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An Interview With:

COACH PARKER

COACH PARKER: What are we talking about?

Q. Your call.

COACH PARKER: Well, I think, you know, the most noticeable difference is some of the guys, Ballard and Clayborn and Klug, those guys are not there and you come into the team meeting it looks a little bit different without seeing those three guys there. We seem to be defensively, we seem to be fairly decent with our speed.

I do think we'll be fairly good. I just question when, you know, we have got some young guys and some things to clean up, but they are young, aggressive guys that can run fast. And all of that seems to be going pretty good.

So you know, and I'll just go positionally, in our defensive ends, we have got Binns, who played last year and played well for us, and he's having a real good spring. And then Lebron Daniel, and then Dominic Alvis are playing some in there for us. At inside tackle we have Mike Daniels, who is playing real well. And then a big kid, Carl Davis, that I think is doing well. And then we are using Dominic Alvis in there, a little bit, too.

The middle linebacker, James Morris, he picked up right where he left off last year and you know, I think he's really going to be good. He's sort of got better during the winter without even practicing. He's a sharp kid. And you know, he should be on that Wheatie's box kind of guy. Tyler Nielsen is at the other linebacker. A little bit of a sore neck, but has done real well. And then our weak side linebacker, between Christian Kirksey

and Anthony Hitchens, I think those two guys are really talented guys.

At the corner we have Shaun prater. He's playing well. And then Micah Hyde, we are using him at free safety. He can always go back and be a corner. Tanner Miller is out of spring ball, so we are just teaching Hyde the position in case Miller doesn't -- you know, something happens with his shoulder that he's not ready to go. But Hyde looks real good there.

The kid by the name of Colin Sleeper has been the strong safety that has got a lot of ability. He can run like a deer and he'll hit you.

The other corner, we have got Greg Castillo and then B.J. Lowery has made all kinds of interceptions and he looks good.

So we have got some good, young kids. They seem to be enthusiastic about what they are doing. So we'll just have to see where we go from there, but I do think we have a chance to be fairly decent.

Q. Has Hyde taken to the safety position well?

COACH PARKER: Yeah, he look goods back there. He looks good as a free safety. And I think it looks good for him, whether he ends up back there or he goes back to corner, I think he'll better understand his position at corner by playing free safety.

I think it's been a good experience for him and even if he was like the second free safety, maybe he was a corner and if something happened to Miller, you always knew that I had Hyde. He's at least been there and knows what he's doing a little bit, but he's done real well.

Q. Do you see a scenario where you play Tanner and Micah as safeties together?

COACH PARKER: That's 12 guys, right? (Laughter) Yeah, if we played in Canada.

It could happen. I mean, you didn't want to

see Tanner not be in spring ball. He needed the spring ball, and I think that, you know, we have got to see how he comes into fall.

But I think he's going to do pretty good. You know, he's a smart kid that's interested. He's just got a shoulder that needs to heal.

Q. Is there anybody that's made you say, oh, wow, anybody that's really stood out that you are maybe not expecting to?

COACH PARKER: B.J. Lowery has made some plays on the ball, some interceptions, and then the two young linebackers, Hitchens and Kirksey, I mean, they are -- they are good hitters. They can run and they will hit you and there's promise there. Now, they are going to make young mistakes, but they are going to be it good players.

And then I think James Morris really picked up where he left off and improved some. You know, I like him. I like him. He's doing well.

Q. What can you tell us about Morris?

COACH PARKER: Well, he's just -- he's faster than you think he is. He's got good speed. He's got good speed and he's really into the game. He's sort of the All-American boy. I mean, he works hard. He studies hard. He just does everything right. He does everything right.

You know, he's overcome his dad. He's overcome his parenthood. But I think he's doing really good.

Q. Last season, how quickly did he integrate into what you were doing?

COACH PARKER: Well, you know, pretty quick. I mean, all of a sudden, it was a couple of guys got hurt and bang, bang, he was in there. I mean, he studies the film. He studies and he does that stuff like you would expect an older guy to do it.

I mean, he approaches the game like you would expect a junior or a senior to approach the game. He's not -- he's very -- I think the word would be professional in what he's doing and how he approaches it and everything.

You know, he's a kid that if you had a whole bunch of those guys, it would be an easy situation.

Q. Does the personnel, all the guys who you lost up front, solid guys who could be in the NFL, does that cause a shift in philosophy at all because of personnel you have on hand?

COACH PARKER: Well, it's a little bit of a double-edged sword. You think that, you know, with losing all those guys, some of the guys that we have now that probably are not as big but might have a little bit more quickness or have good quickness, that you might like to do more things to really off-set that lack of size, but they are so young that -- how much can you do before that goes backwards, too.

So we are just working on fundamentals. I think they are pretty good. I think they are decent. They can move and they use their hands and they like to play football.

So we have got to overcome that, and then we have got to, you know, Clayborn was such a good leader; that part of the game, you don't know who is going to take over that part of the game. You never know that until the next season comes.

Q. How do you see that front line rotation? Would you like to settle on just four guys for the season or are you comfortable with seven or eight rotating out?

COACH PARKER: Well, you would like to have seven or eight, if you had seven or eight. I think we have got to find out, you know, exactly where we are at and what the difference is in their abilities and when have we -- I don't want to say diluted it, but by playing too many guys, when have we gone down ability-wise.

But I think we've got young guys that, I mean, they are eager and they work hard.

Q. Is there a position group that's ahead of schedule of where you thought they might be?

COACH PARKER: No. I think they have all improved. I really do. Those particular kids; I'm not saying they are better than some of the groups we had last year or something, but I see all those kids improving.

There's not a group out there that you are disappointed in. I think everybody is getting a little bit better.

Q. Can you talk a little bit about Carl Davis and what he brings to the table, size-wise?

COACH PARKER: Well, Carl is a big guy. He's probably six -- close to six-five. He's 300-some pounds. But quite athletic. I mean, he moves his hands. He doesn't look like a

300-pound slow guy out there. He moves his hands. He's athletic. He's a 300-pounder that can dunk a basketball and do all that stuff.

I think the problem was with a lot of those kids like that, they have never really played against anybody their own size before. In high school, they are always the biggest guy, and all of a sudden, they are playing against guys that swing back at them; you know, punch you back. He's got to get through that.

He missed a little bit of the spring. He got hurt in the Dance-A-Thon. He hurt his knee in a -- dancing over there. But he'll be all right. But he's a nice kid and he's working hard. He's working hard and he takes coaching. You know, Rick coaches them, he coaches them hard. It's not a field day out there for those guys.

Q. Would you characterize this as a Norm Parker defense?

COACH PARKER: I don't know what you mean by that.

Q. Well, the stats prove what it's done over a period of time.

COACH PARKER: I think we can be decent. You know, I think they are fun to coach. They are young. They are getting better. They play hard. They make mistakes. Which you know they are going to make those mistakes. You like to cure those mistakes and then hope that they don't blow some fuses out there as soon as that stadium is full.

It will be fun this weekend just to see them when they go out on the field by themselves and there's nobody telling them, watch this and watch that, and check this and check that, and everybody is standing on the sidelines and they have to go out there themselves and do it. Sometimes it's a lot different when they have to go out there themselves and do it.

It's good to find out who is going to be the leader out there. You know, which guy is going to grab the control -- a lot of guys like to play in the band but not a lot of guys like to lead the band. And we have to find out who wants to lead the band out there.

Q. Do you have any ideas yet who you see leading the band then?

COACH PARKER: Well, you'd like to think -- ideally, you'd like to think that the free safety and middle linebacker lead the band. I

mean, defensively, that's who you want to lead the band is the free safety and the middle linebacker.

And I think James is really -- he's much further ahead than when he was last year. Last year everything was so new to him that, you know, he wasn't sure of himself when he said things. But now when he makes a check, he's sure of himself. He knows what he's doing a little bit.

And then Hyde is -- Hyde's done well. He's been a pleasant surprise back there. He played a little bit better than I thought he could play back there.

Q. After seeing him do what he's done with the ball on two occasions last year, do you want him returning punts -- Micah?

COACH PARKER: I don't have anything to do with that.

Q. You don't have anything to do with that one?

COACH PARKER: No.

Q. You can't say, he's my free safety, I don't want him back there?

COACH PARKER: No, if he can return punts and help our team, put him back there. I don't care. I mean, if he can help win the game, put him in the game. That's my attitude.

Q. A guy who comes across as pretty confident is 93, Daniels. Tell us about this guy.

COACH PARKER: He's really a team leader. He's not real tall. He's extremely strong and powerful. He's an outgoing guy. I mean, a very proper, outgoing guy. He came from a good family, and, you know, he would be the leader on a student council or something like that. And he's really a hard worker. He's an easy guy to coach.

I mean, you would like him as a kid. He's really a good kid. If the team had to vote on, you know, who they wanted to represent them, I'm sure Mike would be one of the guys. He's a little bit like clay burn or something like that.

Q. He's pretty exuberant out on the field.

COACH PARKER: Yeah, he likes to play football. He likes to play, and he's a go-getter in practice and you never have to -- he's got a motor. He turns it on and he goes and goes and goes. He'll do everything you ask him to do.

Q. Strength-wise, does he compare with anybody that you've had in the past or is he kind of off in his own in that realm?

COACH PARKER: I mean, you know, we have had some strong guys, but he's got strength. He's short and he's got body leverage. But he's a powerful young guy. He's powerful. He doesn't lack for strength, I'll say that.

Q. Would you say you are 100% back from everything that happened last fall?

COACH PARKER: I'm closing in on it. I'm closing in on it. I feel better. I can walk a little bit now, and, you know, get around with my cane.

My goal is to by the end of the summer, play a round of golf. If I can do that, then I'll be -- I know one thing, it will slow your swing down.

Q. Is that a good thing or bad thing for you?

COACH PARKER: For me, that's good. Because I don't have a swing; I have a slap shot.

Q. Do you envision being on the field in the fall or are you going to coach from the press box again?

COACH PARKER: I don't know, if a crowd started coming my way real fast, if I could get out of the way. I remember one time when I was at Michigan State and I got hit by Nick Bell out there. He knocked my ass off. (Laughter) I wanted to cry but I didn't want to cry in front of the players. I think I would be a hazard, not only to myself but to somebody else out there if I couldn't move around, if I had to get out of the way. Even with my cane. (Laughter).

Q. Trip 'em.

COACH PARKER: Trip 'em.

Q. The time away, that you had to spend from the time last season, did that clarify anything for you as far as the future? Did it make you want to coach anymore? Did it convince you that he needed to coach?

COACH PARKER: Yeah, probably. It probably -- made me, you know, I never doubted it. But it reconfirmed some thoughts that, hey, this is where I belong. This is what I like to do. You know, I mean, this is how much I would miss it if I wasn't there all the time. So I probably like coaching more now than I did, you know, before.

I appreciate it more; let me put it that way. I appreciate it more.

Q. How much did you enjoy December last year?

COACH PARKER: December?

Q. Just getting back and coaching the defense against Missouri.

COACH PARKER: Yeah, that was fun. I enjoyed that. And our team really worked hard. When the team is working hard and everybody is doing their thing and they put a lot of effort into it and they had a lot of focus on it, that makes it fun. And it was fun to be part of that.

Q. Do you have some goals that you want to reach health-wise, because last two years, you've had a hard time making it through the whole season. I know that's probably a concern for you, and you probably want to have a good feeling going into the season that you're going to make it through.

COACH PARKER: I'd like to be alive when the season is over. I feel pretty good. I feel pretty good. I just want to get to where I can be more mobile. You know, learning how to walk and I can go across flat surfaces, but if something's real bumpy, I'd start to get a little wiggly.

Q. What are you kind of hoping the defense will show on Saturday in the last spring practice, scrimmage?

COACH PARKER: Well, the No. 1 thing I hope, is that when the day is over, they are still all there; that nobody gets hurt. I mean, that's the big thing. And that they will go out and that they will play hard. They are going to make mistakes. You always make mistakes. But that they will run and that they will hit and that they will be aggressive and that nobody gets hurt.

Because this is a fun group to coach, though. This is a fun group to coach. They are eager to learn and they are eager to practice and just that they have that same enthusiasm Saturday that they have had this previous part of spring ball. They have been fun.

Q. From your standpoint, from the defense, how has Vandenberg looked?

COACH PARKER: He's pretty good.

Q. Hyde was talking him up a lot.

COACH PARKER: No, I think he's pretty good. And to me, he reminds me a little bit of the team -- this is just my observing it. The team and the guys really liked Ricky Stanzi. Stanzi is an easy guy to like but the team really liked him. I mean, he was their guy; and therefore, they played hard for him. And I think the team really likes Vandenberg. He's a popular guy, and the people respect him because of the hard work he does.

I think it's a little bit like Ricky. And the same qualities that Ricky had, I think this guy has got in terms of relationship with the team. That's just from the way I look at it. He's one of the good guys, the kind of guy you like to see.

Q. Along that line, during the off-season, do you cross-check each other, the coaches? Do you give your opinions of the offensive players and they give you their opinions of the defensive players? Does it that ever happen?

COACH PARKER: Yeah, we do a little bit, but it's like if all of us in this room, I gave you my opinion of your kids and you give me your opinion of my kids, you've got to be careful, because everybody thinks their daughter is prettier than the other guy's daughter.

So, yeah, you tell them if you think somebody is good, you don't tell them if you think somebody's bad. Because everybody's got some pride in their positional players.

Q. What about some of the receivers, do you see any of the young kids stepping up?

COACH PARKER: Yeah, I think the one from Cedar Rapids, he's made a couple of great catches. Keenan has made a couple of catches. The guy from St. Louis made a couple of great catches during the fall. The tight ends have been really catching the ball. I mean, that Fiedorowicz, he's a big kid now. He's a big kid and he's talented.

This is just from me looking. I don't want to be judging on them but I think offensively, we are pretty good. I think it's very encouraging offensively. You know, we haven't been hitting Coker. Has not been a lot of tackling him; that would be foolish. But to me he looks like he's bigger and stronger and got a little bit more quickness to him. I think they're pretty good. I hope they are. We can sit on the bench and watch. That's the way to play defense; thatta boy, keep moving that ball.



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Q. You have a player in Prater last year, first team All Big Ten; what ways do you feel he can maybe get better this season coming back for his senior year?

COACH PARKER: Well, he's got to get more exact in what he's doing. Shaun Prater has got more get-up-and-go in him than probably all of us in this room. I mean, he's like the Energizer Bunny; you turn him on and he just goes. I don't think he -- he loves to play.

He loves to go fast. He loves -- but he's got to go more exact. You know, but in terms of liking football and everything, that kid has fun. He just loves to go out there and run around and play football. He loves to do it. He never goes -- he doesn't have a slow step in his body. He's just always going a hundred miles an hour. But he's got to learn to be more exact in what he's doing. Sometimes he just runs around a little bit. He's like a crazy man.

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