Pokey Allen

The name is now a household word among Boise State football fans. The legendary promoter from Portland State who once rode an elephant to lure fans into the stadium is now a Bronco. Allen, named head coach after the resignation of Skip Hall, takes over a program that last fall suffered through its second losing season in 44 years.

How does the new coach feel about winning ... and losing, about academics, about the profession he has chosen? FOCUS asked those questions, and more, in this interview.

"We didn't come here to lose"

A coach is a combination public relations agent, management expert, public speaker, counselor, teacher, budget analyst and fund-raiser. What do you think leads to success as a coach when you look at all those dimensions?

You can be good at everything, but the main thing in coaching is that you have to be a good teacher and a good recruiter, which involves salesmanship. You've got to win in college football. You've got to be entertaining on the field, but you've got to win. You can do all the speaking, all the promotions, all the fund raising and they don't mean a lot unless you can put a good product on the field. There are a lot of exterior things that people worry about that really don't matter. I'm not going to change the color of the jerseys. I don't care about the helmets. I don't care about how we warm up. I don't care about a lot of things. We don't run a lot of stats. What we do is recruit and we try to coach our systems on both sides of the ball.

You probably have a fair idea of what the fans expect from you. What do you expect from them?

I don't really expect anything. They buy their tickets, which is what I want. I knew what I was getting into when I wanted the job. I know a lot about Boise State. I have coached here a couple of times and I have been in the Big Sky before. I've wanted the job and I will not be complaining about it if things don't go right, because I knew exactly what was happening. But I think the fans will be fair. I think they are always pretty fair. We are going to try our best and we are going to put a good product on the field. We don't think it is going to be bad. We didn't come down here for pain, we came down here because we think we can do the job. There are no guarantees we will do the job. There are no guarantees in anybody's job.

Coaching is obviously an insecure existence. Do you think it is fair that coaches should be judged just on winning or losing?

No, I don't think it is fair, but what difference does that make? You know, a lot of things in life are not fair. If you are going to get involved in it you have to take the good with the bad. That is the way it is. There is no sense in complaining about that.

What single element are you trying to get across to the players to make them successful?

I want to eliminate all the things that aren't conducive to winning — and there are a lot of things. Everything has got to be for the team to win. Now, you may win once in a while with guys doing cartwheels in the end zone or with guys yelling at each other and fighting. But over the long haul, you won't. I think these kids will do what you want them to do. You just have to make sure that they understand it is fair. I am not asking them to run through a brick wall. I am asking them to be responsible and work hard — and not for long periods of
time. I’m asking them to be on time and to be team oriented. I don’t think that is too much to ask.

YOU AND YOUR ASSISTANT COACHES ALL SEEM VERY POSITIVE ABOUT YOUR ABILITY TO WIN. IS THAT A CORRECT PERCEPTION?

We are not going to ever get arrogant. In this business if you get arrogant you’ve got some problems. We have been very successful. There are a lot of head coaches, but there are not very many head coaches with a good staff. We have been together a long time and we have a lot of confidence in each other, which is a real plus because when we stepped in here we knew our responsibilities. On that first Monday everybody knew what they were doing the first hour. We are confident. We did not come down here to lose. I guarantee you that. The other reason we are confident is that we turned a program around that was a disaster. And under duress we made it a great program. We have had seven pretty good years. That will make you pretty confident in this business — seven years is a long time. I hope that seven years from now we are laughing at Boise State.

WHEN THE PLAYERS ARE FINISHED WITH FOOTBALL, WHAT DO YOU HOPE THEY TAKE WITH THEM?

First of all, I want them to get a degree and I want them to think that we will help them in their line of endeavor after they get a degree. If they get a degree and they play football, it is amazing the amount of success they have. It is just amazing. Football teaches you competitiveness, it teaches you hard work, it teaches you how to get along with other people — which may be the most important thing — and it teaches you the ups and downs that you get in normal life. I think it is a great training ground if it is done right.

EVERY COACH SAYS THEY WANT TO EMPHASIZE ACADEMICS. WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO THAT MAY BE DIFFERENT FROM OTHER COACHES?

I think what I would do a little better than most head coaches is that I am going to get personally involved. From what I’ve understood or what I’ve seen, no matter how many advisers you’ve got, how many tutors you’ve got, the main factor in graduating football players is the coaches caring whether they get the degree. The thing you can’t do with players is bluff them. They find out pretty quick when you are just talking and not really meaning it. We will try to put some pressure on them to make them graduate.

I have always wondered what an athlete does if he doesn’t go to class. People always act like football and academics are time consuming. There is a little time involved, but try getting a real job and see how much time is involved. You take 15 hours of courses — that is three hours a day five days a week. If they are going to study three hours, great, that is six hours a day five days a week. I don’t think that is too much to ask. I mean what are you going to do two years from now when you’ve got to go to a real job?

HOW IMPORTANT IS WINNING TO POKEY ALLEN?

I am very competitive. We laugh a lot and I think one of our pluses is that we get over our losses real quick because we are looking at the next game. We enjoy ourselves, but you don’t want to be around us on Sunday morning after we lose a game. In this business you’ve got to be competitive.

We understand it is a game. It is our livelihood, but it is a game and it should be a game for everybody. We know that we’ve got to win too if we want to stay at Boise State. I just hope they don’t send a moving van to my house the first time I lose.