

University of Iowa Football Media Conference

Wednesday, October 21, 2015

Greg Davis



GREG DAVIS: Well, obviously we're glad to be 7-0, and the bye week comes at a good time, gives us a chance to get some bumps and bruises healed up. Also gives us an opportunity to work with some of the young guys that have not had as much work since we broke camp, so you know, that's encouraging.

You know, a lot of positive things going on right now. I think someone told me we're leading the Big Ten in plays over 40 yards, so one of the things we wanted to do was try to be a little bit more explosive. We have nine different guys that have done that. We're doing a pretty good job in our 3rd downs, and so, there are just a lot of good things.

Next man in, we've had four different tackles start ball games. We had two different running backs that have gained over 200 yards. So we're excited about where we're at. We realize there's a bunch of work to be done.

Q. How do you explain, you have three new linemen in three different positions, you run for over 280 yards against a pretty good defense. They only had a week to prepare for that, putting Cole on the left and Sean on the right?

GREG DAVIS: Well, throughout camp we mix-and-match lineups, realizing that during the season different guys are going to have to play different places.

The lineup that you saw the first week of the season, I mean, guys had already been working at different positions. We had started working James at guard, center and tackle; Sean Welsh is a guy that has worked at tackle during camp some. So you try to prepare for those situations. Obviously Brian did a great job in game week realizing what we were going to have and the best way to fit all the pieces together.

But you do work on some of those things in camp, moving your top six, seven guys around.

Q. Can you put a finger on how or why this offense has become more explosive?

GREG DAVIS: You know, I think that, one, our backs are doing a good job. I think C.J. is seeing opportunities to take the ball down the field and taking them. He will take those shots.

The other thing I think that goes unnoticed -- two things, really. Our fullbacks have done a great job, and our wide receivers have done a great job. Most of the time when an explosive play happens, for example, the very first touchdown against Northwestern, I think it was 35 yards around the end, the line did a good job. It was a little bit of a counter zone play. Jake Hillyer did a good job, he came in and got the safety, and we had Akrum one-on-one with the corner.

So we had cleaned everything up for the back. Akrum made the corner miss, and it turned out to be an explosive play.

Usually those things are a combination, but I think probably not enough nice things are said about our fullbacks and our wide receivers because they've really done a good job of creating explosive plays downfield.

Q. It seems like the explosive plays mostly have either been screens or running plays.

GREG DAVIS: We've worked hard on our screens. We've worked hard on our screens. A lot of times that's, again, putting a back in a good situation, and again, the line has to do a good job because they're not just all going out together. There's assignments that they have, and then our backs have done a good job of running after the catch.

Q. Obviously with C.J.'s health, you've had to prepare a No. 2, and probably prepare 3A and 3B. What do you say about their development now, Tyler Wieggers and of the two freshmen quarterbacks?

GREG DAVIS: Tyler had a really good week last week. He took most of the reps with the first unit prior to Friday, and then C.J. was able to work on Friday. Tyler has continued to grow from spring ball to camp through the season, and he would have been ready to play. I mean, in terms of getting us in the right plays and all that.

With C.J. not practicing a lot last week, we did work Ryan Boyle quite a bit with the second group, and he's doing some fine things. But we'll just continue to work those guys as we see fit.

Q. Staying on the two quarterbacks, Boyle and Cook, are they the emergency type situation right

now with Beathard kind of dealing with the injuries, and are they still projected to be quarterbacks maybe next year would you say, too?

GREG DAVIS: Yes, they're definitely still projected to be quarterbacks next year. We would like to redshirt both of them, especially at this point, but at the same time, you've got to do what's -- you've got to do what's best, and whatever the situation presents itself are.

Q. So Boyle is moving ahead of Drew?

GREG DAVIS: No, no. Boyle will work with the second group. He did work with the second group. And if we would have got to that situation, he would have played.

But I wouldn't read a lot into that, quite honestly.

Q. Do you have an emergency guy who can take a snap, say -- and this is hypothetical, but Wiegiers is in the game, C.J. couldn't play and then his helmet comes off for just one play on 2nd and 2? Do you have a running back so you don't blow a redshirt on a guy --

GREG DAVIS: C.J. would have been able to go back in in that situation. We could have put him in the gun and handed the ball off. We'll try our best not to blow a redshirt year.

Q. You guys are reaching different areas in the running game this year. You just mentioned a counter inside zone, which has been a pretty play for you. You're able to run out of the shotgun. You're averaging about five yards a carry on 1st downs. How much has the running game been kind of a platform for C.J. to do what he's done?

GREG DAVIS: Well, I think without question, when you can run the ball, a lot of things set up for you. The play action pass, your protection. So it all starts there in terms of what you try to get done, and the backs have done a good job, the line have done a good job, and so we haven't done a bunch of different things quite honestly. We've done a few more different formations this year. We've played with some 20 personnel, in and out of some 20 personnel. We've done some things. But for the most part we still believe in running the zone, the slant, and then a couple counter punches off -- the play that Jordan broke for 75 yards was a one-back power play. It was a check play. C.J. saw a look that he liked, and he took it, and Jordan took it to the house.

A lot of it is what's happening up front. I think a lot of it is our quarterback is getting us in the right place, and then again, the receivers downfield.

Q. Coach Ferentz could have made some changes in the off-season. How much has the continuity helped kind of year three to year four in terms of

the assistant coaches?

GREG DAVIS: Well, I think our room has basically been together now for three years. LeVar came over and is doing an excellent job with the tight ends, and so the more you're together, the more you understand what everybody has to do, needs to do, and whatever. But we have a good room right now.

Q. How much is this year, the running game, how much of it is a product of running back playing running back and not a fullback playing running back like Mark?

GREG DAVIS: Well, you've seen a bunch of ballgames, so you can kind of answer that. But you know, I said in August, I thought we had four backs, and I also said in August that we would need all four of them before it was all said and done. I didn't realize it would be by the seventh game.

You know, hopefully this week will give us a chance to get LeShun back and get him rolling, and then the young guys that I think Kirk mentioned, we were going to give them a bunch of scrimmage work this week, they got a bunch of hits last week. But they're doing a nice job.

Q. Do you feel like it's going to be tough to share the ball now with Akrum and Derrick doing so well or do you still want to go with two main guys for now?

GREG DAVIS: Yeah, you'll play that out as it happens, but typically you like to go into a ballgame with two guys that you plan on using, and then some kind of 3rd down back situation where -- which early in camp we thought that would be Derrick Mitchell, and he's been kind of dinged up. He hasn't really been able to get into that role, although he played in there a lot for us the other night.

Q. How much has this year been personally rewarding for you, even though it's only halfway over, a little over half, but judging from the way things ended at Texas, and for every offensive coordinator there's ups and downs with the public and media and what have you, but now to be in this kind of groove that you guys are on, 7-0, ranked high, how rewarding is this for you?

GREG DAVIS: I'm excited for the kids. I mean, they've worked their tails off since January. It's been well-documented that the off-season, the leadership, the slight edge which has been referenced a bunch of different times, you know, you're excited to see those guys getting paid back for the hard work that they've done.

Q. What is your biggest surprise with this offense this year in your success?

GREG DAVIS: We're probably more explosive through seven games than I would have anticipated in August, and again, we've talked about that quite a bit.

But if you can get a couple of chunk plays during the course of a game, it does wonders for field position, it does wonders for your football team. And also, our defense has done a great job of giving us some short fields, and we've been able to take advantage of that. They've done a super job of turning the ball over for us and allowing us to play on some short fields.

Q. What have you been impressed by in terms of development from CJ?

GREG DAVIS: From a tangible standpoint, his ability to get the ball to his second and third receivers. I felt like at the line of scrimmage he would do a great job. But his leadership has been pretty remarkable starting in January.

Q. You've said that he was kind of a gunner early in his career, CJ, and that doesn't seem to be there. Although last week at Northwestern he did make a couple of those Brett Favre around the line of scrimmage plays. That doesn't seem to be there. He's making good decisions. When did you see that? When did you know you could trust him with the ball like that?

GREG DAVIS: Well, coming out of August, I felt that. But until you go play in a ballgame, you don't really know for sure. I mean, until you put the quarterback out there with the band and the lights on, you're not sure.

Somewhere in the third or fourth game, it wasn't like it was an epiphany, it was okay, he understands taking care of the ball, and understanding when he should take a shot and when he should not.

Q. Have you identified a part of the run game and pass game where you would like to see improvement over the second half of the season?

GREG DAVIS: I think in the pass game, our movement balls have not been up to standard in terms of getting the quarterback on the edge, whether or not that's off play action or sprint out or whatever. I think that's an area that we have to improve in in the passing game.

And then in the other aspects, you know, we're constantly looking for better ways in that third and 2-3, whether or not that's a throw, whether or not that's a run. I think that's an area that we can improve in as we continue down the stretch.

Q. Is LeShun working 100 percent now? Is he on the way back?

GREG DAVIS: He will be after this week.

Q. How do you envision that working with him, Wadley and Mitchell for the Maryland game?

GREG DAVIS: I really won't have a good answer until next week. We see that he is 100 percent and he is able to go, and then we'll kind of play it by ear after that.

Q. You've played two of your true freshman wide receivers. Can you discuss those guys and how that group has looked?

GREG DAVIS: One of the things that happens with injuries in general is if you can survive them, you end up with more depth. Cole Croston and Sean Welsh have both played at tackle, James Daniels, and then with Tevaun's injury, Jerminic Smith has started and played well. Played well at Wisconsin, even though we didn't get him the ball. He was open a couple different times, and then he came back here the next week and did a good job. He is really a very unique freshman in terms of his ability to comprehend everything that's going on and changes and sight adjustments and route adjustments to different coverages.

Adrian, we haven't been able to play him quite as much as we had hoped, but we felt like when we made the decision to play him that by this point in the season he would be getting closer because he is a very talented guy, and hopefully over the last five or six ballgames we'll be able to get him some more action.

Q. What's it like as a coordinator when you're able to throw heavy personnel on the field and that tells a defense, it's going to be a run, it's going to be probably between tackles, probably maybe an inside zone, and you're able to run that and run that and run that, especially against Illinois? What's it like for you to be able to press that same button and have that work?

GREG DAVIS: Anytime that your line can take a ballgame over, it's a great feeling, because when they're coming off the ball the way they have been and your backs are running behind, sometimes things are not always clean. When you look at the coaches' copy and you look at the end zone, but guys are coming off with such intensity and backs are running and trusting that there's going to be something when they get there, and then even if there's not, they're sliding one gap or whatever and being productive, it is a great feeling. There's no other way to describe it.

Q. The resumes for your left tackles now are almost even, with Boone Myers playing four, Cole Croston starting three. When Boone is fully recovered, how do you see that playing out between those two?

GREG DAVIS: When he's fully recovered, it gives you

confidence that we can roll Cole in there and that he can play at a high standard, and again, I mean, those things -- we haven't had to worry about rolling anybody lately, but hopefully when they all get well, then we can work some kind of rotation where we're getting them all on the field and they're all staying healthy.

Q. When Jordan was hurt Saturday, Akrum goes from 0 to 60 as far as carries and trust goes. Had you guys seen enough in practice or was there just no other choice?

GREG DAVIS: It was probably a little bit of both. Chris White had been saying for about two weeks now that with LeShun down, he had been kind of beating the table, hey, this guy has really practiced. Everybody can see his ability to jump sideways and make people miss. But everybody can also see that prior to that, that ball was out way too many times.

But Chris had really been saying this guy is really practicing well, is really doing a good job. During the course of that time he got hit more than you normally would get a back hit in practice, and so we felt pretty good about it, but it certainly made us feel better that we came out of the ballgame and he had carried it over 20 times and not once was it close to coming out.

Q. How close is Jake Duzey to getting back to a more expanded role?

GREG DAVIS: We were just looking at the morning practice, and I thought Jake looked like Jake this morning. Now, we were not in full gear, but I think he is getting really close. But you know, Henry and George are both playing really well, too, but you can never have too many good tight ends. Hopefully we can find more out about Jake over the next two weeks and get him back into the rotation.

Q. With Brian taking the run game coordination, how has that worked? And it obviously looks like it's been successful.

GREG DAVIS: There hasn't been a bunch of change, quite honestly. The line coach, at least in the places I've been, has always kind of been the run game coordinator, whether or not there was a title or not. Brian is an extremely bright guy and has done a great job with the line. How it's worked, it's worked pretty well. He and I work pretty close together. But we had for the first three years, also.

Q. Is he going to be a head coach some day, Brian?

GREG DAVIS: If he wants to be he will.

Q. Do you think he wants to be?

GREG DAVIS: I think most guys want to be, but you can ask him that. It would be better to ask him.

Q. You talked a lot about Ryan Boyle, but how is Drew Cook progressing?

GREG DAVIS: Drew has done a great job. Drew is extremely conscientious, extremely detail oriented, and we're very pleased with what he's done. And this week he'll get a lot more work than in the previous weeks, but we're happy with what he's doing right now.

Q. Jay Scheel was highly recruited, then injured most of his career and then I think that set him back in August. Where is he right now on your development list?

GREG DAVIS: We're very pleased with Jay. He was going into probably the last four or five practices in August before we had to kind of make some decisions, and we made a decision that he wasn't quite ready.

But we're very pleased with him. I think August was the first time he has been close to being healthy since he's been here, really running and confident and cutting and doing those kind of things.