

University of Iowa Football Media Conference

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Phil Parker



PHIL PARKER: Thanks for coming. I want to start off saying I think we've got a decent start going here with our team. Defensively I think the chemistry of the team is good. I think it's a good time to have a bye week to get some guys healthy. It's been physical the first seven weeks of the season. I think our kids are getting back on track, and it's going to be a good day, or at least a good week right now to get everybody focused on the next five games.

Q. Why has the linebacker play been so much better? Is it just maturity?

PHIL PARKER: Well, obviously they've been working together. They had an extra year together. I think Cole has done a good job of preparing, and he's probably the most improved player that we have so far on defense, and Josey Jewell, he finally settled in into middle linebacker, has taken control since the springtime in two-a-days, and he's really comfortable doing that. So I think the experience there of just doing it every day. And Ben Neimann has done a great job on the outside. I think they all have the ability to run. They're physical, and they work together, and Coach Reid does a good job with those guys.

Q. Setting the edge was kind of an off-season issue and it seems that's been one of your better traits this year. Is that kind of a combination of somebody like Ben Neimann or the defensive end being able to set the edge and then the way that your defense has swarmed to the football? How much of that was practiced and coached in the off-season?

PHIL PARKER: Well, everything goes back to leverage, and it's not like we weren't coaching it last year. We just weren't as efficient as we are right now.

I think we put a little bit more emphasis on it, do a lot more individual drills with maybe wide receivers, defensive backs, linebackers, tight ends.

But we emphasize a little bit more, and they've done a good job, and guys running to the ball with proper leverage helps out.

Q. Parker Hesse, he's jumped in there, what does that say about that kid, the job he's done so far?

PHIL PARKER: I think he's done a good job. He's been in the program over a year, and he's got good

strength and a high motor that kind of reminds me a little bit of Nate as far as going, going, going all the time. He does a great job with that, and he plays with great leverage. He's a smart kid and he's tough. Obviously losing Drew was a big factor in what we do, but the next guy stepped in and we're very pleased with the way that Parker Hesse is working.

Q. You haven't seemed to have messed with your blitz numbers. I think you're probably a little less than 20 percent. Do you see that going forward the next five games, or do you think you'll have to kind of manufacture some pass rush?

PHIL PARKER: I think there are times and situations where you need to blitz, and obviously maybe we haven't been in that situation where we needed to do it as much. I'm sure there's going to be some times that we're going to have to blitz more than we want to, but we want to keep it in between 17, 22 percent, somewhere in there. It all depends on where are in the game, what's the situation, what's the down and distance, and that all dictates when you want to bring pressure.

Q. How has Desmond King been in the right place at the right time?

PHIL PARKER: Desmond works really hard. It's his third year starting and I think he has a feel for the game. He has a natural instinct of what's going on in the football game.

He's worked hard in practice. He definitely can improve. I think there are some opportunities that he could have had, and he probably could have had a couple more interceptions than he had right now. But he needs to keep working hard, and I'm just looking for him to improve over the next five weeks.

Q. Who's your defensive MVP right now if you had to pick one guy?

PHIL PARKER: It's a hard choice. I'd have to really think about it. But I think they have all done a good job. Everybody is hustling. It would be hard for me to say one guy. I think there's a collective group that's really playing well. Obviously statistically Desmond King with how many interceptions he has and change of the game and getting the ball back is valuable, but there are a lot of guys out there playing well. I couldn't pick one guy right now.

Q. You talked a lot about scoop-and-score in the spring and fall. Are you pleased with how you guys have been in turnover margin?

PHIL PARKER: It's really been good. It's an opportunity for us to get more balls, and our kids have bought into it. Sometimes during practice we do it all the time. Sometimes guys get mad that we're taking it back and all that, but it's just a habit that they created, and you see it on film sometimes, and even during the games the guys are picking up the ball even though it's an incomplete ball and the ball is dead.

It just serves as a reminder, creating the habit, and I think they've done a good job with that.

Q. You mentioned the linebackers' improved play. How much of that is a result of the tackles, soaking up blockers and keeping those guys engaged in a block?

PHIL PARKER: It all pertains to everybody playing and stepping up at the next level. I think up front they've done a really good job. I think in the secondary we've contained the guys, been in the proper leverage. I think we're back to fundamental football. It's a simple game, you've just got to leverage the ball, and a lot of our guys were running and didn't know where the ball was. Giving great effort, but you've always got to make sure you know where the ball is and at what angle you have to take to make the play. I think our guys have been in tune to that, and it shows up in the way they go through practice every day, hustling to the ball, always trying to get to the ball.

All pertains to how you leverage the ball, how you set edges, and how you tackle. There's not too many yards after contact, either, so it's been really good.

Q. Joshua Jackson is getting a lot of snaps in your Raider. In August he was a wide receiver. Why did you grab him and are you surprised that he's been performing like this to give you that flexibility there?

PHIL PARKER: I think everybody grows up at a different time, and he wasn't getting many reps at wide receiver. We had a need at defensive back at a corner position. When he first came back over, he was already polished enough. He already knew the drills we were doing. He was excited to be back on our side. He had to put some things on his plate, obviously he has the ability, and I think the maturity that he has shown over the last couple weeks and months really gave us a chance to put him on the field and get the trust factor coming from what he's done.

Q. Greg Mabin has been targeted quite a bit, do you feel he's made strides, or is it just a matter of

Desmond King being so good on the other side that people are going after him?

PHIL PARKER: I think he's really become a student of the game a little bit more. There's obviously some times that he needs to improve on some of his fundamental techniques and stuff like that. But I think when you've got Desmond, a guy that has a lot of picks, guys are going to try to throw away from him.

But I think that the maturity of Greg Mabin's mental capacity, what he's doing with the football and understanding the game is really improved, and I'm really looking forward to him improving. He has a long way to go. He has a lot of upside still left in him.

Q. You guys pulled the redshirt off of Hockaday this last week. What was kind of the thinking there and what do you see from him going forward?

PHIL PARKER: I think we thought he was always a good football player. We had a discussion early in the season before the first game that we thought he might be a potential guy that we would use. We started losing some guys, needed some guys on special teams, and figured that he could actually play on defense, too. We talked to him a little bit about it and said, hey, that's a decision that we're going to make, and he was all for it. Obviously he's going to help us on special teams, and he'll help us on the depth of linebackers.

Q. Where do you see him in the linebacker position?

PHIL PARKER: At the Will backer.

Q. Bo Bower has been playing in the Raider package. It looks like he's brushed up on his technique pretty well. He got to the quarterback a few times.

PHIL PARKER: A year ago we had some linebackers do that, and I'm sure it was a little bit of recall from that and worked with him a little bit and it was an opportunity for him to get on the field at a different position, but he's a very tough-minded kid. He's got great effort and hustle, and he still remembered some of his moves that he was using last year.

We were pleased with the way he went out there and performed.

Q. Mends, I don't think he played the other day. Was he a little dinged up?

PHIL PARKER: There's nothing wrong with Aaron Mends physically that I know of.

Q. How has Miles Taylor progressed this year?

PHIL PARKER: Miles Taylor is a very intense individual and very violent football player. I think he's played

pretty well. I think he can play better. He's really worked on his fundamentals. He really understands the game and understands the plays, and he's very sharp at understanding what the guys are trying to do to him, and he is always referring back to, hey, this play, this play, and he spends a lot of time in that film room that makes him a good player. But he's very intense. He has a passion. It means something to him, and we're excited to see where he can go.

Q. Last year teams avoided going up the middle, but with Bazata and Jaleel, they're really plugging the middle. What has impressed you about those two and how they're not letting teams do much up the middle?

PHIL PARKER: I think it really starts up front with the guys, and we want to be strong up the middle and I think Jaleel Johnson and Nate have done a great job of playing fundamentally sound. It took a while for Jaleel to get where we needed him to get. He's got a long ways to go yet, but he's really been disruptive. Bazata is very, very consistent at what he does in his technique, and we'll take him out on passing situations, but I think both of them have done a really good job, especially on 1st and 2nd down.

Q. Cole Fisher it seems to us came out of nowhere and won that starting job in camp. Can you describe what he's done to get there and how he's doing?

PHIL PARKER: Well, obviously he's a great athlete, and he's a tough kid and very smart. He's in engineering classes, and it's really interesting because he doesn't have as many classes to take (this year). He only has five credits so he spends a lot of time over here now instead of in the academic world there. Now he's here. We practice in the morning, he's not missing practice. He can go to class in the afternoon, has time to study and he has more time to prepare for football. That's how I think he really got to the starting position.

Q. Have you found that with a lot of your players, the morning practice clears their day for going to school?

PHIL PARKER: I hope so. A lot of times I think the professors teach in the afternoon, and they have to go to class. That's part of the requirements here. I think it's been a benefit to us and our kids.

Q. What do you see from Matt Nelson going forward? We're seeing glimpses with Drew Ott out. Where do you see him the rest of the season and down the road?

PHIL PARKER: I definitely see him playing a lot of football, and he's got a lot of potential. He's a big guy, obviously, and he really took the challenge on. He needs to step up, and I think last week he was really

practicing hard with a lot of intensity, and we look forward to playing him a lot with Parker Hesse and rotating him in there. He's going to be playing a lot.

Q. Your defense has always had grit, toughness, been one of the best in the country year in and year out. But this year almost to another level, is there anything that they've done impressed you, surprised you with regard to some of that?

PHIL PARKER: What's impressed me the most is going to the meetings every day and the intensity that they come into the meeting and the preparation that they do. I mean, this team has a chemistry, and togetherness that reminds me of some of the teams back in the early years -- 2002, 2004 teams. They understand they're in the room, they're talking, and it's really important to each other, and I think the chemistry of the team is probably the most important thing that's really impressed me.

I question nobody's toughness on that field. I think they're tough-minded guys. They want to work together, and it's always worried about what's next.

Q. Josey Jewell seems to have toughness and intensity with even just talking to him on the side. How has he grown as a player? He's only a sophomore but yet he plays like he's an upperclassman.

PHIL PARKER: There are a lot of things he has to do to improve, and he'll tell you himself, but I think he's a good guy to go in there and lead our team. That's the guy you want to be in there, be aggressive, and if you look at his effort, the way he runs to the ball all the time, and he's been doing that since he's been here. Guys respect that. And then other guys try to compete and do the same thing, and that's the beauty about our team right now. Everybody is trying to outdo somebody with their effort, and it's been fun to watch.

Q. Where are you at in developing some defensive tackles maybe that we aren't seeing? Obviously you've got a good combination there now, but behind Terlouw and Ekakitie, what do you see coming up?

PHIL PARKER: There are some other guys coming back in there that are young guys that you haven't seen. Michael Slater is a guy that played a stand-up linebacker in high school, and he looks like he has a lot of potential, and we worked some of those guys today. We're looking forward to seeing him coming on. I think he has a promising future.

But most of the guys are just so young right now, they're just learning the position. But I don't think that's going to be a problem for us in the future.

Q. Is there anything with the defense as a whole that you'd like to improve on?

PHIL PARKER: Yes, there is. The biggest thing I talk about is scoring defense -- the most important thing to me. I think we're somewhere around 10th in the country with that right now. I think that, and obviously rush defense is important to us, and we might be somewhere around fourth in that position. But my biggest thing that I think we need to improve on is giving up big plays. I think right now we have a total of five big runs over 15 yards, which is not good enough for us, and then we have 22 passes over 20 yards. Anytime that we've been a really good football team around here, we're usually about 35 to 38 big plays a year, so we're at seven games, we're averaging right around 3.9 big plays a game. We want to be two big plays a game or less. So we're a little bit high on that number right now.

Any time you give up big plays, you sit there and watch, it usually turns into points. So if we can eliminate the big plays in the passing game and the run game, we should be okay. Back in 2009 or something, I think we gave up nine runs over 15 yards. That's our goal, to be at least under 10 with the run. We definitely need to improve that.

Q. You talked about Nate Meier last year. I think this year he's finishing things more. He's finishing plays and he's getting the quarterback and tackling the quarterback more.

PHIL PARKER: He's more mature. Obviously it's important to him, and he's grown up. He's a year older. He understands the responsibility of playing at a high level. Last year he was doing the same thing, but he wasn't a couple plays here and there. Well, now you have to improve every year, and every week he's trying to do that, and I think he's one of the hardest working guys on our defense.

Q. Teams that have seven games of film on your unit, what's the hardest part about towards the end of the season adjusting to what offenses have scouted on what they've seen so far this season?

PHIL PARKER: This is a great week to go back and self-scout yourself and see what issues that were causing you problems in the first seven weeks, and make sure that we cover that during this week here. But usually guys are going to sit there with the same offense -- whatever they're running, they're going to run -- but they might pull one or two plays out that might have hurt us early in the year. So you've definitely got to bring that back up to your kids and make sure we cover it again this week. It's a good time to have a bye. Two reasons, one, to self-scout yourself, and two, to get healthy.

Q. How much is Drew doing now that he's obviously not playing, what's he been doing behind the scenes?

PHIL PARKER: I think he's with the guys, talking to the guys. He's on the sideline with the guys. To me that's important. He sees a lot of things. He's been out there. He knows what's going on, so he can help the guys -- what kind of play was it, what kind of block it was, what happened to them. He can give information to us, and he can give information to the players on the field, which is good. He's part of the team, and that's a big thing, the leadership.