

December 16, 2011



An interview with:

COACH KIRK FERENTZ COACH NORM PARKER

THE MODERATOR: Coach Ferentz.

COACH FERENTZ: Welcome. Glad everybody is here. Just a couple words before I turn it over to Norm. We've been running around recruiting. This is our last day of contacts, last time we're allowed out. As a staff, we've been kind of running around, doing that. Some of the guys have been working on Oklahoma.

I think we're looking forward to having the banquet tomorrow. Our guys have finished up their finals, then we'll be able to turn our sights towards Oklahoma on Sunday.

I think we have 13 guys graduating tomorrow. All the seniors will be excused from football activities tomorrow, then we'll have our banquet tomorrow night.

Side-bar there, I think Tyler Nielsen, I remember the days when academic performance was rewarded. Tyler graduated in business with pretty hefty credentials last May. He by far gets the prize. He has a final this afternoon and one this evening. He has the last two time slots as the reward for being a good student. We're all kind of chuckling about that.

The guys have been busy. As I said, we'll turn our sights to Oklahoma after tomorrow's banquet.

I thought the main thing today is for Norm to have a chance to visit with all of you. The announcement was made last Sunday about his retirement. It's really fitting this is the year Norm was already selected to be AFCA Assistant Coach of the Year. Probably long overdue in my mind and our staff's mind, but a real fitting reward.

I think everybody is aware of Norm's expertise as a defensive coach. The record speaks for itself and the numbers speak for themselves. I point this out every time I have a chance to talk about Norm, but I think his impact, the effect he had on this football program goes way beyond the football part of things. I don't care if you're talking to our staff, players, support staff, they'd all tell you the same thing: his impact has really gone beyond any defense he may have called or coached during the week. That's something we're real appreciative of.

I've been here 23 years now. My first nine-year stint was with defensive coordinator Bill Brashier, as fine a man and as fine a defensive coach as I've ever been with. Then Norm comes along and has just done a stellar job in all regards.

I know I speak for everybody on behalf of our program, how appreciative we've been of Norm's efforts and all he's done for us. Without further ado, I'll turn it over to you, Norm.

COACH PARKER: Do you want to talk about Oklahoma (laughter)?

Like he said, you know, I'm retiring. I would really like to thank Mr. Barta and Kirk. The University of Iowa has been super to myself and my family, my kids. The whole thing has been a great, great, great experience. I want to thank them and thank the players.

You know the fantastic fans we've got. From the secretaries to the equipment people, to the medical people that kept me standing, I got to say thank you.

It's all been a lot of fun. It's all been a lot of fun. I'm very appreciative to everybody, to everybody - even you guys (laughter).

Any questions?

Q. Do you plan to stay in Iowa City?

COACH PARKER: Yeah, I'd like to stay around. I think the big thing now is to see if we can slow down these Booner Sooners and then

see where we go from there.

Q. Will you hang around the football office?

COACH PARKER: They'll probably throw me out (laughter).

I'll probably be like Carl Jackson. When Carl retired, he used to come and see us once a day. I think he did it to get out of the house. Now he calls us once a day on the phone.

But I don't know. I'll have a hard time sitting at home, I know that. I like being around. I like being around the guys, being around the players. It's the fun of it. I feel like a guy, that I'm 70 years old and I've never really gone to work a day in my life. I never felt like, Oh, I've got to go to work today. I've never felt like that one day. So I guess that's good. I'm sure you guys feel the same way.

Q. Do you see yourself still in contact with the student-athletes?

COACH PARKER: I don't see any official capacity. I don't even know what the rules are there. I don't know what I'm allowed to do.

Q. What went behind the decision for this year?

COACH PARKER: As much as anything, as much as anything, I think you got to be fair to the team, you got to be fair to the program. When it's time to go, it's time to go. I have always said, I never want to coach just to have a job. When you can't do it and do it right, do it the way it should be done, then it's time to let somebody else do it.

So I think in all fairness to the team, the players, the other coaches, myself, it's time to get out. It's time to go bounce some grandkids around on your knee.

Q. Norm, is there a moment or a game or a win that stands out in your mind that you'll tell your grandkids that that was a lot of fun?

COACH PARKER: Yeah, you know, I don't know. There's plays. You remember plays that happen. You remember plays. You remember incidents. You remember different things happening, funny things happening, as opposed to a win or something like that. You remember plays that happened.

The hard part about coaching is you remember the losses more than the wins. That's the hard part. I'm not going to talk about all of

them that I lost. I'm not going to bring that up again.

Q. When you were a young coach in 1965 at St. John's, can you talk about how the game has changed since that day when you first put a whistle on till now?

COACH PARKER: I think the thing that the public really doesn't understand, people don't understand, is you hear of guys playing in the old days and now. Believe me, they are so much bigger, stronger, faster, and hit harder than ever before.

From now to 20 years ago, it's a different game. It's a different game. You get old geezers like me that say, That's when football was tough. No, it's tougher now. Now they're bigger, they're stronger, they're faster, and they have no fear. It's a harder game. I think when you even take that to pro football, it even goes up another notch, it even goes up another one.

Q. Is that I don't want to say 'scary' but shocking for you?

COACH PARKER: Yeah, yeah. You would go down on that field and all of a sudden these things are flying around down there hitting each other. You say to yourself, Damn, man, these guys are going at each other. It's changed. They're bigger.

It's like the Olympics. They run faster, they jump higher, they throw the shot further. They're better. They're bigger, they're stronger, they're faster, they're better than ever before. Ten years from now... When does it stop? How fast can a guy run? How high can a guy jump? I don't know, but it will go up. They'll get better.

Q. What persuaded you to come to Iowa and join this staff 13 years ago?

COACH PARKER: The opportunity, Kirk. I always thought when I coached at the other Big Ten schools, I thought this was a nice place. I heard a lot of good things about Kirk. We had some mutual friends that sort of talked about the thing. I talked to them. I just thought it was a good opportunity, which it was. It was a great move. It was a great move. It was a lot of fun.

Q. Have you heard from a lot of your players and what have they said?

COACH PARKER: I've heard from them.

They've said, you know, nice things. Not many guys going to call you up and say, It's about time you quit. Not many guys going to call you up and say that (laughter). They've said nice things.

Q. If you had to pick one or two of your former players...

COACH PARKER: I'm not going to do that.

Q. ...who would you pick to help you stop Landry, the Oklahoma offense? Who would you pick to help you?

COACH PARKER: That's a hard question. I'd like to know what Matt Roth is doing that day, who could go get that quarterback. I mean, there's a lot of them you'd like. There's a lot of them you'd like at different positions.

I think a lot of positions have to play very well for us. I'd like to know what Considine is doing that day. I think the free safety is going to be an intricate part of what we're doing. To try to stop them, you have to have a free safety. I'd like to know what Considine is doing that day, see if he has that ability left.

Q. How does it feel to have your final challenge be against an offense like Oklahoma, all the weapons they have, how explosive they are?

COACH PARKER: Got to play somebody. Everybody's got to be someplace that day. Got to be there. Where else would you rather be than doing that? You wake up in the morning, you got to be someplace. What the hell, might as well be here. Let's go have a football game, see if you can win. That's what you do it for.

Q. If a college kid somewhere here in town said, I'm thinking of going into coaching, what do I really need to know, what would you tell him?

COACH PARKER: I would tell him that it's rewarding, but it's long hours, and if you are going to do it you have to do it the right way. Don't do it halfway. Don't insult the game.

To me, I think the game is a very important thing. If you do it half-assed, then you're insulting the game. If that's what you're going to do, don't go into it. If you're going to go into it 100 miles an hour, full heart, then go do it, but don't insult the game. Don't insult the players and don't insult the game.

Q. I know you spent 12 years at Michigan State, you've been at Vanderbilt, East Carolina. That jumps off your résumé as a different location. Did you kind of find a home here at the end, do you think?

COACH PARKER: I think this, without question, is the nicest community to live in of all the places I've been. And I like the other places, I don't want to say that they weren't nice, but Iowa, this is a nice place, this is a nice place. It's got great schools. My kids weren't young enough that they would have gone to school here, but I think this is a great place to raise a family.

College Town USA to me it is. I think it's a nice place.

Q. Could you talk a bit about a person or a moment that had the greatest effect on you in your career.

COACH PARKER: In terms of what?

Q. Let's say your coaching development.

COACH PARKER: I think all the guys that I worked for. I could give you sort of a sentimental story, but I don't want to get into that.

I think my high school coach was very important. I think my dad. I think my dad. I'm one of those guys that still at this age, my dad is long gone, but I still idolize my dad. He always encouraged me to do sports, to do other things. I think probably him more than anybody else.

Q. What is it about football that did it for you that got you out the bed in the morning, made you excited?

COACH PARKER: I think when you look at it, you know, you heard it said a lot of times, it is the ultimate team game. It is the ultimate team game. I think just being with the guys, being with the team, being part of something, just that. That got me going. That's what I like. I like to be part of the team. I like to be around the guys.

I think you often hear if you hang out with those younger people, they keep you young. I don't know if they've done that. I'm like a relic. But to me that's fun. That's fun.

Q. How are you able to relate year after year after year with them, with the different generations?

COACH PARKER: I honest to God don't

think the players have changed. I don't think the players have changed nearly as much as people think they have. I think the parents have changed. Don't get me going on that.

The kids, they're the same. They're the same. I don't care if he's a kid from South Dakota or he's a kid from the inner city of Detroit. I think Abdul (Hodge) and (Chad) Greenway, they taught me as much as anything. I mean, here you had the white guy from South Dakota, the pig farmer from South Dakota, and the kid from the inner city of Miami, and those two guys were like this. They were so tight, it was unbelievable.

The beauty of it was when they looked at each other, when Abdul looked at Greenway, he didn't see a white guy, he just saw his buddy. When Greenway looked at Abdul, he didn't see a black guy, he just saw his buddy. And they worked hard. That's what they looked at, what they saw when they looked at each other. To me it was a teaching thing for me to watch those two guys interact because that's the way they were.

It would be nice if everybody looked at everybody like that, if everybody could really just look at everybody like that. They didn't see a difference. There's no difference to them. They just saw their buddy. I really thought that was cool, just watching those two guys interact. I thought that was great.

Q. When you look at Oklahoma, without their top wide receiver, top runningback, how different has their offense become because of injuries?

COACH PARKER: None. They just reload. They just reload. I mean, they take this guy out and put that guy in. Different number. Same ability, different face, different size.

They lost two great players, but they've got great players. They've got a great football team. They've got a great football team. Talent-wise they're probably as good as anybody.

Q. Iowa's defense, did it all end up the way you thought it would 13 years ago?

COACH PARKER: I used to be a blitz-o-maniac, a blitzaholic. You sort of do what you can do with what you got. You do what you do because of what you have and who you're playing. I mean, I think you got to adjust a little bit. But, you know, the basic idea is to stop the other guy. Regardless of how you got to do it, you still have to try to stop him.

Q. (Question regarding Iowa's defense.)

COACH PARKER: If you had to classify what we had, and we've had some good athletes, but basically I think we've had tough, smart, hard-working guys, and then we've had some guys ability-wise, there's some what you would classify I don't know if you want to call them superstars, but there's been some of those guys that have been in there.

When you take guys like Mitch King, guys like that. If Considine walked in the door or Pat Angerer walked in the door and said he's a middle linebacker. Who the hell you kidding, middle linebacker in pro football.

But he's tough, he's smart, he's overachieving. He's an Iowa guy, he's an Iowa guy. That's what they are. That's what they are.

I think they work hard. Angerer, King, those guys work hard. So you have that core of your team, and then outsiders come in and they have to join that team. They have to take on those work ethics. That's the idea. That's the idea.

The core of it is made up of King, Angerer, Considine, those type of guys, then anybody that comes in has to join that core, has to join that core. If you do that, you got enough guys doing that, then you got a halfway decent defense.

Q. Angerer called you a genius the other day.

COACH PARKER: Angerer has been hit in the head too much. Got to examine his helmet (laughter).

No, Angerer is a good guy. If you look at Pat Angerer physically, he tells you he's a middle linebacker in the National Football League, you would tell him you're Vince Lombardi or somebody. But he's a good football player, a darn good football player.

Q. Would you like one of the current assistants on this staff to step in for you?

COACH PARKER: I want to see whoever Kirk wants to hire.

Q. You worked with a lot of these guys. Are they capable?

COACH PARKER: I'm not in charge of that. You're throwing out loaded questions at me now. I came in peace (laughter).

Q. How important was it for you to come back for the season after the amputation?

COACH PARKER: I think personally it was important just to prove that you could do it, just to prove that you could do it. 'The leg ran me off': I didn't want that to happen. Just to prove that you could do it. I don't know if that makes any sense or not.

But, you know, I can remember when I was a little kid, we used to put a rock in your shoe, you would see if you could walk all day with the stone in your shoe to see if you could do it. It hurt like hell, but you didn't want to take it out, just to prove that you could do it.

Q. Is that one of the things that you'll take away from this final season, that you did prove you were able to do it?

COACH PARKER: It's something I'll know. It's something I'll know. When I read that article about the kid in the paper yesterday that's playing middle linebacker and fullback, it makes me look like a piker. I felt like a sheep. I'm walking around, and he's playing middle linebacker and fullback. Sort of makes me look not real tough.

I admire that guy. I admire that guy. I mean, he must be one tough kid to be able to do that. He should win that Rudy award, whatever that award is. I can't imagine what he's doing.

Q. What did Kirk say when you told him it was time?

COACH FERENTZ: Glad you're gone (laughter).

No, he was very nice. He was very nice.

Q. What did your wife say?

COACH PARKER: I'm not sure she was that nice.

She didn't say much, you know. I hadn't talked it over with her. It wasn't like it was something we talked over a lot. Sort of, well, if that's the way you feel, you shouldn't do it any longer if that's the way you feel.

My kids were happy. They were afraid I was going to die on the field. They were all good, you know, so... I ain't going to die, don't think.

Q. What have other teams been able to do to slow Oklahoma down?

COACH PARKER: They were going 100 miles an hour, then Texas Tech beat them. It was like, Oh, we're not going to be the national

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champs. Then they lost another game. Other than Oklahoma State, nobody has really slowed them down. I mean, they move the ball. They move the ball.

It's not so much what they do, that they do anything fancy, it's the speed that they do it. It's not only the speed they execute the play but the time there is in between plays. It's almost like they line up, run a play faster than you can get lined up. It's as fast as you can get lined up, then they run another play, then they run another play. They'll go with no gain, no gain, no gain, then all of a sudden it's 15 yards, 20 yards, 25 yards, and they're in the end zone. But it is boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom. It's the speed that they run in between the plays. I mean, it's fast.

The hard part is going to be simulating that in practice. How are you going to get that simulated in practice? Then during the game, they get you out on the field, they get teams out on the field, they get tired, but there isn't any of that waving your hand, Hey, coach, I'm tired, get me out of here. There's not time to get you out of there. Stay in there.

They go fast. They go fast. It's fast-break football. It's like fast-break football. If they were a basketball team, they sure as hell don't need a shot clock, they'd be gone. First team to 100 wins, which seems to be the mentality. A year ago they were trying for those games. They can put points on the board fast.

Q. What would you tell the person that will take your job?

COACH PARKER: I'd tell them it's a great job and good luck. I'd tell them that the guys are going to fight hard. I'd tell them you got good people, going to work for a good person, work in a good place. I think you'd tell them congratulations. That's what I'd tell them, you know. I don't know if that's sort of what you're thinking, but that's what I'd tell them.

It's a good deal. It's a good situation. I enjoyed it. I had a great time. I had a great time. Don't drive too fast down Melrose, you get a parking ticket. That guy out there will get you. Other than that, that's the only hazard, that cop out on Melrose.

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