

**April 8, 2015**



An interview with:

## **COACH WHITE**

**CHRIS WHITE:** Good afternoon. It's good to be back on the grass with the players for a lot of reasons. Football is about a couple things. In my mind, it's about preparation and execution, and clearly we weren't happy with the way we finished the season last year, the last three games. But I can tell you guys this: From the day these kids got back here on winter break they've entered this new building with passion and purpose, and it's been great to see.

As the coaches, we spent a lot of time just self-evaluating in every aspect of the program from offense, defense, special teams, how we do things. Our job is to put these kids in a position to execute, and we feel we need to do a better job at that. It's just been exciting working with the players.

Coach Doyle is extremely happy with the winter program, and it has shown up in the first six days of practice, and it's been fun to coach these kids. I'm really looking forward to it. The chemistry of this team, you can feel it, and it's been exciting to see.

As far as my position, starting with the running backs, we had graduations with Mark and Damon, and it's hard to explain to you guys the value of a guy like Mark Weisman. He just embodies everything about this program, and he'll be missed, but we're really excited about the guys that we have. Starting with Jordan Canzeri, he's going to be a senior this year, and he really hasn't had a full year where he's been healthy, and last year was certainly the case, but I think we got a glimpse of him in the bowl game. He still wasn't 100 percent, but what he's capable of, you know, and what he needs to build from there. He's taken on a really good leadership role in my room.

The next guy is LeShun Daniels. LeShun has had kind of one injury after the other as well. He was really ready to take off last year and he got hurt during the bye week, and it was unfortunate for him. We call LeShun big boy, but he should be called little big boy now. We've asked him to cut some weight, and he's down to about 225 or so. He just looks unbelievable, and it shows on the field. His speed, his pad level, and as a matter of fact I think he broke the running back's shuttle record for Coach Doyle, which is pretty amazing. So he's going to take the place of Mark, for sure, in terms of those carries and more.

Then we've got some younger guys like Akrum. Akrum Wadley is a super talented player. He's really working on just his physical development. He's put on at least 10 pounds this spring working out with Coach Doyle. This has shown up on the field. He had a couple of pass protections the other day that he went in and stoned the guy.

As you know, he's a work in progress in terms of his ball security, but this kid is talented. He does things that I can't coach. We've got to just keep making progress with him.

One guy of interest is Derrick Mitchell. Derrick was a wide receiver for us last year, played some special teams. We're getting ready to play Wisconsin last year, and we needed some scout team guys to replicate Melvin Gordon, which is kind of hard to do. We put him over -- we nicknamed him DMX, and he came in there and we got off the practice field and all the defensive coaches are just raving about how they couldn't tackle this kid.

So we felt that this spring is a great opportunity to do those things. He's made the transition, and he is a talented player. He had an outstanding day Saturday in live tackle football. We put him in some situations there to see how he'd respond, and he broke off a few long runs. He's got some ability; he's going to push for some

playing time too.

The other two guys, C.J. Hilliard is a redshirt freshman, and he's making some steady progress. We actually moved a kid, Marcel Joly from defensive back over to the running back position, which he had played in high school, and he's done a nice job as well.

Fullback-wise, we're a team that uses a fullback, and not many teams do, and we're very fortunate we have three guys with a lot of playing experience. This is a position that you don't want to take an insurance policy out on them. They're just battering rams. We've got to keep them healthy, but between Adam Cox who got hurt early in preseason camp last year. He's making steady progress. He's back into practice, and every day you see the old Adam back a little bit. Then Macon, the same way, he's had a lingering shoulder deal, and he's fully healthy and playing at a high rate right now.

Then we were forced to move John Kenny from linebacker last year because of the two injuries, and John stepped in and I thought did a really nice job for us without knowing much of what to do, and he's going to stay at that position for the future of his career. And we think that's best for him. So that's kind of the fullback running back deal. I'll quickly go over the specialists and returners.

Obviously, we need to be better in the kicking game. We need to punt the ball better. We need to kick field goals better. I thought Marshall did a nice job toward the end of the year being more consistent. But clearly probably the number one thing that we need to address in this program right now is getting the punter, and the whole punt deal straightened out. We're working hard at it, trust me on that. We'll get it right.

It's a wide open competition between all three right now. It's between Connor, Dillon, Marshall's getting some reps, even Miguel Recinos, and it's a daily deal where we're competing. It's a fluid situation right there.

We feel good about Marshall. His leg strength is obviously rare. Kickoff coverage is a great thing as a coach to know that about 75% of your balls aren't going to be returned. Then he's working on being more consistent with his field goals. Mick Ellis has a chance to be very consistent, and he'll push him as well as Miguel will.

Finally the returners, this is, again, another open competition deal. We get as far as the kickoff returns, and Jonathan Parker is a young,

inexperienced kid, and he showed flashes, but he obviously needs to catch the ball better and make better decisions. But he's a great kid and working really hard at that.

We do plan on expanding the role of Desmond King a little bit and seeing if he can be a returner for us, punt returner or kickoff returner, as well as Akrum. Akrum needs to be pushed because of his athletic ability, and then we have Matt VandeBerg and Riley McCarron who have experience there.

So that is kind of it in a nutshell in terms of the personnel. I'll open it up to questions. Anyone?

**Q. Coach, is it fair to say the best case scenario for you guys would be that Jordan and LeShun are healthy enough that they form that one-two punch?**

COACH WHITE: Well, yeah, the young kids are pushing them too. And I think the best thing that we have going for us right now is the competition. We held those two out the other day, LeShun and Jordan with the tackle part of it, because we didn't want them to get tackled. And the young kids came in there and opened their eyes and they see that competition. They said we've got to step our game up. That's the biggest thing we've got going in our room right now.

But, yeah, you need at least in college football two backs, and I'd love to sit here and have Melvin Gordon run it 50 times a game for us. We don't have that right now. We'll make the best. We have very talented running backs here.

**Q. With regards to LeShun, did you encourage him to cut the weight? Was that weight he put on with the surgery?**

COACH WHITE: No, he's always been very religious about his workout regimes and everything and what he eats. He's always met his target weight with Coach Doyle, and we had him in the 230s. Coach Doyle just thought, hey, this kid is so strong that he doesn't need to get bigger. We need to get more athletic. If you look at him right now it's a completely different picture. It had nothing to do with him being in the surgery and just being hurt. It's just we wanted to cut his body bulk. He doesn't look nearly as bulky, and you see it on the practice field. His movement and his pad level are markedly better.

**Q. Is he fully recovered?**

COACH WHITE: Oh, yeah, absolutely. He looks fantastic. He really does.

**Q. Has LeShun kind of grasped the Iowa style of running, the inside zone, outside zone stuff a little bit better at this point?**

COACH WHITE: Yeah, I think so. Obviously we spent a lot of time in the off-season watching tape. The thing about LeShun, he hasn't played much. He's played as a true freshman sparingly, and then he got hurt early in the season. But the thing that we do is we watch the film, and there are a few things that we pointed out that we are coaching better on the inside and outside zone that the players are executing better on the practice field right now.

It's hard to explain to you, but it's more hitting the track, pressing the hole. Getting your shoulders on the inside zone, being more square to the hole, a little tighter to the guards and the tackle, and it's helped us be able to jump back if we need to if there is a hole there.

**Q. What do you think would be the prototypical perfect back for this offense?**

COACH WHITE: Back?

**Q. Yeah.**

COACH WHITE: I don't know. They come in all shapes and sizes, but I know this. A guy like LeShun is a workhorse type of guy that has a little bit more speed, and jump cut, agility. We all know Mark, what he was. He was a fullback playing tailback, and he was pretty good at it. But he had his limitations, and he'll be the first one to let you know that. But I think LeShun is a little bit different. He can hit a little bit longer run, and he can make a guy miss in space a little bit more than Mark can, I think.

**Q. How has your relationship with Brian Ferentz changed now that he's the run game coordinator? Are there any changes involved?**

COACH WHITE: No, I can't really specify that, but I mean, Brian's very talented. The thing that we've done specifically with the running backs and tight ends with Brian now being the coordinator is we've spent more time in the meeting rooms together, as opposed to the running backs are here, the tight ends are here, and the O-line is here. We're hearing one voice from the run coordinator, that this is how this ties in

with the O-line, this is what the coach is telling the back that you need to know that he's pressing the hole here. He's reading this. These are the line calls. This is how it all ties in together. And Brian has done an outstanding job of that, and he sees the clear picture more than most coaches at his age do. He's a very talented coach.

**Q. Schematically is there anything different with Brian running the running game?**

COACH WHITE: Not really. We're trying to incorporate a little bit more of a few different things. I don't know if you understand some of the stuff I'm talking about. But more gap scheme plays, and pull outside things. But our bread and butter is still inside, outside zone. Me personally I've been asking Coach Davis and Brian about putting in a little bit of a draw, type of lag draw type of thing for Akrum, specifically, and he ripped off a couple the other day.

I think those type of things, we're getting more multiple. I don't know if you watch us on Saturday down at Valley, you'll see the tight ends being disbursed more in different spots. You'll see wide receivers moving around a little bit more. That is kind of the things that we've worked on this spring.

**Q. Is C.J. maybe a little quicker? I think Jake was about the same speed, but do you see the read option becoming, I don't know, more of a play call for you guys?**

COACH WHITE: Well, that's an interesting question, because C.J. could be really good at it, but right now we have two quarterbacks. And we don't want him to -- as a matter of fact, we're trying to work on his get-down skills, sliding skills a little bit, because he's such a competitor. Things like the draw that I'm talking about, the quarterback draw for him is perfect. I'm not sure how much read. We haven't put it in yet, but I'm sure we will in the spring. Especially our defense needs to see it as much as possible for anything.

**Q. You mentioned Mark a fullback playing tailback, did Mark express frustration at times that he couldn't get to the hole that was there? Do you feel like your backs are more adept at taking advantage of the holes that the line produces this year?**

COACH WHITE: Yeah, I do. I think some of the guys we've got almost hit the hole too quick.

Like Akrum's very fast to the hole. He doesn't see everything as clearly as he should at times because he's going so fast. But that's a pace thing. That's an experience thing. But, yeah, Mark couldn't get there sometimes and sometimes he could. He showed up with a demeanor that was good for us.

But we're really excited about the guys we have right now. It's been fun to coach these kids. They're going to keep getting better, and you're going to see some more excitement and longer runs, I believe.

**Q. Sounds like Marshall and Miguel's in that mix too now. What opened the door to that? Last year's performance?**

COACH WHITE: Yeah, there are no two ways to put it. That's an acceptable performance, and they (Connor and Dillon) know it. They did not execute. Talking about preparation, execution, and I've got to find a way to have someone execute better in games. The competition again is the only way to do it. We have what we have. We have four specialists in our program. One of them needs to step up and perform better on Saturdays.

**Q. What has Marshall shown as a punter?**

COACH WHITE: He technically doesn't know what he's doing, but he hit a 60-yarder Saturday. Didn't know what he was doing. The ball just pops off his foot. His leg strength is rare. It really is.

**Q. How would you manage him if he's handling both duties?**

COACH WHITE: I don't think it's as hard as some people, but a lot of college kids have done that. You've just got to make sure he doesn't get a tired leg. You can't punt him too much. The thing that strains you the most at specialist is kickoffs. It takes a lot of energy out of your leg. You can't have him kickoff too much.

**Q. What are some of the things that you saw on film that Marshall's accuracy that you've been wanting to work with him? You said he's got the leg strength but the consistency is a big thing?**

COACH WHITE: A couple minor technical things. The first thing is his plant foot being consistent. It's got to be just six inches from the spot, and it's got to be at a certain point where that's inconsistent. And that is probably the most

important thing for a kicker is your plant foot. Just like golf, if you're teed up over here, the ball's going to go over there, it's not going to go where you want it to. And that changes with balls on the hash and all that stuff like that.

But he gets amped up. He is one of those kickers that he's not one of those cool-hand-Luke guys. He's a football player, and he gets a little overexcited and gets in there sometimes and he wants to crush it. He doesn't need to do that. He's got plenty of leg. It's like on kickoffs, the ones we track and the ones that got return on us last year are the ones he mishit, the balls that kind of fluttered. He mishit those. Those weren't on purpose. The ones did he hit right, they're not returnable.

**Q. When you look at Jonathan Parker, about half of the year leading the kickoff returns. Was it a lack of confidence getting the ball to bounce? How do you explain how that unfolded in the Tennessee game?**

COACH WHITE: I wish I had an answer for you. He just is not innately -- catches the ball like some kids do. He's actually working with the wide receivers now, and that's going to help him tremendously, tracking balls and feeling the ball and catching the ball. We hope that helps in the return game.

It's just another thing. This kid is a great kid. I can't tell you how important football is to him. In that play in particular you're talking about, it crushed him. As a coach, what are you going to tell him? I've never seen anything like it, and probably most of you haven't. But it was just a reaction and those experience things that he's going to learn from.

We haven't lost faith him. He has more play-making ability than most on our team, and we need to find a way to get him to track the ball better. He had trouble tracking it. He let a couple balls fall on the kickoff in front of him. But that's just, I don't know... reps, reps, reps, and if he can't do it, we need to find someone else.

**Q. There is a perception that maybe you guys were a little passive in the punt return game. Is that fair? How do you get more out of that?**

COACH WHITE: I think it's fair in terms of we've been burnt on fakes. We have almost a philosophy that the ball is the most important thing.

At times we were in a punt safe, defensive stay, mentality that at times we probably could have been more aggressive. I think we do need to pressure the punters more. In today's college football with all the formations and everything, it's really hard to practice the return against all these formations and a full-out pressure. I'm happy to say LeVar Woods is going to now take that over. I've given him that job so he can take that headache away from me.

So that is another thing that we talked about just in terms of special teams. We felt that more coaches need to have voices in the whole scheme of things. So we're going to divvy up some responsibilities so that they're not just hearing my voice. More importantly, I think more the assistant coaches are going to be more -- they have been, but more actively involved coaching it on the field.

**Q. When you look at the importance of fullback in this offense, some teams have gotten away from that, and sometimes it can limit the visibility, I guess of the running back at times because you've got one person in front of you. What makes the fullback so important and integral especially in the zone, running scheme outside zone, and what kind of role do you see it having this year with the veterans that you have?**

COACH WHITE: The best way to explain it is they are the erasers if something happens up front and someone misses an assignment, they can make them right. Specifically we have a play called 17/16/boss, boss meaning fullback on support, which is like a safety. Most of the time he never blocks that guy. Most of the time he cleans up in the back, makes the cut, and the safety is never there. So that is the importance of it.

Then it's just the mentality that we have at Iowa of we're coming right down at you. We don't care if you know it's coming. We're going to bring it, and the fullback is going to lead it. Those two guys Macon and Adam, they epitomize playing smash-mouth football. They love it. Our team feeds off of it.

**Q. Would you say Daniels is probably the only candidate of like a red zone or goal line running back or will you mix it up in that area?**

COACH WHITE: I think we need to find that out. Believe it or not, Akrum Wadley between tackles has shown that he can mix it up in there. If

he ever gets to 195 pounds, he's getting there. Every day is a little bit closer.

**Q. Talking about Jordan, it seems like his game you always wonder about that. He's got that, he's got the outside of health, what do you see want see out of him this year?**

COACH WHITE: I think one of the major points that I get to all of them, Jordan in particular, I don't know if you remember a couple runs in the bowl game where he's in space, and he's kind of weaving around there a little bit instead of just running.

We went to a bunch of different places this spring. We went to UCLA, the coach there is a really good coach. Got a few drills from him. But one coaching little buzz word he always used was get your eyes to the end zone. I was like, simple as that sounds, right, guys get in space, and they're looking around and who is going to tackle me, right? You're in open space, get your eyes to the end zone and then figure out who is going to attack you. But these guys are weaving around. It drives me crazy. We've got to get that fixed, and that's one thing that Jordan is working on.

Jordan has made a tremendous progress in pass protection, and he'll be the first to -- he was kind of a liability. And that is why Damon was such a valuable role because he can do both. Now we feel confident putting Jordan in on third down, which is important.

**Q. I was going to ask you about that. Bullock seemed to be in on passing downs, a lot of times when you're five wide he was on the edge, do you have a specific running back that's going to fill that role or do you think right now that it could be Akrum or it could be Jordan or even LeShun, could he fit that role?**

COACH WHITE: LeShun's protection is outstanding, and believe it or not, he catches it a lot better than people think. But one guy that is tailor-made for this role is Derrick Mitchell. You talk about a wide receiver converting to a running back. He showed in the first six practices a willingness to block in protection and a willingness to learn. He's a good learner. So he's got tremendous ball skills. He catches the ball effortlessly, and obviously he's a great route runner from Coach Kennedy's two years with him. So we're hoping that might be a role for him.

Akrum, same deal. He's getting better at

protection. So that's wide open. And Jordan is fighting to keep that because he wants that role.

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