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An interview with:

COACH KENNEDY

COACH KENNEDY: Good afternoon. Chris mentioned about getting Akrum a little more weight, get up to 195 pounds. I would be happy to donate to him. It's good to be here. Obviously, we're six practices in. I'm excited about the direction and attitude that our team has taken this spring. My position, at wide receiver, I've been pleased thus far, but not necessarily satisfied. Because I do think we have a lot of work to do.

Obviously, we have some returning players in Tevaun Smith, Jacob Hillyer, Matt VandeBerg, Riley McCarron, some guys that have played significant roles in our offense. But we also have some guys that need to come on this spring and show what they can do. Andre Harris, Jonathan Parker, Chris talked about him moving to wide receiver. I think that's been a good addition, not only for our group, but also just for our team. Getting him on the field and allowing him to play in different situations rather than just on the fly sweep I think will not only help that play, but also he's got very good hands, so I'm excited to see him progress this spring.

Jay Scheel, didn't see a lot of Jay last fall. He is coming off injury and really started practicing for us in December, but excited to see how he's progressing. I do think he's a talented kid.

Overall, what we've been working on as I've been calling it the three T's, technique, toughness, and then tempo. If you look at last year, was not satisfied necessarily with the overall performance of my group, and that falls on me. And really particularly from a blocking point of view in the running game, when I looked at the cut ups and even throughout the season, was disappointed in how my group executed a number of aspects in the run game. So that is one thing that we've been

working hard at, and that's where I think the toughness comes in.

I think my failure in that has been -- I've been doing this a long time, but on the other hand too, every year I think you have to walk guys through progressions and steps and get them to do it the way you want them to do it. I'm also pleased at a number of aspects that the group performed at last year. I thought we caught the ball well. Not as many drops as in years past, but that's something that we can always strive to do better with.

But, overall, I'm pleased with the direction of our group. I'm pleased with the direction of our team and the attitude. And we've got a lot of work to do with only six practices in.

Chris mentioned it. We're challenging guys this spring in terms of if you look at the first two years. Obviously, I came in a year after Coach Davis got here, I've been with him now for 10 years. We joke about it, but I'm the longest tenured wide receiver coach in his career, so he either runs them off or I'm crazy for staying with him. But, no, I really feel fortunate to be with him, because we understand each other and I think we're on the same page 99.9% of the time.

But on the other hand too, I think it's time for the wide receivers, being the third year of being under my tutelage, to challenge them a little more in terms of understanding the whole scheme, where they fit, playing multiple positions, moving guys around, and taking advantage of match-ups.

You know, the thing that I always felt, whether it was in recruiting or I was told in the past in my previous experiences at some of the other places, is there is no doubt that this is a pro-style offense. If you look at us from two backs, one tight end, two wide receivers, one back, one tight end, three wide receivers, you see a lot of the same schemes. Inside outside zone, the gap schemes, the passing game schemes, that you'll see in the NFL on Sunday.

So getting these guys to understand the

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big picture, understanding match-ups, being able to take Tevaun and playing him in different spots and challenging him that way, I think that will be good for his growth. And it's good for the other players to understand that there is more to this game than just your spot, and how you respond to things.

So, like I said, pleased but not satisfied with where we are six days in. We've got a lot of growth yet. I've always said, and you guys have gotten tired of me saying it. Right now at this stage we're really growing. We're replacing a couple of guys in that Kevonte Martin-Manley, Damond Powell, over the past two years with Jordan Cotton and Shumpert. So while we have some experience, there is also some youth coming.

Then I look at the three guys that we're going to add that we signed this year. We're extremely excited about those guys because there are going to be opportunities and there are going to be opportunities, like I said, for guys like Jay Scheel and Andre Harris. It's time to see what Andre can do, and Andrew Stone. He played, got his feet wet last year. Played a little bit more in the bowl game, but it's time for him and Andre to either step up and accept the challenge or there are young guys coming.

Obviously, the transition from high school to college is big, just like it is from college to the National Football League, but I think the constant theme this year or this spring with Coach Ferentz is let's see what these guys can do. Let's be supportive and apply pressure on them and see what guys can do, get them headed in the right direction.

The good thing about this group, even though we have some guys returning in Tevaun Smith, he can get better. I've said before that he's a really talented guy. He's not arrived yet by any means in my estimation. Jacob Hillyer is an extremely valuable player not only at the wide receiver position but also special teams. He's not arrived yet. He can get better. He can get better this spring, he can get better next fall.

Matt VandeBerg right now is stepping into Kevonte Martin-Manley's role. He's a guy that needs to show that he can do it on a consistent basis. So that's where my excitement is. I do see we have some experience and we also have some youth. But it's time for the wide receivers to step up on a more consistent basis.

Q. To clarify, is he (Parker) working solely with wide receivers now, or the backfield?

COACH WHITE: Primarily wide receivers, but it doesn't mean we can't put him in in the back field because he has that knowledge. But he's been working with me for the majority of his time this spring. Speaking of him, like I said earlier, I'm really excited about J.P.

I heard Chris' comments. He is a really good kid. He is a willing kid. And to me, in this game, that is half the battle. He accepted the role, just like Derrick Mitchell. Derrick Mitchell, I hated to lose him. I thought he was possibly getting ready to kind of emerge in the wide receiver group, but on the other hand too, he did such a good job last year performing on the scout team that people said this guy might be a running back. So we've given him that opportunity. Doesn't mean he couldn't play wide receiver also.

Q. Do you know if Scheel is 100 percent healthy?

COACH KENNEDY: I think he's moving in that direction. I think it's a gradual process. I think when you're dealing with a kid's body, I think really only they know if they're a hundred percent. But the thing that I've been impressed about with Jay Scheel is once again, his willingness to fight through things, and he's getting better this spring. He's showing flashes of what we saw in high school, but by no means would I say is he -- he's just not totally fluid yet.

Q. How tough is it for a coach in a position like yours to have a guy like Derrick that you invest a lot of time in and you're starting to show signs and then he's gone, and then you've got to start over with someone else?

COACH KENNEDY: Yeah, you know, it changes in this business, it's constant. Derrick Willies and I still have a very good relationship. When I say very good relationship, you know, not to harp on Derrick Willies, because I'd rather talk about the guys in our program, but relationships and dealing with kids and their emotions, dealing with coaches emotions, right, is not the easiest thing all the time.

If you're in this business long enough there are ups and there's downs, whether you're a coach or whether you're a player. The important thing

sometimes is to fight through those emotions because there's not a one-way road map to do things. I often told a story and some of you guys have heard it before about Jordan Shipley. When we won the National Championship in 2005, he was hurt in 2004-2005, and then he comes back from injury, and we had just won the National Championship with some really good players. And Jordan came back off those injuries, and even though we didn't lose one of those guys, he kind of felt it was his time now.

And part of my job as a coach, and I can always get better at this, is kind of trying to help guys through understanding when their time is, because if you ask a kid, their time is always right now. And that's the tough thing about this business because they're really talented guys who don't necessarily understand the process sometimes. To be frank, and I've said this before, not only with him, but my challenge and my charge as a coach is to try to do a good job with all my players.

It's often, Coach Davis always says, what's fair is not always fair for the kid sometimes, but what we've got to do is be fair to Iowa, and sometimes getting a kid to see that big picture doesn't happen right away. So you've just got to continually work with guys.

Q. C.J. Beathard has a live arm and let's his receivers make plays. How do you coach with that, knowing he won't be so quick to take the check-down?

COACH KENNEDY: Yeah, you've got to run fast to get open to see things coming. And C.J. is obviously a very talented kid. I was under the belief that we had two really good quarterbacks and right now, C.J. is the guy, fully supportive of that decision. But, yeah, there's a tempo change. I mean, that thing comes and you better be ready. That's where we talk about the 3-T's, that's where the technique comes in. Getting it out, snapping your head, shooting your hands, being ready because you know that ball is coming. That's where you have to have some understanding as a wide receiver, because he does have great tempo on his ball.

Q. Who takes over the Powell role and stretches the field like Powell did?

COACH KENNEDY: Well, if you look at it, there is no doubt that Damond, we used him to stretch the field and as a big play guy. I would think if you went back, and I haven't studied the

numbers extensively, Greg always gets on me because I'm not a real numbers guy. I'm just kind of a production guy.

If you looked at Tevaun over the last couple years, I think he's developed more and more into that role. Andrew Stone has some ability to stretch the field. I'd like to see more out of Andre Harris. Jay Scheel, I think when he gets more comfortable has that ability. But the thing that I'm very confident in saying is that we have some guys that can make some plays. We'd like some more big plays, so if they're listening, we'd like that. But on the other hand too, Tevaun's been a big play guy. I'm eager to see Andrew have a little bit more of a role, but he has to embrace that role kind of like we've talked about, and to see Andre and Jay come along.

Matt VandeBerg, we talk about it in the staff room all the time. I'm not so sure Matt doesn't run as well as anybody we have in the wide receiver room. Then, the other thing that goes along with that, and the reason why he played as a freshman and then had a significant role last year was because in practice and the times that we've seen him, which is pretty much every day, because I go to all the practices, but he has the ability to make the wild catch. So he has developed into that role also.

Q. What will it take for Tevaun to reach his potential?

COACH KENNEDY: I think a couple things. I think not being satisfied with where he is, and what I constantly preach to guys over the past 25 years is you could very well be the best guy at Iowa or Washington or wherever I've been. But the thing is are you the best guy in the conference? Are you the best guy in the third of the country? Are you the best guy around?

So if you're never satisfied, always know that there is a quicker, more skilled athlete out there. But you work and continue to work and develop skills and technique and explosion and all the things that Coach Doyle does in the weight room. That's where games -- I don't want to say won and lost -- but how you develop in the off-season. So not being satisfied and understanding that there is a bigger picture, and what you want to be and what you want to turn into.

Then the other thing that I've always mentioned to guys here is that on a daily basis,

okay, we're giving you the answers to the test, okay, scheme-wise, practice, et cetera. Now the test is the game. How do you stack up against the defensive backs at Michigan State or the defensive backs at Ohio State, et cetera. Like I said earlier, there is always, as an individual, we're all biased towards ourselves to a certain extent. But on the other hand too, looking at things with a critical eye and knowing how you prepare in the off-season, how you've eaten in the off-season, the sleep patterns, et cetera, that's going to determine in the long run how you stack up with other people. How you work, how you take to coaching. Are you a guy that comes in the meeting room eager about working and excited about getting better? Or, okay, are you a guy that kind of thinks he has it all figured out? Because I've been doing this a long time, 25 years at this level. I don't have it all figured out. I could constantly get better as a coach.

That's why Coach White mentioned earlier and Coach Ferentz has been really supportive in terms of us going out and meeting with different staffs and everything might not fit, but you might find one thing or two things that can fit with you in your offense, with what you do whether it be in the red zone or on third down, et cetera. So it's no different for a coach than it is a player.

Are you continuing to try to improve and try to get better? Going back to Tevaun. I've said this before publicly, I think Tevaun can be really good, okay. But where he has to embrace the challenge is putting it on tape play after play and showing that he can be an elite guy. To me, either you do it or you don't. If he doesn't, boom, good for Iowa, right? -- if he does it, good for Iowa. If he doesn't, bad for Iowa, and bad for Coach Kennedy.

It's interesting too, and I was talking to somebody earlier, I think sometimes everybody gets intrigued and fascinated by, "Oh, what was pro time today like? Did you run this? How many reps did you have on the 225? Your shuttle time?" All those kind of sexy things, right? Okay?

But what it comes down to as a player and as a coach, Coach Ferentz says it all the time, are you getting out of your players when you turn on the tape, are you getting what you coached? If you're not, then you're not doing a very good job, okay. Just like players, sometimes they get wrapped up in the numbers and this and that.

Really what scouts are looking for and NFL people are looking for is when they turn on the tape, is the guy blocking, is he tackling? Is he making catches? Does he have too many drops,

et cetera? And a lot of times we get wrapped up in those numbers.

Like what does Tevaun Smith run in the 40? Honestly, sitting here, maybe I should do a better job with this. I couldn't tell you. I know he can run. I know he's run away from some people, okay. I know he also got caught by some people. So are you getting what you coached? When people turn on the tape, whether you're a player or a coach, do you stack up?

Q. You and Coach Davis both mentioned speed when you came in and there was kind of a lack of it. What is your progression there? Is it where you want it to be? Is it where it needs to be?

COACH KENNEDY: It can always be better. Like somebody asked about Damond Powell. Obviously, he had a great ability to run and run fast. All players have deficiencies, right? So maybe there were some things that were deficient on the other end. But, yeah, you're always trying to increase your speed. You're always trying to get faster. Because in this game, look at J.P. against Indiana, right-hand on the fly sweep. Jake comes down, makes a good block. But he just needed a little crease, and he took it to the house.

You always like those guys. But on the other hand too, and we're always trying to improve, but I think when you talk about some of the guys we have coming in, and Emmanuel Ogwo, okay. I think he ran a 10.61 in his hundred the other day. That's pretty good. That's pretty good national time. Now can he transition his speed and everything from track over to being a really good football player, okay?

They're big guys in our crew that people say, boy, they don't run well enough and this and that. On the other hand too, what do they bring to the table? Do they go and dig out safeties do they catch the hitch route and spin out of it ten yards for a more explosive play? So there are different ways to gage speed, but we're always trying to get those fast, fast guys because those are the guys that everybody says, oh, wow, did you see what he did? Always trying to get faster.

Q. You mentioned match-ups for Tevaun. Has that become more of a focus in game planning, or scouting or would that be something you guys want to set up?

COACH KENNEDY: There is no doubt that we're making a conscious effort to move guys around and get them in spots where they can be successful. But then also move guys to spots where maybe it's a tight end on a linebacker walked. We're always going to be trying to find those match-ups. I know we're moving in the right direction.

Q. Yardage-wise in the last few years you've made progress. But if you go back to the first spring practice and where you are now, what's pleased you the most with the progress you've made at your position?

COACH KENNEDY: Yeah, the thing that pleased me the most at my position, okay, is that I love walking into my meeting room because we've got some guys that are really, really want to be good. Really compete at a high level in terms of whether it be practice.

We haven't arrived yet. But I think the overall attitude of the guys, in terms of wanting to be good, putting the work in, and we're not perfect, but also I think if after that first spring, you're exactly right, being with Coach Davis for so long, like I said, knowing what he expects and knowing what he wants, I remember some of the criticisms earlier that guys seem like they're on the same page and different comments.

I'm pleased with guys being in the spots we're supposed to be in. It's not a hundred percent all the time. We make mistakes. But on the other hand too, I think we've moved in the right direction.

I'd be less than honest, myself, Coach Davis, Coach Ferentz, at the wide receiver position, you know, moving in the right direction and getting there, it's a long haul. I think we've made some progress, but on the other hand, like I said, where my shortcomings were as a coach, whether it be pass game, run game, whatever, is getting the guys to understand the big picture, how they can affect the play. If a play is going away from them, can they get that extra effort. We still need to improve in that regard. I see us heading in the right direction in a lot of ways. But on the other hand too, I think we've got a lot of room to grow.

Q. Coach Davis talked about that tongue-in-cheek. How has that changed now?

COACH KENNEDY: Coach Ferentz always says, sometimes simple is best. And I think if you give guys tips, okay, alignment, assignment. Now when I get aligned, what is the first thing you look for? And we've talked about

this before. The first thing we look at, is it a double or single safety? Okay, now what happens when the ball is snapped? Is a guy spinning down to me? Is he staying back? Do I have to negotiate the linebackers. Having to be simple with guys, I do think guys are getting in the right spots. But also giving them basic tips and not trying to make things too complicated.

It always hurts when people say, "Oh, we did this at halftime, and we did this." There are only so many things you can do. You can make adjustments. Like Chris said earlier. Brian Ferentz, I'm a huge fan of Brian Ferentz, because he wishes he was as good looking at me, I wish I was as smart as him. But there is a guy that there is a lot going on up front, and he's got to make a bunch of changes on the run.

I think it's very different for wide receivers. You get your pre-snap look. You know where it's supposed to be. I've got to negotiate a linebacker, and negotiate a spinning safety coming down to me. But a lot of times too sometimes your athletic ability has to take over. But we are for the most part, not a hundred percent, getting in the right spots.

Q. You won't know until they get on campus, but for one of the three wide receivers coming in maybe a little more polished that you see on film?

COACH KENNEDY: I think Adrian Falconer is really talented, and hopefully -- I'd like to get all three of them in the mix. Maybe that's unrealistic, but I'm going to push for that to happen. The good thing about pushing for that to happen, I'll tell you, and I said this earlier, guys like Riley McCarron have great pride and are going to do everything you ask and die trying. Jacob Hillyer, same way.

Tevaun, you know, he being challenged by a younger player or by Jacob Hillyer, whomever, I think guys when he gets in those situations where they're getting pushed a little bit, rise up or they wither. Competition is good for everybody. So hopefully we can get these guys to a base understanding of plays this summer and also in camp where they are able to compete. The toughest thing for a guy coming from high school to college, just like it is going from college to the National Football League, okay, there is volume. What they're asked to do. What happens when guys tend to overthink or think too much, their

athletic ability slows down, their speed slows down because their mind locks them up. So hopefully we can get a jump on that and see what guys can do.

But there are going to be struggles. I remember it was my first year. We kind of thought Tevaun was going to be the guy. Shumpert who played well his senior year was better for Tevaun to come off the bench to get a feel for how the game was going and kind of see things first. So it allowed him to play a little faster as a young player. So it just depends on how quickly we can unlock their mind.

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