

**September 30, 2014**



An interview with:

## **COACH PARKER**

**Q. Can you start off with your defensive presence so far?**

COACH PARKER: Well, this is a great time to have a bye week. I think we've got the pieces of our defense, and the guys in the right spot right now. We're really working good as a team. The communication has been better. We're playing a lot more guys during the game. I think we took 29 guys on a trip last week and 24 guys were actually participating in the game, which was a good thing.

Obviously, we've got to get better with the communication. I think we could have gotten better. There were a lot of things on the film from last week that we need to improve on, which I think we can be better. I guess as a coach you're always trying to improve. I don't think we're exactly where we want to be right now, but the kids are working hard, and it's a good time to have a bye week.

**Q. What areas are you most satisfied with right now?**

COACH PARKER: I think we finally got settled on the linebackers and moving guys around with Bo Bower moving out there with the outside linebacker, and we'd move Josey back inside. I think he's done a good job, and we moved Perry back inside to the Mike. I think Mabin on the corner has really shown up and done a good job trying to hold down that job. I think he's been playing well. He's just so young right now. He's only played five games and he's learning every time he goes out there, very similar to Desmond King at this point. Desmond would actually play four and a half games at this time. But there is a big improvement.

I think the safeties are improving. The defensive line is doing a job where we're playing

more guys. Jaleel Johnson has gotten in there a little bit. Faith has gotten in there. So we're happy and excited about that. I think everybody's getting closer and starting to understand what we have. There are a lot more adjustments as you go, and things that come up, we have to make adjustments.

**Q. In the Northern Iowa game there seemed to be a disconnect with the linebackers and the secondary. But it seems they've improved on both sides of that equation. Do you agree with that?**

COACH PARKER: Yeah, there is no question about it. You go into the first game and you have three new linebackers in the game that are not used to playing with each other with a back in. I think in the back end Johnny has been a young player. He's only started one season. His second year of actually starting and playing the whole time, and he has to improve, too, at his position.

There is so much stuff you have to know as linebackers and safeties, and always being on the same page just takes time. The more you do things, the more comfortable you get and understanding that you should see a formation and recognize what they're going to do to you. This happens. Everybody's a copycat. They're going to try to beat you again, and obviously they tried last week a couple times to run the same type of route and we covered it pretty good.

**Q. In response to what Greg said, could you ever see yourself coming back to the role of offensive coordinator?**

COACH PARKER: Well, Seth Wallace had a stat that offensive coaches live longer, ten years longer, so I think I'm already affected by the first 26 or 27 years. So I don't think I'm going to expand my life span. But sometimes we think about it, it might be easier. But I love what we do,

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trying to stop guys. That's what we do. It was an interesting stat though.

**Q. How did you come up with the Raider package?**

COACH PARKER: We ran that Raider package probably back in 2004, 2005 when Norm was here. All you do is take out a three technique and stand up a linebacker. We used it against Northwestern a lot. They had a run around guy. We went back and looked at it. Ed Myles was out there, so there were some things that we did out of that, so basically you can run your whole defense out of the same package.

So it was a thought after the Ohio State game. A year ago we had opportunities to stop them on third down and we couldn't stop the quarterback, so to our benefit we got more speed on the field and that benefited us a little bit. We'd been expanding on it. You play a little zone, you play a little man, you blitz out of it and have a lot of different options out of it, but you have more speed on the field.

**Q. You were pretty high on Mabin a while ago. What did he show you in his move from offense to defense, and right now what do you think of his growth in that position?**

COACH PARKER: Well, Mabin when he was first was here, he was flopping back and forth between the wide receiver, defensive back. He played both in high school. What I think he's really done is he had to make a commitment to playing football. I think he was just here at times going through the motions. He has a lot of athletic ability to be a pretty good corner, and he may have a chance at the next level, but he's so young of understanding of what you have to do in college football. So many different coverages. You have to understand your techniques and your assignments and your responsibility. He's still learning. A prime example last week, there are a couple things he made some mental errors and didn't do. But it's a learning process, and he'll never forget it again.

I think the more he keeps on going, the more mature he gets and he feels more confident, I think he's got a lot more upside.

**Q. Is Bradley Fletcher a comparison with Mabin?**

COACH PARKER: Very similar body types. I think they're both fast. I think Greg is probably a little bit quicker, but both of them have

long arms, both big, big guys, and they both can run. I think that Mabin probably has quicker feet than Bradley.

**Q. Did you think going in you'd have to juggle the linebacker like you have to get guys in the right spot?**

COACH PARKER: Yeah, we have some thoughts and it depends on some guys banged up during camp or during spring, and just trying to figure out what was the right fit, and to do what we do. Do we have the guys? Who are they? What kind of character are they? Are they inside guys? Are they more of a plugger? Are they outside and running with wide receivers? We were spoiled a little bit. He was probably faster than any defensive back that we had. He ran pretty good in the combine. He had length, and he had knowledge and power and strength. So he's a very rare player that we had.

So finally just to get settled in, it took us a while during two-a-days because guys weren't comfortable yet. We were still trying to figure out where Bo was. He's made a big jump, and he was growing every week. We were banged up a little bit at Mike, so we moved Travis back in there. He's a competitive guy that's still not there yet either. He's still learning the calls and stuff like that because everything's new.

**Q. It seems like the last two years so far this season that you're blitzing more. Have those percentages gone up?**

COACH PARKER: I don't think so. We're right around about 20 percent. I don't have the exact numbers. But I think it's good to put pressure on it, but you've still got to be able to cover them. I think we have some guys that can cover. We play a little bit maybe more straight man with four-man rush with a post safety. I'd like to have a post safety in there.

But there are times when we do blitz, but not zero blitz. We haven't done that much. So it all depends. But I'd say it's about the same. In practice sometimes we jump up to 35 if I'm not real happy during the time.

**Q. Are you still influenced by Norm Parker in your daily things?**

COACH PARKER: Yeah, it's pretty much the same system. I've been around the same defensive scheme, probably, for a long time. Since

I was back in college. It was the same basic front. These teams are more spreading it out and there are a lot less two backs, but the same type of philosophy. I'd probably look at it different. I'd take it from the back end. How can my guys fit into the run game, and how are they going to be able to cover in the pass game and probably take it from the back end down where Norm was from down and back. So that's probably the difference between me and Norm.

**Q. You had a couple guys like Gair and Fleming who were forced to start and play a lot of minutes. How's that going to pay off for you getting into the heat of the season?**

COACH PARKER: I think it was twofold there. One, every kid thinks they're ready to go out and play, and they can do it in practice, until they get on the game field and actually do it and execute it they don't understand what it takes to prepare. I think Anthony Gair found out when he was thrown in and we lost Lomax, that he could have done a better job of preparing, and next time he did. He has an opportunity. He worked harder preparing and watching film and practiced harder and he's doing all the things you asked him to do. Same thing with Maurice Fleming.

But sometimes just because you work hard, you might not still get in, but you have to be ready at every play. I think it's going to help us down the road. I think there is an opportunity for him to even help us in our sub-package, the Raider package or even in nickel package.

So to me, he's growing. He's starting to mature as a football player, and we're getting more guys that can play in the back end.

**Q. I assume you were deeply involved in the recruiting of King, right?**

COACH PARKER: Yes.

**Q. Are you finding out more things about him as it goes along?**

COACH PARKER: Yeah, a lot of times those guys in Detroit play in these power leagues or little league things that everybody knows everybody and they play against him and play so much. He was a good player, both a running back and defensive back. I think he also set some records for rushing. He has the ability to carry the ball, and I've seen a lot of that. Lot of times defensive backs, you don't see in high school. It's hard. Sometimes the guy stands out there and there is not much activity. But when the guy was

running the ball that relates to being a defensive back, and that's the hardest challenge to find defensive backs that are involved on both sides of the ball.

**Q. Spearman appears to be an incredible athlete. How is he taking the weak-sided linebacker? Is that his ultimate position? Do you see him essentially in transitioning a year or two outside maybe down line?**

COACH PARKER: I think the possibility that it could happen. He does get in the Raider package, and becomes a rusher on the edge. It all depends on how much he grows and how much weight he puts on, and can he do it in a consistent basis to go on and take offensive linemen on. Right now we feel like this is the best position for him. When we need to, we'll put him in rushing situations in our subpackages, but eventually it could. If he keeps on growing and getting to 245, 250 we might put him down. But I'm sure if he hears that, he's going to stay down to where he's at.

**Q. What does Nate Meier bring you that you didn't have last year?**

COACH PARKER: One thing about Nate, he's a tough character. He's one of those guys that you want on your side. I think he's a guy that goes hard every time with little disregard for his body. He's a really, really, really tough guy. I think this whole game is about being tough and being violent. He's a violent football player. He's relentless about it. Now he'll make his mistakes like everybody else, but our job is to make him right.

**Q. How does he compare to Howard Hodges height? Same size? Those guys kind of disruptive?**

COACH PARKER: Yeah, I think Howard ended up about 255 something like that when he left. Nate's not that big yet. I think Howard had a little bit more -- he could put on a little bit more. He was a little bit taller, maybe a little bit quicker, but similar.

**Q. Can you teach somebody to be a violent football player? Do they have that or they don't when they get to college?**

COACH PARKER: Sometimes. A lot of

time in recruiting, that is the hardest thing to find out. You can watch film and see guys. I always like guys that leave their feet. You see a lot of guys running tackle, and you just want to see how fast they're getting there. When they get there to make contact, how explosive are they being at the guy? I think when you see guys layout and give their body disregard, no responsibility. They don't care about their body, and they just give it their all. Sometimes that's hard to find.

I think it's hard to coach. You try to teach toughness, and you go through tackling drills and you grind it into them in our strength and conditioning program, our off-season program mentally getting tough. Some guys have a natural ability to be a violent football player because it's a violent game.

**Q. Do you think you did that as a football player?**

COACH PARKER: I don't know. I couldn't cover anything.

**Q. Against Iowa State, the defensive linemen were basically containing instead of rushing Sam Richardson. The next week seemed to be more aggressive in pass situations up front and contained. Is that by style or is that by --**

COACH PARKER: It was probably by design when we went into the next week. You go into games, and sometimes when you start playing not to lose, everything being cautious, sometimes you have to go out there and play the one. You're going to throw your bullets when you can, and throw them often.

So just kind of maybe changed the coaching staff's mentality a little bit. Hey, if we're going to go down, we're going to go down fighting and throwing punches.

**Q. Did you learn something from your team that second half of Pitt? They responded defensively. They could do pretty much nothing except shut down their running game.**

COACH PARKER: Going into that week of practice and preparation, I thought we had a very, very good Tuesday and Wednesday practice. I mean, it was the most aggressive practices that we had probably all year, including the spring time. I really thought guys were running the ball and violent during practice.

But we couldn't put the next day in there on Thursday. I think we lost a little bit. But I think

they showed up in the second half. But I think the first half when you start practicing against all these different runs and you go against your scout team they don't fit exactly the same way when they're actually live or the team running like Pittsburgh. They're very similar to Wisconsin concept. We understood what they were doing, we just didn't do ours to exactly the way we did in practice on the football field.

But they came back running the same plays and we shut them down. So the guys understood it, believed in each other and kept on fighting. That is the whole thing. Can you play 60 minutes? I believe if we can play 60 minutes, we can be a good defensive football team.

**Q. On the Big Ten teleconference, you just said that you think the safeties have made strides. Can you let us know where they've started and what strides they've made?**

COACH PARKER: One thing about Jordan Lomax is that he is a very quiet guy. He has to learn how to be more vocal. I think he's taken charge of that and the communication problems early in the season. Everybody has to be on the same page. We can't be on split coverage stuff. One coverage this side, another coverage over here.

So I think they really bought in. And I think they've really worked together studying the game of football. A college student, you go to class, you get your homework done, and then this time of year the only thing you have is to watch your opponents during this time. I think they kind of gelled together the more times they worked together, they can see it together when they're watching film in the film room.

So when it happens on the field, they're a little more comfortable with each other. I think that is contagious. I think more guys are doing that, and the more we can do that, the better football team we're going to be.

**Q. Will you be out (Indiscernible) this weekend?**

COACH PARKER: Yeah, we're discussing that right now. I know some guys are going out. I have a plan to go out as long as I get everything done here, I probably will be out.

**Q. Where does Matt Nelson fit in right now? He's a red-shirt obviously. Has he**

**shown the kind of growth you would expect for someone who is highly touted and local?**

COACH PARKER: Yeah, I think he's got a lot of his strength that needs to get better. I think that's happened. But I think picking up the system he's done a good job doing that. Right now he's just to me not ready to play. I just don't want to waste a year of playing him ten snaps or thirty snaps in a year. So I think it's good to develop him and mature his strength and strength and conditioning program, and definitely he's going to help us out next year.

**Q. Speaking of defensive end, does depth there kind of make you nervous. You only have three guys that play there?**

COACH PARKER: We have some other guys that we can put in there. I know Faith has played out there before, so we can flop him back out there.

**Q. Last week against Purdue, Drew Ott was walking guys back in the back field I haven't seen that since Matt Roth was here. Can you talk about his growth in this game? Has he bought in and understand how to use that leverage and get under guys now?**

COACH PARKER: Yeah, he's become a better pass-rusher, and it all starts with strength, and he's a bigger guy, and you watch the Purdue game when he was playing a year ago than he is now. He's a just a different guy. He's a bigger man. He's stronger and improved his pass rush. There's a couple bull rushes that he took and carried the guy back to the quarterback. And the next time he double slapped to come around the outside and makes the guy throw a bad throw. He's improving just like anything else. He's doing it. And like a golf swing, you swing it, and swing, and swing and finally you make the shot.

**Q. You played two freshmen, can you talk about their development?**

COACH PARKER: Yeah, Miles Taylor is a great effort, toughness, violent guy, football player. I just love his attitude the way it goes. We figured he can change the tempo of a game and he's still learning. It's a lot of stuff to go through for a true freshman to play at safety. It is a lot easier to go at corner, but we like his growth and ability the way he loves the game of football.

Ben has done a good job for us. I think he's going to be a really good football player. Obviously we had some insight with his dad.

We've known his dad. Just being around him, he's a great kid, a good athlete and really going to help us. We're going to try to keep on getting him in our subpackage where I think he can help us too.

**Q. Typically he's your leading tackler year to year, is it just a matter of growth from the two young players in that position?**

COACH PARKER: I think it comes down to the way they're running the ball or the way they're dumping the ball off. You look at Hitchens two years ago, his junior year, he made a lot of tackles, right? There are two reasons you're making a lot of tackles. You're in the right spot and you're playing your position, or they've found a weakness and they're trying to throw the ball in your area, and you just happen to be there. But Hitchens used to make a lot of tackles five yards down the field in pass coverage, and everybody said, wow, he's leading the Big Ten in tackles, you know? I just remember watching. I showed my family members, guys coming from my hometown, said he's doing pretty good and just start watching tape. Where are you making the tackles at? When you're making them five yards down field.

But he improved, got better, and started making the plays in the back field like the Michigan game. One of those plays he comes in and makes it for minus two. He just improved as a player. So it really depends on how the offenses want to attack you. If you're a weakness, you're going to have a lot of tackles, just like a corner. If you make a lot of tackles, you're probably the weak link in the back end because you're throwing the ball.

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