

December 29, 2021

[Liam Coen](#)

[Will Levis](#)

Orlando, Florida, USA

Camping World Stadium

Kentucky Wildcats

Press Conference

LIAM COEN: Would love to thank the Citrus Bowl. It's been an unbelievable experience so far. Great for our players to come down and play a very quality opponent in Iowa specifically speaking on the defensive side of the ball. Love to thank the University of Kentucky for promoting us and having us in this Bowl game.

It's a big-time game for us. Super excited to be here. This is a great opportunity for us as coaches, staff and players to be down here at a great venue, have a great time and play in a big-time game.

So open it up for any questions now.

Q. I know you faced this Iowa team previously. How are they similar, how are they different, and how have you changed since that game?

WILL LEVIS: Pretty similar, honestly. I think their tendencies, just the first thing that sticks out to you when you watch their film is how disciplined and consistent they are with their techniques and coverage discipline.

And little things from when they play certain coverages and certain down and distances have changed a little bit, but the same coverages that you see in the past with them are the same stuff that you're going to see this year and what we expect to see as well.

That doesn't necessarily make it easy at all, because, like I said, they are disciplined and even though you might know what you're going to get on a certain coverage, it's a defense that it takes a disciplined offense to combat it.

We need to make sure we go out there and play cleanly. As long as we do that, I think we should be able to do some good stuff.

Q. The quarterback and your top receiver, familiar to Iowa. How do you weave people like that together who in other programs learned other things, focused on other things, and make it work so fast?

LIAM COEN: When you have quality kids in the program already, I think that's a big-time advantage when you do bring players in from other organizations, other programs, specifically speaking from the transfer portal.

When you already have a strong culture and players within the program, I think it's easy for to you bring in quality kids and good players into the program and they mesh very well with the guys that are already there.

We brought in some guys from the portal, but they were of the utmost respect in terms of on the field, off the field, in the classroom, socially doing all the right

things, speaking of specifically on the offensive side of the ball, Will [Levis] and Wan'Dale [Robinson] and then Dare Rosenthal up front for us.

So being able to mesh it really wasn't that difficult, because the guys in the program were yearning for a leader like Will, a playmaker like Wan'Dale. That was something that we needed and the program needed, and ended up working out pretty well.

Q. Curious from day one until now, in what ways has Will improved the most, and how has he made you a better coach?

LIAM COEN: From the improvement standpoint, that's what we always talk about with Will is every single day of practice is him getting another rep at being a full-time quarterback. Every single seven-on-seven, every single blitz period, every single team period is an opportunity to get better. It's still learning how to play the position because he wasn't used to play this position in years past.

That's why I just think that the ceiling is so high for him to be able to play at a high level and continue to push himself to get better and better. He is not just going to continue to take practice reps to take reps. He tries to practice to get better every single day.

That's what's fun to coach and that's why it is a challenge to coach him -- you better be on your stuff. You better be ready to go as a coach. When you don't, you can tell he gets bored.

That's something that it's on me as a coach and us as coaches to challenge him daily, both mentally and physically, with some things. That's going to be a big-time emphasis for us this spring is continuing to challenge him both mentally and physically to get better.

He definitely raises the standard in the room, in the offense, and as a coach.

Q. In some ways, Wan'Dale Robinson reminds me of one of your other former teammates, KJ Hamler. In what ways are they similar, and what does Wan'Dale mean to this offense? Because he really seems to have taken off from what he was a couple years ago.

WILL LEVIS: They have the same number, so that's one thing that's similar (laughter).

When I started working out with Wan'Dale, I instantly made that connection. Obviously, they are on the shorter side, so like that's a connection, they play kind of similar slot position.

They are both very instinctive players and football smart. When you talk to Wan'Dale, he will tell you a lot of things about not only the receiver position, but football in general that the average fan will not know and the average player will not know. He just kind of gets it. It's something that you have to work for, but it's also natural ability and natural instinct I think.

He's able to take a certain route, the teachings from a route, go into a practice versus a coverage -- that we haven't even talked about and understand what's going to make it work as best as possible. That is something that is hard to find in a receiver or in a player in general.

Obviously, he has the play-making ability. He has the agility. He has the speed, and he is just someone I can trust throwing the ball to all around. So, great player to have.

KJ, I played a little bit with him when I was there, but definitely very similar. I think that just as KJ has had success at the next level, I think Wan'Dale can, too.

Q. When Iowa was here talking about the running game, they mentioned the running game, the running game a couple of times. When you first saw Chris Rodriguez, what were your initial thoughts, and now that you've been with him the last six or seven months?

LIAM COEN: To speak to when I first got to know Chris in the spring, he was coming off a little bit of an injury, so we didn't see him all that much in spring practice. We had him practice, but we didn't see him live. I didn't see him live all the way through until training camp. Not even sure we did too much live.

You don't get a full feel for Chris until you truly go live and people need to tackle him. That has been the thing that has been probably the most impressive since getting around Chris is once you get him going, he's just rarely going to lose yards.

I think that seeing something -- he leads the country in I think four-yard carries over the season -- that's efficient. He is an efficient runner. He is difficult to take down. That's a big part of this offense is being able to run the ball efficiently, being in manageable third-down situations, which has helped us throughout the season, and, you know, keeping people off balance with the quarterback run game as well.

I think it all ties in together, but he has been a special player for us this season and I think will continue on.

WILL LEVIS: He is definitely unique in just his style of running. He's not necessarily a guy that's going to always make someone miss at the next level, but he's always going to fall forward. It's very rarely you see him get tackled by the first guy that makes contact with him.

And like Coach said, it took until that first live scrimmage, or the first game, really, to see what he's really capable of and what makes him so special as a player. He's been a key player in this offense for a few years now for a reason. He's a great kid and a great teammate and just someone that we are really lucky to have on the team.

Q. Will, you've said often that you don't think the offense has played its best game yet. For both of you, what does that look like, and how do you get there? How do you play that complete game?

WILL LEVIS: I don't think there is ever going to be a point when we think we will reach our full potential, because there's always room for growth.

Me as a quarterback, going back to your first question, what I have improved in most is the comfort aspect of the position. Like Coach said, that really just comes with reps, and that really comes with seeing different looks in a variety of different ways. The more looks you see and the more reps you get, the more comfortable you' are going to be.

I think as long as it's the end of this year or for as long as I play this game, I'm always going to be striving to get better and better and better physically, mentally, what have you.

But yeah, I think our best game, just kind of what our -- a sum of what our offense has done all season, which is being able to run the ball effectively and throw the ball effectively on average throughout the board. We haven't done both necessarily extremely well in many games, but I think we have averaged something like 200-plus pass, 200-plus run throughout the season this year.

I think like playing at our best, assuming that the defense we are playing allows us to do both, is having just that good balance of run and pass. We look to do that every week and be prepared to do well in each of those areas each week.

Q. Coach Stoops obviously has a lot of Iowa connections. Have you been hearing him talk about that, and is there any extra added motivation to give him a win against his alma mater?

WILL LEVIS: I haven't heard anything, obviously, from him. Obviously, he likes to win whoever we are playing. But personally, I think he'd tell that you it does fire him up a little bit, but he hasn't made that a story line in the locker room or anything this week or the past month really.

LIAM COEN: He's spoken of great respect for the program and Coach Ferentz and what they have done there. It's more a respect thing, a mutual competitive respect for how they play the game, for how they are coached.

That's some of the things he's emphasized to our players and our staff about just respecting the game, respecting your opponent. He says that every week, but specifically these guys because of the way they are coached and the way they play.

Q. Just wanted to ask about your offensive line. Seems pretty dominant on film, one of the best in the country. What's helped take it from a good line to a great line this year?

LIAM COEN: I think that it really started with Coach [Jon] Schlarman and how these guys have been coached prior to our arrival. These guys were very well-coached. They had a sense of pride in the room for years.

When I arrived, that was the first thing that kind of stood out to me was just the demeanor in that room, in the offensive line room. I think that was instilled in those guys from years past.

I think that this year, just adding a little bit of different variety in the run game has helped our players have success up front. And also just the leadership that we had up front with Luke Fortner, Darian Kinnard, [Kenneth] Horsey, all those guys that have played a lot of snaps, have stepped up and continued to play a lot of snaps and stay healthy for us this year for the most part.

We go as they go. When we break the huddle, that's exactly what we want the defense to see first, and they have been unbelievable for us this year.

WILL LEVIS: Yeah, I think, too, just like you said, with the diversification of like the schemes we have been running compared to what they ran in the past. Bringing a new offense to a line that is pretty experienced and used to running certain concepts, it took a few games for us to find our true identity and like what our bread and butter is in terms of what schemes work best for our offensive line.

I think Coach did a really, really good job of seeing what necessarily we would like to work, but isn't working well. We don't want to change things midseason and

what is working and what we want to build on from that midpoint in the season on, which I think we have done a really good job of in the second half of the year.

We know what we are good at and we try sticking to that, but we are good at a lot of stuff. We are looking forward to bringing everything we can to the table in the run game.

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[Brad White](#)

[Yusuf Corker](#)

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BRAD WHITE: Obviously, we really excited to be here at the Vrbo Citrus Bowl. I think our guys are really ready to play in this game. They have been excited. The energy and practice both at home and here on site in Orlando, has been at an all-time high.

We know it's going to be a great challenge, a really physical Iowa offense. They have a couple of different ways that they can beat you, but it all starts up front. We know we have to play physical. We know we have to try to create some turnovers.

Obviously, they have got an incredible defense. They have been able to create a lot of turnovers that last year we were able to create, and we were sort of in the upper echelon of creating turnovers last year. This year, not so much, but we have to able to make those opportunities count in this game.

It's going to be a heck of a battled and one we're ready for. Really excited to watch Yusuf [Corker] do some damage on the field, and try to put him in some positions to make some plays.

Q. Iowa's offensive numbers are not great, but what do they do well that you need to look at controlling?

BRAD WHITE: I think stats at times can be deceiving. When you look at how they are able to control the game, and it fits into what they do. It is their identity. It all started, we talked about it in the opening statement, it starts up front for them. Their offensive line, especially interiorly, does a great job of creating initial push, creating some seems in their run game, in their zone scheme. Then, it sets up their

play-action game and it sets up their boot game. In the boot game, the mirroring of both run and play-action in boot, looks almost identical.

So to fit the two-back run scheme, I've got Yusuf here, from a safety standpoint, you have to be really, really disciplined with your eyes. When it looks the same, it gets to be hard and they do a great job because of repetition. They do a great job of marrying looks and they do a great job of self-scouting themselves, so their tendencies are minimal in that regard.

It's hard to pinpoint and attack certain things. Obviously, not having [Tyler] Goodson is a difference for them, but they have running backs that have plenty of experience and have done some really good things.

I don't think anything really changes identity-wise for them in terms of how they are going to run the ball, how they are going to push it down the field. So, I think that's really where they create some challenges for you. It's a scheme that in a world of spread offense, and that's how you sort of build your defense, now it is a little bit more old school. You have to get physical and you have to get nasty. Our defensive front is going to have to play, you know, really well. Our linebackers are going to have to take on backs and lead blockers. It presents a completely different challenge than something we have really faced all season.

Q. You guys during that three-game losing streak were kind of reeling a little bit, tinkering with the secondary. How did you respond to that adversity to be able to recover and finish the season strong?

YUSUF CORKER: We went back and watched the film and see the things that we needed to work on and just be real with our receives. We didn't create any turnovers, obviously, in those three games. We didn't play well. We had bad eyes and things like that.

After those games, we put it behind us and we just look forward to the next opportunity. I feel like we played better on our last, I'd say, three games of the stretch -- at the end of the season.

Q. Your last answer got me curious. When is the last time you faced a team like Iowa, that old school mentality?

BRAD WHITE: Probably inside the five-yard line. And it's true, in this day and age, I joked in a previous deal back home, is that for some of our younger players that haven't been around and have only seen spread offenses, especially in high school, they don't even know what a fullback is.

But that, it creates two-back run fits that create problems, and it stresses your rules. What you have to do you is have to key on that fullback -- and our guys have to do a great job of understanding. Hey, it's creating two-by-two formations or three-by-one formations, depending which way he goes, but you have to identify flow early, and then you understand your run fit, where your support is.

That's where some of those creases have really come for them is that there have been some unblocked players that can make a play. But, if you push the ball the wrong way, if your help is outside, but you send the ball inside, even though that there's an unblocked defender, the running back is walking in the end zone.

So, you have to be perfect. Obviously, we have been working a lot on that, but until you get the game speed of it, the true physicality of it. We will have to make

corrections on the sideline just like every game, but I think, again, I think our guys are forward. They understand that it's a -- you challenge their pride.

Especially when it's a physical game. When it's one of those games where you call it a circus and there's motions and flies and ball going this way and that way. It's just sort of, hey, play soft and let it play out in front of you and then you go play ball. This one is sort of challenging your pride. They are not hiding anything. They are coming downhill. They are going to put their pads on you, and they are going to try to drive you off the football.

If they are gaining yards, it means that they are physically more dominant than you. So it's a sense of pride for our front. It's going to be a sense of pride for our back end when they have to come and fill, and they have to tackle these big backs coming downhill. We have to impose our will and our physicality, and it's something that we've been able to do over the years. We've been able to do it this year, at times, and we need to show up and do it again.

Q. For you guys as a defense, do you get a sense of smelling blood in the water for an Iowa offense that has struggled this year, and they are without their starting running back? Their quarterback situation is kind of on the fence a little bit. And two, with playing a physical team, how much do you look forward to that as a physical defensive back?

YUSUF CORKER: Well, any game, our next game, I look forward to it.

As far as Iowa, when I go back and watch the film, I feel like they are a really good, disciplined offense. I feel like the last game they played against Michigan. They really kind of shot themselves in the foot. There were opportunities they could have put up a lot more points, but like I said, they shot themselves in the foot.

It's going to be a physical game for us and like Coach said, it's going to be a lot of pride. I feel like for me getting off blocks and making tackles for the whole defense is going to be real big for us.

Q. You were here a few years ago as a redshirt freshman and now you're back, could be playing in your last game what would it mean to start your career with a big win in the Citrus Bowl and to wrap it up with a 10-win season in the Citrus Bowl?

YUSUF CORKER: It would mean a lot, especially with this team. This might be my last game. It's going to be very emotional. You are never going to get this team back again. Everybody is going to go to different places and different ways, so it's going to be very emotional for me.

Q. Iowa has not announced a starting quarterback. How do you prepare for that? Do you think there's a difference between Spencer Petras and Alex Padilla, a big difference? How would you assess that situation?

BRAD WHITE: You know what, I think from a scheme standpoint, I don't think it changes. I don't think it's as drastic a change if it's a pure pocket passer versus, all right, this guy is a runner then tries to throw.

I think their skill set is within the same ballpark. I think [Alex] Padilla probably runs a little bit better. I think decision-making, [Spencer] Petras understands where to go with the football -- been really successful in the offense.

So from that standpoint, it's not a big difference for us in that regard in terms of how we scheme. It's not going to be a different game plan., but you do have to be mindful of who is in and what that particular quarterback's strengths are.

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