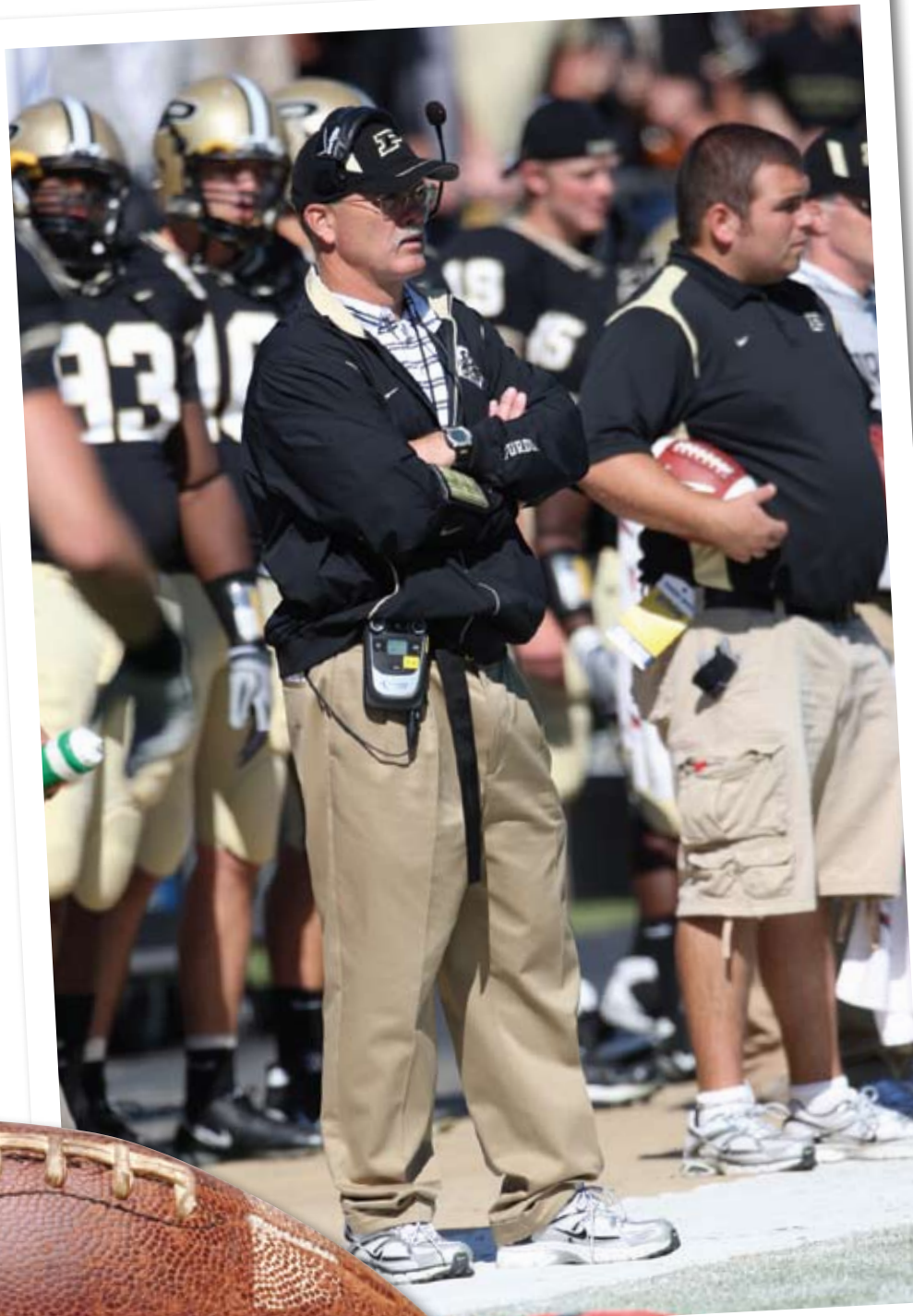


# Interview with

# Coach Hope

Building on success, a new era begins



*Danny Hope became football head coach officially on Jan. 1 and sat down for this interview Feb. 5.*

**QUESTION: What leads you to define your focuses as recruiting, academic and player development? You've said you have specific plans, so can you say some things about those plans?**

**ANSWER:** I know how important it is for us to win, and I want to stay focused on the things that will help us win and win big. It's important for me as the head coach to stop often and look at what I'm doing and see if it will matter for developing our team. Obviously with the great success we've had at Purdue in the 12 years of the Joe Tiller era, we are going to set lofty goals. We're following a coaching icon.

No. 1 is academics. The goal for academics is for the team to carry a cumulative 3.0 GPA. That's a lofty goal but very realistic. The team average already is 2.71. We've had a great process here, and this plan fits within it. If guys are driven and have enough pride to know the difference between a C and an A, if we have guys who don't allow

themselves to be average, we have a better chance of winning a championship.

**QUESTION: Can you describe any features of that plan?**

**ANSWER:** We sit down every Monday as a coaching staff with our academic counselors and many times with Ed Howat [associate athletics director for student services] and go over every player one by one. We don't just share information but take action about academic support and direction. We had the best fall in a long time. We challenged our freshman class to have a 3.0, and they had a 2.91, I think.

*As associate head coach in 2008, Danny Hope watched the Boilermakers with an eye to that season while shaping what he calls "lofty goals" and plans for reaching them in the coming years.*

INTERVIEW BY DAN HOWELL

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ANDREW HANCOCK

The photo displayed in Danny Hope's office and visible over his left shoulder shows six offensive linemen from Hope's stint as offensive line coach in 1997-2001. The words say, "Protecting the franchise: Brees' line second to none." Five of the linemen have played in the Super Bowl — Ian Allen on Philadelphia; Chukki Okobi on Pittsburgh; and Matt Light, Brandon Gorin and Gene Mruczkowski on New England, including back-to-back years together, a rare feat for any university. At Purdue, Hope says, "It was one heck of an offensive line."

**QUESTION: As you see player development, how broad is this? Strength and conditioning, or more?**

**ANSWER:** Everything. Of course, in this part of the year, a major focus is for the guys to get bigger and stronger. Our process for that has brought great success in the past. Jim Lathrop, who came with Coach Tiller and us from Wyoming, does a great job. Now we've brought in some new help into the weight room, increasing the number giving attention to football. Also we'll give more off-season time to speed and flexibility and position-specific development. But we have leadership development programs in athletics.

**QUESTION: You've made just a few selective, strategic coaching changes, and Brock Spack left to become a head coach. What do you look for in hiring for your staff?**

**ANSWER:** This year, I sat down with all the guys on the team and talked about the characteristics I was looking for in assistant coaches. I think that gave the team some real comfort about who I

brought on board. The bottom line is I want to have men on the staff that, when the players are done playing, they'll look back and see their position coach as a great hero in their life. So I was very selective and spent a lot of time on it. I'm really pleased. Everyone but one, I've worked with before, some for many years including here. We're on the same page and I'm excited about the quality of men. I'm really big on the football family part.

**QUESTION: When you were hired as associate head coach in January 2008, some former Purdue players were asked for comment, and they used lots of words like intensity, spirit, swagger, attitude, demanding, energy, tough. Is that you? How'd you get that way?**

**ANSWER:** [Laughs.] Well, those are some great traits that you need to be a great football coach, so I appreciate their comments. In my returning, one of the most rewarding things, and I didn't know of it, guys were pooling efforts to ask the administration to look at bringing me back as head coach. That made me feel good because we

had such a great experience here before. Hopefully, some of what they said is true and a lot of it will rub off on the team.

**QUESTION: Some Purdue fans may have a Spoilermaker identity — be competitive enough to grab a few upsets. For you, what is a successful season?**

**ANSWER:** I don't want to put a label on it. But I know that in major college football, the status quo is not good enough. The last 12 seasons have been at a new level. Certainly we'd like to play in more Jan. 1 bowls. We'd like to compete for the very top spots in college football. To have goals less than that would be beneath us. It would be accepting the status quo. The success of my predecessor kind of puts us in a pickle.

**QUESTION: Your coach's bio mentions quite a bit of community involvement while you were head coach at EKU. Here, you've signed on as spokesperson with the Purdue Cancer Center run. What expectations in this area do you have of your staff and players?**

**ANSWER:** Last time here, I was community services coordinator for Coach Tiller. We are in a position to make a difference, so we want to take advantage of that. At Eastern Kentucky, we did an annual blood drive. When you can take your football team and part of a day and save several hundred lives, that's a no-brainer. We were involved with Backfield in Motion, a nonprofit group out of Nashville, and I hope we can do that at Purdue. It involves the development of inner-city youth as young men.

**QUESTION: You work really hard, long hours — 5 a.m. to 1 a.m. days on end, you've said. How do stay sane? Can you eat what you want while recruiting?**

**ANSWER:** I tell you, we eat terrible on the road. At the end of the week when you turn your rental car in, and you look at the back seat at all the trash and you wonder how you could still be alive. Recruiting is like a game. You rush, you have to be "on" when you go into a home. You have to remind yourself, this is your shot.

**QUESTION: Your family obviously provides a lot of support. Is your wife a college football fan in general?**

**ANSWER:** She is a great coach's wife, and there is a difference between a great wife and a great coach's wife. She always has

been, and she's the difference maker in my success as a coach. As I said, I'm big on the football family, and she's a big part of putting it together. She's around a lot, around the players. She's involved with connecting the families with the Football Family Fanatics letter. She comes to all of the recruiting dinners. She's very charming, and young people are really drawn to her. I would not be in this position without her.

**QUESTION: And your son, Chaz?**

**ANSWER:** He has a lot of friends here and has spent time with them in summers since we left here after the 2001 season. But since then he's grown up in Richmond, Kentucky, and goes to Eastern Kentucky. He comes up for the games and to visit us and his friends. We're very close, the three of us. We have fun and enjoy each other's company. We talk on the phone and text-message several times a day.

**QUESTION: What else would you add?**

**ANSWER:** I'm excited and honored to be back here as Purdue's head coach. In talking about our signing class, I told some of the media that in recruiting this year, I think the economy played a factor. We didn't anticipate it happening, but when we went down to Florida and other places, we started talking about the value of a Purdue degree and job opportunity and our career placement program here. And the last couple of months, some information has come out about a Purdue degree and how much bang you get for your buck, and how much Purdue grads make five, 10, 15 years down the road. The timing of all that coming out at the same time the economy is like it is, I think was a factor, especially in South Florida. There were a lot more parents sitting up straight and listening when we were talking about the educational benefits of Purdue. When they looked at the football opportunities and academic and professional opportunities, Purdue was a great sell. So I'm very proud to be here and have that to take on the road.

#### WEB RESOURCE

Much more about Purdue football and Danny Hope is at [www.purduesports.com](http://www.purduesports.com).