

University of Iowa Football

Media Conference

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Brian Ferentz

Press Conference



schematic? Is it you? Is it the play-calling? Is it your father? Is there one area you think you're looking at saying this is where the root of all this is?

BRIAN FERENTZ: Thank you, guys, for being here. I appreciate, as always, the opportunity to meet with you guys in person, for the first time since camp.

I just want to start with some general thoughts. I think, obviously right now we're all disappointed and frustrated by our performance offensively on Saturdays, but I'm proud of the preparation and the effort the guys have put in on a weekly basis, seven days a week. The effort and the preparation has been excellent.

The reality is right now the production certainly hasn't been what we expected, and it's not meeting our level of expectation, most importantly.

I felt like we had seen consistent improvement going into the Illinois week, but unfortunately, I think we took a step back that night over in Champaign.

The positive is we've got an opportunity to come back to work this week. Guys have come in with an eye on the future, the eyes on the horizon, and really a renewed focus on improving. I think for us right now it's very important that we're worried about improving and executing at all 11 spots. We all have ownership in this right now.

Making the makeables, doing our job. Just the simple basics.

Then, I think we all understand and need to understand that we need to take advantage of the opportunities that are in front of us. We have six football games remaining in the season, and the reality is we all need to do better, and the good news is we're committed to doing that moving forward here.

I would like to open up to questions, and who wants to start?

Q. I could recite the stats and the rankings, but you probably already know them, and it doesn't really matter anyway. Is there a clear source of where the offensive issues start? Is it positional? Is it

BRIAN FERENTZ: I think, unfortunately, we don't have a root cause. I think we have to look at everything. The reality is, as I just said, we all have ownership in it.

As simple as it sounds, the basic are the basics. If you just think about offensive football our job is to possess, advance, and score the football.

You have to start by possessing the football, so you look at turnovers to start. Certainly in the first two weeks those were huge problems in those games, right? We turned the ball over four times in two games. Every single one of those turnovers either took points off the board for us or put points on the board for our opponents.

I felt like we had addressed that, and I've seen marked improvement in that regard. The next thing you look at offensively is first down production. Are you staying on schedule? Are you staying ahead of the chains in those manageable situations? Are you being efficient on first down?

Right now the reality is not consistently, which then leads to critical downs. So now you're going to need to stay on the field on third down or fourth down. Not doing that as well as we need to do and as consistently as we can.

Then on top of it, right, that's going to limit your ability to move the ball down the field. Are you creating those red zone possessions? When you are, are you scoring touchdowns? Are you scoring points? That hasn't been consistent enough.

If you are not doing any of those things, then you better be banking on explosive plays. At times that's gotten us out of trouble. We've hit some big plays that have gotten us out of bad situations, but that's not the kind of world you want to be living in on a consistent basis.

I look at all 11 spots. I look at the coaching. I look at the scheme. I look at everything, and I say we have to do better in all regards. How do we put our players in better positions to be successful in those opportunities, right?



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How do we execute better when we have those opportunities, and how do we make the makeable plays at the end of the day?

Q. You had nine months to try to improve this offense after not so good numbers last year. Why do you think it's since then regressed for all the ways that you have just pointed out?

BRIAN FERENTZ: Sure. The hard part is, like I just told Scott, it's very difficult to pinpoint one issue. When we've been good in certain places, we haven't executed in other places. The reality of offensive football is it takes 11 guys. It takes 11 guys, and then it's more than that if you include the play caller, right?

We all have a hand in it. The clear explanation or clear issue, clear root, I wish I could give you one. The reality is we've got a lot of issues that we're working to address right now, and it starts up front, continues outside.

Really the tight end position I feel like the production has been good there. It's hard to point the finger at those guys.

There's plenty of examples where we can block better, we can run routes better, we can catch the ball better. Okay, we can run the football better at the running back position or we can throw the ball better at the quarterback position.

It's a culmination of all 11 things that lead to some of those issues. That's what we're working hard to address.

Q. For you guys it's always started up front. What do you see from your offensive line not getting the push that they normally would and the issue for pass protection?

BRIAN FERENTZ: Sure. Well, I think the other night is a good example, right? So there's different kinds of games you can be in. We knew what kind of game it was going to be on Saturday night. Part of the reason I have a lot of respect for what they do there, they're going to play in an eight-man front regardless of what they're doing behind it.

What they're doing is they're going to line up and say, hey, listen, we're going to play one-on-one at every single spot across the board here. If somebody wins for us, we're going to be in good shape.

If somebody loses, it's not going to be so good. You look at the game a year ago. I felt like we were able to run the ball pretty effectively against Illinois last year in Kinnick. We were winning some of those one-on-one battles.

The other night we knew there were going to be man

blocks, and at the end of the day we just weren't able to win enough to get anything going.

You think about push, and that's true to some extent, but at the end of the day if you are not going to be able to win the one-on-one battles, it's going to be a problem.

Same thing in pass protection the other night. The same issues that the front creates in the run game, it creates in pass protection where you know it's going to be five-on-five for the majority of the night.

Maybe not true against a four-down front or some other teams, but the problem is real simply we've got some guys playing right now that simply haven't developed to the level that they probably need to be out there, whether it's injury issues, whether it's missed time, and it really doesn't matter.

The reality is what we have to be doing right now is pushing those guys forward as quickly as we can trying to get them the tools they need to be successful and get them out there.

I think I would be remiss to say in fairness to some of those players, I've seen improvement. I've seen marked improvement with some guys. I think a lot of guys are making strides.

Didn't show up consistently enough the other night, but I'm excited to see how they continue to progress.

Q. I wanted to ask about three plays from the other night. One by one or give them --

BRIAN FERENTZ: Let's go one by one.

Q. The one Arland was in the backfield and there was a shovel pass. Was that the quarterback's read there, or was that always going to be a shovel?

BRIAN FERENTZ: It's a read play, so there is an option there to hand the ball off. We chose to shovel, and obviously, it didn't end the way we wanted.

We would have liked to score a touchdown, but the good news is we maintained possession of the ball.

Q. Then there was a pass to Gavin up the right sideline. Didn't look like he was looking for the ball. Was that supposed to go to him or Nico who was underneath and wide open?

BRIAN FERENTZ: Can you give me the question one more time?

Q. You were backed up. It was early.

BRIAN FERENTZ: It was the second possession.

Q. It was like a wheel route up the side, and it looked like Gavin wasn't looking for it. Nico was wide open underneath. Curious, was that always supposed to go to Gavin?

BRIAN FERENTZ: Any time we run a pass play, right, if we free release the back, which we did on that play, there's five guys in a route. There are five viable options in the route. Everyone is live. We were going to highlight or lowlight things based on the coverage we're getting.

There are scenarios where that ball would go to Gavin. Certainly didn't feel like that was the scenario we wanted to go to Gavin, but the reality is we still had a play that was makeable, and we didn't make it.

Q. The last one was delay of game towards the end? Obviously, that turned into a punt and their winning points as a result. The play looked like it was in on time. What happened there that caused --

BRIAN FERENTZ: The play was definitely in on time, but what happened there was we were in the end zone. Their band was there. There was a little bit more noise than I thought maybe existed at the time looking back at it.

I didn't probably give a good play call considering the amount of noise because we had to shift on the play, right? We had a short motion with the back. It was actually the same play we had called earlier in the game.

It was Gavin. Gavin was the back. He was starting to the field motioning into the boundary and then we were snapping the ball with him on the move. I think the motion probably cost us the penalty just getting that lined up.

I would take accountability for that and say what I wish I would have done in retrospect, we can run the same play with him in the backfield without the short motion. That's what I should have done to put the players in a better position to be able to get that play off on time.

Q. That caused the more conservative call, I guess, on third and long and the delay? It was a hand-off --

BRIAN FERENTZ: Here's the reality. We went from a position where I believe we were on the 4 1/2, 5-yard-line. I felt like that was a play that we were going to get the ball off on the plant or at worse on the hitch. It was going to come out pretty quick, and it has a good build-in hot in

case they want to pressure it.

From the two, just was really concerned that something bad could happen that would lose us the football game right there, so it definitely changes your mentality. There's no question.

Q. How do you evaluate yourself as a play caller?

BRIAN FERENTZ: How do I evaluate myself as a play caller? It's pretty simple. Are we doing the three things that I mentioned at the beginning. Are we possessing, advancing, and scoring the football?

I don't think we're doing any of those things very consistently right now, so how I would evaluate myself is I need to improve. I need to work on ways to get better. How do I help the guys do those things? How do I put us in positions to be successful and to advance the football without taking unnecessary risk, and then certainly we get down in the low red area, we need to score. We need to score touchdowns. We're looking to score touchdowns. Certainly field goals are preferable to the alternative, but touchdowns are the goal.

My evaluation, I need to do better. How do I find ways to make us more successful and improve as we move into the next six games?

Q. When you evaluate quarterback Spencer Petras, nobody else has taken a snap. You have talked and Kirk has talked about a lot of confidence in Alex Padilla. Yet, when the offense continues to struggle week after week after week, why not make the change just to make a change, just to change something up?

BRIAN FERENTZ: I don't disagree with the philosophy of changing for change's sake. I think it has been effective for people. I think it exists in the world. It's like any philosophy. You can point to times it's successful. You can point to times it's not successful.

Just like sticking with somebody, right? That's going to cut both ways at some point as well. It's not a philosophy that we adhere to.

Since I've been a part of this program -- so I have 16 years in this program as player or a coach. You know, our philosophy is we begin the season. We're in it together at that point. We can get to the end of the season and worry about making changes for change's sake, and we've done that from time to time. I think back to 2014, the 2014 season, got to the end of that season, and certainly made a change.

But right now the best way I can describe the quarterback position is this: It's like any position on our football team. We're evaluating everybody all the time on everything. The quarterback position is very simple. Who can do the job the absolute best?

What are we looking at? We're looking at metrics. Not just games. Practice. You're talking about decisions, reads, timing, location, all those things. The good news with the quarterback position it's very tangible. There's not a lot of gray area when you are grading those factors.

So the reality is we do like Alex. We would feel comfortable with Alex in the game. We feel like he is a good player, but the reason that Spencer is our quarterback is we feel like he gives us the best chance to win.

Q. Earlier in the season you said right after South Dakota State that you thought Spencer had adequate time to throw and the execution wasn't there. Do you still believe that's been the case through now six weeks, or is it a different story now?

BRIAN FERENTZ: Like which game specifically, though?

Q. Just over the course of these six weeks.

BRIAN FERENTZ: No, that's not always true. Just like it wasn't always true in the South Dakota State game. I thought with the exception of two plays in that game that he had adequate time to throw. I think we could point to plays in any of the other five games where maybe he didn't have the time, but that's the reality of playing the position.

You are going to have some of those instances. Now, you look at the other night. I would say there's probably four examples where he is just certainly not going to have time to get the ball off.

Unfortunately, one of them was on our last non-desperation type play. We've got an in-cut breaking open at about the 40. Is he going to get in field goal range? He is going to be pretty darn close.

Unfortunately, that's one of those plays where you don't even get a chance. You couldn't have thrown that on the plant if he wanted to, and that's a hitch and throw.

There's opportunities in the game to overcome some things with timing. There's other times when there's not.

I don't know if that answers your question well enough, but it's yes and no. You look at other times. I think one of the hardest things to evaluate as a quarterback, what is the

affect of what each play is having on you as the game goes on, right? There's a cumulative effect that comes from being under duress or being hit. And, unfortunately, it is going to manifest itself from time to time when you would prefer it doesn't.

Q. Brian, with this being the bye week, what specifically is going to happen in terms of taking that first step to kind of get back on track to meet your expectations with the offense?

BRIAN FERENTZ: That's a good question. I know you can't do anything without taking a step, right? It doesn't matter how small it is. I look at this, and I say, OK, what can we do better right now? What can we fix right now?

Well, I can tell you this, we need to do a better job of eliminating negative plays. Whether they're sacks or lost yardage on rushing plays, you have to eliminate negative plays.

Right along with negative plays are penalties. We've done a pretty good job through the first four weeks as far as penalties and being penalized. Not the case the last two weeks. We've racked up all kinds of penalties in the last two weeks and all in fairly critical situations, whether it affected field position, whether it affected down in distance.

We're at a first in 25, that's difficult to overcome. If you are third and goal on the 6 or 7, wherever we were on that first series -- I think we were third and goal on the 6, left hash. You have a legitimate chance to go to the end zone, and there's a lot of good plays from the 6.

From the 11 not so much, right? It changes your thought process. It goes back to your question, Chad, about being on third down on your own 4 versus your own 2 or your own 5 or 2 1/2.

The penalties are right there with that. Then in my mind it's just making the makeables. I think that's different for every position.

Going back to the one-on-one battles, Tom, on your question, the reality of football is it's a competitive endeavor. You're not going to win every one-on-one battle. That's just not the way it's going to work.

But when you are giving up unforced errors or in the wrong place and you cut somebody loose, that's a problem. That's a makeable as an offensive lineman or a running back or a tight end in protection or in the run game. Dropping balls, that's a makeable. Overthrows, under throws, missing open guys, makeable.



When you look at the makeables, if you're not making those makeables, then you're going to have a hard time sustaining any success. I look at that and say, what can we do right now to address those things?

It's not glamorous. My answer is we need to do better. We need to do better in practice. We need to have more focus. We need to have more attention to detail.

We need to have more sense of urgency about making sure that those things that are going to set us back aren't happening on Saturdays.

Q. Quarterback Joe Labas in the spring and throughout fall camp, it was about getting him up to speed with the quarterbacks in the room. How would you assess his progress through six weeks, and has he made steps to close the gap on Spencer and Alex?

BRIAN FERENTZ: Joe continues to do a good job, but the simple answer to that is he has not yet closed the gap on those two guys, but doesn't discourage you from continuing to work with him, right, and hope that you get there.

Q. News flash here: People watching the Hawkeyes want more changes to be made. I'm sure that doesn't surprise you. What change --

BRIAN FERENTZ: You ask in such a somber -- I don't mean to laugh. You've got to let some of that off your shoulders. Just ask the question.

Q. What tangible change could you point to coming out of the bye week that might be different about this offense going forward?

BRIAN FERENTZ: I think we'll have to wait and see. I don't know how exciting that is as an answer. That's not going to take any weight off your shoulders.

But the question is fair, right? Let me try to give you a fair answer. Look, if the run game is not effective, if we are not being able to move the ball on early downs with the run game, can we find a way to do it with the passing game?

Or are there ways to manufacture yards on early downs whether it's quick game, whether it's emptying the formation out, whatever it is? Can we create more space and then put the ball in space? Can we do that?

Are we asking the proper things in the run game out of the right guys? Can we do a better job of having certain backs run certain plays? Are we asking the guys up front to do things that they cannot do? I don't know.

We have to look at that right now. That's what we're in the process of doing. Can we find better ways to create some of that success on early downs.

And then changes as far as third down, you know, I would point back to the Illinois game. We came out with some different looks on third down. We played a little more empty. We tried to open the field up a little bit more. We certainly tried to feature Sam a little bit more, which there's some danger in that too. You don't want to become too one-dimensional, which we got pretty darn close the other night. He had, like, 16 targets. He may quit at some point here and protest. Kind of running the wheels off of him.

Are we going to put guys in a better position to become successful? Can we put the ball in the perimeter more, however that is going to be, whether it's bubbles, jet motions, fly motions, things of that nature?

I don't have great answers right now. We're in the process of going through those things, but the reality is, yeah, we have to look at doing things differently and changing some things moving forward here.

Are we going to be five-wide in the wildcat and things like that? I don't think that's the answer. If it was, I can assure you that's what we would be working on doing. The reality is we're trying to win football games, and we're invested in this. This is very important to us.

What can we do to get better? That's a question in our minds at every moment of every day, and that's not unique to the bye week, right? These are things that you are trying to adjust and change week to week during the season in the midst of it.

Q. Jacob Bostick and Diante Vines got in uniform. Diante came out of uniform before the game. What could they add and to the offense moving forward? Because it seems like they'll be back from Ohio State, I think, and what's the status of Keagan Johnson and his return?

BRIAN FERENTZ: I'll start with Jake Bostick. Obviously, he is a young guy, but he continues to show improvement. He has had to battle some injuries here. I'm not confident that he will play against Ohio State, so I don't want to get anybody excited about that prematurely. Still battling through some of those things.

Diante, I don't want to make that proclamation. I'll leave that to the head coach next week, but we are confident that we're going to get him back as we move forward here. Hopefully it's Ohio State. I thought we were close last week, but there's just obviously you're always going to

defer to the medical staff. The player safety would be the number one concern.

We are really excited about him because he is a guy that had flashed in camp. He is a guy that really before he had the injury, really thought he had done some nice things in the red zone. He has some speed that is impressive on the outside for a bigger guy.

He is not real lengthy, but he has some size to him. He can run and use his body. Really his ball skills impressed us since he has been here, but unfortunately, he has battled a lot of injuries. Camp was really the first time that he was able to kind of push it forward and get going. Really excited about that.

Hopefully we can incorporate him moving forward here and can just give us, number one, some presence outside, and then maybe we can continue to build depth.

Then with Keagan still continuing to battle some of the injuries, some of the soft tissue stuff, I would defer to the head coach just about his availability.

Q. When you look at the Big Ten, things have changed quite a bit where you have seen two assistant coaches fired this week, you've seen two head coaches fired, including one that was quite a shocker, or at least to me. Have you had any concern about your position and based on the success or lack thereof of the offense, and have you considered stepping down because of that lack of success?

BRIAN FERENTZ: Okay, so I will start, number one, with the last part of the question. In my opinion it doesn't make it right. There's two options in life in any situation. You can surrender, and if you surrender, then I think the results are pretty much guaranteed. Or you can dig in, you can continue to fight, and you can try to improve and do things better.

I will always choose option A. Done it in my personal life. Done it in my professional life. I wouldn't be able to go home and look my children in the eye if I wasn't an option B person. I think I said option A. I started with option surrender, right? That's not me. Let me be crystal clear about that. That's number one.

Number two, to the other question, you know, look, in this business we all signed up for this. This is a results-driven business. It has been since the minute I entered it. None of this is a new phenomenon.

Things that go on outside of this program never surprise nor shock me. Ever. Because this is the world we live in.

This is the life we chose. You have to get results. Otherwise, they will move on to people who will. That's the way it is.

You add on to it my emotional ties to this place. I already referenced it, player or coach, 16 years here. Was born in a hospital across the street, spent my entire childhood wanting to run out in that Swarm and got to do it and now got to coach here. I love this place. There is a responsibility and a privilege that comes with being a coach here or being a player here. I feel that deeply.

There's another layer for me. My father is the head coach. I've been answering questions about nepotism my entire adult life. None of that is new to me either.

I would flip it and say if you think that I don't feel an added responsibility or added pressure to perform well for my father, you are crazy. Of course, I feel that. I'm a human being.

But at the end of the day, what you can't let happen is worrying about anything that's not going to help you do your job.

I learned that very early in my career: Keep your eyes on the road. Keep your eyes where they need to be. Keep your feet where you are and worry about doing your job as well as you possibly can regardless of circumstance, regardless of what's going on around you. Keep your focus there. Pour your effort into that. Whatever happens, happens. Do the best you can where you are at with what you got, and you won't have any regrets.

That's what I was taught at an early age. I continue to live by that. So I don't worry about what's going on other places.

Quite frankly, I don't worry about what's going on for my job status or anything like that. My focus is on the staff, the players, and doing my duty to the best of my ability to help them be successful.

Q. Along those lines, do you think that in terms of your job evaluation that that's been influenced by the fact that the head coach is your father?

BRIAN FERENTZ: You would have to ask the head coach. I don't think anything. That would be a question for him. I don't want to speak for anyone else.

Q. I wanted to ask about the quarterback. What would be the downside of -- I know we've talked about this. What's the downside of going with Alex? You still have Spencer on the team. What would be the



downside of giving him a shot?

BRIAN FERENTZ: The downside of --

Q. Making a change at quarterback.

BRIAN FERENTZ: What would be the upside?

Q. Making a change. I'm just asking.

BRIAN FERENTZ: I'm not trying to be coy. What I'm saying is -- I think I addressed that, Scott, when you asked the question -- what's the downside? I'm not interested in making a change for change's sake. What I'm looking at is I'm saying what's the upside?

I don't know. There's unknown there. I know what Spencer has done. I know what Spencer can do, and I know what he does every day. That's the evaluation piece that we were talking about. That's what the decision is made on.

I do understand the question. I don't want you to think I'm being flippant, but does that answer it?

Q. Eh, yeah.

BRIAN FERENTZ: Sort of? Kind of? Not satisfactorily?

Q. I'm thinking back to our last Zoom talking about the mobility aspect. It seems like a more mobile option with the line troubles you're having. It would be a benefit to me, but maybe you can tell me.

BRIAN FERENTZ: I understand that question. Let me explain it this way. The passing game is a system, and the system is built on timing and location in the zone coverage world or if we're dealing with man-to-man coverage, matchup leverage throws.

For example, in the game Saturday night we didn't see a lot of zone coverage. There's not probably great examples of that. There's two. I'll give you a couple.

In the two-minute drives, we started with quick game through a hitch route out to Nico at No. 2. We throw the hitch route out there. Ball was on time. It's right decisions. Everything we talked about. The guy that could take it away was pretty darn close. Okay? It was pretty darn close. We come back to that play and throw it to the sit route twice later.

Now you're beating that defender, you're playing the game, timing and location. That's one way to play.

The other way to play is matchup leverage. Plenty of those throws in the game, right? There's a couple where it's uncontested. There's just a guy running wide open because the man cover guy falls down, or whatever it is.

But you even think about the second play of that two-minute drive at the end of the first half, we throw a circus route to Sam into the boundary. It's man-to-man. It's tight coverage. The defender is low and inside; the ball is high and away. That would be matchup leverage. Throwing where the defender is not, where only our guy can make a play on the ball.

In either case it's still built on timing. The mobility aspect, certainly understand the question; but the reality is the majority of the passing game, it needs to happen on a timeline, and the minute that timeline is compromised, now all bets are off. Now it's backyard football.

There's nothing wrong with that from time to time. A good example of that would be the scramble where Spencer got hit on the third and two or whatever it was. You're off your clock. You've got to go.

It's also a good picture of improvement. We had the same situation against Rutgers. Similar play. Not the exact same play. Similar play. You're not there. You're off your clock. He ended up eating it on the 7-yard line end of the first half when we got down there.

You are looking at those things and saying that's improvement. That's what you like. That's what you are looking for. But if that answers your question, I don't know that the mobility -- just having a guy running around, I'm not sure that's going to solve any of our issues. You're not going to be any more open just because a guy is running around.

Q. A finite amount of time in the bye week and the rest of the season to make improvements. How much of an improvement do you think is feasible for this offense?

BRIAN FERENTZ: We need to make any improvement. I'm not worried about how much is feasible. I'm worried about how much can we make? We need to be striving to make as much as we possibly can.

Going back to the first three points of the press conference: possess, advance, and score the football. How do we do those things better? How can we get them better? Any improvement is better than no improvement, but then let's start building on that and let's see how much we can make.

What I don't want to do is say finite amount, how much, I don't know. How much can we make? That's how much



we need to make. Whatever we're capable of making in a short amount of time, let's work on that; then understand that's going to have to continue week to week.

Q. It looked like your running backs, Leshon Williams and Kaleb Johnson have made a lot of progress. Those two, how much do you think you can lean on them, and how much in concert can they grow with the offensive line to maybe give you a good punch the rest --

BRIAN FERENTZ: Hopefully a whole lot. We feel like Kaleb took a step forward in that Nevada game. That was his game to figure out, hey, I can do this. He did some good things there. Then he continued to build on those.

Especially the next week at Rutgers, I thought both those guys ran the ball extremely well. Especially between the tackles.

How much more progress can they make? Shoot, I think everybody can make more progress. Right now Leshon is probably a little bit more consistent than Kaleb because he has played more. He has been in the program longer.

You can trust him to do just about everything we do at a higher level than Kaleb because this is all still pretty new to him. I expect him to continue to close that gap, but also expect Leshon to improve.

And you can never have too many good football players. The better those guys are running the ball, the better we're going to play. There's no question.

Q. Schematically, how much can you change here in the bye week without overloading guys with information?

BRIAN FERENTZ: I don't want to say this in a way that -- how do I say this properly?

The scheme -- you have a vast amount of scheme. It's not that you are just going to overhaul the scheme. It's what are you working to feature?

The playbook is expansive. Everyone's is. There's only so many ways to play offensive football. How much can you change? You're really not changing anything. How much can you focus on different things? Plenty. You can do that.

At the end of the day a lot of our issues when we're talking about making makeables, we just need to do that. Let's start there.

Q. So you mean by that more execution is the problem more than schematics?

BRIAN FERENTZ: I think we need to execute a lot better, yes. Did I answer that question?

Q. Yeah.

Thank you, guys.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

University of Iowa Football

Media Conference

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Iowa City, Iowa, USA

LeVar Woods

Press Conference



LEVAR WOODS: First off, I would like to thank you guys for being here. It's a beautiful fall day out today. We had practice this morning. Noticed all the leaves changing colors. The reds, the yellows. Fall is coming here.

You guys could easily be out at Wilson's Apple Orchard or out at Kroul Farms getting a pumpkin with your kids. If you had that, that's what I would be doing if my kids weren't in school and I weren't here.

Kind of just appreciate you guys being here and your interest level always in Iowa special teams.

Kind of where we're at right now as far as special teams go, happy with kind of how the units have been playing. Definitely not satisfied. There's a lot more out there for us. There's some things we've had some really good moments so far this year and then some moments that -- some near misses where we felt like we could have impacted the game but didn't do it.

We always talk about here being championship level, talking about championship-level practice, championship-level play in games. Again, we've seen that so far this year at times, and there's times where, again, near misses where could have, should have, would have.

The goal right now is trying to eliminate the could have, should have, would have and more being happy and satisfied with the results.

Happy with how the guys are playing in general. Starting off with the punt game, I think Tory is punting the ball well for the most part. There's some things consistency-wise I know that he is not happy with. I'm sure he has told you guys that. If he hasn't already, I'm sure he will.

As far as coverage goes, I've been happy with the coverage. I think you have seen this in games already. You've seen Cooper flying down the field making tackles. You've seen Terry down the field making tackles. You've seen Jack Campbell down there making tackles, and Xavier Nwankpa is a freshman that happened to join the

unit, which is hard to do as a true freshman, to play here on our punt unit. But he is doing it and doing it well, along with the rest of the guys as well.

I think it really speaks to the culture that we have here and the way that this team operates. It speaks to the character of the guys.

It's very rare you have an All-American linebacker like Jack Campbell flying down the field, making tackles and not just doing it willingly, but wanting to do it. You guys saw that in the game last week.

He was the first guy down the field. Ball pops up. Bang, he is the guy that recovers it. Again, I think it speaks volumes to his character and what he wants to do on this football team. That's set by Coach Ferentz. The culture and what we try to do within this building and within this team. Just happy with that. Again, some things we still need to clean up.

Ultimately, you talk about Tory, and I think he will be the first to tell you, he is getting some really good snaps. Some things that are kind of hidden that people don't really notice, he is getting some really good snaps from Luke Elkin. Something that I think maybe as a younger coach I took for granted, the snapper position and how critical that is and how much it can help a punter.

I think I've called Luke the ultimate setup man. He is the ultimate setup man, good snaps, puts the ball where he wants it, and also, he is getting done. You've seen that as well this year. Getting down the field and tackling guys and making tackles, which is pretty rare for a snapper in college football or in pro football.

As far as that goes, field goal units, I think Drew is coming along as a player. He is definitely young. He has had -- every game is really like a new experience for him in some way because he was a high school kid a year ago. Really less than a year ago.

I think he has made a huge transition since spring. We've all kind of seen that. He missed a kick, his last kick, against Illinois, which I know is just eating at him, but to me that shows the guy is a competitor. He may be young. He may be inexperienced, but he is a competitor, and he has that drive inside.

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Again, helped again by a new holder with Tory. The first-year holder. Tory has done a great job with that. Protection has been good. I go back to the ultimate setup man with Luke. Again, stuff that you don't really see.

A lot of times if you really pay attention and watch NFL snappers and where the laces are coming and where the operation is, that's what we are trying to get to. If you ever watch that on Sunday. I don't pretend that you pay attention to that stuff, but as a special teams coach, I definitely do, and we do. I think we're getting some of that right now from that position.

As far as those two units, kick off has been good. So far I've been happy with that. Some guys flying down. Jay Higgins playing a lot on defense, but also getting down there, making some tackles, making some big hits. It's been good for our football team.

The return game is a position -- both kickoff and punt return, both of them we're still working to improve. I think we've seen -- in kick return we've seen Kaleb Johnson, flashes of him as a potential exceptional returner, but there's still -- he is still a freshman. Some things we're still cleaning up. The things we're working on, we worked on this week during the bye week: communication, better understanding, alignments, finish. Some of the little things that can either make or break a big return in either punt return or kick return.

Those have kind of been the focal points for us so far this year. Then also during the bye week. Again, happy with where we're at. Definitely not satisfied. I think we can help our football team better.

With that, any questions you guys may have.

Q. Your kick return unit, you have Louie Stec kind of on the back end. He was like the third to the back. I don't know how you call that, what position you call that. It's unusual to see a defensive tackle back that far. What does he bring in your kick return unit that puts him in that position, and how comfortable would you be if the ball came to him?

LEVAR WOODS: I'm glad you noticed Louie back there. It's another position on our team that kind of goes unheralded, but he brings -- packs a big punch and really helps our unit.

Another guy that played there was a defensive lineman. Oh, my gosh. His name escapes me right now. Oh, my gosh. Loved him. 53 from Pella. Oh, my gosh. Thank you so much, Garret Jansen. Very similar. Mobile. Can

move. Can strike guys on the run. Hard to do. Typically it's fullbacks that play that position. A defensive lineman plays that position. You see it a lot more in the NFL than you do in college football, just based off the roster size.

I think Louie has done a good job with that position. If you saw the first kick return against Illinois, it was literally right in front of me, and it sounded like a car crash. That's not something that's easy to do. It makes you realize why people are talking about eliminating kickoff from football because it was a collision. It was a hit. They knocked that guy silly.

That's what Louie brings to the table. He is a lower guy to the ground, bigger guy that can pack a punch and move people out of the way.

Yeah, he has also had in practice not in games where he has had the ball in his hands and can move with it. He does a good job. Not only that, if you pay attention and watch us and study us, he plays in our punt shield. An unheralded position nobody wants because they're sending some guy straight through him, right through his face, and Louie is a stout, powerful, tough guy that handles that dirty work.

Part of special teams I feel like there are some positions that the job is the job. It's sort of like playing fullback on offense, right? Okay, my shoulder is sore, my neck is sore. Someone still needs to go to slam into a linebacker, and I think that's the position that Louie played and played really well for us.

Q. When you look at a lot of special teams metrics, you have consistently been in the top 20 despite losing Charlie Jones, despite losing Caleb Shudak. What's the key to having that consistency?

LEVAR WOODS: I think it goes back to the culture that Coach Ferentz sets within this building. Not just what Coach Ferentz sets, but what our guys are trying to do. I go back to the character of the men on this team. I keep bringing up the same guys. With Campbell and Benson, Roberts and DeJean, those guys are playing every snap on defense, but yet, they're the first guys to run down on punt coverage. That doesn't happen on a lot of teams.

I can tell you when I was a player, I wasn't signing up running to the coach saying, put me in on punt. It was, fine, I'll let you do it.

These guys are different, high-character people, high-character individuals that want to help their football team and make plays. We're reaping the benefits of that right now, but again, all that is set from Coach Ferentz at



the top and the culture within the walls of this program.

Q. I have a question about specifically last week, the last one after Illinois' last field goal. I think it was Gavin who caught it and then just kind of took a knee really quick. Was that designed to try to get the offense the ball really early even though he was a deep back, or was he just --

LEVAR WOODS: I don't like the ball hitting the ground. Of course, we don't ever want that in kick return, but we are trying to conserve time as well. The thought is to not let it hit the ground. We want to catch the thing and get down as fast as we can, as much as we can, as fast as we can to let the offense go.

The timing is thrown off. You've heard me talk about kick return in the past, like a symphony, right? The timing of all the strings and the cords and each instrument that's played at what time it's played. Timing gets thrown off when the ball is on the ground or the kick is short. So in that regard we want to get as much as we can to get down and let our offense have the ball with as much time as possible.

I can't remember if there was one time-out or no time-outs left in the game, but that's what we were trying to do.

Q. Wouldn't it make more sense to go get eight more yards in that second?

LEVAR WOODS: You are taking four, five seconds off the clock. Potentially, yeah.

Q. First down.

LEVAR WOODS: Eight yards is it not a first down. I know what you are saying. I know what you are saying, but I don't know that there's eight yards out there either based on what we're trying to do return-wise.

I can tell you I wasn't disappointed by the decision. I was disappointed the ball hit the ground because you don't ever want that.

Q. Would you rather have him fair catch that in that case?

LEVAR WOODS: Yeah, if you can. Sometimes it's a tough kick when you are running up. Here's the other thing that's unknown in college football. You have the fair catch rule. A guy can signal fair catch, but if it's not a clean catch, the ball hits the ground. You don't get the ball at the 25. You get the ball wherever it's down.

It's part of, knock on wood, why I don't like returners doing

this in the background because it's not a clean catch. We've benefited from that a couple of times. I think it was Northwestern last year and I want to say either Nebraska in '18, Purdue in 2019 I want to say. They tried to fair catch and then ball is in the ground, and we get it at the 4. You don't want that at all.

Again, strategically the play is you don't want the ball to hit the ground for sure, but how many yards are out there, the journey is over at that point. We just want to get the ball and give it back.

Q. Do you still consider it an open competition at kicker between Drew and Aaron, or are you more set on Drew for now?

LEVAR WOODS: I think Drew has done a good job with the opportunities he's had so far. I know that Aaron is working his butt off and same thing with Lucas Amaya. He is working as well.

I think Drew has done a pretty good job with that role. I'll never say never or anything like that. As long as the opportunities keep coming and he keeps taking advantage of them, I see that going for him.

Aaron is right there as well, and he has been busting his butt and working hard too. Coach said this in a press conference. I don't think we've seen the last of Aaron Blom. I would agree with him on that. Whether it's in place kicks or kickoffs, somewhere in there, we're still working with that.

Q. What goes into the calculus of -- you've seen Drew can obviously kick touchbacks consistently -- between whether you want him to go for the touchback or whether you want him to try to drop it in kind of inside the 5, inside the 10?

LEVAR WOODS: Hang time is taken into account. We're striving for four-second hang time. 4-0 hang is what we say. Anything beyond that is a bonus.

Drew has done a pretty good job with that. He is not totally at 4-0 hang time on his kickoffs, but he is pretty close. Again, I go back to the timing of kick return. The timing gets thrown off when the ball is hanging way up in the air, like Michigan did to us. Kicked the ball I think it was 4-2-8 hang, and we tried to return it, and we found out real quick it's hard to do.

Then conversely, it's why you see at the end of half when a team kicks the ball on the ground because the timing gets thrown off, it's hard. You may get five yards or even eight potentially, maybe if you are lucky. Very rarely do you see

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it take off and go the distance.

Timing just gets thrown off by high hang and then ball is on the ground.

Q. How happy are you with punt return right now?

LEVAR WOODS: I feel like we can be better in all regards. Again, that was the focal point of today's practice and today's meeting, was it comes down to the little things, the details with how we're -- it's one thing, hey, I have my man, I'm running with him. Well, if you are the returner back there who is like this, his eyes are up and he catches the ball, and all of a sudden he looks forward, all of you guys look the same. You could be media members, football players. It's all the same to me. I don't know who is on my team, who is not.

When there's a seam, when there's a separation created, when someone is I'm running with my man, and I actually move him out of the way while I'm running with him, that opens a seam for the returners. That's what we're trying -- that's what we focused on today, is just trying to give the returner better vision, more opportunities that way.

As far as -- I don't know how many -- we face some pretty good punters so far, and we've also faced a couple that eliminate returns based off not great punts. I think the things we need to improve upon are keeping the ball off the ground, fielding the ball. Same thing in punt return and kick return to eliminate some of that bleeding yardage.

Then also finishing some of our blocks. I feel like the guys that have been working there with Bruce and then also with Cooper, I think we've got two pretty good candidates there with Witte coming along as well and some freshmen that are still -- they're not primetime-ready yet, but they're working well in practice and anxious to see them as we continue to move forward.

Q. You look at the officials on special teams, and now they're getting over well on defense. Who are those guys (indiscernible) I know you mentioned Xavier earlier, but who are some other guys across the special teams unit that are impressing you and might be able to parlay that into play at their own position?

LEVAR WOODS: I'm glad you brought that up because those are two guys with both Jay and Kyler who have done exceptionally well on special teams. They're the bell cows for us, if you will, as core players on special teams.

You're seeing it translate into roles for them on defense. You mentioned one already with Xavier. I definitely see Xavier with that. Terry has done that as well, right, playing

as a gunner and then transitioning into a corner. Cooper has done that. He did that last year. Played mainly for us on special teams. Then it just gave everyone confidence, like, hey, put him in the game on defense, and he hasn't come out since.

Those are kind of the guys right now as far as younger players. I could see right now in that role -- there's a guy that I've kind of got my eyes on and fixated on. It's not just myself but the people I work with, Brock Sherman and Arash Asadi. Deavin Hilson has done a really good job on the scout team and does a really -- he is making it really hard for us in kick return and in the looks he has given us flying down the field and getting in on tackles. We've transitioned him. Okay, you're not doing it on the scout team for us. You're doing it for us. He played us one snap in punt coverage last week as well.

That's a guy I could see transitioning his role, becoming a little bit bigger, not only on special teams, but on offense as well.

I don't want to speak for Coach Betts or anyone on offense, but I could see that.

Some of the other guys I mentioned previously. I think Louie has done some of that as well with Coach Bell. Some of the toughness he brings to us on our football team. I'm glad you pointed him out because, again, both those positions are not very glamorous positions. They're dirty-work positions that need to get done, and he has been getting the job done fairly well.

Appreciate it. Thank you, guys.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

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Phil Parker

Press Conference



PHIL PARKER: I would like to welcome everybody. Thank you for coming this afternoon. I'm sure that you know this bye week you have a lot of time to get your honey-dos done. I know I have had to go out and cut the grass a little bit and edge it. I know I got some of my stuff done. That's a beautiful time by yourself.

Anyway, I just wanted to welcome you guys and just talk to you a little bit what we're doing in this bye week. We're trying to evaluate a little bit of our self-scout and the things that we're looking at.

Obviously, some of the things that we're looking at is -- the biggest thing I look at is a lot of the explosive plays, how many we're giving up. I think it's a total of five.

I think big plays that we're giving up, we gave up 18 as a total, and that's a 20-yard pass or a 15-yard run.

Then, obviously, I think there's 24 chunk plays, which I call in between 10 and 14. You try to evaluate that and see is it the defense? Is it a guy? Are we in the right defense, or are we losing -- some of it's just basic leverage, football leverage that I always talk about that is so simple.

The other things that we always look at is our efficiency. Our efficiency is we're talking about every down and distance. You go first and 10. Are you second and 7?

If you are second and 8, we have to be successful at third and 4. I think over time we've been pretty good.

I think the last couple of games that we didn't hit our numbers that we expect to hit. So I think that is something we've definitely got to work on and see what we can do to improve that.

Another area that I think, in the red zone, we're doing a pretty decent job in the red zone as far as points entering into the red zone. I think we can do better a little bit. I think there's some opportunities out there.

One other thing is I look at is third downs. We were 67%

overall on third downs, but then if you add the fourth downs into it, you know, we gave up too many fourth downs. Might be one. Might be two. It kind of drops you down a little bit.

Just an opportunity to get off the field, and we didn't do it. Take-aways are down compared to what we're used to. We had some opportunities. We didn't take care of those things.

We're working just like everybody else. Very happy. Pleased the way the guys are working. Obviously, this is a week that we can get some of our starters a little bit of a rest and work some of the younger guys. By talking about some younger guys really that are really impressive that have stepped up that maybe not be in a starting position.

You look at a guy like Higgins or Craig or Graves, as young guys that are getting a lot of reps. Then another thing we have Terry Roberts that was in there, and then is he back out. We ended up putting Castro, who's really kind of filled in and did a really nice job for us there in a couple of games when he was playing the cash position. Then we flipped Cooper back outside to a corner.

That's kind of where we're at right now, and it's preparation for after we did our self-scout. It was really looking forward to seeing the next opponent and working on those guys.

And then obviously this thing that comes up every year is recruiting in the bye week. Very disinterested sometimes. It's like an interruption thing, but it's things you have to do to make sure you go out on the road in recruiting. And I'm sure a lot of us are going to be out in schools and watching some games.

I'm sure you guys are real happy that you guys don't have to go to games or have to do anything this weekend. Right? Kind of. Honey-dos?

I'll open it up to any questions you guys have.

Q. I have a question about Cooper, and cash is still a relatively new position as far as being a prominent position in your defense. Most of those guys, you know, Monte and Dane were safeties, and you played them at safety. He is transitioning from corner to play in this hybrid position. How challenging is that for him

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and for that position? Then, also, what kind of progress has he made as a true sophomore basically doing what he is doing?

PHIL PARKER: Go back to first thing, we had him at corner, and I think what you really mean was he ended up in corner at the end of the Kentucky game. He can play -- when we first recruited him, we recruited him as a defensive back and didn't know exactly where he would fit in.

He has the ability of playing actually corner cash, I think strong safety, can play free safety. I think he can play multiple positions back there.

For a guy to be a sophomore and do the things that he can do and understand what he needs to do I think is really good. It's really an elite -- in my thing, just looking at him and saying how can he do all this stuff?

He has great balance. He has great football awareness. He sees things, and he is always on his feet and has always, what I say, play with good leverage.

I'm really pleased the way he goes. He has great ball skills. Some catches that he makes during practice that are what I call freakish. You know what I mean? One-handers behind and all this stuff. You say I'm sure he can play multiple positions, but he is definitely mature enough, hard worker. Always in the film room or always working.

I used to see him in the summertime all the time just going out there to the indoor trying to work on his footwork and stuff like that. He does a good job. A lot of those guys do.

Q. Was there a single point where you realized Cooper, this guy is special?

PHIL PARKER: I guess when you go out there and you are with these guys every day, you kind of get used to what you are seeing. My expectations of him become higher every time he goes out there. Obviously, he started real fast and started going to it, and I think he is still improving. I think he has a little bit more to give even. That's the way you look at it.

If you look at it, everybody wants to be perfect. Even if he makes a play, you want to be perfect, right?

And nobody is perfect. Everybody will say you can't be perfect. But you can try to be perfect. If you get to try to be perfect, you can be excellent, right, instead of just going around and being average.

Q. Phil, a couple of the players last week talked about doing a better job winning first down against the run. How much of a concern is that for you moving forward?

PHIL PARKER: Yeah, any time. I think you start talking about looking at how you are going to stop the run and make it a manageable third down, and that's been an issue for us.

I think we've done as best we can right now. It's getting down. Are we doing the right things? Do we have the guys in the right spot? Are they putting us in different formations and getting different guys in the box and trying to do that, and we're trying to solve those problems and making sure that we're not putting guys in position that they can't make a play.

Now, I think you can look at every play, and there's mistakes sometimes all over that nobody really sees. I just think we need to improve our fundamentals. The more you improve your fundamentals and they become a natural thing, then I think that's when everything comes together and you have a better chance of stopping them on first down.

Q. Look at all three games in Big Ten play. I think you have allowed points on the opening drive. All of them have been long drives. Michigan I think took a lot of time off the clock. Illinois, 17 plays maybe. Is that an issue for you, do you feel like, or why do you feel like that's happening?

PHIL PARKER: I think we have to really to go back and look and evaluate when you could have got off the field on third down. We could have got off in the Illinois game on third down, and we were going to get off the field, and we got a penalty.

Some of the things, sometimes the guy makes a good catch. Sometimes the guy doesn't play with very good technique. Sometimes it's a shitty call, you know what I mean?

Those things you just have to keep on working at. The guys that we're playing against, I think are on scholarship too. They're trying to win too. It's very competitive. The sense of urgency to make sure you're exact, and you have to be perfect.

Q. Nothing you're doing differently on the first drive of the game as far as like --

PHIL PARKER: No, I don't think so. I always think it's important to stop the first third down. There's no question

about that. That's how you see the game going. Usually it depends on how you react to the first down and how well do your guys know the team that you are playing?

I think that's an issue. If you don't stop the third down, I think sometimes kids say, oh, God, no, here we go again. You know what I mean? I think you have to do a better job. I have to do a better job of getting them in the right positions to make those plays and to help those guys out.

Usually a first third down in a series I think is very important.

Q. What have you seen from Jay Higgins this year?

PHIL PARKER: I just like his motor, the way he goes. Very flexible. He is aggressive. He is very serious, and he is mature. I think he just loves the game of football. You like that energy.

He brings a lot of energy to the defensive unit over there. It's fun to have him around. You like him to be on the field, and he has been in some spots where he had to come in there and help us out. I think I can see more of that here in the future.

Q. Coach Ferentz has talked a few times about concerns about depth at cornerback with a lot of different injuries. How would you assess how TJ Hall, (indiscernible) Jamison Heinz, and others have developed behind Riley, Cooper --

PHIL PARKER: I guess you look at Heinz and TJ Hall, they've been working. This is a good week that we had. The last two days of practice they got a lot of reps here to show that they're improving and stepping forward to what they have to do.

Are they exactly where I want them to be? No. I mean, that's why they're 2s, right? Hopefully we can push them and keep on pushing them.

We have another six weeks to go with these guys after the bye week, and they need to improve just like the first-teamers need to improve, just like we do as coaches need to improve.

If you're not evaluating everything, and the kids have to take it to, hey, they have to look at it. Am I doing the best I can? Can I do better?

Just like any game that you go into, it doesn't matter whether you win or lose. You are always looking at the plays. Don't worry about the plays that you played and that were really good plays. Look at the plays you didn't make

or have an opportunity to make. Then go back and look at the plays you did make.

You made a tackle. Could it have been better? Could you have been in better position? Could you have tackled them faster, quicker if you would have went through your progression faster? You always evaluate. That's what you do as a coach. It's a never-ending battle.

You critique. We critique ourselves as coaches. We critique our players every day. It's a business. That's what it is.

If you don't and you stop doing that, and if a kid doesn't want to be coached or doesn't want to be critiqued on his technique fundamentals and stuff like that, then eventually I think guys don't coach them anymore. He is not listening.

I think all of our guys are coachable, and they want to be coached, and every kid that's trying their heart out every day to go out to practice and the film room, whatever they do, whether it's in the weight room or taking care of their bodies.

Q. What kind of a lift can Yahya Black bring to you now that it seems like he is on track to play at the end of this month?

PHIL PARKER: I think obviously you had a big asset that got hurt in there early and has had a little bit of an affect on us of a guy getting enough reps and making sure that we don't wear out the D-line.

He is going to add something to us. I don't know how much he weighs now, but he is a good-looking dude that can help us out.

I think the first couple of days of coming back I don't think he was just going each drill one-on-one, whether it was blocks drill. Was he doing to get better? Then we have the team. He is getting better. We still have another week and a half. I think he will be ready to roll. Hopefully he does have a chance to get there and help us.

Q. You mentioned Deontae Craig earlier. What have you seen from his development? And, also, Ethan Hurkett getting opportunities.

PHIL PARKER: I've seen both of those guys work really hard. They go hard every day in practice, and one thing about it, I see the maturity a little bit with Craig as far as the way he is going about his business and the way he is moving on the field. He gives us another opportunity to put another guy in the field that has a chance to make some plays.

Hurkett is the same thing. I just like his demeanor all the time. He is a hard worker, goes hard. We're always trying to make these guys improve. Wherever they're at now, I want them to be better by tomorrow, you know? That's the way we think.

Q. What have been your impressions of Nwankpa in the first weeks, and how do you think he can fit in the defense the second half of the season?

PHIL PARKER: Every day he picks something up. Every day. Today I thought he actually practiced at a higher level. Do I think he has a lot more upside? Yes. Is he getting there? Yes.

He has to grow up faster, which is hard. But I'm very happy and pleased the way he goes about his business. He has done a good job. He knows he can improve too. That's a good thing.

The good thing is when you are sitting there watching him practice, you start seeing things now that show up and say, eventually. I don't know when, but it's going to happen.

Q. I don't know how much you know about Ohio State, their offense.

PHIL PARKER: I'm from Ohio. (Laughing.)

Q. Looks like a really dynamic offense. We won't get to talk to you before the game, obviously. How is this different from any challenge that you will have seen maybe in a long time?

PHIL PARKER: I think Ohio State has had great players since I was a little kid. They have had a lot of NFL players on the team.

We're just going to have to -- they're going to motion and shift and trade. They have athletes that they can get the ball to, a dynamic quarterback that can get the ball to them. They have good running backs. They have a good offensive line.

When you start seeing all that, you really have to play well. They're a well-coached team. I don't know what their averaging. Something maybe around 50 points a game or something like that. I don't know where they are as far as Big Ten thing is. I couldn't tell you that right now. I think they're a really good football team. It's what we've seen on the film.

You've got to practice well, and you have to play well, and you have to be in the right spots. You have to have eye

discipline just like any other game. You have to play with great leverage, I think.

Leverage is a word that we throw around, but leverage goes from everything about your base alignment and if three or four guys go over this way, well, you better -- that's the enemy. Let's move our troops over there.

If they go the other way, you switch it over. You got to know how to line up and make sure you're leveraging the formations and leverage the ball when you are going to tackle it. You have to play with leverage when you are defeating blocks. That's what you do. Right?

Same thing with defensive backs. You are getting blocked. You have to get off blocks. Same thing as a back end. Same thing as a linebacker. Same thing as a defensive line.

You have to separate and get off blocks. You can't make the tackle. If you are tied up with somebody that's blocking you, it's hard to tackle. I think. But you've got to be around the ball to make a tackle. That's one. You have to be around the ball to intercept the ball. You have to be able to recover it, a fumble. If you're not around the ball, you can't recover a fumble.

We're preaching the guys run the ball. I think our guys are really working hard. They look at it and say, hey, they're all in. It's really a great, great atmosphere the way it goes.

The way we're practicing today was good. I thought it was really good.

Q. You look at Quinn Schulte and his impact. He made some pretty big hits just right away. Seems to be in pretty good position throughout the season thus far. In what ways is he similar to some of his predecessors like Jack or Jake Gervase and some of the others who are walk-on --

PHIL PARKER: Brett Greenwood. He was just here yesterday.

Q. With Pat, yeah. How is he like those guys, and how is he different, and what kind of --

PHIL PARKER: Very similar to I would say Brett. I categorize him in that thing. Very quiet. Doesn't say very much. Just goes to work. Understands what you are asking him to do. He works for perfection. That's what he is trying to do.

Is he the biggest guy? No. Neither were other guys, right? What he does in his preparation and the way he goes



about his business, is he doing it the best he can, and he has done a really good job. That was another guy that I probably forgot to mention that was a guy that's just your starting safety for the last six games, and he has really done a good job for us.

Q. How much does losing Jestin Jacobs kind of impacted what you want to do with your defense just because of what he was able to do in space?

PHIL PARKER: It's hard when you lose a good player. It's hard for him going through that and for us to be able to do it. The good thing about the way we approached it, we had a lot of guys playing a lot of different positions. We would move the guys around. Campbell used to play outside. You have Benson that played outside. You had Higgins to play outside.

I think, with doing that, that really helped us in the long run right now, not knowing that we're going to have him out for the rest of the year, but that was a benefit that Coach Wallace thought it was important for him to keep on moving those guys around to make sure they got experience to go out.

It's hard to go ahead and say, "Hey, you go up there and get in there, now you're playing this position," when you were playing a Will back or playing the mike back. I thought that was very beneficial for us to do that and a lot of times in preseason.

Q. Do you ever feel like when your offensive unit is struggling that you need to take up more of the slack, or do you ever say that to your players? Or do they just internally feel that when they notice that they need to make a play to win the game as opposed to just playing their position?

PHIL PARKER: My thought about the way we coach on defense is we're looking for perfection on every play. So I don't care what the score is. I could go off and we could win the game or lose the game. Everything is going to go on to what's happened to that play and how did you do.

And I'm going to evaluate you on that play: Are you giving me enough effort? Are you giving me hustle? Are you in the right positions? Are you making the right communications? Are you making mental mistakes, critical errors, leaving a guy open when you have a man-to-man? Those are the things that we coach on.

That's all that we can control what our guys are doing. That's our job. They all know it. Our job is to go out there and play the best that we can play to our ability. I think they've done that.

I see no guys ever sitting there questioning anything that's going on about -- all they do is worry about, hey, you get off the field and get to the bench; let's make sure we cover our stuff that we need to cover, and let's get it corrected as fast as we can and make sure that we're giving them enough information to help those guys on the field. That's the way we look at it.

Q. You've allowed ten points or less in five games. What's your kind of evaluation of your defense right now, and how much better can you get? Especially playing some pretty explosive offenses in the second half.

PHIL PARKER: Well, I'm always looking to make sure that they're playing better than the week before. You start looking at how many points you give up. This many, this many. That really doesn't matter after a while.

Hey, did you win or did you lose? That's what it comes down to a little bit to everybody in the outside world. To me it's the way they go about the game. How good this team can be? You know, don't know. Don't know. I think they still have room to improve to even be better than where we're at right now.

I think we gave up some cheap explosive plays that might have led into a touchdown or something like that. Obviously, you go all the way back to the Michigan game. You know, there are some things out there that we left on the table that I thought we could have done a better job.

I'm still going to preach to these guys that, hey, we need to play well, and our standard keeps on going up every time you become a better football player, a better game. I want you to play your best game always on the next time.

Q. Logan Lee and Terry Roberts went out with injuries last time. Do you think they'll be back with Ohio State?

PHIL PARKER: I think so. It's a football game. You get halfway through the year, some of these guys -- you look at Terry, possibility of being his last year. I'm sure that he wants to come back. The faster you get back, you only have six more guaranteed. I think guys do what they have to do to get back.

I don't know exactly what's going on with both of them, but I'm sure that there's nothing major.

Q. What do you see as the next step for Jack Campbell?

PHIL PARKER: Next step? I think later today we have a



position meeting, and I think he is going to be in there. I think that's what you are asking. What is he going to do next? He might in class.

Q. Next step of his development.

PHIL PARKER: Jack is -- I think what he is he is a unique guy. He is a full-go motor guy all the time. I don't know. We played him a little bit as a money backer last week.

The kid can do a lot of different things. Just let him keep on going out and keep leading. How far can he go? I don't know. I don't have that vision. If I did, I probably wouldn't be sitting here as a coach. You know what I mean?

He is doing all the right things that he has to do, and I'm really happy and pleased the way the leadership is with him and Benson. Really I think we've got good leadership all the way across the board, from top to bottom, everywhere in this building.

Thank you, guys.

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