

Petersen: The bar has been set very high



In December Chris Petersen was selected to lead the Boise State football program following Dan Hawkins' departure to Colorado. From 2001-05 Petersen, 41, was the team's offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach under Hawkins and is generally considered the mastermind behind the high-scoring, nationally rated offense that helped the Broncos win four straight Western Athletic Conference championships. Petersen (left) began his coaching career in 1987 at UC Davis, where he was a second-team All-America quarterback in the mid-1980s. He was the quarterbacks coach at Pittsburgh in 1992 and at Portland State in 1993 and '94. Prior to joining BSU, he was the wide receivers coach at Oregon from 1995 to 2000. He has twice been a finalist for the Broyles Award as the nation's top assistant coach. Petersen recently sat down with *FOCUS* editor Bob Evancho for an interview:

Q: Most people who follow Boise State football know you and Dan Hawkins are close. How are the two of you most alike and how are you different?

A: I think probably the core values that we have are very similar — how we believe in treating players, the coaches, other people. I think all that is very much the same. I think another key similarity is winning; we both know how to win, but our styles are quite different. There is a certain similarity in the way that we work where we really try not to focus so much on the wins and losses — although we know that's what this job is really all

about — but operate day to day and do the best job we can, whether it's in the classroom, whether it's in the weight room, whether it's conditioning sessions. If we do things the right way Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday during practices, then Saturday kind of takes care of itself. That's where Hawk and I are probably very similar. We really try to focus on the process, and the product will take care of itself.

Q: You obviously played a major role in the Broncos' success under Hawk, but now you're the main guy. What do you think Boise State's fans are going to expect from you?

A: The bar has been set very high and I think that they expect us to continue what we've done the past five years, and that's play at a very high level, compete hard, and represent Boise State. That's our expectation as well.

Q: What do you expect from the fans?

A: I hope they continue to make Bronco Stadium one of the tougher places to play. I also hope they have some patience because the things that we've done here in the past five years have been pretty spectacular, and it doesn't always go like that. I mean, you can be a very good football program, but not always be the leading scoring offense in the country or have the best defense in the WAC, but you can still be pretty darn good. So I think the thing that we hope is that the fan base continues to build. We love our fans, and we think they're very passionate and care tremendously about what happens on the blue.

Q: What do you think

the pressure will be like now that you've been selected as the person to lead the program?

A: There's a big difference going from an assistant to head coach. There are many more avenues that you're dealing with. ... But I will tell you this, the pressure is really all self-induced. I've put tremendous pressure on myself the last five years. I just kind of focused in on one side of the ball, but felt tremendous pressure and responsibility to get things done. But whether we win 10-0 or 50 to something, the bottom line is for us to win as a team and play well.

Q: As head coach, how do you plan to keep the program winning at the same pace it has while you were the offensive coordinator?

A: First, you have to hire great people and have great kids around you, and I think we've done that. You've got to trust those people and let them operate, and things will usually work out as they should. The assistant coaches have tremendous ownership in this program. I think we've put together an A-plus staff, and it's really a testament to where Boise State football is and where the city of Boise is because that's why these guys are here. And we're only going to be as good as our staff; one guy cannot carry this flag. Two guys cannot carry it. It's got to be all 10 of us together. When I hired our staff I was very slow and thorough. I feel very good about who we have hired. Take Sean [new offensive line and assistant head coach Sean Kugler, who came from the NFL's Detroit Lions] for example. What's happening in Boise and at Boise State is why he's here. These coaches wanted to live in a good place for their families. I think that this place is very special in those terms. I mean, to get a guy [like Kugler] to come out of pro football, where the money's way better, where the exposure's going to be much different, where the resources are completely different and better, and he still wants to come here. That says a lot about what's going on here.

Q: What do you think you will enjoy most about your new position?

A: The best part of the job is dealing with the players and dealing with the staff. Our staff is very diverse itself; the fun part of the job is dealing with the different personalities.

Q: How important is it for the Broncos to recruit and coach not only good players, but also good people?

A: It all starts with character. We're looking to recruit talented guys, but good players character-wise and personality-wise, too.

Q: Speaking of getting quality players, how will the recently completed indoor practice facility and planned expansion of Bronco Stadium, and the Broncos' success help with your recruiting efforts?

A: It's critical. It all starts when they walk into the stadium. I was even blown away coming from the University of Oregon, which I think is one of the best football setups in the country. When you walk into Bronco Stadium before a game, it's electric. When you come into this stadium, which is probably half the size [of Oregon's] with ends that are open, and a track around it, you don't expect to feel that same electricity from the fans and that intensity. But I was very surprised walking in here the first time. It was very similar [to the atmosphere at Oregon], and I think opposing teams feel that as well, and that's what players and coaches want to be part of.

Q: It's been pretty well documented that you weren't really interested in a head coaching position, but that Boise State was perhaps the lone exception. Is that accurate?

A: The coaching profession is tough. I knew that from the time I was growing up. My dad was a coach, an assistant and later the head coach for a few seasons at Yuba College [in California], and I really saw a lot of the hardships and time requirements that can go on in coaching. ... But I learned from him how to handle some of those demands.

Q: Like Hawk, you played at and began your coaching career at UC Davis. He often speaks of how his time there greatly influenced him as a coach. How about you?

A: Every stop along the way in my career, I have had coaches who have influenced me tremendously. But [former UC Davis coaches] Bob Foster and Jim Sochor are two of the main reasons why I'm sitting here today in the coaching profession. After watching some of the things my dad went through, at first I didn't think that's what I wanted to do. But then I saw their [Foster's and Sochor's] perspective on things, and it really changed my way of thinking about coaching. And Paul Hackett [another Davis product who hired me as an assistant at Pittsburgh] is one of the greatest teachers that I've ever been around. Take the football part out of it, and this guy would be a great biology teacher or a physics teacher just in terms of imparting knowledge.

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Q: What other coaches have influenced you?

A: [Portland State's] Tim Walsh, for how he deals with players. I had great coaches at Oregon, from [head coach] Mike Bellotti and the coordinators who I worked with, from Al Borges, who's at Auburn, [current Arizona State and ex-BSU head coach] Dirk Koetter and [current Cal head coach] Jeff Tedford. And then certainly Hawk.

Q: If there was one message you could convey to FOCUS' readers, what would it be?

A: I'd say that this is just such an awesome time to be a Bronco. You can feel the change happening, but not just in the athletic program. Equally impressive are the changes that are occurring on campus. The academic programs that are being started and the buildings that are going up at this place are very impressive. It's a great place to be right now. In four or five, 10 years, this place is going to be much different and even more impressive, and now is the time to jump on the bandwagon.