

Guard John Urschel
Big Ten Spring Football Teleconference
April 11, 2013

Q: How is spring football going?

A: Spring ball's going pretty good. I think this is a good second spring for us under Coach OB. Last year, we were just getting introduced to the offense, learning a lot of new things, getting familiar with the coaching staff, getting familiar with how Coach O'Brien runs practice, how he coaches. This spring, we're just much more comfortable with each other; the players with the coaches, the coaches with the players. Now we're really trying to add some things into the offense and really improve upon the things we did last fall. For the offensive line, in particular, I'd say, we've done a great job of filling some of the holes that were left by the leaving seniors. I'd say we've got a solid front five who have played a lot of football, guys that really know what they're doing. I'd say we've had some of the rising juniors and sophomores really step up. We lost (center) Matt Stankiewitch, but I'd say our center, Ty Howle, has done a great job in spring ball of taking his game to another level. I don't think we're going to miss a beat at that position.

Q: If you could only do one thing between learning and teaching math and practicing and playing football, what would you choose and why?

A: I'd say practice football, to be perfectly honest. I really, really enjoy going out there, hitting the defense a little bit. Especially days where it's more run heavy, we get some 9-on-7 going. It's very, very enjoyable and you're only young once. I think I'm pretty blessed to be able to go out and every day and practice and have some fun.

Q: Coach O'Brien was talking about limiting some contact and tackling for you guys this spring to stay healthy. How different is practice from last year and has it been working? Do you feel that less contact is making for healthier bodies?

A: I've certainly noticed that we're having less contact. To be perfectly honest, I don't actually notice a physical difference in terms of what I do on a daily basis or in different team periods. Honestly for offensive lineman, whether it's a live drill where guys are tackling or guys are fighting off or just tracking, the offensive line, we block the same regardless. I haven't really noticed much of a difference at all at my position, but I'm sure if you asked some of the running backs and receivers, they'll tell you differently.

Q: Can you talk about how the quarterbacks have looked and what impresses you about each one of them?

A: Honestly, if you guys want to talk quarterbacks, you're probably talking to the wrong person in the wrong position group. I spend a majority of my time blocking for these guys, so I don't really get to see their decision-making process in terms of passing. I don't really even see if they threw the best route or if threw the best ball. I don't really get a feel for these things. What I get a feel for is how these guys do controlling the huddle, how they do at the line of scrimmage, getting us out of bad plays and into good ones. Honestly, both of these quarterbacks have done a great job of that. (Steven) Bench has been under the system for a whole year and he's very, very solid and has a great understanding of it. (Tyler) Ferguson, he just got here but, man, he's picked it up quick. Both of these guys are doing a great job of understanding the entire offense and really taking a leadership role at that position.

Q: You mentioned Ty Howle having a great spring. Has anyone else on the offensive line jumped out at you as having a great spring?

A: I could talk about Ty all day. If you asked me, he's one of the most underrated players on the team. Aside from him, I'd say Miles Dieffenbach has really stepped his game up. He started a lot of games for us last year, he's a good football player, but he's really tried to take his game to the next level. Honestly, that's what we're all trying to work on as an offensive line, but he's another guy that's stepped his game up.

Q: Can you talk about who is running with the first team on the offensive line besides you, Ty, and Miles?

A: For the five guys that who are running with the ones right now, it's Miles, Ty, and myself, for the interior linemen. For tackles, we have (Adam) Gress playing at right tackle and Donovan (Smith) at left tackle, with (Eric) Shrive taking some reps as well. Also (Angelo) Mangiro is taking some reps with the ones a little bit, rotating with the three of us.

Q: What have you noticed about (Kyle) Baublitz on the defensive line this spring?

A: I've noticed that he's playing better, he's really stepped his game up. He's taking a lot more reps than he normally would be because some guys are banged up. Sometimes when you have to step up into a higher position that maybe you wouldn't be in normally, you get a little concerned, you're worried about how you'll do, you're worried about whether you can play at that level. Baublitz has really taken his game to the next level and I think he's going to play a lot of football for us this fall on the interior. I think he's going to be a good player for us, just from what I've seen going against him in practice.

Q: Why do you say you could talk about Ty all day? What has he done that impressed you?

A: There's a difference between being on the inside of the football team as one of the players and being on the outside covering it. There's a big information gap. I'd say this is one of the things. For lack of a better way to put it, you guys have missed on this guy. He's a good football player and I've thought this since we got here. Honestly, when I got here, I thought Ty was the best offensive lineman in our year of the seven of us. He's a strong, tough football player with good fundamentals and plays on his feet. This is a guy who isn't exactly blessed with great intangibles, maybe, like Donovan. He's not a really tall guy, but he gets the job done. He's a consistent player. You don't see him missing a lot of days with injuries. He's a tough, hard-working football player. I'm blessed to have him next to me.