

University of Iowa Football Media Conference

Wednesday, September 18, 2019

Brian Ferentz



BRIAN FERENTZ: Obviously, we're 3-0. It's best we could do after three weeks but as we look at the tape and certainly it's been an ongoing process but getting a chance to take a look at all three weeks together, I really think there's a lot of room for improvement and a lot of things that we need to clean up and do a lot better as we move forward. Pleased with where we are at.

Q. How would you describe your running back right now? Obviously four guys you like a lot?

BRIAN FERENTZ: We played four guys. We're pretty comfortable with all those guys doing various things. They all have strengths. They all have certain things they do particularly well, but the reality is that we trust all four of them.

We demonstrated that early in the season at the Miami of Ohio game, it was maybe a two-score game when we had Goodson in there for most of the series. In that game Ivory only played one snap and blocked for Goodson. What that tells you is that we have a very unselfish room right there, and we have four guys that are much more interested in the team winning and the team doing well, than any kind of a personal accomplishment.

Ivory turns around the next week, has a huge play on the screen and that sets up a touchdown and obviously he was a lot more involved last Saturday and did a lot of good things in that game.

You look at what Tyler has done. He's done some really good things. Toren has been really good. And certainly Mekhi has been the workhorse, the Jack-of-All-Trades, but with him dinged up on Saturday we felt like it was best to perhaps not give him quite as many snaps, trying to be as smart as we could with his injury.

Q. You mentioned stuff you want to correct during the bye week. End of the first half, clock management, what do you see there that you wish you would have done differently?

BRIAN FERENTZ: You go back to Rutgers, I did a very poor job managing the clock. We checked the play there on first down and -- maybe it was second down. Ended up taking us a little more time.

We were sitting on two time outs. Really when you look

at the end-of-half management, regardless of the score what you are trying to do is ensure two things: You want to ensure a score and the last possession. The last thing you want to do is give the ball back to the other team and let them have a chance to go score.

I think in the Rutgers game, we should have used a time-out. Didn't manage that well. That falls on my shoulders. That was poor and probably cost an us opportunity to score six points.

You look at Saturday night, felt like at that point, we didn't want to give the ball back to those guys to end the half. Certainly we had not played our best football for the majority of that half, or whatever stoppage we were out of, I don't know, but certainly didn't feel like we were playing as well as we had opened the game. We had given up a big play on defense. We had just come up with a big turnover after a bad series offensively.

The last thing you want to do is give them the ball back. So we want to be pretty cautious. We end up third and four, and end up converting that and felt like we had a couple opportunity to take a shots at the end zone. We weren't able to hit those and put the field goal team on and hit the field goal.

I think the Rutgers one was poor.

Then last week, certainly you wish you could come away with six points, but just that's not going to be the reality at the end of every half.

Q. On the offensive line, you rotated a lot of guys the first couple weeks. Do you anticipate trimming back more as you get into the meat of the conference schedule?

BRIAN FERENTZ: No, we have guys we trust and we have guys that we want to play and develop more trust in.

The way the game was going the other night, it was just a strange game. We didn't have long possessions after the first drive. And then on top of it, right, you're on the field, you're off the field, it just becomes a little bit disjointed.

There's something to be said forgetting in the original. The game especially when you might want to make

some substitutions, but the way the game started shaking out, we went with the guys that were out there. There were some things that happened in the game that we didn't feel like Wednesday had a lot of preparation for and so we had to make some adjustments and change some things and so you wanted to go with a little bit more experience in that regard at that time.

But I think moving forward, we'd like to get all those other guys involved. Certainly having AJ back at some point will be, I think, really good for our football team. But right now we're trying to do the best we can with the guys we have.

Q. How do you feel about the tight end position? I know it's more than statistics and catches. You seem to be doing well in other phases.

BRIAN FERENTZ: Feel pretty good about it. I know we talked a lot about this in the off-season and training camp, but when everybody laughed, like, yeah, whatever, we're going to get the ball to the best player.

We're going to get the ball to the guys that can do something with it. I think right now, our tight ends are maybe growing into a role where they can get some more touches, but the reality is that we have some very capable receivers.

We're trying to get the ball into their hands and we're trying to get the ball into the back's hands and when you're playing 65 to 80 snaps a game, there's only so many opportunities to go around. Right now the ball has been targeted more to some other guys. With the things we have asked them to do, we feel like they have done a pretty good job.

I don't think you can under value the contribution of a guy like Nate Wieting makes to the whole offense and the things that he's out there doing. He plays a multitude of positions for us and does a lot of things. He comes up big on a scramble the other night. Keeps us from being second and ten. Puts us at second and four. Just a really solid guy. Catches the ball at the end of the game, probably not really a very good play called.

He catches the ball and is able to get a bill. This guy is a good player. Unfortunately for him just the balls haven't gone his way right now. I think that's a good problem to have, but it seems like every year no matter what, somebody is not going to get the ball enough, right. I think that's the reality of it. The good news is none of our guys can ask for a trade.

Q. At the end of the game, was that simply you want to go win the game?

BRIAN FERENTZ: No, it's both. But at the end of the

day, you certainly want to stop the clock. So you want to try to give yourself the best chance to make a first down but the clock was clearly much more important than anything at that moment. So that's another example of really poor game management and ultimately that falls on my shoulders, as well.

You want to win the game but you want to give yourself the best chance to win the game. I don't feel like we had done that up until that point.

Q. Is there a point real late in the game where you go from obviously want to win it but make sure you don't lose it?

BRIAN FERENTZ: No. I wouldn't say that. Every decision that you make throughout the course of the game, whether it's the end of the half, whether it's the first play of the game, you're trying to make sure you're making a decision that gives you the best chance to win.

For example, at the end of the game, we're in a situation where had we made a first down on any of those first three plays, you would see our ball carrier immediately get down once he got past the sticks. We're in a situation there where going and scoring doesn't help you win the game.

We learned a hard lesson in Minnesota in 2015, come out, a 60-yard run, hit it against our goal line defense, totally unexpected, just grind the situation out and all of a sudden we score a touchdown. Now they can and get a two-point conversion. They can kick an on-side kick. That's the only way we can lose the game.

Penn State two, years ago, the only way we can lose the game, we lost it. We probably lost the football game is by scoring a touchdown, because now you give them an opportunity to come back and take the football.

You're trying to manage all those situations the best you can at any given point. But it's not so much about trying not to lose the game. Although, this the greatest football coach I've ever been around, his whole mantra was you can't win it until you don't lose. So everything you do, you're trying not to lose the football game, but that's how you win, ultimately, is you just try to make smart decisions, which I don't think we did.

Q. When you look at short yardage on third down, traditionally you have 22-personnel and the numbers don't bare it out, but it's not real successful. Is that a scheme that you guys feel married to over a long period of time and will continue going forward?

BRIAN FERENTZ: What numbers don't bare it out? Traditionally, so championship level for us would be 75

percent on third and one. I mean, we've hit that every year that I've been here.

I guess I would disagree with that, No. 1.

And No. 2, we were actually in 23-personnel the other day. It wasn't 22. I think we probably outsmarted ourselves on that one, too. We went out there, we wanted to show it so we ran a little dive play. We wanted to take a shot later in the game.

I think basically by being in that personnel group, we announced the shot because that particular personnel group had only been in third down, I think twice last year, both in the Penn State and one was a shot.

Now you're trying to seal the edges up, get big blockers in there and make a first down. That's ultimately what you're trying to do.

Q. Oliver Martin only played two snaps, is he just behind the other guys?

BRIAN FERENTZ: I will tell you right now, I'm not going through that this year. This guy plays, that guy doesn't play -- if guys are out there producing, that's the way it is.

Q. The weather delay, keeping everybody focused?

BRIAN FERENTZ: You play the game. Any good football team I've been around, you show up, any time, any place, anywhere, that's what you do. They had the difficulty of having to restart, stop, all that stuff. But hey, those guys were dealing with that, too. We weren't dealing with anything they weren't dealing with. I thought both teams handled it pretty well.

There's nothing you can do about it. So what you do is you try to stay focused and you try to keep the guys into it, which they did a great job of. There's nothing for us to do, really, and then you go back out.

Once the game started again, then it was really a non-issue, but that stop and start for a while was certainly a little bit different than anything we are used to. But at the end of the day, they are playing by the same rules we are playing by. Just comes down to trying to do the best you can to handle whatever comes at you and that's how every game is.

Q. Last year, Nate Stanley put too much pressure on himself -- feeling more comfortable, and how do you evaluate his play and the confidence he has right now?

BRIAN FERENTZ: I think he's played pretty well. We missed a couple throws the other night. Certainly wish we would have had the last one back down in the end zone. Thought we had a chance to score the

touchdown there, and we didn't make a great throw.

You look at what he's done through three weeks, it's been pretty good, pretty efficient. Keeps us out of some big plays. Like I said earlier there were some things that happened in that game where -- I can't say enough about the job their coaching staff does. They have a tremendous football coaching staff. Their defensive coordinator, John Hancock, is in my opinion one of the better coordinators in probably college football. I don't know where he ranks on that deal, but I know there are famous guys, like Brett Venable gets a lot of publicity. When I turned on Clemson the first week, they were playing John Hancock's defense.

I think he's a pretty good coach, and he certainly threw some things at us that we didn't expect and that we had not anticipated or prepared for. That's the hidden value of a guy like Nate. Nate is able to get us in and out of plays and deal with some looks that were a little bit different, handle some pressure looks, make some adjustments. The last pass to Ragaini, we missed the throw but actually that was not the called play. You can see in the very last seconds, Stanley gives him an adjustment on the route. Saw something in the coverage and it was there. We just didn't make the play.

But a guy like Nate, that's what you can't necessarily put into words what he does for you. He's just in total command out there.

Q. Winning a game in that environment, does that help you going forward in hostile environments?

BRIAN FERENTZ: We are going to play in a lot of big games. What we talk to our football team about is you can only handle whatever is in front of you. So they schedule these games and you play them one at a time. The best you can do every week is win. That's certainly the ultimate goal.

But where we play, when we play, that's all out of our control. We've had three different kickoff times. We've had home games, away games. We've had delays.

None of that is within your control, so you're just trying to do the best you can to handle each environment and each day as they come up. But I think they did a nice job the other night. The one thing I know is it didn't get easier. It's going to continue to get probably a little bit more difficult as it goes.

Q. The freshman center who seems to play really well his first couple of games. Is that something that you expected? Because he's a young player and has a lot on his plate, and going up against a guy that's probably an NFL-calibre player.

BRIAN FERENTZ: Tyler has done a pretty good job.

We talked about that in the off-season going back to at least August, I remember a question about him. I think I said something to the effect of: You don't notice him very much, which I think is a positive thing.

We were talking about a first-year player at that position. I would echo that right now. I know he gives us some leadership up front. He pushes the tempo, and those are the things you want out of the position. But I think he's kind of a microcosm of where we are offensively. There's been some really good things, but there's a lot of things we have to clean up and improve on moving forward here and he's the same way and would tell you the same thing.

You can't ask for more out of a guy as far as toughness and competitiveness and those types of things.

Q. You were ask the about the tight end and you're saying right now -- essentially the running back, too, how much is this your vision when you took over as offensive coordinator to add more to the arsenal?

BRIAN FERENTZ: I don't think so. I think that stuff gets overplayed. I think that you look at the best offensive football teams, they find a way to get their best players involved. That's ultimately the goal.

Right now we feel like we have pretty good skill guys at the receiver position in the running back room. So we are trying to get those guys a little bit more involved and try to play in personnel groups where we have as many of those guys on the field as possible and do things to get the ball in their hands. That's what you're always trying to do. You're living in a world where you're taking what the defense gives to you some extent while still trying to have your best players involved.

So if we are trying to run quarterback draws for the rest of the year thinking that that's going to be our whole running game, that's probably not very smart. But the other night, it was available, so you're trying to take what they give you.

Then I thought going back to what they did, I thought they did a lot of really good things to take away some of the things we wanted to do and they were trying very hard and successfully at times to make us play left-handed. So that's something we have to improve upon moving forward.

Q. Felt like Nate was looking more deliberate or a match-up driven thing?

BRIAN FERENTZ: Well, two of them were called. So yeah, that was probably more deliberate.

But you know, when you play a team like that where they are going to have a lot of opportunities to see a three-man rush and eight guys in coverage, there's different philosophies to pressure the quarterback. They used both the other night. They can come after, and they can add the coverage.

But when they are adding the coverage, and certainly you make it more difficult to throw the ball down the field, but at the same time, you'd better be really tight and you'd better be really disciplined in your containment of the quarterback. Otherwise, there's some opportunities to use your feet and pick up some yardage. Those are things that we've talked about.

If you look at his development over the last three years, he's certainly been more willing to make plays with his feet and it's helped our offense.

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LeVar Woods



LeVAR WOODS: Appreciate all you guys being here and talking about special teams. Obviously that's what I'm here to talk about. Right off the bat, I feel like we're off to a good start collectively in all the units that we're dealing with right now on special teams.

There's certainly more work to be done. We're off to a good start, but there's certainly places that we need to get to that we are not at right now.

I feel like we're kicking the ball well. We're punting the ball well, kickoffs and field goals and I think we're covering the ball well in both kickoffs and punts. There's certainly some plays that I think we'd all like to have back but we can't get those back in football.

The things I think we need to improve upon kind of right off the bat are punt return. I think we are starting to get that going a little bit and then our kick return game, as well.

I think the area more important to me is the penalty area. We've had too many penalties. We've had five in three games. That's too many. We want to make sure that we are playing turnover- and penalty-free, so those are things we're working on right now.

Just right off the bat, I feel like we've gotten good leadership. This is year three, I guess, if you will, since I've been coordinator of special teams and some of the guys have been mainstays here for three years.

So they kind of know the ropes and they are leading the young guys and helping develop a good culture that we have going on right now. It's been fun to watch those guys grow and develop roles on special teams and they can translate to offense or defense and seeing some of those guys have success so far.

Q. Can you talk about Keith and his re-emergence, and what you've seen since the spring?

LeVAR WOODS: I think Keith has done a good job. I wouldn't necessarily call it a re-emergence. Maybe re-emergence to the public but I think he's been working really hard behind the scenes, not only Keith but also Caleb, as well.

I think we're blessed with two really good kickers and two guys that are competitive every single day in both

kickoffs and field goals and they push each other. They make each other better. I think that as far as a re-emergence, I think it's more that last year, it was Miguel had the job and those guys still every day came and competed and worked hard, and kind of put themselves in good position for it this current season right now.

Q. How much has Sleep-Dalton helped this team?

LeVAR WOODS: I think it's been pretty obvious if you've been watching, but he certainly has a talented leg and he's helped this team tremendously.

I think if you look at just the Rutgers game alone, I think that's the one that people sort of started to take notice because the first game was terrible, and he'll admit that. First punt, not ideal. But I think the Rutgers game is the one where we started off backed up, his first real punt, he hit the ball across the 50-yard line and we go down and cover for no return, I think it's minus two return. It's a huge play for a team like us that prides itself on winning field position.

I think that's been big. It showed up later in that game, as well, where we pinned one down on the one-yard line, another one inside the ten, the nine-yard line, if I recall.

Then go to last week, in a big game, in a tight game, at Iowa State and comes out and hits two really good balls that end up turning the tide of the game for us. It's certainly been a big deal and it's certainly helped this football team.

Q. The consistency the last couple years, how has that helped you guys coach and maybe tweak some things?

LeVAR WOODS: Sure. I think consistency is the name of the game in any area in football, but particular any in that, where the guys that are covering have a good sense of where the ball is going to be and a good sense that they are going to have an opportunity to go down, particularly our gunners, to go down and take a shot on the returner.

It helps the punter, as well, to know he has a group of guys that are willing and hungry and want to get down the field and handle the returner if the returner does get his hands on the ball.

I think consistency has been good over the last two weeks. First week, I've thrown that out because it wasn't ideal in any stretch of the imagination, but I think we are on the right track and just need to keep pushing that thing forward.

Q. What does a player like Devonte Young do for special teams?

LeVAR WOODS: I think Devonte Young epitomizes what Iowa special teams is about: Finding a role on this team. He may not be a starter on offense or defense, but he has a role on special teams, and not only is he a player and contributor, but also as leader on special teams.

He was a guy that I talked about his freshman year. I thought he played really well as a freshman, but sophomore year took a step back in all areas, and I think he'll tell you the same thing.

He's very productive for us last year in a bunch of areas: hold guy, rush guy, coverage guy, all the different things you look for in a special teams player last year. I think he transitioned that into this year and he's taken a step forward as a leader.

He can still do more and still do better and that's what he's working on. I think it's been a good story so far. I'd be shocked if there weren't more stories from him coming up here.

Q. You kept Colton last Saturday as your holder, and Miguel talked about a lot of trust that he had in him last year and Keith mentioned it the same way.

LeVAR WOODS: I have all the trust in the world in Colton as a holder and I think both kicker, both Caleb and Keith will tell you the same thing; that he does a really good job, and it makes them comfortable. Gives them the perfect spot to tilt the laces the way they want it and Colton has been very good at that. That's been his role this year and he's done very, very well with it.

That's also helped the transition of moving to a different kicker, not only the holder, but also the snapper in Jackson Subbert. Jackson has come light years from last year as a snapper. Last year was his first getting in game, and really, start building as the season's went on and I think he's improved drastically in both the punt game and field goal game.

Q. Broken in Harris and Campbell last week. Something you saw in practice?

LeVAR WOODS: I think both those guys have done a good job. Obviously there have been some depth issues at certain positions, but both those guys went in and did well and got their feet wet. It's fun to see them

and fun to talk to them after the game about their experience.

I think both those guys are certainly capable guys that can help not only special teams but help this football team.

Q. What did they say about the experience?

LeVAR WOODS: It was really fast, coach. It was really fast.

I told you it was going to be fast.

Q. What's the adjustment for Michael this week? One thing he talked about during Media Day was he wanted to be challenged in cold weather. Are you looking at that already? What are some things that he can do as we get into the later weeks.

LeVAR WOODS: Certainly that's going to be a challenge for him, because the last school he was at was warm weather all the time. He's played in rain and he's played in some conditions before but not like he's going to see here in October and November in Iowa.

I think that's part of the reason, as you mentioned, that he came here. That's one of the things that drew him to coming to Iowa. I think last week was a good test for him in a game where the condition, the field, was a little bit muddy and wet. I think it's part of the deal for him in dealing with those elements.

Now, as the weather starts to change, wind is going to be a factor, potentially snow, cold. But I think for him, it's getting used to those things and having a plan like we did last week and executing a plan and going out and doing what he does.

Q. Would you say bad weather helped for a change?

LeVAR WOODS: I think that's something that wanted to draw him here. That's one of the things, when he reached out that he wants to kick in the Big Ten because punters in the Big Ten have to deal with weather, and he feels if there's a chance to play at the next level, that's something to add to his resumé.

Q. Keith Duncan kicked a field goal in each of the quarters -- sunlight, dry, wet, rain, different hashmarks. When you analyze what he was able to do and the distances he was able to do it from, how many performances have you been around that have been comparable? Seems like a very short list?

LeVAR WOODS: I think one of the performances you could compare is the Pinstripe Bowl against Boston College where the field was frozen and eight degrees, the field was frozen. Every kicker I saw go out and take

pregame warm ups fell on their back side. Somewhat comparable to that. I would say that was probably a little bit worse. Keith would admit that, as well.

However I think the way not only Keith but all the specialists, the snapper, the holder and the punter handled that situation, not only the field conditions and wet balls and muddy balls, things like that, but also the delay. That can certainly affect a person if they let it.

But I feel like we have a mentally tough room; a room that had a plan going into it and executed the plan and then when some adversity hit, that they regrouped, went back to the plan again, more adversity, meaning two-hour delay, and boom, they regrouped and went back at it.

I feel like we have a really good group, a really good room and a really good group in that regard. So they are able to handle those situations.

Q. What led to your going with Nico as your punt return guy? Ihmir was top of the list for a while. As an area of improvement, what would you like to see happen back there?

LeVAR WOODS: I think Nico has done a good job. He hasn't been back there before as a punt returner. If you look at the library he's had for three games now, started off with a punter where he kind of knew where the ball was going to do. Traditional style punter with good spiral, knew where it was going to go, and good to get his feet wet with that because he knew where it was going to go.

Next week is, okay, now you have a rugby punter where it can go this way, could go that way, you're not quite sure how deep, how short. And he had two games right way that were bang-bang that were two good tests for him.

And I think then going into the next week, now you play a guy at Iowa State where he can traditional spiral or he can roll out in rugby. I think he was able to take advantage of that.

So I guess my point with all that -- I think you're only going to see him get better at that. I think you're only going to see him become more comfortable back there making a decision, and fielding balls and getting his hands on it and getting more confident.

I think that's what you're going to see here coming up in the future. I've seen it myself in the last couple weeks, just week-by-week, it just gets more comfortable. You've seen him at receiver and he does pretty well. He's good in traffic and has good hands and he's a trustworthy guy.

Q. But you picked him over Ihmir, you must have seen something. What did you see in him?

LeVAR WOODS: I think not to compare him to a person but I feel like he does have the ability to make a quick decision and he can run in traffic. So we went with him for that and Ihmir for kick returns and kind of see where it goes moving forward.

Q. Kicking game as a whole, I don't think it could be any better at this point. How do you keep that momentum?

LeVAR WOODS: I think keeping the guys hungry. I think they come to work every day -- I'm talking about the kickers, punters and also the coverage units. They come to work every day to get better and they have something to prove.

I think one of the things that I've been incredibly pleased with is the way Caleb is kicking off the ball. I think he's a good weapon for us in that regard. He gives us good hang time, not always a touch back, but we have a chance to go down and really get after a returner if we want to.

He certainly can kick a touchback if you want to, can kick it left. He can do a lot of things, and so he's certainly been a weapon for us.

But I think the biggest thing is keeping guys challenged and keeping them hungry and trying to be best we can possibly be and that's what we're doing every day.

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Phil Parker



PHIL PARKER: First of all I want to thank everybody to come out to talk a little about Iowa Football on the defensive side.

Starting off on our bye week here right now, it's nice to be 3-0. Obviously it's a good time for us on defense to have a chance to get should other guys back on our team that we lost and haven't been playing with, so we are looking forward to that.

Last week was a good game; when you look at it and see the growth of the first game from Miami to the Rutgers back and back to a really competitive game at Iowa State. I see a lot of growth, but I also see a lot of potential to become a better football team.

On Friday, we start practicing for Middle Tennessee and moving forward to the next game.

Q. After the first half against Miami, you scrapped the nickel package. Is that based on the injury status of your players? Is that based on need and what you saw?

PHIL PARKER: Well, it's a lot of things that go into the fact of the first game was their substitution was going and the pace of the game was going. They were trying to keep us out of certain packages. So we kind of adjusted on the run there and I think we did a pretty good job with that.

Sometimes you have to be very careful when you're going in and out and then obviously limited us with some of the guys injured on the back end with our package, so we moved D.J. back out to the corner spot and that's where he ended up. A little bit of lack of depth might have hurt us a little bit.

Q. When guys start coming back, you're still sticking with 4-3 --

PHIL PARKER: I think we'll go both ways, depending on who we are playing and what their personnel is going to be. If we can adjust, we're going to try and get into match personnel as much as we can.

Q. How close are you getting Merriweather back?

PHIL PARKER: Merriweather is a guy that has a chance to get back. I think it's looking pretty good but I know I'm not the doctor. I know this week right here is a good week even to rest our starters, and get some

other looks at some other guys and bring them along.

Dane Belton is another guy that we thought a lot that he was moving up and he fell back down a little bit and now he's moving backup, so interesting to see where he is here in the next week and a half.

Q. Brought Harris to Iowa State -- may have shown some progress.

PHIL PARKER: I like Harris, what he's doing. He's making a lot of progress. He's very athletic. Very good skill. I think he's grown and grown, and I like the way he's going.

McKinney is another guy that we had to bring and he's a guy that's been here since January, so he's been around the program a little bit longer probably than Harris, a couple months. But I think they have both done a good job.

Q. What are one or two things you want to work on this bye week moving forward that you need to improve?

PHIL PARKER: I think the last couple games, what happens during a game, can we make adjustments, and I think, we have been making some adjustments and to make sure that the kids can see things. I'm looking at the players gathering more information rather than telling them what is going on and what to expect.

I think we always need to be growing like that. Not a lot of information being retained in certain areas that we need. We've done a better job and we're working on it, but that's constant. You're working on it all the time.

Obviously the tackling, I think should be better. The communication that we've got to have. There's a couple plays out there that we left out there that, you know, if we would have made the right call, something could have been different. Once again, in an atmosphere like that, you miss some things but we have to be better communicators. That's everybody. Including myself.

Q. What do you do to free A.J. up a little bit?

PHIL PARKER: It depends a little bit. I think teams are going to start looking at AJ, looking at Chauncey, where the guys are at. Got a four-man roster, they are

going to start sliding and protecting and blocking.

Iowa State did a good job of moving the pocket. They weren't sitting in the pocket as much as they wanted to. So did that help us? Probably it helped. Probably helped them and probably hurt them a little bit, too.

We did get pressure on him a little bit. Lost contain at times. I think you just keep working and when things come, they come. I don't think you can say, hey, go out there and it's always going to be this. They know where the guys are and protecting, and if I need more heat, then I have to bring more guys because they are protecting with more guys.

Q. How do you feel about your depth at defensive end, beyond your starters? Do you feel like you need rotate some of those guys in more?

PHIL PARKER: We still need to have rotation as far as who played last week and we have to continue to keep on growing that. I think Amani Jones has done a good job out there to help us out, especially on certain situations. You always try to build depth. I'd like to have eight to ten guys to be able to roll in and out up front.

Q. Work on the 4-2-5, somebody goes out, that's got to be a priority because you know you have to use it at some point and you haven't gotten to.

PHIL PARKER: Yeah, going through practice, it all depends, if there's opportunities during practice and you see our offense during certain personnels, we'll slide in the guy and give him some reps. If it helps, we'll use it but it's going to be a gradual opportunity.

You can only do it so many times a game. With the linebackers we have, they have done a good job. You always want your best players on the field, whether it's a 4-2-5, whatever it is, you want the best out there.

Q. D.J. Johnson got beat on the double pass -- how do you think he responded and how he grew as a player during that game?

PHIL PARKER: Sometimes you can sit there and tell players and make sure you have eye discipline. With that play, obviously he took his eyes in the wrong spot. Young kids do that. I had a guy, Amari Spivey, I think at Penn State, gave up a 70-yarder on the first play of the game and came back to the bench, had to talk to him a little bit, the way I talk to the guys, and he got back. He came back, and fought.

And same thing with D.J. He had a great response. He goes, "Coach, I know, I've got to get better." I think there's some plays he made out there. One time on the deep ball in the post, he defended that well. So he grew up. Does he have a lot more to go? Yeah, he has a long ways to go, and he knows that and he worked

hard today.

Q. Are you noticing a big change this year with how teams are approaching AJ compared to his first two years here? Is it a big difference?

PHIL PARKER: Yeah, there's a little bit of difference. They know where he's at.

But I think AJ, he's been putting a lot of pressure on the guys, any ways. Second play of the game when we came back out, I think there was three guys within a half a yard from the quarterback when they hit the slant on the second play of the game on defense. There's three guys in his face. I think they are still getting pressure.

Maybe they don't have the sacks, but they are making the quarterback throw before he wants to throw the ball. And that's kind of a little bit what that RPO stuff is, protects a lot of those guys to, hey, get rid of the ball fast. It's going to be hard to get pressure. That's why some guys are dropping eight guys, rushing three, dropping eight.

Q. Is it realistic to get Brents back?

PHIL PARKER: Yeah, he's been working and he's getting closer. I don't know exactly where he's at right now, but we practice with the guys that come out there. He's been in meetings. He's learning, so I'm looking forward to getting him back. It would be nice to have him.

Q. With he and Moss -- since they have been out for a while -- is it possible to turn into a redshirt year, keeping it under four games?

PHIL PARKER: That's definitely a possibility, but the way I try to do it, hey, let's get back and start playing and help us win and you're going to start playing. We can't think about, hey, is this a possible redshirt, or, you know -- it will come up if they don't get back fast enough.

Q. Who has played better free safety so far? You got to look at Kaevon once and Jack twice.

PHIL PARKER: I think Jack, he's obviously started two games and played two games. He's growing every day and I think he's really made some jumps. It's going to be hard and very competitive at that position when Merriweather comes back.

Q. Do you have a plan for how to handle it? Will you pick one guy?

PHIL PARKER: The great thing about it is the players usually decide.

They usually decide who is playing, their preparation and their understanding; how they take command of

the back end. And the hardest thing is, because you've got Geno over there, he does a good job, and controls part of it, but you also need a good free safety to be the commander, too; and whoever can come out there and take that.

I'd rather have a guy that knows what's going on and can get in the right places and making sure that we are in the right defenses.

Q. Still using did D.J. at the cash mostly in practice, or him playing corner --

PHIL PARKER: We'll use some other guys. We'll use Belton there a little bit, help us out a little bit. But it's hard, you only have so many guys you can practice with and I'm getting slim back there. Hopefully we get some guys back.

Q. When you looked at training camp, you had an abundance of players in the secondary, and now you're playing true freshmen, have you had an experience like this before?

PHIL PARKER: That kind of goes with the job. Whoever you got over there, coach the guys that show up to practice and ready to play.

If they are injured, what are you going to do about it? I can only play with the guys we've got and get them in the right spot and if they are learning every day, because they are in meetings, too and they are practicing, they have the same opportunity.

We are not very complicated on defense, they should pick up on things well. I'm going to coach like I expect you to be. If you put somebody in, you've got to be the guy. Obviously we gave up two touchdowns last week; two explosive plays. Gave up two explosive plays in the Miami game; that's four. That's a little bit too much for me, but you give up more than three, I don't like that. If you give up two, we're down still like ten points a game. I think that's a good place to be at. But don't even want to give them up, but it happens.

Q. Can you talk about the difference between Michael Ojemudia last year compared to this year?

PHIL PARKER: You can see the way he is on the field. He knows what's going on. He has a little bit broader understanding of what we are trying to do. He's helping the younger kids out, and the leadership, you can count on him when he's out there. It's been a pleasure doing that, and obviously Matt when he was there, you feel confident when you got the two corners that have been in games and know what it's like to go over there and play at different stadiums.

The challenges are for these young kids, going to a big atmosphere is how they are going to react. I think D.J.

has really done a good job coming back and having OJ there helping things out is good.

Q. The unique challenge you went through on Saturday, how did you keep your guys loose and is the locker rooms sufficient enough or better than if you were at somewhere like Purdue?

PHIL PARKER: Yeah, it was good. They had enough space, and the kids handled it really well.

The coaches were probably more walking around like, hey, what are we going to do as far as are we doing the right thing for our players.

It was a long one. Somebody said it was the longest second quarter -- I don't know. It was a late drive home. You know, that was okay for me. I wasn't going to do anything else on Saturday.

Q. You mentioned giving starters some rest. I assume that includes your starting linebacker?

PHIL PARKER: Yeah, we try to shut some of these guys down a little bit. We'll go out and practice and have a little bit of developmental practice out there afterwards. I thought was really good to get some fresh guys and some freshmen in there and some guys out there making calls and see if they can run a practice for themselves, run a defense for themselves.

Q. What's the worst locker room you've been in, in a situation to try to get people ready?

PHIL PARKER: Before Michigan State fixed theirs up, it was bad, but it was worse when I was a player there. That was probably the worst one, Purdue might be one. But a locker room's, a locker room. I think we have a good one over here.

I was in that old pink one upstairs, that was terrible. We never went back up. We went down. We put newspaper on it and stuff like that and then we stayed down at halftime.

Q. Would that have bugged you as a player?

PHIL PARKER: The hardest thing right now is getting the guys to focus on the game of football, right, with everything, social media and things, are we really focused on the right things. It's about tackling and blocking and getting to the ball. Tackle the guy that has the ball. That's what my dad said before he died.

"Phil, it's easy. Just tackle the guy that has the ball."

"Gotcha." To me, I think if you focus, like they could have used, example of last week, the storms, oh, we lost the game because of the storm. Well, you could.

But can you be mentally tough enough to go through it

and focus on what your task is and I think that's what our guys are trying to do, be mentally focused.

On the defensive side I try to mentally challenge these guys and especially on the back end, I'm going to mentally attack, address, you know and get after these guys so they know the pressure. Because you've got to make decisions all the time within five to six seconds, can you make them, when you have to, and can they be the right decision.

So to me I'm always putting pressure on them. I think it's the fun part about it.