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An interview with:

COACH GREG DAVIS

THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead with Coach Greg Davis.

COACH DAVIS: The scoring system for the spring game will be offense basically scores the way they normally do, so a touchdown is six points, extra point, field goals. The other way the offense will get points in this system is three first downs in a row creates one point or an explosive play run of 12 plus or a pass of 16 plus. So that's where the offense will pick up points.

Defense scores but obviously any kind of return for a touchdown is seven points. If they get a turnover that does not result in a touchdown, it's worth three points. If they get three-and-out, it's worth one. A sack is worth two points. A sudden change in the red zone, if the team turns the ball over in the red zone and offense does not score a touchdown, they get four points.

If you got that down, you're in the wrong business. You should be in the accounting line of work.

But that's the way we'll do it. It's a pretty good way to have an offense play the defense and everybody gets some points. That's where we're at.

We have no idea right now who the quarterback will be. We started spring training with the idea that every time we practice we would rotate every two snaps. Whether or not that was a drill or whether or not that was a scrimmage or a situation, third-and-six, red zone, whatever, the situation was totally we're rotating every two snaps.

In Saturday's work, we did that during our individual time. Then when we went and scrimmaged, we let the quarterback own his drive.

If he started the drive, it was three-and-out, the next quarterback played the next series. If the quarterback went eight, nine, ten plays, he got to own his drive. That is probably the way we'll do it this Saturday.

Kirk and I have talked about it. He'll make a decision. But probably what we'll do is the quarterback will get to own his drive this Saturday. They'll both play with all the groups.

They've all done some really good things, but they have not separated themselves yet. I see things as encouraging by all three of them. So that part makes you happy. I wish one of them would go on and separate. So that's where we're at right now at that position.

Q. Anything stand out of the three of them?

COACH DAVIS: I've been asked a lot of times over the years. What do you look for when you get in a situation like this? It's not unusual. But, we want guys that can make plays off schedule, when things break down, who can extend the play, who can make a play that's not exactly the way you draw it up. We want guys that will take care of the football. That will be part of the evaluation.

We want guys that make big plays. Those are things that we're talking to them on a daily basis. Here is what happened in yesterday's practice. Here are your mental mistakes. Here is your explosive plays. Here is this and that. There's a whole litany of things that they are aware of that we're trying to evaluate.

Q. You mentioned working with quarterbacks, having them own drives. How much does that account for the decision you make as a coaching staff as far as that separation is concerned?

COACH DAVIS: Well, a lot. The quarterback is busy taking his team from here to

there. That will be a big part of it. But also taking care of the ball, getting us in the right plays, and creating explosive plays. That's been a big emphasis in evaluating those guys. If they've had an opportunity, did they create that play?

Q. Is that based on the fact that most of your plays were called from the perimeter, not necessarily down the field? Is it limitation of the personnel or the play calling?

COACH DAVIS: I'm sure part of it was limitation of play calling, especially from the cards and letters I got.

There's aspects of vertical in all plays. Sometimes it's just having a better focus on giving that guy an opportunity. The other thing is most explosive plays in the passing game come off play-action because that's when you have a chance to freeze the secondary. Usually play-action creates better protection. You can hold the ball longer. Guys can move down the field.

We've done a lot of things this spring where hard play action and the receiver has a vertical decision to make at 16, whether or not he goes deep, sits down, turns in or out. All of that takes time to do. We've also tried to be very cognizant of giving our guys some opportunity to push the ball down the field.

Q. Coming off last year, do you feel more pressure?

COACH DAVIS: I feel pressure every day of what I've done for 40 years. But we did sit down and evaluate obviously things that we felt we could do better, things we should do more of, less of, whatever. And I think we've got a pretty good mix going right now.

Q. Any chance you wouldn't have been back?

COACH DAVIS: You're asking the wrong guy that.

Q. How do you feel the team has understood the offense compared to last year? Have they grasped it better?

COACH DAVIS: I think we're much further along at this point. Obviously they've had a spring, a season. Some of the conceptual things that you're trying to do, they have a better grasp of, so they're getting to it quicker, playing faster. I feel like we're much closer to being on the same page snap after snap than we were last year.

Q. Do you have the personnel for the offense even after struggles last year?

COACH DAVIS: I think what you have to do is you have to take what talent is there and try to maximize that. So make sure that we're trying to get the ball to guys that can make plays.

Q. How would you say the additions of Coach Kennedy and Coach White to the staff has changed the dynamics here?

COACH DAVIS: Coach Kennedy is obvious. He stepped in from just a philosophical standpoint, from a language standpoint. So he was able to hit the ground running. He brings great energy to his job and does a super job.

Coach White, he's got background both in what we were doing and background from the NFL. He's brought some great thoughts to us and is a very detail-oriented coach. I think both guys have really joined in and been a big plus.

Q. The zone read last Sunday or two Sundays ago, how is that going to work with three drop-back quarterbacks? Will the defense believe they're going to run it?

COACH DAVIS: Unless they run it. We have implemented a little bit of zone read. But it won't be a huge part. It's a part that is aggravating to the defense. Anything that's aggravating to Coach Parker has to be a good thing because that's not what they want.

Colt McCoy, he was a drop-back guy, yet he could run three or four, five a game and create some explosive plays. Not only that, but create some assignment football by the defense.

Just the fact that you have some of that forces the defense to play more assignment football.

Q. In some ways is it easier, because you had James Vandenberg, he had been established, now you're starting from scratch, is that easier on your part?

COACH DAVIS: Well, it's different. I mean, obviously it's different because none of these guys have played. All these guys can make some plays with their feet, they can extend some plays and do some things.

Q. You mentioned explosive plays a couple times. That was missing a little bit last year. Where do you get that next year?

COACH DAVIS: Well, I think, again, play-action is a great way to start explosive plays. For the things we mentioned a while ago, usually your protection is good. You have the ability to hold the ball. When you have the ability to hold the ball, receivers can force down the field and see what is happening.

So we're doing some things down the field where receivers are making decisions at 14 and 15 yards down the field, and you can't do that unless you can hold the ball. Typically that comes from play-action pass. It gives you a chance to take advantage of what the defense did, how they rotated to stop the run.

Q. How do you feel you want to use that?

COACH DAVIS: Going to keep doing that. I think we have a good group of tight ends. We've got tight ends that will allow us to put multiple tight ends on the field, maybe have two attached, but one of them could be deployed out wide. Again, you're creating some opportunities for the defense and the way they match personnel to try to create some advantages.

So the tight ends need to be a big part of what we're doing.

Q. How tough was last season for you personally?

COACH DAVIS: I mean, it's part of it. We set out as soon as it was over and created a litany of things we wanted to look at and things that we did good, things that we did bad, and how to correct those things.

So hopefully we've addressed some of those things and we'll have a chance to get better.

Q. You mentioned second-year experience. How much of an issue was that especially for the receivers last year?

COACH DAVIS: Anytime you do things post snap, you got to get reps and reps and reps, and you're depending on quarterbacks and receivers to be seeing the same things.

There's always going to be mistakes - receiver saw one thing. But the more you can eliminate those, the more opportunities you have to be consistent and stay on the field. I think we're closer in that area. We're not who we want to be, but I think we're closer now than we were at any point last year.

Q. Quick feet and decision making, can those separate the quarterbacks?

COACH DAVIS: Decision making is always a part of the quarterback position. The guys that can extend plays. Coach Walsh told me 15 years ago about drafting quarterbacks, and he said 50% of the snaps in the NFL are not the way you draw them up. Somebody is sliding in the pocket, you're not on the rhythm that the play is designed. So the ability for a quarterback to extend the play, to make things happen off schedule is a huge part.

Q. James Vandenberg shouldered a lot of the blame last year. How much of that was on him and how much was on the receivers or the system?

COACH DAVIS: It's a combination. We've moved past that. James is an outstanding young man, brilliant. I think he'll get an opportunity to play at the next level.

But, you know, it's as much my fault as any player's.

Q. With that, he probably would have been a drafted player this weekend. Do you feel the change may have prevented him from reaching his full potential or did you help him maybe reach what he could have done?

COACH DAVIS: I'm sure I could have done a better job. I'm sure I could have done a better job with James. He is a better player than he played last year.

Q. With these three quarterbacks, do you see a two-quarterback system?

COACH DAVIS: Probably not. I mean, we may not know when the first game starts. We had a situation where we opened the season in '06, I think it was, we played two quarterbacks every three series for two weeks in a row, then we made a decision and went with Colt.

Some things you can't evaluate in practice, because they're not going to get hit. So I just said extending plays is a part of it. The first time the pocket breaks down, we blow them dead, which you have to do. But maybe they would have got out of that situation. Maybe that would have become a first down and you stay on the field.

Some of those things you can't determine until you're playing live football. So hopefully we will. Hopefully by the mid-part of camp in August

we'll be able to make a decision. But if not, we'll see where it goes.

Q. Are you comfortable with that kind of rotation, the two quarterback thing, in a game?

COACH DAVIS: I think everybody would rather have "This is the guy." I think we all would. But at the same time if that guy has not emerged, then you need to evaluate both of them in live work. We don't have exhibition games.

If that's the way it turns out that we have to do it, that's the way we'll do it.

Q. How close is this race at quarterback?

COACH DAVIS: It's close enough that they're taking every two snaps for 13 practices. They haven't separated.

But I feel like they will. I feel like they will.

Q. Getting cards and letters from angry fans. What is your reaction? Can you share any of them?

COACH DAVIS: Yeah, I can.

Q. What have you thought of the running game so far?

COACH DAVIS: Some of them are from my parents. Sorry?

Q. The run game. How does it look this spring?

COACH DAVIS: We're committed to running the football. It's been nice to have two backs the whole spring. Mark and Damon have both made every practice. That gives you an opportunity to wear down the defense. It also gives you an opportunity, because of their abilities, to put the two of them in the game and maybe you're in two backs or maybe you're in one back.

Again, some defenses, everything they do is personnel driven to match properly. So if you put that personnel on the field, then you're in one back, they don't like that. It's not that they don't know how to match it, they do. But they may be asking a linebacker to play in space that they don't want him to play in.

Those are things that, you know, you can create some advantages hopefully offensively. But both of those guys have done a good job. Very pleased with where they're at right now.

Q. How many receivers have secured their spot in the wide receiver rotation?

COACH DAVIS: Kevonte for sure is a guy that has played a bunch of ball. It was good to have him back Saturday. He's an experienced guy. He communicates well on the field.

If we played Saturday or if we played last Saturday, the three guys we would have started in that personnel group would have been Tevaun Smith, Kevonte Martin and Donald Shumpert.

Q. You're still waiting on five receivers. It seems like you saw some struggles a couple weeks ago. Do you feel you still haven't seen the whole picture of what you have at receiver yet?

COACH DAVIS: We've told the freshmen receivers that some of them are going to get an opportunity to come in and show what they can do. At the same time I would caution that they're freshmen, and freshmen are freshmen.

Maybe Tevaun last year was a guy that was mature for his age. He did get to play some. He's a much better player now because of it. So maybe one or two of those guys, hopefully, will be able to come in and offer some help.

COACH PHIL PARKER

COACH PARKER: Thank you, guys, for coming.

Just to tell a little bit about where we're at going into the 13th practice, I'm very comfortable with the last couple days of practice. Our units have played with a lot of energy and played with unity, a little bit of excitement the last two practices. It took a while to get there, but I'm happy with that progress.

Are we there and close yet? We still have a long ways to go to play a game yet. But I just like the way the group is going.

I think the front is progressing up front. The linebackers obviously are experienced. They've gotten much better with Coach Reid handling the inside linebackers, I think that's been working really well. Basically in my role right now is also taking over the secondary which has been good for me to get back in the room with the kids and teach 'em football. So that's been good. It's kept me pretty busy and more involved with the secondary. I'm very happy at this stage where we're at.

We have three days here, we can get a lot of work done, see some jumps with some guys.

I'll leave it up to you guys for some questions.

Q. When that opportunity presented itself for you to go back and coach the secondary, is that something you were immediately wanting to jump at? Did you have to give it a lot of thought?

COACH PARKER: I didn't really give it a lot of thought. I was doing it for such a long time. The year before when we went through and I wasn't actually in the meetings, you kind of miss it. I was looking for the opportunity to come back. So I was pleased to get back there.

There was no hesitation for me to go back.

Q. Are you going to stay upstairs during games?

COACH PARKER: I haven't even thought about that yet. I talked to a couple guys on our staff, where they like to be. It was good for me last year to be up in the box and away from some things. I think when you're coaching the secondary, sometimes you need to be eyeball-to-eyeball on the field and be more in touch with the atmosphere on the field.

So that hasn't been decided yet and I'm not really worried about it right now.

Q. Coach Ferentz mentioned Carl Davis is a guy who made a lot of progress this spring. Can you talk about his progress and who in the defensive line you're liking right now?

COACH PARKER: I think Carl obviously has a lot of athletic ability, played a little bit last year. Sometimes he can really be a hard guy to block. He's a 315-pound very good athlete that can move. We have to be a little more consistent. I think he enjoys football a little bit, he enjoys coming out to practice. That's helping with his progress that he's doing. We're very happy with him.

Some other guys, Drew Ott was a guy on the outside we played last year. Halfway through the season we pulled his redshirt off. I thought he was doing some good things before he had to sit out a couple practices.

Alvis to me, Dom has done a great job in playing well this whole spring. I'm happy with his progress.

Louis is out, sitting out in spring. Gives Cooper a chance to come out and do his thing. Cooper was a little bit hurt, but he's progressing.

I'm looking forward to it.

Faith is another kid, if we're going to play him inside or outside, we have a chance to move him around, he's very athletic and he can run.

So it's still a work in progress. I still like to play eight to 10 guys in that position, especially where offenses are learning to play hurry up, catch guys off guard. Everybody wants to play a game and a half on offense and say how many yards we have. But it's a game and a half. If you're going to do that, you better have eight to ten fresh guys to go out there and execute, as long as it doesn't throw you off of them actually being efficient out there.

Q. You had a lot of talent, but a lot of inconsistent play last year. Do you feel you've been able to smooth out some of that?

COACH PARKER: One thing about it is, I don't mind guys getting beat if they're contested, the plays are contested. You look at how many big plays we gave up, compared to the year before, years in the past. Very similar numbers. Just probably some of them are a little bit uncontested for running free.

I think a year of experience has done them some good, understanding the system, getting familiar with it. Tanner has done a better job of staying focused, trying to be a leader back in the secondary, along with BJ. Obviously BJ, in my opinion, is playing at his highest level right now. Hopefully he continues that. But I think he was banged up last year. I think Carl Davis landed on him and hurt him a little bit. He really wasn't the same after Carl landed on him.

I think they all have been kind of working together and are starting to form a good unit.

Q. Haven't seen much much Jordan Lomax. What does he show you?

COACH PARKER: One thing about a kid missing a whole year, the one thing, a smart, intelligent kid, he paid attention all last year learning the system, what we're asking our guys to do. He's showing up in practice. He's done a very, very good job. Very smart kid, fundamentally sound. So I really like him. He's a quiet leader. He's done a good job.

I'm not stamping him in there as my starter

yet, but somebody has to line up in the first group right now. But I think he's done a very good job.

Q. Do you see the defensive line being relied on as usual for most of the pass-rush?

COACH PARKER: Usually you take 85 snaps, if you're playing base defense, they're going to get the majority of the pass-rush. It all depends on how many passes they throw. Sometimes you got to add a little bit to it, to the pass-rush, maybe try to get some other guys that can rush the passer, try to work on that a little bit through the off-season, the summertime, maybe have some guys practice doing that, obviously doing two-a-days.

For right now that's who it's going to be and we'll try to add some guys in the near future.

Q. Talk about putting pressure on the quarterback. Last year you were ranked last in the Big Ten in sacks. Are you concerned or are you starting to see progress?

COACH PARKER: I think there's some guys that have some knack to get there. Carl Davis, Cooper as an inside guy can help you. I think Dominic outside can hit you on the edge.

We might have to create some situations a little bit more to help them out, maybe add some guys to the rush a little bit to help them out. It's hard to get there when you have five guys blocking four.

We all understand that. My biggest thing is try not to give up big plays. I think the game is still about scoring, not giving up points. That's the most important thing. I think for the last two years, we were 24, last year we were 23. That's my main concern, is points, I think.

Q. Back to your assuming both roles. As you get into the season, game planning, and doing position coaching, I'm interested in your time allotment. Ultimately was that yours or Kirk's decision?

COACH PARKER: In what?

Q. Going back to the position coach.

COACH PARKER: I think the one thing about it, there's only 24 hours in a day. You got to be real efficient in what you're doing. The way we do it, a lot of our guys have input of what we're doing, trying to keep focus on what we're doing.

I think I've been in the secondary for a long time, so it's kind of easy for me to walk in a room and get guys to understand what I need from them.

That really hasn't changed for me. As a matter of fact, it gets me in touch with the guys a little bit.

My role changed. I don't know if we can put any more hours in the day. I'm going to have to speed something up. I think it was more of a mutual agreement for me to go back in the secondary. Darrell Wilson had an opportunity to leave and go to Rutgers. He'd done a very good job here. It was an opportunity for me to meet with Kirk a little bit. He was more than open to it.

Q. Team struggled getting off the field on third down. How much of that was experience, depth, and how better suited are you now?

COACH PARKER: Well, obviously everybody wants to get off on third downs. When you go through it, the guys have to understand. I think the guys have done a great job, at least in the last two months of being around the guys, getting back at it, they're understanding the game of football. Really after a while, when you study guys, understand the game, it's going to help you what they're trying to do on third downs.

I think we need to do a better job of that so they understand what plays they're going to see instead of saying it's a personnel issue or you're not blitzing enough.

To me it's just about understanding the game.

Q. You have three redshirt freshmen in your two-deep on the defensive line. Do you see them contributing heavily?

COACH PARKER: I think Faith, he's probably the most intriguing guy. I think he can play inside and I think he can play outside as an end. Very impressed with the way he can run and move. We moved him out here late a little bit at the end. He probably had four or five days of practice. So we're intrigued by putting him out on the edge.

Jaleel has done a great job inside. A strong, big kid, hard to move him.

They're still a ways away. They're still young pups yet. But I think they're definitely going to have to help us out next year.

Q. What has Jim Reid brought in terms of practice? Can you lean on him?

COACH PARKER: He's an excellent coach, has a lot of great experience. Sometimes

he gives me different ideas, different ways to look at things. I think it's been a great addition to that aspect of it. I think he's done a good job of getting the linebackers to play downhill and being aggressive.

Yeah, it does help a little bit with having an experienced guy, has a little bit of knowledge, he's been a head coach, defensive coordinator, been in the pros. Definitely a positive thing for me.

Q. Have you noticed a significant change in the linebackers now that they have two coaches working with them?

COACH PARKER: I think it's obviously helpful, but I think it's also the growth of kids. Obviously Kirksey and Hitch were not redshirted, neither was. I don't believe James either. That's a very hard thing to do. Coming up and being seniors, really they should only be in their junior year.

The experience, the history of our program is obviously the longer you're in the program, you're in there for your fifth year, you're going to be a better player than you were as a junior. You're really a junior. I think that's probably helped them understand what's going on.

Q. A couple players left the secondary. How does that affect your depth?

COACH PARKER: I think the two guys that left, obviously Kevin Buford had a chance, he played a little bit in some games and special teams games, dime or nickel package last year. Then Torrey Campbell chose to go on and pursue track.

I don't know how much it's going to affect us. Obviously in recruiting next we're year, we're going to have to take some more guys in the secondary. It wasn't like they were projected as a starter at the time. I think the other guys have to move on. I think Maurice Fleming and Draper are going to have to push a little bit to help us out.

Q. Do you feel you have enough depth in the secondary where you may be able to play?

COACH PARKER: In the secondary we might be able to avoid that. You look at a kid, somebody wants to play early, they want to play on special teams, let's get them involved in the game, especially in Kinnick Stadium. You look and say you're going to take 90 snaps on special teams for the year, or you're going to play full-time and take 900 or 1,000 snaps. They don't understand that. There's a lot of peer pressure at home. Heavily

recruited, why aren't you starting, why are you not on the field.

I think we have to educate the kids. I like to redshirt them, get them some growth, get them with Coach Doyle, get their bodies built for a Big Ten season.

Q. Looking at the Northwestern game from last year, the rushing performance they put on, how do you come back from that?

COACH PARKER: If you go back and look at the plays that actually came out of that, obviously some guys that are maybe not in the right gap, some guys not taking the right angles. Some of the big plays that came out are leverage problems, base football, understanding how to run to the ball, how to seek the guys. Sometimes just because you're running fast doesn't mean you're going in the right proper position to go ahead and track a guy. I think a couple of those were broken up just because of bad angles.

The game is about angles. I think we didn't do a good enough job in that area.

Q. You mentioned Drew Ott earlier. Is he bettered prepared for Big Ten football?

COACH PARKER: Obviously the strength and knowledge of being on the field already, he's been there. That's not going to be a factor for him. I think he keeps on making great improvements. Out there every day. Running with the ones a lot. Getting some good work. It does help you in some ways to be ready for the next year. You look three more years down the road and say, you could have him as a full-time starter. Lost a lot of reps.

Q. Is it tough to prepare for dual threat quarterbacks when you don't have one on the roster?

COACH PARKER: You can always find a skilled guy back there and put him back in there for that week. I don't think that's really an option. There's always somebody out there not working with the first or second team, you can get a guy skilled enough, defensive back, wide receiver type of guy, runningback. Put them back there, they're reading cards anyway. But their athletic ability to get out there and run, that's what we look for when we try to run against those dual threat guys.

Q. Is it fair to compare Faith Ekakitie to Christian Ballard?

COACH PARKER: Athletically we mentioned that the other day, it's probably about the same. Christian Ballard was a little bit taller, but bigger, height-wise, but very similar. We thought the same thing about four or five days ago.

Q. Will this defense go as far as the line can take it or are there things you can do to boost them to help them? They're still young.

COACH PARKER: Yeah, I think our linebacker group, with those guys in control, I think that's going to help us. I think the maturity of our defensive line, I think Dominic Alvis, Carl Davis, even Drew Ott, even though he is young, I think he is starting to mature a little bit. Then you have Louis who hasn't practiced, he helped us out last year, did a great job. Then you have Cooper. I think we have a little more depth up front. Quinton Alston for a linebacker, he's coming on. Marcus Collins and Cole Fisher at linebacker, everybody is growing. How can we build the team to come together as a unit. I thought I had seen that the last couple practices that I was impressed with. Not to say we did everything perfect.

Thank you.

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