

University of Iowa Football

Media Conference

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Seth Wallace



COACH WALLACE: After seven practices, you could call it probably midway through our spring practice, but it's a great opportunity for us, great opportunity for myself to share with you the progress on our linebackers.

We certainly look forward to seeing everybody in Des Moines this Friday. It's a big event. We've made some changes to it. We're looking forward to see the youth up there, be able to see our fans up there, kind of reconnect with that area of the state here mid spring.

I'll give you an update on our linebackers.

We have two that are sidelined, Ben Niemann and Jacob Sobotka. Those two have yet to be out on the field. We don't expect them to be out on the field this spring. Their rehab is going well. They're both ahead of schedule. Right where we need to be according to our medical staff.

The three that are running with the first team right now would be Bo Bower, Josey Jewell and Aaron Mends. In the second team, you'll begin to realize that we're not real deep. You can look at our depth chart and figure that out as well.

The second team includes Jack Hockaday, includes Angelo Garbutt, Nick Wilson, then Justin Jinning. Right now we've got seven guys out there.

The group is not big, but I can assure you that what they're getting right now is they're getting a lot of experience, they're getting a ton of reps. If you're able to spend time at our practice, you'll find we give reps to the ones, twos and threes. I go into every staff meeting every day saying, Coach, I don't have any threes. My threes are my twos.

Those guys are out there for a good deal of snaps. Because of that they will gain experience this spring and they'll certainly move forward with that.

The guys in the first group, they're doing well. As you can imagine, there's two guys out there with a good deal of experience. Aaron Mends is at the Will linebacker position. He's gaining experience right now. He hasn't seen a whole lot with Cole Fisher really solidifying that position last year. But Aaron's jumped

in there, gained valuable experience, took what growth he had last year and he's continued to build on it.

Behind him you've got Jack Hockaday and Justin Jinning. Jack is doing well. Justin is doing well at the Will linebacker position.

At the Mike linebacker position, we're two deep, you have Josey and Angelo there. At the Leo position, our Sam linebacker, you have got Bo and Nick Wilson.

Again, depth is a little bit of a concern right now. But the nice thing is, is we're gaining some valuable experience.

With that being said, I'll open it up to any questions that you guys have, linebackers, anything that's on your mind.

Q. Talk about Josey a little bit. He came on strong last year. Continuing to improve as he goes along?

COACH WALLACE: Josey is the leader of this team. I think everybody in the room would recognize that. He's a leader. If you just come out there and watch him practice, you can tell he's a leader. He doesn't have to open his mouth. The way he goes about things, conducts himself, what he expects of those around him.

So really we're trying to increase everybody's value on this team. He's got a way in which he can do that even though his value may be a little bit greater than some others.

But right now from a leadership standpoint, holding everybody accountable defensively, everybody's eyes are on him. He's our signal caller defensively with usually a safety helping him out.

He's got to continue to be vocal and he's got to continue to just conduct himself with a presence that a middle linebacker should in the Big Ten.

Q. How has he grown from an intangible aspect from playing a little bit, injured his freshman year, to now being potential an All-American linebacker?

COACH WALLACE: I don't know where he would be accolade-wise. Certainly, like I talked about, there is value to the team. I talk to our guys about that.

Just going out there every day, improving, will increase your value to the team. I think that's really all that he's looking at doing right now, is just going out there and doing everything he can to make those around him better, including himself.

Q. He wasn't heavily recruited. What was he lacking as a recruit?

COACH WALLACE: I wasn't around here when he was being recruited. He showed up before I got here. I would really hate to say. Outside what I've gathered from Coach Morgan, I think it was just probably the projection of him. He played multiple positions in high school, I know that. But projecting him as a scholarship linebacker in the Big Ten is maybe what held some folks around here back.

Q. Cole Fisher exploded onto the scene his final year here. Anybody you could see that could be a similar storyline heading into 2016?

COACH WALLACE: Yeah, we're going to need somebody to really be one of those stories. I know Coach Ferentz speaks on that all the time, that we've got guys that emerge. We talk to our guys about emerging and breaking through, creating that new story. I'd hate to speculate or predict who that could be. I can guarantee you that will happen, we'll have some stories like that develop. Right now it's probably too early.

With the guys I've got, the seven that are out there, the two that are in rehab right now trying to work their way back, I can assure you that's what they're trying to create, they're trying to create one of those new stories.

Q. Will you look maybe more this year to get Josey, to get Ben off the special teams and build that core with your guys?

COACH WALLACE: We've always placed a special emphasis on special teams around here. We're going to continue to use who is needed on special teams.

As the season increases, and last year we were fortunate to enjoy a 14-game season, so you're really one more than maybe some other teams, there's a lot of miles on the tires.

Cole Fisher is a good example of somebody that we probably rode as hard as we could, so to speak, because he led our team in snaps and in special teams snaps. Over the course of a 14-game season in the Big Ten, that starts to wear on you.

Anytime we can find somebody that can replace a starter, we're going to. That's what we're doing right

now. We do special teams drills before practice. We have a walk period, we have an actual period during practice, and we've got what we call a special teams emphasis at the end, then any post-practice work. We're trying to develop those guys and sell the fact that they can increase their value by being a member of our special teams.

Q. Aaron Mends has shown ability on special teams. What do you expect from him being on that weak side, especially in the box?

COACH WALLACE: You're exactly right. He's very athletic. He moves extremely well. He's very explosive. He's very powerful.

What Aaron needs to do right now is he just needs to hone in on a position that's not easy to play. You just can't be slotted in there because you're athletic. There's a lot that goes into it based on what we do defensively from a mental standpoint.

The reps he's getting right now, which are very significant, they're going to help him gain that experience. But for him right now, it's really getting his feet wet. He does have some competition behind him, I can assure you the two guys behind him are pushing him, which is nice. But what he needs to do right now is he needs to concentrate on that because we have seen what he can do special teams-wise.

Q. How close is that competition between Mends and Hockaday right now?

COACH WALLACE: I'd like to say it's real close. There's days where you walk off the field, one may have had a better day than the other. That's going to be the case at that position. I think it's different with maybe Josey and Angelo. Even with Bo and Nick's competition they have going on over there.

These guys are working together. It's a small group. The nice thing about a small group is the closeness is there. They all try to coach each other. They all try to critique each other which is building unity, but also building accountability throughout that room.

Q. Last year you had five guys, Perry could slide here or there, Bower as well. Where do you see Bower's role? Backup outside?

COACH WALLACE: Not necessarily. Bo has made significant gains during the spring in these first seven practices. There's a time in which you would like to be able to move these guys around, get them some work at a different position. I think Bo probably needs to get some work at the Will linebacker position.

Right now it's a matter of depth and getting to a point where I feel like we can do that and start moving some

guys around.

You saw it happen occasionally last year where maybe Josey had to go to the Will position or maybe even the Leo position and Travis had to come in there at the Mike position. Right now let's make sure we're good at one and then we'll try to move them around to give ourselves the ability to say in August that we've got five or six guys that we could place in there.

Q. Are you looking to get your best three out there? Bower has the experience edge over Mends, Hockaday.

COACH WALLACE: There could come a point where we have to put our best three out there. We've got one that started a bunch of games last year that's on the sideline that you have to take into consideration.

So from that standpoint, to answer your question, yes, there's going to be a point. Right now it's more about just the development and the improvement that we're trying to get.

Q. You signed five potential linebackers. Kirk in his press conference said he only saw three. Do you expect five guys?

COACH WALLACE: I don't know how many to expect, to be honest with you. The nice thing is, we'll get them all here in June. We'll have an idea where that fits in. They'll get into their football-specific stuff based on what we can do within the rules. They'll get into that during the months of June and July. You'll have a little bit better idea of where they fit.

I wouldn't say that it would be five. I wouldn't say it would be any less than three, which is nice, because we will have three guys minimum to work in there. I just can't tell you which ones they are. I think you could probably look into it and figure out. There's some that could play at another position.

Q. Mends holds the squat record for inside linebacker, which is amazing to be able to do that. Is it right now catching up mentally with his physical abilities?

COACH WALLACE: Yeah, not to take anything away from his squat record, but I don't know how much of that actually equates to playing the Will linebacker position other than what I mentioned earlier, that he's extremely explosive.

Right now to him it's slowing the game down. The only way to slow the game down mentally and even physically, because you have to slow your feet down to slow it down mentally, is to get the experience.

Right now he's just taking as many reps as he can and

seeing as many different pictures as he can based on what he's seeing offensively.

Q. You shared what you still need to see from Mends. What do you need to see from Jack Hockaday?

COACH WALLACE: Jack is young. The one thing Jack did get last year is he he got some game experience from a special teams standpoint. He kind of got his feet wet. He's not a fish out of water, so to speak. He jumped in there and accepted his role. I think he sees where there is a competition going on between he and Aaron. Because of that, he comes to work every day.

Jack and Aaron are wired a little bit differently. There's not a disconnect between the two because they're competing against each other. I mean, it's back and forth. They continue to talk.

We've got the opportunity with that second team to move some guys around. For instance, today Jack took a few snaps at the Mike linebacker position as well. We just need to see how it all fits.

I can assure you, the more they're out there, the more experience they're getting, the more opportunities to improve.

Q. Obviously new position replacing a guy that was beloved among the players in Jim Reid.

COACH WALLACE: After taking over this group, Jim was outstanding with these guys. He really was. He was an outstanding coach and an outstanding mentor. I think the guys really loved being around Jim.

From that standpoint, you know, you're not going in trying to duplicate what Jim did, you're going in being yourself.

I do think the guys that I've had the opportunity to work with, they come to work every day, they're eager. They want to learn. We see some things differently, Jim and I. There's been some changes.

But from a defensive standpoint scheme-wise, it's all the same. That's what I've been a part of for however many years going back to when I was a GA. That hasn't changed much.

What I'm telling them, what they're hearing is really no different defensively. It's really how we're going about doing some things, whether it be drills, the fundamental aspect of things. That's the difference.

Trying to replace Jim in terms of who he was versus who I am, we're different.

Q. Talk about how the read-option has made the outside linebacker a real hybrid position. Seems like Ben took to that last year. Is that the case? Has that made his position sometimes you're safety, sometimes you're linebacker?

COACH WALLACE: Probably across the country, you know, maybe some offensive coaches would potentially describe what we do defensively personnel-wise as a 4-2-5. Now, 4-2-5, they're using that guy as a safety at times and they're rotating down maybe away from him.

Personnel-wise, our Leo linebacker is in space more than he ever has been. You go back and look at the number of snaps last year in regards to what type of personnel we were facing, there's very little two-back, there's very little him having to be aligned on the tight end.

Yeah, he's out in space. He has to be a little bit more of a hybrid. We ask him to do some things that probably eight years ago you weren't asking that player to do. So he's got to be able to run a little bit better than maybe he was eight years ago.

But that's really the nature of football, talking about the zone read. That's where it's going. There's more on the perimeter and less up the middle, unless you're playing Wisconsin or Michigan State.

Q. Does Ben's football IQ show up there? Football family. I would imagine it is already high. Do you find yourself listening to him a little bit?

COACH WALLACE: With any of those guys that have gained that valuable experience, because they've been out there, there's certainly times as a coach where you kind of shut your own mouth and you listen to them talk because you can learn through maybe the way that they see it.

But in Ben's case, he does come from a football family, so he's probably got a little bit more of a base from a football standpoint knowledge-wise than some of the others in the room.

Now, Josey has been out there for a bunch of snaps. Bo has been out there for a bunch of snaps. Those guys, you kind of shut up and listen when they start talking because you can actually start to figure out how they see it through the way they explain it to you.

Q. In the grand scheme of things, Josey and Ben, relatively young, two years left. What did they learn having played 14 games last season? How important is it that they were able to gain that experience?

COACH WALLACE: I think they learned that it's a long season. 14 games is a long, long season. The tough

thing is having to prepare from week-to-week. That's probably the toughest obstacle.

You start talking about, you know, maybe some of the youth at the linebacker position. Right now they're gaining football experience. Then they get into August, and it's a completely different season. It's a night and day difference from what we're doing right now.

They really have to rely on the experience that Bo and Josey and some of those guys have because you are going from one week to the next week, and the game plan could be completely different based on the opponent.

I think the one thing that's probably most valuable about maybe where Josey, Ben, and Bo are at right now, is the fact that they've gone through a 14-game season, and even more than that, they've done it week-to-week-to-week. They've been successful doing it.

Q. How have you helped Kelvin with his transition into your old position? How do you think he'll do?

COACH WALLACE: Kelvin didn't need much help. There were a few things in the beginning that I may have kind of relayed to him. He may have bounced some things off of me.

At this point in time, he's got this thing up and running. You can see just in the recent weeks with some of the success we've had recruiting-wise, I don't think there's much of a difference between the two of us.

This program, the way it's built, the way we've always recruited, Kelvin and his leadership, his instruction to our staff in the terms of the way we maneuver through it.

Q. Globally, recruiting expenses have skyrocketed in the last three or four years. What did you see the changes, not just territorial, but technological, those types of changes have made that allowed those expenses to grow for everybody, not just Iowa?

COACH WALLACE: There's a lot more vendors involved in recruiting now. There's a lot more experts. There's a lot more people out there that are selling to us as a staff, to universities across the country, that they can minimize the workload, so to speak. They can start to pare it down for you, which is helpful, because there is a lot out there.

We're a little bit different. We don't recruit nationally. We have our areas, our niches. That's where we go to find guys.

You guys have access to all of it. We're not spending

maybe what other programs are spending 'cause we do things a little bit differently. We are not taking private flights out to California and back. We're not sending coaches all over the country. We're dropping into the areas that we're most familiar with.

Now, within those areas, if we can find technology, if we can find folks that are experts in those areas, then we'll jump on and hook up with their services, which we have been. We don't do it like everybody else does.

Q. How much of that is trying to be cost-effective?

COACH WALLACE: I would say a good deal of it. It is cost-effective. I mean, you've got choices. You can spend it that way or you can have a room full of 10 guys that are in behind the wall behind you that are watching tape, and they're trying to narrow it down for you.

To me, it's all about how you spend your money. Do you spend your money paying those folks to do that or pay a service you can trust to pare it down a little bit.

Q. With Reid, he was known for having thick informational packets. Are you following that script or...

COACH WALLACE: Yeah, I mean, I'm not handing out the big, thick -- I'm not giving them the playbook week-to-week yet. If they need it, that's what I'm going to do.

I don't think right now it's probably fair for me to decide on how I'm going to do things during a game week.

Again, Coach Reid and I are a little bit different in some ways.

Q. You mentioned you're doing things a little differently. Do you have any examples?

COACH WALLACE: I would say from a drill standpoint, just your everyday routine. You get 15 minutes of individual time. I'm going to be a little bit different from the way Jim did his individual. That's the biggest thing. It's still the same defense, still the same reads, still the same terminology. It's just how I conduct myself as a coach and what I expect for them in terms of their growth in those individual periods.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

COACH WALLACE: Thank you.