

**University of Iowa Football Media Conference
Wednesday, December 15, 2021
Iowa City, Iowa, USA
Head Coach Kirk Ferentz
Recruiting Coordinator Tyler Barnes
Press Conference**



COACH FERENTZ: First of all, I just want to welcome everybody. Just talk a little bit about our bowl prep and then also the biggest thing today is signing day, so I will hit that.

Then I'll turn it over to our director of recruiting, Tyler Barnes, and he'll be able to give you more in depth information about our recruits.

Certainly, since we got back from Indianapolis, our guys have been really pretty much entrenched with their academics. We're in finals right now. So we're trying to give these guys some space. It was a long season, hard season. It's really important our guys get a chance to bounce back and recharge a little bit, not only physically but also emotionally. We are trying to be a little bit mindful of that.

Really we'll wait until we get through this week. We worked lightly a couple times, but we'll wait until we get through this week and start working in earnest for the bowl preparation as we go along. One thing I wanted to get across to our football team was that we won 10 games this year. We're only one of 10 teams in the history of the program to do that, so they can really be proud of that. We still have an opportunity to become one of only five teams to win more than 10. So those two things are certainly significant in themselves.

More importantly, it's just a great opportunity to play in a tremendous bowl game against a really good opponent, tough opponent from the SEC. So that in itself is really exciting. When we do start getting ready, football-wise, that will be first and foremost in our minds.

Just on a side note, we've had a couple player departures, a couple guys who decided to enter the transfer portal. One player has decided to forego his last game, at least the last game this season, and another year of eligibility to play in the NFL. Certainly, it's just a sign of the times. I think everybody's kind of experienced some of these things, and we certainly have over the years.

The bottom line is we just wish all of our guys nothing but the best moving forward in whatever path they choose to take. We'll just continue to push forward in that regard.

In terms of recruiting, I think really things don't change an awful lot overall. Our approach historically has been to try to get to know the prospects as well as we can, get to know their families, talk to coaches, teachers, counselors, people in the schools and gain as much knowledge as possible about each and every prospect just to see if we really believe they're going to be a good fit in our program.

Then it's a two-way street. We certainly want them to come to campus and have an opportunity to do the same with us, really get to know us better, get to know the people on campus better, and most importantly, talk and visit with our players just to get a feel of the program.

I think this past year was a little bit interesting, certainly different than a year ago. At least all of our prospects have been able to be here on campus, all but one, I should say, for official visits, but they've all been on campus. They've had a chance to investigate, learn more about the program. So that's been helpful. Thank goodness that opened up back in June.

We also in turn have had an opportunity to get out and get in schools, maybe not as much as in a normal year since really we were just out last week. But it gave us a chance to be in some homes, visit with people, and learn more about the prospects. We feel really good about the class. There's no question about that.

Again, our biggest asset continues to be when prospects come to Iowa City. Be it to go to a game in Kinnick, but most importantly, I think, just to experience Iowa, experience what it's going to be like to be able to go to school here, be part of the program, meet with the academic experts in their given areas of interest, also meet with the counselors, Liz Tovar and her staff, meet with other people on campus, and obviously the coaches, coaching staff.

Most importantly, I think, be hosted by our players and spend a lot of time with our players just so they can get a feel of the program. I really feel fortunate that's been able to take place. Again, feel really good about the class.

The bottom line is this. To be a college football player and play in our program, it takes really hard work and serious commitment. I really feel that each and every one of the 17 guys we signed today understands what it is we're looking for, and I think they fully embrace that challenge and are looking forward to getting here just like we are.

It's certainly exciting. It's always exciting to add to your football team. So we feel really good about the group and just want to compliment our staff, the support staff, all the work everybody's done. Compliment the efforts of our players. This is pretty much year round because prospects come year round, at least in a normal year, and that began in June. So our guys have given up a lot of their own time to spend time with the prospects. That's a huge part of recruiting. So we're really appreciative of that as well.

All that being said, we're just really excited to have these guys join us, excited to have their families be part of the program. With that, I'll throw it out for questions.

Then Tyler Barnes will come and just help fill in some blanks for you. But I'll throw it out for questions.

Q. Good afternoon. Hope you're doing well. Wanted to ask you about Xavier Nwankpa, five star kid, about that process of getting him. Then that visit with him last -- I think it was last Monday, where you were in home and how he kind of blurted out that he was coming to Iowa and what that moment was like for you.

KIRK FERENTZ: That moment was pretty good, as you might well imagine. So the process itself was long. We've identified Xavier a long, long time ago. It doesn't take much investigation. He's one of those players that really jumps out at you on film. I wasn't at the Prairie game. I saw the first half, had to go back and join our team that night. Turns out he blocks the winning field goal. Really good players have a knack of doing that, and that seemed to be part of his DNA.

But the other part about Xavier, I think, that's so impressive is the kind of young man he is. He's a really impressive young person, very humble, and just really excited about his mental makeup. Just excited to have him join us. Great family. They're a really supportive family, and it's been fun to get to know them.

It was kind of a long, long process. I don't know if anybody could have predicted a couple months ago what was going to happen, but last Monday night was a real highlight for us just to have him accidentally, I think, tell us that he was going to become a Hawkeye. It was early in the evening, which made the evening a really good evening. Just took a lot of pressure off our shoulders and made it really an enjoyable evening.

Q. Speaking of Xavier, how helpful has it been since he's committed to be recruiting. He was joking with Tyler Barnes about coming for his job on Twitter today.

KIRK FERENTZ: Well, I didn't hear about that, as you might imagine, but we're just thrilled to have Xavier join our program, first and foremost as a player and representative of the university. It's going to be great. If he wants to take on some side jobs on the side, I'm all for it.

I do mention our players are the ones who sell the university. They sell the program. So I think Xavier's already helped do that with some of the current class that we signed, and he'll continue to do that in the future, and that's super. I'm just really excited about that.

Q. Coach, you've had several commits just today alone, some flipped, some outright commits. What do you attribute the late success that kind of builds up to getting so many commits in one day, and what is that experience like as a coaching staff having to reserve spots or all that kind of goes into that process.

KIRK FERENTZ: First and foremost, I think we just try to be patient. We move at a pace that we think is smart. Ultimately, when we go out for prospects, we try to run the race with them, see where it's going to take us. At some point you find out you're doing well with the prospect, sometimes you're not. Then as you move forward, you just make adjustments.

A couple of the guys that announced today, we knew about that maybe a little bit earlier in the process. But bottom line is we really do believe we run the full race. There were several guys we signed, Koen is a good example, Entringer, who was really more of a soccer player actually. It's an interesting story. Spent a lot of his time as a child growing up in Arizona as a really good soccer player and is new to football. Last couple years, two years, I guess, he's played football. He's learned it real quickly and done very, very well at it.

He's a guy to me that is a late developer. He's got a world of potential. He's already a good football player. So we just kind of ran the entire race with him and looked at his film from this year and just were extremely impressed.

Olando Trader is probably another example, was a MAC commit. We watched him hard during his senior year knowing that corner is a position of need for us. That thing worked out.

T.J. Hall was committed to another school. There was a little turbulence in that program, so we stuck with him. We happened to have a connection to T.J. His dad played for Don Patterson, who knows an awful lot about the Iowa football program. His dad played for him at Western Illinois. So we had a little bit of a connection there, a little tie-in, and that worked out really well.

For us we just try to be as thorough as we can with the evaluation, try to take our time, not make rash decisions. If we're not sure, we try not to make a decision that is a four-year commitment. We just try to be prudent, smart, and run the entire race with the prospects.

Q. I know in the past you haven't really wanted to do the NCs and visits just simply because you're trying to juggle game preparation with a visit. However, when you look at the Penn State game, in particular, three guys that came for visits, all three ended up, and they're all highly touted prospects, all committed to you. Plus you have a lot of future guys that have that potential as well. Have you changed your mind at all on that based on what we just saw, or is it still just kind of developing with the times, I guess?

KIRK FERENTZ: Not really. I think in a perfect world -- and I can think of two of the guys you're referring to. Xavier came for his official visit that weekend. He's an interesting guy because he's been on campus anyway. He's been here for games, so it wasn't new to him, but the environment that day was absolutely fantastic.

But he's also been on campus to do all the academic stuff, and he knows some of our players on our current roster, so that helped us as well.

The one thing I think when a player comes during -- and T.J. Hall is a good example. He came on his official visit for that weekend. What you miss out on is they don't get as much time with our players because our players are sequestered on Friday night. That happened to be a game that went late. So Saturday night's kind of short. It cuts into the time they get with our players, first and foremost.

But also just being with a group of recruits, I think that adds to the chemistry sometimes with a group. Still in a perfect scenario for us it would be players get to come here for several games in Kinnick so they get the feel of the atmosphere and

then come on an official visit where there's a lot of time and a lot of space and they get a bit more thorough picture of the program. That, to me, is still the ideal way.

But when you talk about prospects from outlying areas like California, like Florida -- and Jazz is an example of that -- it gets a little different that way.

Q. Kirk, not only did you land Xavier, but you also landed the No. 2 prospect in the state with Aaron Graves. What is it about Iowa that has helped you in really landing the best recruits out of this state, do you think?

KIRK FERENTZ: First of all, it's a tale of two cities there. Xavier ran the entire race. Ten days before signing, before we knew what he was thinking, we knew we were in the race, I'm not so sure of where we were six months ago, quite frankly. But obviously, we knew we were finalists. We weren't sure until 10 days ago what he was thinking.

Conversely, Aaron was an easy sell. Aaron wanted to become a Hawkeye. That was a real easy one. It happened really early. I don't know that we've offered anybody younger than Aaron. Gosh, is he an impressive young man. We're thrilled he's joining our program.

We're going to try to do our best each and every year to recruit the state as well as we can. If there's a player we feel like is going to fit really well in our program, we're going to try as hard as we can to recruit them and convince them this the best place for them. All that being said, there's still a lot of competition, and it's never easy -- rarely easy. I shouldn't say never, but rarely easy.

Q. As you know, the recruiting isn't done with the portal situation, roster movement all over the place. But you've never taken anyone at quarterback. Is that something you would consider in this cycle with so many names there? And in general, just with the portal so full right now, what is your approach? Aggression, I guess, aggression level at positions of need.

KIRK FERENTZ: You never say never. I was just telling somebody the story about Brad Banks over the weekend. When Brad came here, we were looking to get a high school quarterback and that was our goal, try to build with somebody who was going to be here for a longer period than a year or two years. So in a perfect world, I think that's how you want to build your roster just in general circumstances.

As of all of us know, at least everybody on this call knows, the world of college football is changing really rapidly. Players are going to depart, and they are departing right now at a record pace. They may be joining at a record pace too. I think our approach to the portal is going to be the same as it's been with prospects. We're going to try to be thorough and make sure we're identifying the right things.

Ultimately, it's like a prospect, you want to get somebody who's going to come to our campus and really maximize their experience and be here to run the entire race. That's the goal. It doesn't always work out that way.

So we'll continue to evaluate our roster. We'll continue to evaluate what is available. If there are players out there that we think can help our program either immediately or maybe long term, we'll consider that.

As I think about the portal, I think about guys like Zach VanValkenburg. I think about guys like Jack Heflin. I don't know what the market was for either of those guys. I think about guys like Mekhi Sargent, and I can tell you what the market was for him a couple of Aprils ago, or May, whenever it was.

All three of those guys ended up being great players in our program. Both Mekhi and Jack made NFL rosters. Mekhi was a captain for us. Both of them made NFL rosters this past year.

So that's probably more the prospect we're looking at, but we'll entertain any possibilities. If we feel like they're going to help our roster, we'll consider anything.

Q. You were a bit prophetic back in late June when you talked about the visit weekend and you kind of tempered the expectations a little bit. How challenging is it to kind of stay patient when things don't go well, or as well as you hoped, in a situation like that and kind of run this race, if you will, borrowing from your own terminology?

KIRK FERENTZ: A couple things. A year ago, it was unusual because whatever the number was, three or four prospects, five, I can't remember, ended up signing with us. Never got here for an official visit. We never got to meet them face to face because of the pandemic. This year's a little bit different because things opened up in June. But if you think about it, over the course of the recruiting period, most of those prospects, other than local guys, didn't have a chance to get here from the start of the pandemic on.

So a huge component of recruiting for us is getting prospects here in Iowa City and getting them here on multiple occasions. So I think it was realistic back in June to think that maybe things were going to be a little slower than normal, whatever normal is anymore.

And the bottom line, again, is to make sure we're getting guys that we really feel good about, not only in terms of their athletic potential but their ability to really fit in our program and work in a way that's going to benefit everybody.

So I think it's like anything. If you're not sure, just don't make a move. We want to be patient, continue to learn about guys. I think all of us were confident too that there would be good stories that would emerge. Guys like Orlando, guys like Koen that had their best football still in front of them, well in front of them, and it just panned out that way. It really worked out to our advantage, I think.

T.J. Hall is another example. He was committed and all that back in June, I believe, to another school. The longer it went, it just kind of worked out in our favor.

I firmly believe there's probably a couple players out there right now that we're not aware of that probably could help our program. We'll try to do our due diligence and see if there's anything we're missing and then push forward after that.

Q. What impact did COVID have as you're recruiting many of these kids while that was still going on?

KIRK FERENTZ: We made the best of it. Zoom was a huge component of what we did, and it remains helpful, but it's not the major part anymore. During the pandemic, we had no choice to do anything other than Zoom, whether it was visits,

virtual visits, facilities, all those kinds of things. That's a heck of a lot better than it was 30 years ago, but it's still not the same as getting in front of people and really getting a feel for the personalities of people involved.

There's no substitute for that. I don't care what business you're in. I certainly know in education, in coaching, you've got to be with the people you're working with. It's the same way in recruiting. Ultimately, again, that's our best chance is when a prospect comes to campus several times and really gets to know the feel of things.

Again, I'm not pretending or suggesting that every kid comes here and falls in love with it. Sometimes it's just the opposite. That's healthy. That's good because that's what recruiting is all about. Each prospect figuring out what it is they want. Then eventually end up at the school that's going to best meet the things they think are important.

Q. Kirk, getting back to the transfer portal, you mentioned you've hardly lost anybody compared to the national average, I would guess. A very prominent national coach today said that the transfer portal has caused total chaos, that there's tampering galore, there are no consequences. Adults are manipulating young men. Have you found any of that to be true?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yes, yes, yes, yes, all of the above for sure. It's really sad. My understanding -- I'm just a novice at this stuff. The portal is kind of like NIL. I think we're all just on the front end right now. We really don't understand the total ramifications that are going to result here.

There's no question. One thing I have seen over the years is there are more and more adults with bad intentions. Or at least, I'll say they've got bad intentions dealing with young people and influencing them in a way that maybe -- it's really no different than going to a little league game where parents are just kind of misguided on what they think is important.

It's still about -- when you're competing, it's about the camaraderie, the teamwork, trying to do your best as a team, at least in our sport. That's all you can ask anybody to do.

I think, when it comes to college athletics, I think it's still important to come get a degree. We had six of our former players here last Thursday night visit with our seniors and juniors, and each and every one of them to a man said that the value of getting their degree, not necessarily that they're going to use that degree in their chosen field of their professional lives, but just the value of getting that degree. And these are six guys from different age ranges and all different backgrounds all sharing that information with our players.

It's still a huge component of the college experience. Hopefully, you have a really good career in the meantime. If you can take it beyond that, that's great. If you can benefit from NIL, that's great. All those things are good, but there's still something about signing up and running the entire race and sticking with it. I think it's part of the sport.

But all that being said, I'll go back to the original point. One thing I learned 23 years ago, actually when I got to Maine in 1990, you can't make everybody happy. Certainly in a program not everybody's going to be happy. Not every player is going

to be happy on the team. It's just unrealistic. That's reality. In that regard, it's probably good when players have the freedom to leave.

You just hope a guy leaves for the right reasons. He's not leaving too early. And somebody with bad intentions might be influencing him, and you hope that's not the case. I shouldn't say bad intentions either. Maybe self-centered intentions for that adult. Sometimes that happens.

Q. Just one question about quarterback now. At the midpoint from the championship game to the bowl, have you made a decision as far as who's going to start, or is that still in flux at this point?

KIRK FERENTZ: This may shock you, I have not looked at one play of Kentucky yet. I think we've been on the field, let me think, three times maybe. I think I'm correct in that. We've been on there three times with our older guys. We're not remotely close to thinking about that right now. We're just trying to keep our guys moving a little bit, let them sweat, no contact, get them on the field and off the field.

We'll start preparing next week. Our focus as coaches has been on recruiting, getting our guys warmed up. We had a big recruiting weekend this past weekend. We'll start thinking about football here as these finals wind down. We certainly are not going to win or lose a bowl game at this point just because of what we've been doing. We've got more time.

I was telling the staff today I can remember last time we went down there. I think we probably went down nine days before the game. I had not seen a stitch of film on LSU because back then the recruiting rules had us traveling right up almost until departure, so it was just like a mad house. My fear right now is we'll probably have too many ideas up on the board next week because we still have time to get going.

Personnel stuff, we'll just see who's healthy, who practices well the next couple weeks, and we'll go with the best guys to give us a chance to win this game. It's going to be a tough game, but we look forward to that.

I'll close it down, and Tyler Barnes, our director of recruiting, will take it over from here. Thanks guys.

THE MODERATOR: Welcome, Tyler. Would you like to open with an opening statement.

TYLER BARNES: I'll hit a couple items and open it up for questions for everybody. First and foremost, thanks to everybody for being out here. I wish it was in person. I enjoy being in person more than being on zoom.

We know it's exciting the way we finished today. I think our staff did a good job. Obviously, we probably didn't get off to the start we were really hoping for in June, and really through the summer I think there were a few things that kind of played into that, as Coach had mentioned just a little bit.

When you go back to last year's class, we had a majority of class on campus before the COVID dead period hit. So we were able to get some momentum there and get the bulk of our class done. When we fast forward to this class, I think we only had three guys that we signed today that had made it to campus before that COVID

dead period hit -- Aaron Graves, Xavier Nwankpa, Jayden Montgomery. The 14 guys never got to campus until the very earliest June of this year.

When we got guys on campus, we obviously knew we were going to have a small class. We wanted to be a little bit pickier than we probably have been in years past. But the biggest thing is I think our staff did a really good job. We stayed on some of those guys that didn't commit to us in June, a couple guys that went elsewhere and ended up signing with us today.

As Coach Ferentz mentioned -- he's been in this a long time, he's incredibly wise -- it's not a sprint, it's a marathon. You've got to be patient. I think our staff did a good job just being patient. Seeing some guys in their senior film in high school, sticking with some of those guys that were here in June that did not commit to us at the time. Ultimately, I can't say enough about what our staff did just to finish.

I think we're very pleased with how things turned out today, the guys we were able to add into this class. Like Coach said, we're not done yet. We've got a few spots. We'll get into January and February. We'll see what's out there, both high school wise and portal wise. And we'll keep adding to this class.

I can't give you the definitive number. It's pretty fluid. We still have some guys here on the roster making some decisions. We'll have a better picture, I think, once we get through the bowl game and have an idea what the remaining needs are for this '22 class. That being said, I'll open up for questions for you guys.

Q. When you land a recruit like Xavier, what does that do for the rest of the week for you and trying to land some of those guys that maybe haven't committed yet?

TYLER BARNES: That was an interesting recruitment. If you go back to May, April, May, even June, I think if anybody on our staff told you they felt good about that recruitment, they're lying to you. I think we were definitely on the outside looking in.

We were able to get him unofficially in the summer, which was huge. For us, there's a difference even with an in-state kid coming from unofficially to officially. Getting him here in June was huge. To be honest, I thought it started to turn back in August. He was here for an open practice. He was here for the Indiana game.

Probably when I got most confident and excited about everything, he went to the Iowa State game with his father. They bought their own tickets. His dad was an All-American sprinter at Iowa State. Xavier was extremely brave and wore an Iowa shirt to that game. For me right there, it's like we've got to be making headway here. After that Indiana game, he talked about setting up an official visit for Penn State.

I knew we were coming back into the picture a little more than people realized, but you never want to get too excited about a recruit, especially somebody the caliber of Xavier, just the status he's had in the state and around the country.

Fast forward to it. I felt pretty good about a month and a half, two months out. There were obviously some bumps in the road there, and Xavier is an incredible poker player because he doesn't give away anything, no tips to anybody, as well as his mom. Once we kind of got into it, me personally, I was really nervous when

Notre Dame hired Marcus Freeman. I know they were really close. I thought we were right there at the finish line, and crazy coaching changes take place.

He did commit to our staff Monday night when they did an in home visit. Our staff and Xavier and his parents are evil people. They told them not to tell me about it. So they made me sweat it out for 48 more hours. I got tipped off on Wednesday by a couple people, and it made me feel good.

Until he actually said he was coming, you just never know. Recruiting is a wild and crazy world. A guy like that, that's what I really appreciate, he and his mom and the whole day through, I understand you've got this decision day in mind and it's great and we're going to wait for you, but the momentum he can create and just the power and pull he has with other peers. We can be the best recruiters in the country, but dudes want to play with dudes. When you have a guy like that who's got the reputation he has and the pull he has with kids, you can't replace that. You can't buy that in recruiting. That's huge.

There's no doubt he certainly had a part in helping us close out this class, there's no doubt about it. Selfishly, it would have been nice to have him in the boat a little bit earlier, but it is what it is. As a recruiting guy, it's always a big win. When you can be those blue blood programs you talk about, especially you keep a kid like that at home, that's huge no matter how you look at it, and we're extremely excited about him.

Q. Koen is sort of an interesting case to me because he's a soccer player mostly growing up. He didn't even play defense until this year. I think back to when you told us, I think, earlier in the year that it was kind of nice for you to be able to evaluate senior tape this year as opposed to last year. What really stuck out about Koen, and how did he come on your radar, and how did you end up securing his commitment? Because he was a very, very high riser late in the process.

TYLER BARNES: Koen was committed to Central Michigan. I actually saw Colorado offered him maybe about six weeks ago now. We have somebody in our office. Anybody in a six or seven hour radius, any Division I offer they get, we put together a list every single day, and that's handed out just to stay on top and make sure we're not missing any of those guys.

I saw Koen's name there. I popped on the phone, and within six clips, I texted Phil, you need to get down there and watch this kid. This kid's a little bit different. We were recruiting his teammate, who signed with Wisconsin today actually, about the same time. We had just offered his linebacker teammate Aidan Vaughan. It's funny because Aidan was the same way. Aidan was a guy who was committed to Air Force and didn't have many offers. Really blew up his senior year and ended up signing with Wisconsin ultimately today. But Koen is on the same team right behind him making plays.

With that, reached out to the kid. Got a little more background on him and talked to his high school coach. The more we learned about Koen and talked to him, the more we fell in love with the kid. He's an incredible kid, incredibly smart. He's got a chip on his shoulder. He attempted to play football his first -- or second year at his high school in Arizona. His high school coach told him he wasn't good enough and that he wasn't going to be able to play there.

Fast forward, he moves to Michigan. Goes to a school in Ann Arbor. They play him at receiver. He doesn't do a whole lot, and he finishes at Walled Lake Western where the coach saw his skill set and was like we're going to play you on both sides.

This is what he does on film. He's a big kid, all of 6'2", 205 pounds. He runs like the wind, great ball skills. Really smart for a second year football player, a football junkie. Then when you're around him, he's just got an infectious personality. He's a guy you really want to be around, you really like.

For some reason, Phil -- the way we recruit, I think Phil tried to talk him out of coming here just to see if he's a fit, what we're looking for. The kid had a really good relationship with Phil, a really good bond with him. Really had a good bond with the other DBs here, including Xavier.

It is good. You never know, when you get to watch senior film, see how guys develop, it could be a first year football player, could be a guy that's under recruited or under the radar for some reason. Koen is a great example, and we're certainly excited to have him in the fold.

Q. Wanted to ask you about Carson May and the process of finding a quarterback in this class because that's always an interesting journey. And flipping Kaleb Johnson. I know you guys were in on him early, and he commits to Cal and you get him back and how that process played out.

TYLER BARNES: Carson is a guy who popped on my radar just based on what he did in his junior year. He was putting up kind of PlayStation numbers down in Oklahoma, a guy who really didn't have a whole lot going on. Had a couple of smaller school offers. A guy we were talking to as the COVID dead period was coming to an end.

Got him up here to camp, did a really good job. Had offered a couple other quarterbacks before we offered him. We kind of gave them their time to see what they were going to do, and ultimately they went in a different direction. Coach O really liked his time working with Carson in camp here. Has an awesome family, really nice parents, good people. Big kid, a little bit over 6'4", 220 pounds. Looks like a tight end right now. Athletic kid, can really throw, can really run, and had a huge senior season this year too.

I think he's severely under recruited, and I'm not the only one. I talked to a few recruiting guys around the country when he committed to us, they were all giving us kudos. This kid is flying under the radar. Excited about Carson. He's a stoic, kind of quiet kid, but he's definitely a gamer. Fun to watch his film.

And Kaleb, we offered Kaleb when Coach Foster was here as our running backs coach early on. You can't teach size. Kaleb is 6'2", 225 pounds this past week on campus, and still got a 12 pack and a big kid. Very fluid on film. Some of the stuff he does, he's extremely fast. Really fluid for a big guy. Obviously can run through tackles and run through contact and is a good kid.

Initially, we were supposed to get him here in June. Didn't quite make it out, ended up committing to Cal. Kind of stayed on him. Obviously, our start to the season helped out in that recruitment there. Got him back unofficially for the Penn State game, and at that point, it was kind of over.

Really looking forward to getting him here. We haven't had a guy his size for some time here. It will be good to add a little size to that running back room.

Q. So with a good chunk of this recruiting happening over Zoom, how do you pitch kids on Iowa without them actually being on foot on campus?

TYLER BARNES: We've got a multitude of videos. Obviously, you're going to use Zoom and FaceTime to do facility tours and whatnot. I put together a pretty extensive presentation that we would kind of go over. It's about an hour, hour and 15 minutes with each kid and his family. Certainly we tailor that to where the kid is from and the position he plays and highlight any traditions or NFL guys, any success we've had at that position.

As Coach Ferentz said, it worked at the time, but it doesn't replace getting here. It doesn't replace getting around our guys and having player panels and being around our staff and having that interaction on a day-to-day basis.

But some of the stuff we did on Zoom and the virtual visits we'll continue to use moving forward just to grab a kid's attention early in the recruiting process before they get here officially or unofficially. It's something we'll use moving forward. I'm very glad we don't have a COVID dead period and we can get kids here on campus because it does make a huge difference. You're able to showcase so much more. That interaction, it can't be replaced by anything you do.

I think our staff did a really good job navigating those waters. Hopefully, we don't have to go back to that type of situation any time soon, but it affected everybody around the country. Various schools did different things, but I think our staff did a pretty good job overall just handling everything throughout that dead period.

Q. I wanted to ask you a couple of questions real quick. One is do you have any early enrollees? I know Xavier is one, but who else? Two, Caden Crawford was -- after Aaron Graves was the second guy to commit to you, and you're able to keep him. What does he bring to the program?

TYLER BARNES: As of right now, we have four guys who enrolled early. That number could grow. There's a couple guys kind of checking things out with their school, and we're working through that currently.

Three scholarship guys. Brian Allen, who just signed with us and committed today, Caden Crawford, who you just mentioned, and Xavier Nwankpa. And walk on candidate, Stevens. They're due to be here in January and will get rolling. There may be one or two guys after that. We're kind of working through some things.

Caden, he's kind of your typical -- when you look at some of the guys we've taken in years past who played defensive line for us or really anybody. You've got to be able to project. Caden never played D-line in high school. He was a high school quarterback and a high school linebacker. As productive as he could be on both sides of the ball. Tough kid, big kid, a little bit over 6'4", 245, 250 pounds right now. He's got a big frame. Comes from an extremely athletic family. Both parents are really good athletes. His sister is a volleyball player at Kansas. Had an uncle that played for the Kansas City Chiefs for a long time.

The blood lines were there, but just a lot of the same stuff we're looking for at really any position we're trying to evaluate. He played with an extremely high

motor. He's a tough kid. He's productive. He runs well. He's going to be a projection on the D-line, but he's got all the tools in place and everything we're looking for. We felt good about him.

He was excited about us out of the gate. He kind of knew what we were about. He knew we had history and success projecting kids and developing kids all across the D-line. He was the second guy to raise his hand and jump on board. We're pretty happy he stuck through everything and excited to get him here in January.

Q. Back in the summer you made a public statement saying the amount of negative recruiting you heard over the last month was laughable. I was wondering, did that carry on all the way through up until today? What are you facing? You've obviously beaten it back, whatever it was.

TYLER BARNES: It never stops. It never stops. Obviously, our head coach has been here 23 years, the longest tenured head coach in the country. Everybody is going to talk about retirement. That's the first thing I always attack, and it's laughable. It is what it is.

We try and address whatever's been said. We try and address it with facts and history here and show the kids and the parents this isn't true. Some of the stuff is not even worth addressing because it's so terrible and just laughable. Most kids and parents understand that.

It's part of how schools, part of how some schools recruit. It is what it is. We don't get into that. We don't want to get into that. Any time we have to spend negative recruiting against another school is time we're taking away showcasing and talking about what Iowa football has to offer. It's not going to go away. It just is what it is, and we're not really too concerned about that. I probably shouldn't have tweeted that. I think a couple schools who were saying some stuff knew exactly what I was talking about.

We'll move on. We've got a couple of those guys, and joke's on them.

Q. I wanted to talk about one of the guys that you flipped, Brian Allen, who's coming in early, what was that process like with him? I know you guys had some hurdles you had to overcome with Jason Manson being at the school. What was that process like?

TYLER BARNES: Unfortunately for us, just getting everything cleared through NCAA didn't line up timing-wise like we had hoped. I think Brian's family had hoped. We kind of ran out of time there. But eventually we got things taken care of. When he opened things up, we felt good about where we were at in the process with him.

Obviously, and rightfully so, he garnered some more attention and some other offers, but just kind of stuck through it, through the long run. Kept swinging away on Brian, and we're glad he made a decision to be a Hawkeye. We felt pretty good about it the whole way through. Again, you never know, especially when some other schools come calling.

I think, even after his visit, he knew where he wanted to be. We had a couple hurdles we had to jump with the NCAA. We got it taken care of and done, and everything's good now. We're looking forward to getting him here in January.

Q. I wanted to ask about Aaron Graves, who's been committed since he was a 15-year-old freshman. Committed very quickly, and you never really had to worry about him. What jumps out to you about him? And what do you expect from him from day one coming on campus?

TYLER BARNES: First of all, that was a really good article you wrote. I thought it encapsulated what Aaron is about and his family and who he is as a person to a tee.

But Aaron, I wanted to offer Aaron after the first two games freshman year high school film. I had to be told to slow it down by our coaching staff, but it was easy to see. He never came off the field in those two games as a freshman. When you know how big he is, 6'5", 270 pounds, build like one of those Nike mannequins you see with a 12 pack, it was pretty easy. Then he came to camp, and it was real quick. It took ten minutes in camp to know what we had there.

He ended up calling coach a few days afterwards. Coach may have told this story. Doc, you hit it in your article there. Coach Ferentz offered them. Before the offer, Aaron said how do I commit? Just tell us you want to come, and that was that.

We knew he wanted to be a Hawkeye. We didn't think he was going to commit on the spot there. Everything you know about Aaron, right, incredibly smart kid, four sport athlete. Dominated on the basketball court and wrestling last year. First time wrestling, finished fourth in the state, which is pretty impressive in the state of Iowa. Obviously high school wrestling is pretty good in this state.

Just the way he operates. He doesn't have Twitter, that's his own choice. He's a little bit of a throwback, which doesn't happen very often with teenagers in this society. He doesn't stop. He doesn't take a play off. He's high motor. All out effort every single snap, which you just don't see a ton, especially for big guys. For Aaron, that's just how he plays, that's how he's wired. He's such a good kid from an awesome family.

He's the epitome of an Iowa Hawkeye. We're obviously thrilled to get him here. It's nice to have a guy commit that early. Probably the lowest maintenance recruit in the history of Iowa football. Didn't need much, didn't want much. Never post him on anything, just kind of how he operated.

Q. I wanted to ask about the transfer portal. It's probably more different than ever this year, maybe fuller than ever. You've got the no restrictions on transfers anymore. How does that change your approach, if at all? I know you've been a little more selective in the past, but curious if that's changed as you look in there.

TYLER BARNES: It has. We keep a board of transfers. We kind of have obviously our high school recruit board from different classes, and we have a board with transfers. I spent more time this year watching film on transfers than I have in my time working in football.

It's interesting because a lot of Power 5 guys, the top tier Power 5 guys, when they hit the portal, it's already done for the most part. They already know where they're going. And tampering, I heard coach say that today, it's 100 percent true. Most of these deals are done. It is college free agency, but it's not free agency because there are tampering rules in the NFL and punishments for those.

Like I said before, we try and really pay attention, those FCS schools, maybe some MAC schools, some of those schools where kids are hitting the portal because they know they can play at a higher level. We evaluate those guys on film first and foremost to see if they can contribute at this level. If we want to recruit those guys, we do the same as we would with high school recruits. We contact the coaches on the staff and see why they're leaving, make sure they're getting glowing remarks. We'll dig into the high school coach and really get to know the kid.

It's changed. Some schools are really going to live in the portal. It's fine. We're not going to live there. We're not going to sign ten guys out of the portal. If we have definitive needs or immediate needs, absolutely we'll look in there and identify those guys and help out those needs.

I still go back to, and I think Coach Ferentz agrees, it's pretty dangerous to build and sustain a team when you're taking 10 to 15 transfers a year because you have to keep replacing those guys. At some point there has to be development of your young guys and your high school kids.

At the end of the day, that's what we're about at Iowa football and we'll continue to be like that. We certainly have a more open eye to the transfer portal than we have in the past. It's not going anywhere any time soon. You're right, I think it's a record number. The last three months there have been a record number of guys entering the portal. The sad part is some of these kids are leaving situations that are probably much better for them currently than it's going to be in the future.

That's the hard part, when you see some of these kids left without spots. You wish they'd stick it out and try to earn their way wherever they're at because the grass isn't always greener. It's the same for us too. When we take a transfer kid, it's going to have repercussions on that position room, that unit.

We have to be incredibly smart and diligent on who we decide to bring in here. The same way we operate with high school recruits is exactly the same way with the transfer portal.

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