

University of Iowa Football Media Conference

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Phil Parker



PHIL PARKER: First of all, I want to thank everybody for coming. We're down to the 13th practice today, and I've been blessed to follow both Ferentzes. And I know Brian was long-winded, so I'll try to keep this thing short here for you.

I think we have, going through it, our front seven guys up front with our three returning linebackers doing well, and our back-ups are getting a lot of work in there between Kevin Ward out there at the leo backer along with Nick Niemann, they've been doing a good job. The inside with Kristian Welch and Amani Jones and Aaron Mends backing those guys up. They had a lot of opportunities this spring.

Our kids are out there practicing; we're cutting reps on Josey Jewell a little bit to make sure we get enough reps with the younger guys and figure out who is going to be who. Up front, we feel very confident that the guys up front are going to do well. Our defensive ends are probably the strength between Matt and Anthony Nelson, and Parker Hesse. I think Sam Brincks has done a good job of really progressing slowly, but he's getting back where we're counting on him and Chauncey Golston is a guy that we feel confident in the future he's going to have opportunities to go out there and play.

In the back end or inside, Nate Bazata and Cedrick Lattimore have done a good job inside, but Brady Reiff has been a standout when he's been in there. I think he has a future to help us out and take a lot of reps this year.

I think Garret Jansen has done a good job. The last couple days he's played well inside as a one technique and a three. And we're happy to see that. At the back end, obviously we have three corners that I'm very confident that can go out there and play. Probably not as good as the guys we had right now at this stage.

But I think between Josh and Manny and OJ, they're doing a good job, and Boswell, we need to catch him up to speed. We're looking forward to probably guys coming in early during the summer and trying to get them ready and help us out on the back end.

Obviously, you know Brandon Snyder is out for the summer. Don't know exactly when it's going to be. It

will be a while before he comes back. But we've got to keep moving forward back there with Miles, and I think Jake Gervase has done a good job replacing that. And I think Amani Hooker is going to do a good job with repeating that.

We moved Noah Clayberg over a couple days ago. He's been working out, and just seeing where he fits in the program.

Basically, think a lot of guys have been getting a lot of opportunity. We're looking forward to finishing up this spring with these next two days and we'll see if these guys can move forward. I'll open it up to questions.

Q. You look at free safety in the past, that's been a position where you're -- maybe that's a bad word, but you want somebody who knows what they're doing back there. And you've had Brett Greenwood and players like that. Having Brandon go down, what kind of challenge is that for you? Conversely, you're going to have an influx of defensive backs. Is that a position you probably couldn't rely on an incoming freshman competing for time there?

PHIL PARKER: I think it's hard at that position, those guys that we have there between Greenwood and Sean Considine, Derek Pagel type of guys, and even Jordan Lomax as you look at how he took control of it. It's a very hard position to take. Like a quarterback back there, he has to be a coach. He has to understand the game. He has to make adjustments. He has to make split-second decisions and make sure everybody's in the right defense, the right coverage, the right support so the communication goes well.

I thought Brandon, as you saw him grow last year, in the beginning of the season toward the end of the season, he made great jumps. But I expect him to be back and help us on the field as a coach. He can give insight as a player where he was, and I think he can help out Jake. I think he can help out Hooker to give him different looks and understand the way he looked at it.

So somebody's going to have to come up and help us out. I don't know how many reps he'll get, but they have to be able to go in and play.

Q. You have two of the tallest defensive end's ever, what kind of flexibility does that give you on rush situations?

PHIL PARKER: I think it gives a great opportunity. Nelson's a guy that can go in there. He's very athletic with great speed. So sometimes you might not have to pull him off the field. Our sub-package goes a little bit. We haven't done much this spring, but a guy that really stands out to me is Brandon Simon. He's done a good job. He's a guy that's kind of getting better, but he's got great quickness. He's got some good pass rush. So I could see him maybe in two-a-days, us putting him in there and getting another guy over there. Not as tall a guy, but he's a very effective pass-rusher.

Q. Depth on the inside, Bazata hasn't been able to do much since he hurt his ankle. Do you look for your defensive tackles -- obviously you want them to do three down, but would it be okay if they're three down and maybe get to your personnel packages with defensive ends since you'll have more defensive ends?

PHIL PARKER: Well, we're trying to keep balance. I think we have enough guys. If you can get two deep inside and you can get two deep outside, I think you could travel with eight to ten defensive linemen. That's what our goal is. I think the time during the summer, I think we'll get these guys up and running where it's going to be an effective pass rush when we need it.

Obviously, we have a lot of linebackers that we can have and put into our bandit package, our raider package, so that's something we're looking at also.

Q. A.J. Epenesa probably going to be at defensive end? Is that the case?

PHIL PARKER: Yeah, he's one of the top defensive ends in the country. One thing about it is you come in here and whatever the best fit for him when he gets here, we'll have to determine that. But I think when you look at him, he's got to come in and understand, first of all, what we call formations, personnel groupings on offense. What defense we're running, what techniques we're using. So he has a lot of things to learn and to ask a true freshman as a defensive lineman to come in, and, hey, you're going to be our starting defensive end and we're going to move you inside and play a three technique or one technique. I think that's a little too much right now.

But I think get him in here in the summer when we do have some time, get him in the weight room with Coach Doyle, and see how he progresses and see if we can catch him up to speed to make sure. If we can get 15, 20 plays out of him during the game, I think that would be, you know, very good if we can do that.

Q. Gervase or Hooker, is it way too early?

PHIL PARKER: I think it's way too early. I've seen them grow. I think Jake has done a good job at free safety. I think Amani Hooker is still young and still learning in the process of it and Jake has a couple years experience on him. He is an athletic guy, has the ability to go out and make plays. You have to mentally get him focused. He's the commander. He's the director. He has to control everything, and there are no excuses.

So as soon as we get his mentality up to where we need it, we'll have a better chance of playing a little bit more.

Q. You look at the outside there, and Manny Rugamba came in and had a really strong finish to the season. And Josh played really well when you needed him to in the bowl game. Do you see those two right now as probably your top corners with OJ right there as maybe a nickel? Then how do you judge the influx of corners that you're going to have coming?

PHIL PARKER: Well right now I think you have them in the right order. If we did go play a nickel package like we did today, we'd probably put Josh inside or put Manny in there. I think we have the capability of putting both guys in as a nickel guy, or they can be a star or dime guy. So if we wanted to get into more defensive backs.

One thing about our sub-package, I think if you want to use our sub-package, you can take a young corner and get him in there early, just like we did with Manny, and have an opportunity to play a couple different techniques, understand the sub-packages and start understanding the base defense is where I think that could move forward for us.

Q. I don't think any player on your team has improved his profile than Cedrick Lattimore. Are you guys going to have 600 snaps out of Cedrick? Do you think it will come to that?

PHIL PARKER: I think he has put on some weight this winter. But I think we're looking at guys. As long as he's productive and we can go out there and play, we're going to play him. Sometimes it's getting the guy reps through a series and a series count, pitch count, whatever you want to call it. I think that's always good to make sure that, hey, he reaches a certain point. Let's give him some rest so he can be effective out there playing. We don't want somebody out there being tired. We'll put somebody else in. I think we're building depth there, so that's going to help us more when we start getting into the season.

Q. What about Josey Jewell's leadership off the

field. Is he one of those guys that fits into the role?

PHIL PARKER: Josey's everything about Iowa football and what you're looking at as an inside linebacker to lead your team. He's got great toughness. He's a smart football player, and every day he's giving great effort. Right now he's watching, helping the young guys.

I think all the things that he's doing for us with that leadership, just by the way he carries himself, his demeanor on the field, off the field. Everybody wants to aspire to be as good as he is. I think that helps the younger guys, and it will speed those guys up a little bit more, the more time that they're with them in meeting rooms, and obviously more times on the field with them.

Q. You obviously have three senior starters, so is right now a time where you're kind of thinking towards 2018 like who are our guys going to be and trying to get them in those spots a little bit?

PHIL PARKER: I don't try to think too far ahead, but I try to go week by week. I think during this spring here we really have done a good job with Josey, we really cut down his reps a lot. I think we've got to figure out who is going to be the back-up Mike, who is going to be the second, third team. We're just trying to figure that out in the depth chart right now. I think there are guys with good athletic ability that can move, they're tough, smart, all that stuff. But to understand the system and try to play like those guys, they need more reps and that's what we've been doing.

Q. Where's Aaron Mends?

PHIL PARKER: I think he's done a good job. He's moved up, but Jones is a little bit ahead of him right now in my opinion. I think Aaron Mends has the capability to help us in sub-packages. I think Aaron is more mental than physical.

Q. You mentioned Sam Brincks earlier and he's playing on the outside. Does he have position flexibility? Can he play a three or one technique if he needed to?

PHIL PARKER: Yeah, I think he could. I think Matt Nelson probably could do the same thing. So I think Matt came out and we talked to him a little bit about trying to do a little bit this spring. So I think he'd be a guy. Sam I'd want to keep outside right now.

Q. Is Noah Clayberg at the strong spot and Amani Hooker's playing free?

PHIL PARKER: Well, the thing I started out with this spring, and I thought I was just going to do it to see where everybody was at, I played right and left safeties. So they both had to learn both sides, both positions. Because in today's football, you could end

up in a position that technically, even though you're the free safety, you're in the strong safety position role. So that changes your reads, your T's, your responsibilities and all that.

So I started the first couple days playing right and left. Then we flipped back and went back to a free and strong. And I think Noah would probably be a better strong. But I do think he has some qualities that I look for to being smart, intelligent, instinctive, that he can also play the free. So right now I'll probably, you know, I'll juggle him a little bit here and there.

Q. With the youth that you do have on the inside defensive tackle, is it good that they're going up against NFL caliber lineman in Sean Welsh? James Daniels has that kind of capability. Have you seen that? Does it accelerate the growth like a Brady Reiff, for instance?

PHIL PARKER: I think there's no question about it when they're going against our offense. These guys are going, and it's kind of nice that Nate's probably not practicing as much. With those guys getting in there, they're getting a lot more reps. You might not see it, whether it's nine on seven, whether it's blocks. Every time them guys are going at it, whether we play 50 snaps and a scrimmage or something, that's against good competition. That's what I think has been a benefit to us the way we practice.