

April 11, 2012



An interview with:

COACH DAVIS

COACH DAVIS: Well, we've had a great start. We've had eight practices now. For the most part, we've got the majority of the offense in. Kind of the goal for the spring is to do a couple things: One, we wanted to get the offense installed; two, we wanted to use the time to find out where our strengths were. Then, from there, we can move the focus of the offense in the proper direction.

Through eight days, I'm very pleased with the way the guys are working. We've had really good practices. We still have a long ways to go.

Q. Talk about DeAndre and what he's been handling the last couple of weeks?

COACH DAVIS: He plays well with both of those guys. They've got good vision. They catch the ball well out of the back field. They've picked up the passing game of what we're doing extremely well. I think both of them have had really eight good days. I've been extremely pleased. I think both are good players.

Q. How much work has André Dawson gotten?

COACH DAVIS: He's gotten quite a bit.

Q. What are your thoughts on him?

COACH DAVIS: I think he has, from what I've been told, he's improved. He's got good vision. He's taking care of the ball. I've been very pleased with the way the running backs, knock on wood, we've not lost a fumble in eight days. Now, having said that, he'll probably do it Saturday. We have taken care of the ball extremely well, and obviously that's a big part of offensive football.

Q. You said from the beginning you would work with what you have and do what your players do best. Any closer to knowing what that might be?

COACH DAVIS: I'm closer. I know we have a group of tight ends that are exciting to be around. There is good competition there. Obviously, C.J., this is only 39 springs I've been in, and I've never had a tight end like C.J. with his size and ability to play at the line of scrimmage and also stretch the field. He's encouraging. But also the other guys Derby, and Duzey and Henry and Ray Hamilton. They've all done a good job.

So one of the things that we will do as we continue is try to define their roles a little bit better, and in some cases expand what we're asking of them.

You'll see the tight ends playing outside sometimes. Used to seeing them in motion, but there will be motion in wide receiver sets in some situations because they're tough match-ups.

Offensively, if you can put two tight ends, and two receivers and a running back on the field, you typically get base defense from the opponent.

Then if you can take that personnel grouping and make it look like a one by four formation, sometimes you can pick up an advantage schematically.

But those guys are talented enough to play both in line, in movement and, in some cases, out wide.

Q. How would you assess the overall speed of the offense? Have you seen enough to be able to tell?

COACH DAVIS: I have. We need to be faster. We need to be able to stretch the field a little better. There is no question about that. At the same time, there are certain things you can do to help that; bunch receivers, stack receivers and do some things to gain an advantage. Because sometimes when you get in those sets, they come

out of a man look into a zone kind of situation. But one of the things that we're all aware of is we'd like to have more speed on the outside.

Q. What about the tempo so far?

COACH DAVIS: Tempo has been outstanding. We have worked many snaps every day. The players attitudes -- I'm assuming that's the tempo you're talking about, because we're also doing some tempo stuff in our no-huddle. So probably about the third practice on we have part of each practice has been no-huddle. Some of that has been extremely fast no-huddle. So I'm pleased with that.

We're still not greased up and totally comfortable with it, but we're headed in the right direction with that.

Q. In that regard, talk about James Vandenberg and how he's coming on as your quarterback?

COACH DAVIS: I'm extremely pleased with James, a bright guy. Every day when I go to the meeting room, he's already there watching film. He's got a list of questions. He's picked up the things that we have changed extremely quickly. I think he'll be an outstanding player.

Q. You mentioned the amount of times you've been using no-huddle as well in practice. Is there how much you want to use it in actual games?

COACH DAVIS: Well, when you talk to defensive coaches, which I try not to very often. But when you do, they usually tell you the same things. If you are a total no-huddle team, they'll follow right in line with you. They'll substitute, go to nickel. But when you're in and out of it, there are communication problems with them.

So we'd like to be at a point where we start next year where we can play a lot of the game in no-huddle. But how much we use will depend on the opponent.

There are some things you can do in no-huddle that forces the action, forces the tempo, changes the complexion of a game, changes momentum sometimes which means we'll be able to jump in it whenever we choose to.

Q. What kind of role do you see for Brad Rogers?

COACH DAVIS: I think Brad's a guy that can play both running back and fullback. I've been very happy with him as a fullback. He's a very

bright guy. He's also a guy that you could, again you could see what the average fan you think would be two backs, one in the game. With Brad in the game, he could be a tailback, and your tailback could be somewhere else.

All of those kind of deals that we're talking about, personnel changes, hopefully we'll be able to get to as we continue to grow. But Brad is not only a good player, he's a good leader, and a good guy in the locker room.

Q. Are there things that you know or realize about this program now that you didn't know when practice started?

COACH DAVIS: I think there have been more things verified that I thought I knew about the program than just new things. Iowa has a reputation of being extremely physical, well-coached, smart football team. And that's been verified by the guys. The guys like the game, they understand the game. So it's been more along those lines than something that I didn't expect.

Q. Going back to the no-huddle thing. How many people, signs, signals or whatever when they go to the sidelines are flashing?

COACH DAVIS: Right now we've got a couple guys flashing. When we get to the season, typically you have two or three guys flashing. One or two of them may be live. The other guy's trying to get on TV. So it's just whatever. All of our quarterbacks could flash at this point.

Q. Everybody knows about Keenan. But can you talk about Kevonte and how they've improved this spring?

COACH DAVIS: Kevonte will end up playing in the slot most of the time for us. The slot receiver is an extremely important position. It's a position with a lot of flexibility. Has to do various things according to the coverage you see. So I kind of see him settling in there when we're in one back. When we're in two backs, obviously, he would be one of the wide receivers.

Cotton has done some things through eight days that are encouraging. We've just got consistency is the term I keep using with him. You know, we'll just say consistency is the term I keep using with him.

But he flashes some things that you really like. It's been a little bit unfair to him because we've moved him around and hopefully when we

get back to all of this, we'll be in position, and let's get all the nuances of that position out.

Q. Did Barry's injury change your vision of running back going forward? Or did you see the two freshmen coming into the fall -- meaning, did you get what you want out of the running back, I guess? Not individual decisions for it.

COACH DAVIS: You know, he worked so hard. He was really in a position to have a great spring. Talking about the young guys coming in, that is a position before that we talked about that a lot of times a young guy can come in and contribute there.

But having said that, both of the other two guys have really been encouraging. I've been very, very pleased. Both of those guys are going to be okay.

Q. What is the difference from your standpoint of spring ball in Iowa versus spring ball in Texas?

COACH DAVIS: Well, I normally didn't have to wear a jacket to practice. That's been part of it, even though this is pretty mild.

Spring ball is pretty much the same everywhere. You're trying to install at the same time. You're trying to get a bunch of reps for young guys to get snaps. You're trying to get a bunch of things on film that maybe, for example, we had a 3rd and 9 the other day in a situational scrimmage. We ran a play out of a tight end motion that probably didn't deserve to be run on 3rd and 9. But we hadn't run it yet.

We needed to get it on tape, and the defense blitzed it. The two kids reacted properly and it was a successful play. It was great teaching. We didn't make the first. We had the ball under the change against the blitz, and that's why you probably wouldn't have used it in that situation.

So that's kind of what spring is about. It's trying to get a bunch of things that you can teach from. I think that's where most springs are very similar.

Q. Would you rather play a game?

COACH DAVIS: As opposed to practicing all the time?

Q. Would you have kind of a full-blown spring game where they run the clock or whatever?

COACH DAVIS: No, I wouldn't. And the reason is the fan in me says yes, I would, but the coach in me says you only have 15 practices. Three of those are in shorts. So now you're down to 12. It needs to be a workday. It needs to be a day that you are looking at various things, just like we're talking about. So you can get some things on film that gives you an opportunity to get better.

Q. Why do so many coaches have spring games then?

COACH DAVIS: I think one good thing that comes out of a game, and we'll play a quarter, is you're off the field, there is no last-minute coaching going on when you break the huddle. It gives you a chance to see what the players know and understand as opposed to as you break the huddle saying be alert for this blitz, be alert for this or whatever.

So I think that's the positive of it is when you're off the field you truly find out what they know.

Q. Have you decided who will be upstairs and on the sidelines?

COACH DAVIS: We're still talking about that. Coach Erb has worked from upstairs with Ken the last couple of years. I'd love to be able to keep him up there with me, if that's a possibility.

Like I said, all of our quarterbacks can flash. Whether or not we let quarterbacks wear headsets to flash the plays or whether or not Erik Campbell flashes the plays, those things have not been determined yet about where everybody's going to play for the game. I am going to be upstairs.

Q. You have veteran quarterbacks and veteran wideouts. You have injuries at running back, two freshmen. Is it setup to go from a quick passing game to a pass that's set up the run type of thing?

COACH DAVIS: Well, I think as we started you try to play to your strengths. I've always said I think James will be one of our strong points. Whether or not it's a quick passing game with wide receivers or a quick passing game of tight ends, no-huddle, et cetera, we're not at that point to give you a great answer. I am very pleased with the two running backs. I am extremely pleased with what they've done so far.

Q. How has Jake Rudock accepted your offense and run the drills?

COACH DAVIS: I think Jake started the spring, like most redshirt freshmen, a little swamped. If we would have talked after four practices, I would have said his head is spinning. But like most bright guys, as we've continued five, six, seven, he's really settled in now. He's functioning very well.

Q. How important is it with you with what you're trying to do here to have a senior quarterback to lean on like James Vandenberg?

COACH DAVIS: I think you would always like that when you're installing something that's new. A guy that has a bunch of snaps under his belt. Because even though we may be calling it something different, he probably has experienced it somewhere along the line and he relates very easily.

Like I said, he's studied tape a bunch. When your quarterback is comfortable, it helps everybody else get comfortable. Even the way the play is called, with the rhythm of calling the play.

I stepped in one night, and I said let's go 12 personnel scat 4-7, fake zero, 4-flat. Well, there is a rhythm to that call. If you're stepping in the huddle and getting it to me again, it doesn't inspire confidence. James has really worked hard at the scripts and just the rhythm of the calls and those kind of things.

Q. Was speed ever much of an issue with you in Texas with that draw or was it something you knew you were going to have as personnel?

COACH DAVIS: You're talking about personnel?

Q. Overall team speed on offense.

COACH DAVIS: It was not a problem for the most part. It's kind of a speed state, so there were guys that could run typically.

Q. Did that make it so you had flexibility on offense?

COACH DAVIS: Just it changes sometimes where your strength is at, in terms of what you're trying to do.

After y'all have been with me a couple of years, you have this huge offense and each year the job is not to change everything, but it's to refocus where the emphasis is. The passing game

that Vince Young ran, and the passing game that Colt McCoy ran was out of the same book, but the emphasis was different on what we went with the two guys. That's what you try to do.

Q. How much time have the quarterbacks had to spend apart from play calling to the mechanics and that sort of thing?

COACH DAVIS: Not a great deal. Not a great deal. You don't change a guy's motion, typically when he comes in. He's been doing it for a long time. The emphasis normally is on the feet and where they go on the dropback. Where they go in progressions and things like that.

I'll use Vince as an example again. He certainly was not classic. He was the most sidearm, low-elbow, guy I'd ever been around. Yet he had an extremely strong arm, and he was accurate.

So I told him when he got there, I'm going to talk to you a little about your arm, but I'm going to spend most of the time on your feet and trying to get your feet in better position to throw the ball. So mechanically it's more along those lines than it is the slot that the ball comes out. Because, if you watch, all quarterbacks have a little different view.

You hear golfers talking about putting the swing in a certain slot. They're all a little bit different. At the same time, the great ones can always throw it from different angles, because sometimes you have to throw it here and sometimes you have to throw it up there.

Q. With two tackles in the NFL, since you lost a first round pick, how are the tackles and what do you see out there?

COACH DAVIS: I think both have done a good job. Obviously they're getting more snaps at tackle now and with the first group. I'm pleased with where they're at.

I mean, you lose two guys to the NFL, and you miss those two guys. But I'm comfortable that we'll have seven, eight guys that are considered starters in the offensive line. You'd like to come out with seven to eight guys that can you go to war with. You might have to have a guy that plays senior and guard or guard and tackle. We'll see how that works out.

Q. Can you talk about the physical part of Iowa. It's something you've come in and seen. What is an example and how has this

place shown you the physicality that kind of carries this reputation?

COACH DAVIS: I just think the way the guys practice overall is a general statement. The number of reps that they're excited about. It's kind of an overall view of practice. There's not a specific story I can tell you. It's just you can tell it's there.

Q. You mentioned many tight ends that you've ever seen. You have an offensive line coach that's coached a couple tight ends and done stuff like nobody's ever seen. Do you think that's this is a guy we can use in a different way than the traditional tight end at the college level?

COACH DAVIS: That's kind of what I was alluding to a while ago with our tight ends. We may be able to -- I don't know how much we'll do Saturday and all that. But when we go to an empty formation, at this point, C.J.'s in the game, and he's part of the empty package.

Sometimes guys like that. They're open when they're covered. I mean, the defense is in a good position. There's been several times this spring where it's a one-on-one situation. The defensive guy is where he should be, James is throwing the ball, and it's a completion, just because of size and match-ups.

There is a term we use where our tight ends get big in the paint; he knows how to get big in the paint. He knows how to get there and box out backwards and that kind of stuff.

Q. Is he a mismatch guy? Can he create a lot of mismatches?

COACH DAVIS: Yes, he can. He can because of his size. I think we'll be able to expand his role as we continue to go.

Q. Have you been working out of the shotgun a lot?

COACH DAVIS: We have worked out of the shotgun. I don't have a specific number or percentage. But we have worked out of the shotgun quite a bit. As we said in the offensive meeting, I've been very encouraged about the shotgun run game. Being able to get in the gun and do a lot of the same things that you do from underneath, again, part of that is the game itself that dictates what you're playing.

Obviously there's never been a quarterback that didn't like to be in the gun, especially in a passing situation, but I don't know

what that number will end up being. But we have spent a lot of time in the gun.

Q. Do you think there is a new challenge of depth? The difference between Ohio or Ohio State and Texas is there is an All-American coming in, and in Iowa, that's not always the same way.

COACH DAVIS: I think some programs do have more depth. There is no question. Some programs have more of this or that and whatever. But at this point, I think we'll have enough tight ends to play. I repeatedly said that I thought the two backs -- when we went into spring with three -- I thought the two backs have really stepped up.

I think all three of the quarterbacks are good, solid players. The two young ones just don't have a lot of experience. Right now, I would say the receiver's spot is where we need an influx of just some speed.

But they are bright guys. They're working hard, and I think they'll improve. But that is an area that I think we need to address in recruiting, and Coach has already talked about it.

Q. How much does Keenan miss not being in there?

COACH DAVIS: Well, if it was two or three springs down the road, I would say a veteran guy, it's okay. But it's a brand-new offense, especially in the passing game. So from that standpoint, I know he's disappointed and we are too, because he's not getting all the reps that you would typically get in the spring.

Each rep is different. The defense does something different. They react differently. That's what he's missing out on.

Q. What can he do to make up for what he's missed?

COACH DAVIS: He's got to have a great summer, and I'm sure we will. I've already talked to the guys about summer conditioning. Slash, throwing and catching is going to really be important.

Q. Can you comment on the quarterback's ability to change at the line?

COACH DAVIS: They have quite a bit of flexibility. But at the same time, they just can't go anywhere with the call. We do a lot of packaging of plays with three or four plays and we let him get

us to the best look. At the same time, there are situations where he goes to a completely different audible, and each quarterback is different in that regard.

There are some quarterbacks that have been in your system overall, and they can pretty much take it anywhere they want to because of the number of snaps they have. But James is very bright, and he'll have quite a bit of flexibility at the line.

Q. You have your scheme to develop in the Big Ten as posed to what you would have had in the Big 12 or is that part of the implementation?

COACH DAVIS: I think that's just part of the implementation. I think it depends. Having played Ohio State a couple of times, three times in the last seven or eight years you've got a certain idea what they have and how good they have it.

But when you get to a game plan, it's all about trying to put your strength in the proper places.

Q. You had a young man named Quan Cosby. He played professional baseball with Cedar Rapids. How did you get him to come back out to football?

COACH DAVIS: We didn't have to do much. When Quan came back, I said, Why did you come back? He said, Two reasons: Pro ball and buses.

Q. Now that you've been here a while, what is the difference living and working in Iowa as opposed to living and working in Texas?

COACH DAVIS: Traffic's a whole lot easier here.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports