

University of Iowa Football Media Conference

Wednesday, February 3, 2016

Kirk Ferentz



KIRK FERENTZ: First of all, just welcome everybody. Good to see everybody again. It's a really exciting day for everybody in our building, to bring recruiting to an end. It's certainly a long process, and it's really a big team effort. A lot of people are involved in it behind the scenes, et cetera. We're very appreciative of everybody's efforts, and I'll address that in a second.

Secondly, it's a day of celebration for all of our prospects. This is really a big occasion for anybody that plays high school football, junior college football, and be it the prospects, their families, their coaches, anybody that's supported them throughout their careers, I think they can all take a lot of pride in what goes on. Any time you earn a scholarship, it's a really significant accomplishment, and I always emphasize with players that we don't give scholarships out; they get earned.

Just want to congratulate all the prospects, certainly.

We're very enthused about this class. I'm sure every coach in America probably feels that way. But I think a couple things of note. First of all, I think the staff did a good job of dictating or determining what our needs are. I think for the most part we've addressed those pretty well. Really pleased with the versatility, the growth potential of the group overall. I think we have a lot of both of those things as characteristics of the group.

And then most importantly, excited about our prospects. Just the guys that signed on with us. The various traits and attributes that they possess. And when we go recruiting, that's really paramount for us. We try to learn from our players year by year, look at the guys that have had success in our program, maybe guys that haven't had as much success, and try to determine what it is, what are the commonalities of players that have been successful with us. Those are the things that we look for when we go out and look at prospects and evaluate the prospects.

A big part of that is their attitude, their work ethic, their wanting to be team-first type players, prospects that way, and then beyond that just the amount of pride that they display in terms of what they do, how they act, how they conduct themselves, and certainly the level of character.

So those are the things that we really try to look for, and if you look at our current players, I think you'd see those things no matter what their backgrounds may be. You take a guy like Drew Ott from eight-man football that wasn't highly recruited, Desmond King, two guys on defense that maybe weren't highly recruited really that have played at a high level in our program, flipping around to the other side of the ball. Henry Krieger Coble who's done a great job, just played in the Senior Bowl. Jordan Canzeri, who was heading over to Villanova, just guys on our roster right now that I think illustrate what I'm talking about, and then certainly guys in the past, as well.

You know, we're very excited about that. And then as we move forward now, I just said at our last press conference, when the team got back here on January 19th, it was a new year, a new season, new challenges, and when these players, prospects show up in June, it's going to be the same thing for them. It'll be a new chapter, but I think the biggest thing and most important thing we try to emphasize to our prospects is that they enjoy every day of their senior year. They only get two opportunities to be a senior and those are both very special. So we encourage them to take advantage of that and really finish strong with whatever it is their doing, both their academics, any sports that they may be involved in.

Then when they get here it's all about building a foundation because even for guys that play as true freshmen, typically I think it's common with any college football player, usually the last couple, three years are the most enjoyable years that they have when they play, just like they do in high school.

It's all about establishing a good foundation, and that work will begin in June when they get here.

Lastly, I just want to thank an awful lot of people. I've got a lot of appreciation for a lot of people that helped out in this thing, starting with our staff. I think they did a great job of identifying the right prospects and then really recruiting him. Seth Wallace has done a great job giving us direction as recruiting coordinator. Scott Southmayd, Kelvin Bell and also Max Allen helping out in that recruiting department. All the assistants were very, very involved, needless to say, on the road doing

a lot of different things that way, and the support staff on campus once players get here.

That's something else I'd just like to bring to light. Any time you're recruiting, and recruiting has really changed a great deal, but there are an awful lot of people involved, not only in the recruiting season, quote-unquote, but it's a year-round thing now.

We have a lot of people on campus that are involved, whether it's helping set up facilities, getting food available, that type of thing, our academic Hawks have been just fantastic coming over and talking about the various programs of study, and then probably as important as anybody is our players, the guys on our team, that really are the best people to talk to about what the program is about, and I think that's true in any campus, and our players, the same way. They're here any time we ask. They've been great about helping out and sharing information.

We really appreciate that.

You know, I said when I got here, 17-plus years ago, it was amazing after being out of Division I football for nine years the changes in recruiting, and it certainly has continued to be a really dynamic process. The last five years alone have just been very, very different. Again, it's a year-round process now. Things are happening a lot quicker than they used to even five years ago, and what that means is, again, we're tapping into a lot of different people. Instead of the old days where you had a couple of recruiting weekends and those were really the only times you're knocking on doors of people; now it's year-round, weekends, July. It doesn't really matter.

So again, I just really appreciate all the people that have helped bring this class together, again, professors, players, et cetera. So an awful lot of people involved. Very, very appreciative.

With that, I'll open it up for any questions that anybody might have.

Q. You have I think five linebackers among your 24 signees here. Did you identify that as a need, and how much position flexibility is there among the group?

KIRK FERENTZ: You know, on my list I've got three linebackers, but that's part of what I was referring to about the versatility. I think we have some players right now I'm not sure where they're going to end up, and that's probably a good thing in my mind. But three guys we have for sure targeted at linebacker position. A couple other guys might be tight ends, linebackers, even defensive ends. We'll let that play out as it goes along.

But I think it is fair to say, defense was a big emphasis for us this year in the class, DBs, linebackers, guys that can really help us on special teams. We've been a little thin there.

And then defensive line was another area of interest, also, or emphasis, particularly with guys on the outside, guys who can play at the defensive end position.

Q. Was the plan to go for the versatile athlete? Was that kind of the blueprint on this class?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, not necessarily. It's always a good thing, I think, and when you have players that can play several positions, it's usually a good deal. Desmond is a good example of that. I thought for sure he'd be a safety. Still not sure he couldn't be. But he's done pretty well out there at the corner position.

Any time you have a guy that can do those kinds of things, I'm not sure he couldn't have run the ball pretty effectively, too, for us, as well. So I think those are good attributes, and the growth potential of players, the versatility of players, and if you look at us historically, a lot of our best defensive linemen were linebackers initially: Chad Greenway was a safety who moved to linebacker, right on through. So I think those kinds of things are healthy. They really are healthy.

Q. What did you see in Nate Stanley?

KIRK FERENTZ: You know, it started, he came to camp a couple years ago. It seems like he was in about eighth grade. I'm exaggerating there, but I think he was coming off his tenth-grade season and he really impressed us in camp, to start with the things that he can do, throwing the football, his release, all those kinds of things, footwork and what have you.

I got to see him a year ago January being up to visit his school and watched him practice basketball, just to see the growth from June to January was very impressive. Now, I had an opportunity to go up and see him play back in October I believe it was, and then last week saw him again on the basketball court. So you watch guys just mature and grow, that's exciting.

But we really think he's got all the attributes of a good quarterback. He's a good athlete. He's got a real command, a real presence about him, and then in a quiet way I would say, kind of like CJ Beathard or Brad Banks, not necessarily a boisterous guy, but a guy that players rally around and gravitate to. I think he's got all the physical attributes that you would look for, and then on top of that, all the characteristics you kind of like to see a guy embody.

I'll throw in there, too, he might have the biggest hands of any player I've ever shook hands with. I thought he

had a basketball glove on the last time I shook his hand. So that's a good thing in the Midwest.

Q. Regarding Stanley, it seems like he embodies that fit you're looking for. Is that the way you see it with him?

KIRK FERENTZ: It doesn't hurt. His mom coincidentally is from Iowa, state of Iowa, and dad is from Sterling, Illinois, which is a home game, too. So that part is good. Both of them went to Wartburg. So there's a little bit of a connection that way. I don't know if that helped get Nate to camp. Once he got here, the rest of it just kind of happened as a result of who he is and what he stands for. The more we investigated, the more excited we were, and we're just thrilled that he was the first commitment in this class, actually. It's a good thing for a quarterback to lead it off and be the guy heading the charge.

Q. How can you project him to be a Big Ten quarterback, who had played the wing-T offense more than Wisconsin. How do you project him to be at quarterback?

KIRK FERENTZ: Well, we saw him throw the ball in camp. We didn't have him running the wing-T there. I think Mecan Plewa and Adam Cox would have liked that. Fullbacks get the ball on a wing-T. But we got to see him throw, and then watching him on tape and then got to see him throw the ball live, that ball comes out pretty good. That's not a concern.

Coach LaBuda up there is a veteran coach who's won a lot of football games. They utilized his talents, as well, and he just did a lot of nice things out there in that offense.

Q. As far as guys from the Detroit area, do you think Desmond helped getting those recruits to really want to be here?

KIRK FERENTZ: I don't think there's any question about that, and two of the young men are from his high school, so that certainly didn't hurt us at all. Desmond has done a wonderful job. I guess it's Cowboy Desmond. I understand he got a cowboy hat and cowboy boots. He and Mel Blount, that's the only other defensive back that I know that wears a cowboy hat.

He's done a great job certainly playing for us and representing the program. He's really grown as a young man, and he really is respected in that school. When I went into that school it was very clear that everybody there is very excited about what he's done in our program, for our team, and really represented East English Village well.

I think everybody is really happy about that there, and yeah, no question that was a helpful thing in the

recruiting process.

Q. Can you talk about Alaric's kind of recruitment and how you guys approached that, and then maybe the last few days with his recruitment and the uncertainty?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I think we were pretty steady in our approach all the way through, and quite frankly when I met him a couple weeks ago, it surprised me, he wasn't really into recruiting, if you will, and I mean that in a healthy way. Some players, I think their whole life revolves around this process, and he seemed very unaffected by it, not that he was minimizing it or neglecting it, but he wasn't overwhelmed by the process. I think he methodically looked at schools that he thought would fit what he was looking for, and a lot of things have happened in the last two weeks, so I've been told. I really don't read that stuff.

But he's been pretty consistent with his message to us. We felt really good after his visit that he had strong feelings about us, and I don't think that's ever wavered. I'm not going to say I wasn't worried about it or concerned about it, but anything can happen in recruiting, I realize that fully, but his consistency throughout the whole process really has impressed me a great deal and makes you feel better about him as a football player, too. I talked about things that we're looking for and guys that can handle the process and get guidance. His mom was tremendous in the whole process, as well. To me those are all good indicators that as we move forward she's going to be right there to support him, as well.

Q. Not that he's a blank canvas but only two years of high school football. What do you see in terms of his upside?

KIRK FERENTZ: Well, I like the fact that he plays basketball, does a lot of different things. When we evaluated his tape, we thought he was a guy that really had the potential to be a good offensive lineman. He's very athletic, got good size needless to say. So now it's just a matter, like all the players, what they do once they get here and they apply themselves, how they absorb and take advantage of all the resources that are going to be available, coaching expertise, whether it's in academics, athletics. And so it's all you can ask for is opportunity. He certainly has that, and he's got an awful lot of potential.

He played very well this year for his high school football team, so we're excited to have him join us.

Q. You brought in five defensive linemen, I believe, if I'm counting correctly. A position of need certainly on the ends. Do you see some of these guys being able to play right away?

KIRK FERENTZ: I don't know about right away. If they can, we're open to it, with all positions quite frankly. But we'll see. Realistically it's a little tougher for guys right on the line of scrimmage offensively or defensively, but if someone can come into camp and show us that they can give us something, even if it's situational help and special teams, those are things that we'll always consider. It's going to be a two-way street, certainly if we play any freshmen we are going to make sure that they're on board with it, too, they want to do that. Lately that's kind of been the trend. Most players would prefer to do that. I go back to when Greenway and Hodge, when those guys were freshmen, they all chose not to, other than Matt Roth. He wanted to play. The rest of the guys all wanted that redshirt year, but I think things have changed a little bit that way.

Q. Did Beyer kind of win you guys over during the year with his play and make it so you had to offer him?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, it's really a unique concept. We really liked what he did as a senior. I say that jokingly, that's one of the fears I have with the pace of recruiting, the way it's going right now. We've talked about it a lot as a staff and we have to build some safeguards in. But we liked Sean an awful lot in camp. Were impressed with what he had done up until his senior year, but not quite ready to just make that final decision, not unlike Josey Jewell, I guess.

So watching him perform as a senior, the way he impacted his football team, and all the things that he did, all the feedback you get from everybody up at his school, not just Coach White, but everybody you visit with up there, they all say the same thing. It was pretty obvious watching what he was doing on the field that somewhere about mid-October we made up our minds that he was a guy that we really thought would be an outstanding player in our program.

Not sure what he's going to play yet, and that's a good problem, too. But he's one of the guys to me an athlete category-type player. But I think tremendous growth side, attitude, and everything starts at home for us. Like every school, you want to do the best you can to make sure the best players in your home state are at your university, so we're really thrilled to get him.

Q. You guys have a bunch of guys who are in the 6'5" range who could play defensive end, tight end, linebacker. How does that process start, and do you have a philosophy on where you start these guys? You start them at maybe the most complex position and have them just kind of take it in, raise their football IQ that way?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, again, I've said before, we're

not opposed to taking players. My sister would identify as good players, not that we -- she's not on the payroll right now, although the way things are growing, I might think about that, actually. But she would just tell me the obvious, and I really don't need that right now.

We're looking at guys that we think have the versatility, the growth potential, et cetera, and a lot of that'll be determined probably how things go this spring. We'll have a better grip on where our team is at the end of April, so we could better assess maybe better where our needs are and try to place the prospects accordingly.

But ultimately it's really going to be determined by what they do when they get on campus. Typically if a guy has a preference, that's where we'll start him positionally. If it's working out well, then there's no need to even address it. But if we see maybe that -- hey, maybe it's worth talking about a position change or considering moving to a different spot, then we'll have that conversation.

But we've already talked about that with most of the players you're probably referring to, and I think most of the guys coming in just have good attitudes. They want to help anyway they possibly can.

Q. We saw Jim Harbaugh, we saw Nick Saban dancing with his recruits. Do you have any funny stories like that?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, you know, I guess our stuff is really not that dramatic. It's kind of like today really wasn't very suspenseful. Personally I kind of like it that way. It's like going into a game. I like that our team is prepared, if they've really practiced well and done all they can to put themselves in position. Recruiting is kind of the same way. To me really it's an ongoing process. The work has already started on next year's class, I think, as you know. So it's really kind of a day-by-day thing. And I'm really comfortable, I think, with the guys that we've signed, in that going back to Alaric, even that I think we had a pretty good grip on where they were, how they were handling the process, what they were looking at. If I gotta stand on my head to get a guy or tell a funny story, we're in big trouble. Ask any of our players on the team right now.

We're just going to try to stick to the basics, so what we have here educationally, football-wise, and most importantly, the community here, and that part is really consistent. That's what hit me in 1981 when I got here for my interview. I was just amazed at the people. However many years it is later now, everybody comes from other parts of the country, even out of state, which amazingly people in the Midwest, when they come to Iowa City, it's a really unique experience.

For us, the biggest part of the battle is getting them here, and once we get them here, I feel like we've got a really good chance without any fancy gymnastics hopefully, because I'm not the most entertaining guy in the world.

Nick danced? I worked with him two years, I'd like to see that. That would probably be interesting.

Q. The entertainment element that seems that Michigan has, I think, a wrestler, Tom Brady, juggler probably, what about the entertainment factor? Seems like that's playing to recruits more these days.

KIRK FERENTZ: You know, I guess time will tell. I'm not sure what you have to do. You know, again, what we're going to try to do is sell what we have, and I think you can't do limos anymore. That used to be a big thing, right, send a stretch limo for a kid and private jets and all that. But the reality is when a player comes here, there aren't going to be any limousines, and there aren't going to be any private jets flying them back and forth. So you get here how you get here, like most of us did when we went to college, and when you get to college, the reality is you're going to be going to school and you're going to be playing football. Those two things are going to consume a lot of your time.

And then beyond that you've got a chance to have a really great atmosphere. I've never met anybody that went to Iowa -- and when I go around the I clubs, I ask people all the time whether they're in their 80s or 20s, anybody that went to school here, just had a fantastic experience. I wish I went to school here. I wasn't invited.

But to me those are the things that are really important. That's really the crux of what a college experience is about, and that's what we try to sell. We also let our prospects know it's going to be a lot of hard work, whether it's talking about earning your degree or playing college football. That's a lot of hard work. It takes a real commitment, takes a lot of effort, and takes dedication, kind of like working a real job or when you get older and you've got to pay your rent and take care of your family. It's the same thing. Not to be a fun killer, but that's really what we're trying -- that's really our message. That's what we're trying to sell. When we talk to parents it's all about our players leaving here four years later, five years later, being people that are ready for adult life, and if entertainment is part of that, too, that's good. But to me, it's more about what you're going to do in your life ahead of you.

Q. You've got two Chicago suburban kids, Barrington Wade and Emmanuel Rugamba, who can probably play either side of the ball. What's

kind of your approach?

KIRK FERENTZ: With both those players right now our plans are to play them on defense. We see Barrington as a linebacker and we told him that from day one. That's what we projected him. I've read some stuff maybe where he was a running back, but he had a really good career. You can evaluate him better, as a linebacker or running back in high school, but it's kind of like Mike Humpal. That was Mike's best attribute, too, but we see him as a linebacker.

And Manny did a nice job on both sides of the football but we recruited him as corner. That's a high need area, too, for us. We're a little bit long in the tooth at that position right now next year. So we really have to have some guys ready to go.

Q. A lot of these guys committed early in the process, but what benefit or effect did the 12-0 regular season have on this group?

KIRK FERENTZ: I think we'll see more of that next year, kind of like playing in the Rose Bowl, and I think this building, too. The impact of this really hit me a year ago, January, we had a junior day the Sunday before school started, and that's really where it struck me just hearing feedback from prospects and their parents how impressed they were at the facility. So that's certainly going to help us moving forward not only in the next couple years but hopefully decades. This thing is just first-class.

And I think the same thing with our season this year, the fact that, to me, we had a really good year I thought two years ago. Last year left some things out there, came back this year and had a historic season. In my mind we're building momentum right now. It's been our goal from day one, and now we still have some other things that we have to accomplish and we're working on. But I think it's going to help us certainly as we move down the road and feel good about whatever the next class is, '17, feel good about the way that thing started out, and I think probably the last season impacted that more so.

Q. You have the two younger brothers coming in with Nick Niemann and Kyle Taylor. Kyle is obviously physically different than Miles, but how are those guys similar or different from their older brothers?

KIRK FERENTZ: I don't want to make either brother mad, but I think they both have the same mentality. They just take a lot of pride in the way they play, and they're both very productive guys. So they're different positions and will remain different positions. I don't foresee that changing. But I think playing well is really important to them, and Miles has been a tremendous teammate, although he gets in a few arguments at

practice just because he gets a little frustrated about stuff, but that's Miles, and that's what makes him good, too.

But they're both really good guys and just really thrilled about that. Ben Neimann, I don't think that caused a big stir when we got him a couple years ago, but what a tremendous player he already is two years into it, and I'm really excited about his next two years, as well, and we feel the same thing about Nick.

Nick is a little different player, but he's got all the right attributes and same characteristics. We're really excited about getting him here.

Q. In talking to some of the high school coaches, they said that their guys stuck with Iowa even when other schools came in late because Iowa had been on them so early.

KIRK FERENTZ: As you're describing I'm thinking immediately to Brian Bulaga, who we took a little bit of a chance with. We threw out the line of maybe being an offensive lineman. Told him I'd love to have him on our team, defensive end, tight end, but really thought his best upside was at offensive tackle, and he stuck with us throughout the process. And everybody came in and got really involved his senior year, but that is something that -- it doesn't always work out, but we try to be out in front of things as far as fast as we can, without making bad decisions, and I think there's a little bit of a balance there.

If we do offer a scholarship to a player, we really mean it, and we try to explain that. I'm not into that soft offer, soft commitment stuff. I'm not sure what either of those things mean. Kind of sounds like contradiction in terms to me. But we try to be as far out in front as we possibly can, but sometimes you want to be a little bit more prudent, as well.

Q. Any clarity on Drew Ott's situation at this point?

KIRK FERENTZ: No. It's still in the works, and I've learned a couple of things that make me a little bit more optimistic, but still, it's hard to say where it's going to go.

Q. Are you a little optimistic?

KIRK FERENTZ: I'm a little optimistic right now. I've learned some things that give me some hope, but we'll see where it goes.

Q. You mentioned defensive end was a big need. What do you see in the three defensive ends and their pass-rushing abilities that makes you feel confident because whatever happens with guys graduating, you definitely are very thin there?

KIRK FERENTZ: A couple of the prospects have good

length. Everybody likes using that word length or height or size. Most importantly move their feet pretty well. Brandon is smaller, not as tall. But if you look, Nate Meier played for us and played pretty well, too. He's a really aggressive guy. They're all a little bit different packages, but I think there's good potential there.

And then a couple guys I think have the capability of moving inside, too, which is also an area that we're concerned about. But if you look at us defensively, Jaleel certainly was a big person last year. Carl Davis the year before. Traditionally we've played with guys that maybe are a little lighter, really guys that have good feet and good hands. That's really important with the way we play defense. That's a little bit more important to us than just pure size.

Q. When you start recruiting guys and their birthday maybe comes across the desk, where it's a couple months before you were hired here --

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, it's frightening. It's just one more reminder that I'm 60, one more reminder. It started when our youngest son lived with two players that their dads played here in the '80s. That was kind of my rude awakening, or when Rob Thein told me he just turned 30. I saw him out getting a cup of coffee several years ago. I was like, you can't be 30. That must mean I'm whatever I was at that time. You always get those reminders. That's a little scary.

Q. What about Toks and Toren, two running backs in this class and what you saw from them?

KIRK FERENTZ: I think they're very different players, but again, I think as you know, we're not fixated on one style of player. The big thing is they're both really productive players on good teams. And Toren has got really good speed. I think he's really very versatile back, can do a lot of things -- I meant Toks. And then Toren is a little more physical, stronger back. It's amazing how many yards and carries he had this past season, his durability.

We're really excited about both those guys, tremendous families. And you know, Nate was our first commitment. I think Toren was probably our most frequent flyer. I think he was here 11 or 13 times, I lost track of that. Double digits, I know that. He's been here a lot. He's got a great attitude. Toks has been really a delight to get to know his family, and the whole family was here a couple weekends ago.

I think after they saw the campus, got a chance to meet everybody and all the people involved, I think they really feel good about things, and that's part of the recruiting process. That's really fun.

Q. You had a couple guys who suffered torn ACLs,

Romeo and Austin Schulte. What is the communication there? And obviously you've had this happen in the past and you guys don't leave guys on the curb.

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I think this might have been a record number of injuries for our football team this past season. And that was one of the things that impressed me about the season, the way our guys kept playing, and we worked around things that were happening that way. And probably a record number, probably because we had a larger group of commitments, but we had those, Amani Jones missed a lot of playing time.

But once we make an offer, a commitment to a player and they make a commitment to us, it's a two-way street. That's just something we believe in. The reality is there aren't a lot of career-ending injuries in football. It could happen realistically, but it doesn't happen very often.

We just tried to do our best to make sure they're getting good medical care, and when they get here if they need to go through the rehab process with our people, that'll start in June. But that's part of football. Injuries unfortunately are part of what we do, and it's just unfortunate, but the good news is at least they get a senior year in college. You hate it when guys miss part of their senior year in high school.

Q. You had a verbal commitment that didn't sign today. How do you see that playing out?

KIRK FERENTZ: We'll keep monitoring it, and I can't really talk about anybody that's not signed, but we still have room in this class. We'll just kind of see how things go when we go down the road.

Q. Is there a backup plan with that if it doesn't --

KIRK FERENTZ: We try to have our bases covered and I think we do, so I feel pretty good about it.

Q. What stood out to you about Spencer most?

KIRK FERENTZ: We really liked Spencer's film as a junior, and then when he came to camp -- camp is an important thing for us. It is a great tool to evaluate players. Probably like the Senior Bowl and the NFL, we had a couple guys play in that last week, and I told both Austin and Henry, it's a job interview because the coaches that are there are NFL coaches. They're going to watch you not only on the field but in meetings, those types of things, and everybody in the NFL is there -- fortunately not everybody in college football is at our camps.

But it really gives us good exposure to see players working on the field, learn a little bit about their attitude, how coachable they are, and those are things that really impressed us with Spencer. We liked his tape.

Certainly we saw him on the practice field, and then we've gotten to know him and his family a little bit, and just really impressed with him all around.

Q. You might have a little rooting interest in the game on Sunday. Are you going to the Super Bowl?

KIRK FERENTZ: We are. We're going to be out there. What I don't like about the Super Bowl, I'll start there, is just all the hoopla and the fact that halftime is instead of 12 minutes, 30 minutes. I think it's really disrespectful to the players and the coaches, which are key parts of any football game. But we're looking forward to being there. It's really exciting, and you know, we're cheering for Peyton Manning and the Broncos.

Q. Do you have any particular plans either with your family, game-day activities going on?

KIRK FERENTZ: On Sunday? I imagine it'll probably take about three hours to get into the stadium, I'm just guessing, and probably three more hours to get home. I've been to a couple Super Bowls. That part is a logistical nightmare quite frankly.

My wife laughs at me because I think there has been rain in two of 49 Super Bowls, I sat through rain in one of them, and my wife took great delight in the fact that, A, I didn't get dropped off by the team bus right at the entrance to the stadium, and then when it started raining, nobody gave me a raincoat, so I got soaked and I froze. My wife thoroughly enjoyed that. She was home.

Q. Will you guys be nervous during the game? Will your wife be a nervous wreck?

KIRK FERENTZ: She's going to watch it in the hotel. We've got a couple grandchildren now, but yeah, that's the down side of when you're coaching, you're working, obviously. When you're playing, you're competing, but when you're a parent, it kind of takes the fun out of everything because it's either black or it's white. That's good or bad. That's just kind of how it goes, so it's tough.

Q. What's it like seeing James get this opportunity with his journey in the NFL? He's had to fight to stay on a roster through the teams that he's been on.

KIRK FERENTZ: It's a good story, and we're really proud of him. I think everybody here is proud of him. It's a good story. Yeah, the guy went from treading water here for a year, practice squad, he got cut again this year, he was hoping to make the roster in Houston, didn't make it, and then two days later got put on the roster up in Denver. It's a good story, he's sticking with it, chasing your dream a little bit. I was teasing him, I

said, he's gone from a day-to-day contract, now he's got a week-to-week contract, so he's improved his lot in life. But that is the reality of the NFL.

Like all of our guys, not many guys make it to the Pro Bowl. We've had plenty, but not many guys go there, and the reality is it's a temporary profession. But why not chase it, why not go after it, and really happy for him, and the Super Bowl is just the cherry on top.

Q. You got a little emotional thinking about how far he's come?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I do. Again, it's a good story. We've had a lot of them here, but just really proud of him sticking with it. You know, he could have turned away at any time and nobody would have blamed him, but he's stuck with it, and we'll see where it all goes. It's fun. I coached a couple guys like that when I was in the NFL. Mike Flynn played for us at Maine, and I don't know how many times he had been cut. We brought him to camp only because we got just decimated with injuries, whatever year that would have been, '96 or '97, and a couple years later he was the starting center on the Baltimore Ravens' Super Bowl team. So when you're around stories like that, it's neat to be part of that. I'm a little bit more distanced than James. I didn't coach James face to face that way, but it's neat to see those stories. Those are just good stories in sports.

Q. How is CJ doing?

KIRK FERENTZ: Real well. He's doing well. You know, for obvious reasons we were hoping not to have to do surgery, and we knew it was a possibility, and then as the clock started ticking, that just was -- it looked like the thing to do, so the prudent thing to do, and we're confident he'll be ready to go when spring ball starts.

We're all eager to see him full speed again. It's been about four months now, five months, maybe six. I don't know. So we are anxious to see him full speed.

Q. When you look at the size and the strength of Cedric Latimore, he burst out as a Christian Ballard-type of potential. Do you see him maybe moving inside being the next Carl Davis or the next Jaleel Johnson?

KIRK FERENTZ: I think he could do several things, and he's one of the guys I talked about versatility and what have you. We liked him on film in his junior season, liked when we got a chance to meet him when he came out to campus in May. But I think more impressive, again, I talked about the way Alaric handled the recruiting process. I was up there a couple weeks ago, week and a half ago, two weeks ago I guess now, and his recruiting picked up, too. He

had a lot of people come to the school face to face, yet he just stayed firm with his commitment, and again, that tells you more about the way he's going to handle things, I think.

He made up his mind for the right reasons. He was convinced that was the best thing for him. His mom was totally on board. So you walked out of the house, you walked out of the school feeling really good about the young man, and those are little things that I think lead me to believe whether he's playing inside or outside he's going to have a really good career for us. He's coming for the right reasons. I think he's highly motivated, and we're just excited to start working with him when his high school season is over.

Q. What are your plans at recruiting coordinator, and how do you --

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, first things first right now. We have one opening, and that'll probably be the recruiting coordinator position, maybe somebody on our staff. But we'll get our ninth coach hired here hopefully next week or the week after, and then start moving forward. But I feel like we're in good shape right now. Seth has done a great job with what he's done thus far. He's a tremendous defensive coach. I think he could coach any one of the positions defensively. He brought a lot of -- talking about versatility, he brought a lot of versatility to our staff. I think that'll be a really easy transition for us, and he's well in tune with what we do defensively.

And then we'll try to do what's best for the program with that ninth hire, and we have some really nice candidates right now. I'm really enthused. I think that shuts down on Friday and then we'll start to move forward. Hopefully in the next two weeks we'll start to make some progress.