

University of Iowa Football Media Conference

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Phil Parker



PHIL PARKER: First of all I want to thank everybody to come out to talk a little about Iowa Football on the defensive side.

Starting off on our bye week here right now, it's nice to be 3-0. Obviously it's a good time for us on defense to have a chance to get should other guys back on our team that we lost and haven't been playing with, so we are looking forward to that.

Last week was a good game; when you look at it and see the growth of the first game from Miami to the Rutgers back and back to a really competitive game at Iowa State. I see a lot of growth, but I also see a lot of potential to become a better football team.

On Friday, we start practicing for Middle Tennessee and moving forward to the next game.

Q. After the first half against Miami, you scrapped the nickel package. Is that based on the injury status of your players? Is that based on need and what you saw?

PHIL PARKER: Well, it's a lot of things that go into the fact of the first game was their substitution was going and the pace of the game was going. They were trying to keep us out of certain packages. So we kind of adjusted on the run there and I think we did a pretty good job with that.

Sometimes you have to be very careful when you're going in and out and then obviously limited us with some of the guys injured on the back end with our package, so we moved D.J. back out to the corner spot and that's where he ended up. A little bit of lack of depth might have hurt us a little bit.

Q. When guys start coming back, you're still sticking with 4-3 --

PHIL PARKER: I think we'll go both ways, depending on who we are playing and what their personnel is going to be. If we can adjust, we're going to try and get into match personnel as much as we can.

Q. How close are you getting Merriweather back?

PHIL PARKER: Merriweather is a guy that has a chance to get back. I think it's looking pretty good but I know I'm not the doctor. I know this week right here is a good week even to rest our starters, and get some

other looks at some other guys and bring them along.

Dane Belton is another guy that we thought a lot that he was moving up and he fell back down a little bit and now he's moving backup, so interesting to see where he is here in the next week and a half.

Q. Brought Harris to Iowa State -- may have shown some progress.

PHIL PARKER: I like Harris, what he's doing. He's making a lot of progress. He's very athletic. Very good skill. I think he's grown and grown, and I like the way he's going.

McKinney is another guy that we had to bring and he's a guy that's been here since January, so he's been around the program a little bit longer probably than Harris, a couple months. But I think they have both done a good job.

Q. What are one or two things you want to work on this bye week moving forward that you need to improve?

PHIL PARKER: I think the last couple games, what happens during a game, can we make adjustments, and I think, we have been making some adjustments and to make sure that the kids can see things. I'm looking at the players gathering more information rather than telling them what is going on and what to expect.

I think we always need to be growing like that. Not a lot of information being retained in certain areas that we need. We've done a better job and we're working on it, but that's constant. You're working on it all the time.

Obviously the tackling, I think should be better. The communication that we've got to have. There's a couple plays out there that we left out there that, you know, if we would have made the right call, something could have been different. Once again, in an atmosphere like that, you miss some things but we have to be better communicators. That's everybody. Including myself.

Q. What do you do to free A.J. up a little bit?

PHIL PARKER: It depends a little bit. I think teams are going to start looking at AJ, looking at Chauncey, where the guys are at. Got a four-man roster, they are

going to start sliding and protecting and blocking.

Iowa State did a good job of moving the pocket. They weren't sitting in the pocket as much as they wanted to. So did that help us? Probably it helped. Probably helped them and probably hurt them a little bit, too.

We did get pressure on him a little bit. Lost contain at times. I think you just keep working and when things come, they come. I don't think you can say, hey, go out there and it's always going to be this. They know where the guys are and protecting, and if I need more heat, then I have to bring more guys because they are protecting with more guys.

Q. How do you feel about your depth at defensive end, beyond your starters? Do you feel like you need rotate some of those guys in more?

PHIL PARKER: We still need to have rotation as far as who played last week and we have to continue to keep on growing that. I think Amani Jones has done a good job out there to help us out, especially on certain situations. You always try to build depth. I'd like to have eight to ten guys to be able to roll in and out up front.

Q. Work on the 4-2-5, somebody goes out, that's got to be a priority because you know you have to use it at some point and you haven't gotten to.

PHIL PARKER: Yeah, going through practice, it all depends, if there's opportunities during practice and you see our offense during certain personnels, we'll slide in the guy and give him some reps. If it helps, we'll use it but it's going to be a gradual opportunity.

You can only do it so many times a game. With the linebackers we have, they have done a good job. You always want your best players on the field, whether it's a 4-2-5, whatever it is, you want the best out there.

Q. D.J. Johnson got beat on the double pass -- how do you think he responded and how he grew as a player during that game?

PHIL PARKER: Sometimes you can sit there and tell players and make sure you have eye discipline. With that play, obviously he took his eyes in the wrong spot. Young kids do that. I had a guy, Amari Spivey, I think at Penn State, gave up a 70-yarder on the first play of the game and came back to the bench, had to talk to him a little bit, the way I talk to the guys, and he got back. He came back, and fought.

And same thing with D.J. He had a great response. He goes, "Coach, I know, I've got to get better." I think there's some plays he made out there. One time on the deep ball in the post, he defended that well. So he grew up. Does he have a lot more to go? Yeah, he has a long ways to go, and he knows that and he worked

hard today.

Q. Are you noticing a big change this year with how teams are approaching AJ compared to his first two years here? Is it a big difference?

PHIL PARKER: Yeah, there's a little bit of difference. They know where he's at.

But I think AJ, he's been putting a lot of pressure on the guys, any ways. Second play of the game when we came back out, I think there was three guys within a half a yard from the quarterback when they hit the slant on the second play of the game on defense. There's three guys in his face. I think they are still getting pressure.

Maybe they don't have the sacks, but they are making the quarterback throw before he wants to throw the ball. And that's kind of a little bit what that RPO stuff is, protects a lot of those guys to, hey, get rid of the ball fast. It's going to be hard to get pressure. That's why some guys are dropping eight guys, rushing three, dropping eight.

Q. Is it realistic to get Brents back?

PHIL PARKER: Yeah, he's been working and he's getting closer. I don't know exactly where he's at right now, but we practice with the guys that come out there. He's been in meetings. He's learning, so I'm looking forward to getting him back. It would be nice to have him.

Q. With he and Moss -- since they have been out for a while -- is it possible to turn into a redshirt year, keeping it under four games?

PHIL PARKER: That's definitely a possibility, but the way I try to do it, hey, let's get back and start playing and help us win and you're going to start playing. We can't think about, hey, is this a possible redshirt, or, you know -- it will come up if they don't get back fast enough.

Q. Who has played better free safety so far? You got to look at Kaevon once and Jack twice.

PHIL PARKER: I think Jack, he's obviously started two games and played two games. He's growing every day and I think he's really made some jumps. It's going to be hard and very competitive at that position when Merriweather comes back.

Q. Do you have a plan for how to handle it? Will you pick one guy?

PHIL PARKER: The great thing about it is the players usually decide.

They usually decide who is playing, their preparation and their understanding; how they take command of

the back end. And the hardest thing is, because you've got Geno over there, he does a good job, and controls part of it, but you also need a good free safety to be the commander, too; and whoever can come out there and take that.

I'd rather have a guy that knows what's going on and can get in the right places and making sure that we are in the right defenses.

Q. Still using did D.J. at the cash mostly in practice, or him playing corner --

PHIL PARKER: We'll use some other guys. We'll use Belton there a little bit, help us out a little bit. But it's hard, you only have so many guys you can practice with and I'm getting slim back there. Hopefully we get some guys back.

Q. When you looked at training camp, you had an abundance of players in the secondary, and now you're playing true freshmen, have you had an experience like this before?

PHIL PARKER: That kind of goes with the job. Whoever you got over there, coach the guys that show up to practice and ready to play.

If they are injured, what are you going to do about it? I can only play with the guys we've got and get them in the right spot and if they are learning every day, because they are in meetings, too and they are practicing, they have the same opportunity.

We are not very complicated on defense, they should pick up on things well. I'm going to coach like I expect you to be. If you put somebody in, you've got to be the guy. Obviously we gave up two touchdowns last week; two explosive plays. Gave up two explosive plays in the Miami game; that's four. That's a little bit too much for me, but you give up more than three, I don't like that. If you give up two, we're down still like ten points a game. I think that's a good place to be at. But don't even want to give them up, but it happens.

Q. Can you talk about the difference between Michael Ojemudia last year compared to this year?

PHIL PARKER: You can see the way he is on the field. He knows what's going on. He has a little bit broader understanding of what we are trying to do. He's helping the younger kids out, and the leadership, you can count on him when he's out there. It's been a pleasure doing that, and obviously Matt when he was there, you feel confident when you got the two corners that have been in games and know what it's like to go over there and play at different stadiums.

The challenges are for these young kids, going to a big atmosphere is how they are going to react. I think D.J.

has really done a good job coming back and having OJ there helping things out is good.

Q. The unique challenge you went through on Saturday, how did you keep your guys loose and is the locker rooms sufficient enough or better than if you were at somewhere like Purdue?

PHIL PARKER: Yeah, it was good. They had enough space, and the kids handled it really well.

The coaches were probably more walking around like, hey, what are we going to do as far as are we doing the right thing for our players.

It was a long one. Somebody said it was the longest second quarter -- I don't know. It was a late drive home. You know, that was okay for me. I wasn't going to do anything else on Saturday.

Q. You mentioned giving starters some rest. I assume that includes your starting linebacker?

PHIL PARKER: Yeah, we try to shut some of these guys down a little bit. We'll go out and practice and have a little bit of developmental practice out there afterwards. I thought was really good to get some fresh guys and some freshmen in there and some guys out there making calls and see if they can run a practice for themselves, run a defense for themselves.

Q. What's the worst locker room you've been in, in a situation to try to get people ready?

PHIL PARKER: Before Michigan State fixed theirs up, it was bad, but it was worse when I was a player there. That was probably the worst one, Purdue might be one. But a locker room's, a locker room. I think we have a good one over here.

I was in that old pink one upstairs, that was terrible. We never went back up. We went down. We put newspaper on it and stuff like that and then we stayed down at halftime.

Q. Would that have bugged you as a player?

PHIL PARKER: The hardest thing right now is getting the guys to focus on the game of football, right, with everything, social media and things, are we really focused on the right things. It's about tackling and blocking and getting to the ball. Tackle the guy that has the ball. That's what my dad said before he died.

"Phil, it's easy. Just tackle the guy that has the ball."

"Gotcha." To me, I think if you focus, like they could have used, example of last week, the storms, oh, we lost the game because of the storm. Well, you could.

But can you be mentally tough enough to go through it

and focus on what your task is and I think that's what our guys are trying to do, be mentally focused.

On the defensive side I try to mentally challenge these guys and especially on the back end, I'm going to mentally attack, address, you know and get after these guys so they know the pressure. Because you've got to make decisions all the time within five to six seconds, can you make them, when you have to, and can they be the right decision.

So to me I'm always putting pressure on them. I think it's the fun part about it.