

A chat with the Coach



Skip Hall . . . by now the name is part of a Bronco fan's everyday vocabulary. Coming from the head assistant position at the University of Washington, Hall, who was named head coach after the resignation of Lyle Setencich, now is in charge of a Bronco football program that last fall suffered its first losing season in 40 years.

How does the new coach feel about winning . . . and losing, about academics and athletics, about recruiting, and about the role football plays in the community? FOCUS asked these questions, and more, in this interview.

F: A coach has to be a combination of so many things — a head coach, a public relations expert, a management expert, a counselor, a teacher, a public speaker, a fund raiser. What do you think leads to success as a coach?

H: I think it starts with integrity. The whole thing has got to be based on a solid rock and, to me, that's integrity in every area. Our program will be structured that way, whether it's recruiting, on the field coaching, or dealing with the alumni or the media. Consistency is another aspect that I'm very, very sold on. I've seen this in the Washington program for years and years. If there's one thing that I've picked up from my former boss Don James, it's the consistency of a day-in-day-out program when times are good and when times are down. Developing that consistency is really important because the players see it, other coaches see it, the community sees it. So I would start off with integrity and consistency and throw in a lot of hard work and I think we've got a pretty good start.

F: • What personal sacrifices are necessary to be a winning football coach?

H: • Most of the people I know who are effective leaders are servants. And that will be my role, too. I'm going to serve. I'm a man of priorities. My faith, my family, and our football team come in that order. And, when I say football team, I include the players, the coaches, the administration, the trainer, the equipment man—anybody who's associated with our program falls into that category. So, to me it's important that we keep priorities in order.

I like balance. I think you have to have balance in everything you do in order to be successful. I've found that out in my coaching career that when I have more of a balance in my life and am involved in some other things, it makes me a more effective coach. It makes me a better coach. It also makes me a better husband and father and community person. So, balance is a real key word for me.

F: • For most of your career you've been an assistant coach. What do you envision as the toughest part of the transition to a head coach?

H: • I think the toughest part is probably trying to be all things to all people. Everybody looks to the head coach for all of the direction and the pulse. I look forward to working with all areas of our program and having a part in it. But I guess the toughest part is realizing that I can't do it all, either. I think one of the key things is hiring people and surrounding myself with people who I can delegate responsibility to and know they're going to get it done, and not trying to do it all myself.

F: • What do you think will be the chief differences between this and the Washington program? Obviously there is a large difference of scale.

H: • I see this as almost a parallel to when we went into Washington 12 years ago. I see what's available here. I see the climate for the development of a program. We've got facilities; we've got great people. Everything that we need to develop a solid program is here. Now, it's our job to get the people going and develop that program. And that's what we did at Washington by taking a good, sound approach, and working hard. I see the exact same parallel right here at this time. The timing, I think, is just right for that.

F: • What single aspect forms the basis of your coaching philosophy?

H: • My philosophy is a team concept. When people ask me, "Do you have a lot of rules . . . what are all of your rules and regulations and disciplines?" I can cover it real simple for you: the team comes first. And that encompasses a lot of rules and a lot of problems that pop up. If somebody comes to me with a question or a concern or a problem, my first thought is, "The team comes first." So we will build a program based not on individuals, not on the personal success of Skip Hall, but based on the team and what is good for the team.

F: • You come from a program where you really are expected to win; you're expected to go to a bowl game. To some extent, that's also true here. Is that fair?

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H: I think it's fair; I think that having the expectation is really important. I think if we don't have something out there that we're striving for, I don't think we're going to put out as much as we normally would. I think it's important that we have some carrots out there; that we strive to do the best we can. I think if we do that, winning will take care of itself. If we put the plan in . . . a sound, fundamental plan . . . and we pay attention to detail and work hard, then I think that the winning will take care of itself. I think that that will come right along with it.

F: Coaching is probably one of the more insecure professions that one might get into. The bottom line eventually becomes how many football games you win or lose. Do you think coaches should be judged only on win/loss records?

H: I think every coach who's ever gotten in this business realizes that sometimes life is not fair. And I think that we all know that, due to whatever the circumstances or the reasons, there could be that time and place in our careers that that might happen. And I think all of us, even though we don't want to think about it, deep down inside know that that's a possibility. It's just something that goes with our profession. We realize that people love to win.

F: How important is winning, personally, to Skip Hall?

H: To me, winning takes on a bigger connotation than just on the scoreboard. I'm a great competitor. Every time we take the field, I want our team to play well and succeed, which means win. But I also know this: If the players I coach go out there and give it everything they've got, and if the staff and I have given them everything that we can give, and if we're operating within the rules of the game, then to me that's winning. I can't ask any more of our players; I can't ask of our staff any more than their best efforts, and if we win on the scoreboard as well, why fantastic. I'm like everybody else. I want to be in the left hand column in Sunday morning's paper.

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F: How long does it take you to get over a loss?

H: I'm not sure that you ever get over a loss. I see losses in this light: they're going to help us become a better football team. Through a loss, we can learn some things about ourselves, about our team, that are going to help make us a better team the next week. I guess if there is value in losing, it's that it should help us find out what we can do to become a better team. Personally, I'm not happy with a loss, ever.

F: Recruiting obviously is critical and, from what we have heard, it is one of your strong suits. What is the key thing that you tell a player to get him to come play football at Boise State?

H: I tell the players and parents when I visit a home that there are three things that I think are important in your selection of a university.

First is the education. Can you get a degree in your field of study from our university? And that's the most important thing that I'm going to be interested in. I want to see you get that degree in hand. I want to see you leave Boise State University with

a degree in hand in the chosen field that you've selected. That's number one.

Secondly, I think that we have a great opportunity to be a winning team—a winning program. Not every school can say that. In fact, about half of them can't say that. In my own opinion, next to Washington in the Northwest, I think Boise State has an excellent chance to be a winning program.

And, thirdly, I let them know that they will have a chance to play early in their career in our program. We're going to play the best players, and if they are one of the best players, then they're going to play. So, the opportunity to come in and play relatively early in their career is going to be, I think, a key point.

F: ● In addition to the obvious, which is athletic talent, what do you look for in a player?

H: ● Our coaches have a screening process, a very complex sheet, that they fill out on every young man that we bring up for scholarship consideration. And, along with the athletic things, we will also have an area that deals with the character side of the person, the individual. We want to recruit strong character people. We want to recruit very capable academic people. We do a lot of research into their backgrounds and we talk to high school principals and counselors and teachers. We ask them tough questions about this young man's character and his academic abilities. So, again, balance is important. We're going to know as much as we can know about a young man before we would ever offer him a scholarship here.

F: ● You said earlier that academics is one of the areas you emphasize. Would you be more specific about the program that you plan to set up?

H: ● I have overseen the entire athletic-academic program at the University of Washington. I've got some real strong feelings on how we're going to set this up. It may not all come together at the beginning, but I know what we want to end up with as we get further down the road. The first thing is that the academic counselor will have my support 100 percent as far as dealing with our players. They will not miss class or anything else unless we're traveling. We will not have night meetings that take them away from study time or class during school. In other words, I will establish the fact that academics is why they're here. We will schedule the football and other meetings around their classes and around whatever's necessary to achieve academic success. We'll be setting up an academic program . . . a counseling program, a tutoring program. And I'm not talking about a dumbbell tutoring program. I'm talking about the guy who's getting a B and he needs to get an A or wants to get an A. We want to help give him the tools to do that.

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We want to recruit very capable academic people.
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F: ● It's not just a program to keep athletes eligible?

H: ● Not at all. Not at all.

F: ● Some collegiate athletic programs have strayed from the rules. Why is this happening?

H: ● I think it's happening because it's been allowed to happen. As a head football coach, I will do everything within my power to talk to our coaches and our

boosters and our alumni about staying within the framework of the rules, because we are not going to tolerate anything but staying within those boundaries. And that's my job . . . my job is to make it very clear and very plain to all concerned at Boise State that we are going to play within the framework of the rules. And that's the only way that I think it should be done.

F: • There have been situations in other programs where the coach may be the last person to know when an infraction has taken place. How will you handle those situations?

H: • I think there's got to be recruiting education for boosters and alumni about what things we can and cannot do. I need to get in front of our people and let them know what the rules are. It's an education that's got to take place and that falls within my responsibility.

F: • Why are athletics important to the fan in the stand on Saturday?

H: • Well, to me, there's nothing like being for something . . . to say "That is something that I really believe in." If we can create a role model program that people can feel good about — the fans, the boosters, the alums, the coaches, the players, the administration—if we can create the kind of program where everybody says, "Hey, that's my program; that's my team," I don't think you can buy that kind of a feeling.

F: • Do you think that college football is overemphasized?

H: • I think college football or professional football can become gods to some people, just like gambling or golf or so many other addictions in this country. That's why I strive to be a person of balance. Even though I've been entrusted with the head coaching position here, I still feel that, in order to be complete and a good coach and a good leader, that I need to maintain that balance.

F: • So you're saying fans should, too?

H: • I believe every person needs to find a balance in his or her life. I think too much of any one thing could develop into a problem. Athletics could fall into that just like alcoholism or anything else. Too much emphasis on football can lead to a problem.

F: • Let's suppose football ended tomorrow for Skip Hall. What would he do?

H: • What would he do? Well, let's hope that doesn't happen, I'm a people person; people are important to me. I'm not just a football coach. I've always felt like I want to be involved with people and I could basically do anything that dealt with people. If it involves people and communicating with people and working with people, I feel like I could do it.

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