

University of Iowa Football

Media Conference

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Kirk Ferentz

Brian Ferentz



COACH K. FERENTZ: First of all, just welcome to everybody. Appreciate you showing up and Happy New Year. It's good to get started here on 2017. Really begin in earnest next Tuesday. Our players will be back on campus and we'll meet with them that day and then start our out of season program shortly thereafter.

Certainly great to get that started. Just looking backwards for one second, very, very proud of the 2016 football team. A lot they can be proud of in terms of their efforts, achievements and I think as much as anything, when I think about the football team from last year, I'll think about their grit and perseverance. They did a great job.

And just one last time, I want to thank the seniors, the 14 seniors did a great job of moving our team forward, especially in November. Very appreciative of them and very confident they will all do very well in their chosen vocations as they move along here.

Just since we've gotten back, a couple news items that have taken place and first and foremost is Greg's announcement of his retirement. Just a couple words, I know he made comments on that in the release but first and foremost, just the admiration I have for Greg Davis. What a tremendous career he's had at every stop, every level and he's just a master coach. Tremendous expertise, was an excellent teacher.

But I think most importantly is just the impact that Greg had. I'm venturing to say it was probably at every stop that he had. But outstanding human being. Just a true professional. So I think that's something that's appreciated certainly by the coaches, staff members, as well as our players.

You know, he and Patsy are just a tremendous couple. When I think about Greg, I think about people like Norm Parker, just have been so good for this profession, maybe any profession they are in, just because of the way they do things and the behaviors that they model. Great guy that had a great impact on our program well beyond what he did as a football coach, and certainly wish he and Patsy all the best as they move forward.

Next thing on the list would be, it was good to learn of Akrum's decision to come back. I know Akrum was going back and forth a little bit. We spoke midweek last week, and was certainly thrilled to learn of his decision. I think he's doing it for all the right reasons and on a personal front, I certainly think he's making the right decision, the one that's best for him and his future.

That's certainly going to help our football team, as well. He's a really good football player, as I think all of you know, he's a good teammate and we're really excited about his senior year, just like all of the guys that are going to be coming back.

We are in the middle of recruiting right now. I think it's well known, this is a dead period, a prolonged dead period right now. The coaches are at the convention. A lot of the coaches are down in Nashville at the convention. We'll reconvene here in midweek and then as of Thursday, we'll be on the road for the next two-plus weeks.

I think we're really well positioned right now, but like every year, certainly like last year, what happens in January, really helps shape and mold the recruiting class, and I think we are off to a good start. We have a good core group of guys right now that are committed to us, and this class, thus far, at least, feels like we had last year, which after having them on campus for whatever it would be, six, eight months, I think they have a chance to really be a good group.

We're hoping that we can finish well. We've got two and a half weeks here of hard work in front of us, and hopefully that all goes well.

And the last thing, just regarding the offensive coordinator position, really excited to name Brian Ferentz to that position.

Just a couple words about Brian. He's had a tremendous career at the University of Iowa. He's obviously a former player like several of the guys on our staff. He really had a great career here on the field. Certainly had a great career academically and I think just really appreciates what's important here.

And then most importantly, once he left, the exposures that he's been able to have, Atlanta as a practice squad player, being around Jim Mora and his staff, the way they did things there, and then after that, spending significant time up in New England and starting ground zero and working up to being a position coach. And being around Bill Belichick, people like Bill Belichick, people like Bill O'Brien on a day-to-day basis, I think has been really beneficial to them. Great guys to learn from. Great guys to have as mentors.

And then Bill O'Brien, in particular, I know spent -- they worked really closely together and spent a lot of time sharing his knowledge with Brian. But you know, Coach Belichick, the same way.

So I'm appreciative of that, and then certainly it's been fun, enjoyable, to watch him over the last five years continue to grow and experience success as a coach here. I know he'll tell that you Greg Davis was a big part of that, as well. He's had great mentors, with them on a day-to-day basis, most importantly, he's been a pretty good student that way.

Really in my judgment right now, I think he's the best person fit to lead our offense moving forward. He knows Iowa. He knows our players, knows our program and most importantly, I think he knows what works here and what doesn't work and that's important for all of our coaches. Certainly important for all of our players, too.

So I'm really excited about this announcement, certainly, and you know, it's my pleasure right now to bring Brian forward and let him say a couple words. Thank you.

BRIAN FERENTZ: Good afternoon to you guys. I just want to begin by expressing how honored and humbled I am to have the privilege to be the offensive coordinator at the University of Iowa.

I'd just start by staying, I think you guys in this room that cover us for a living, you experience some of the same things we do. When you coach or cover this game, your loved ones are asked to make a lot of sacrifices, and I just want to recognize my wife, Nikki, for making those sacrifices for our family, providing support and allowing me to do what I love to do, which is coach football.

That being said, you know, I was born right across the street there at the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics. I just went out for a jog beforehand, ran by the house I grew up in on Koser Avenue right off of Melrose. And I have fond childhood memories of tossing a ball to myself in that yard wearing a Hawkeye uniform.

And then I was fortunate enough obviously as a teenager to live out those dreams. I wasn't tossing or receiving the ball any more but I was able to play here and take the field as part of the swarm. And then to come back here as an assistant coach five years ago, it's been like a dream to me and I just feel so excited and so happy to have been a part of this program for such a long time.

With that being said, certainly my history helps me appreciate the responsibility that I now have as the offensive coordinator and I feel that responsibility to my former teammates, to all of the alumni of this program, of our institution, to our great fans, to the people of this great state, being that we are the flagship institution and football program. That's humbling, and I don't take that honor or that responsibility lightly.

In my career, I was very fortunate, as my dad mentioned, just as a young boy to be around people like Coach Fry and Joe Moore, you know, on a pretty routine basis, that was pretty special as a child. As a player, to be coached by men like Joe Philbin, Reese Morgan, Ken O'Keefe, Chris Doyle here, and of course, my father.

Professionally, once I finished playing, to kind of go to that grad school of the New England Patriots and be around men like Scott Pioli, Dante Scarnecchia, and then obviously Coach Bill Belichick and Coach Bill O'Brien, to work under those guys, just the experience; invaluable.

I'd say from all those people, I learned two major things. No. 1, players win football games and coaches tend to lose them. So I've gained a healthy appreciation of that throughout my career.

And the second thing being just the determination and the relentless effort that it takes to play winning football, to play championship football and to compete at a high level.

Certainly, I wouldn't want to go any further without mentioning Coach Davis and the impact he's had on my life and our program over the last five years. Greg's been a first-class human being, most importantly, but he's been a great coach, teacher, mentor and friend to me. I appreciate everything that he's done.

And I would finally tell you that as we turn our sights towards 2017 and the future, I do think it's important to take a look at the past. Since 1999, our program's been built on the mantra of tough, smart and physical, and that won't change. Certainly is not going to change offensively.

But our stated program goal is to win a Big Ten Championship, and we understand that in order to do that, in order to compete at that level in this conference, we're going to need to have some flexibility and have the ability to change on a weekly basis and do what's best to win football games.

So to begin that process, obviously over the next two and a half weeks, the focus is on recruiting and finishing the 2017 class. But as we do that, we'll begin to go to back and look at 2016 and fine-tooth comb that. We'll study it, we'll examine it, we'll learn from it, and we'll use that to formulate a plan to move forward.

Just in closing, again I would say how honored, how humbled I am, and how big a responsibility this is, but I'm eager to attack it and embrace the challenge. Thank you, guys.

Q. Will you be on the field or in the booth? Will you be coaching the offensive line? Will you be in a different position group?

BRIAN FERENTZ: Those are all good questions. I would defer those to the head coach right away. So how is that for an opening rebuttal.

I think right now, it's probably too early to determine all those things. Right now we need to focus on the immediate future which is getting our 2017 class figured out and finished up and we'll move on and address all of those things at the proper time.

But what I would tell you is my No. 1 concern is doing whatever it takes to help our football team be successful and win, and that's what my focus will be on in the immediate future.

Q. Did you have to apply or show a plan for what you want the offense to be?

BRIAN FERENTZ: We've worked hand-in-hand now for five years. Again, like I said, I think you've got to go back and look at the history of this program, and I mean the program that's in existence since 1999. We've had ups; we've had downs.

I think when you look at us offensively and what we need to do moving forward, we have to do whatever it takes to win. And I know that's not always a popular answer. I don't think you can look at statistics on a year-to-year basis. Every team is different. Every year is different and every game is different.

So far as an overarching plan, I think he would be the first one to tell you that everything here is going to start up front and winning the line of scrimmage and running the football and then after that, how do you best complement that moving forward.

Q. You mentioned recruiting a minute ago. How do you get recruits excited about the passing game and want to come here? Throwing the football wasn't that easy this year --

BRIAN FERENTZ: I'd say they have a tremendous opportunity, I'd start there -- I think it's not going -- to get anybody excited about coming here and playing at the University of Iowa -- it's pretty simple. Do you want to get a college degree? Yes. Okay, good, we can help you with that. Do you want to play football at a championship level; do you want to compete for Big Ten Championships? Okay. Well, we can help you with that. And do you want to play in the National Football League; because we can help with you that. We have a pretty good track record; do you want to play in front of 70,000 fans every week.

There's a lot of good things we can sell here. Certainly offensively we didn't execute to the standard we hoped to this year at all times. There was some good mixed in with the bad. I think it's hard to win eight games with all bad. But as far as getting guys excited to play, I think you sell them on opportunity and what we intend to do moving forward.

Q. What do you have to do to get more out of the passing game?

BRIAN FERENTZ: I think it's a good question and I wish I had a better answer at this exact moment. I think what we need to do is go back and reevaluate everything we've done and start there. When we evaluate that, whether it's personnel, schemes, how we're doing things, just like we do in any facet, we'll do the same thing in the run game.

What's our best chance moving forward to be more productive offensively as a unit, and how can we help the football team win games.

Q. The father/son dynamic doesn't happen all that often in college football. How has the relationship changed the last five years, and do you feel like now you're able to voice more of an opinion?

BRIAN FERENTZ: I've never been shy about giving him my opinion. I think he can tell you that.

I don't know. I think at the end of the day, we all sit in that staff room and we all have the same goal. We want to win football games. I'm in a unique position; I'd be silly to sit here and tell you that I'm not.

And I'm talking on a job that certainly has challenges, expectations and an increased amount of scrutiny that comes with it. And when you add my last name and my relationship with the head coach to the mix, there's going to be added scrutiny. And I understand that.

I've given some advice to my family, my immediate family. My in-laws are dedicated subscribers to the Gazette, and I encouraged them to stop (laughter) or at least to throw out the sports page, because that comes with the territory, and it does, and I don't shy away from that, and I understand it.

But as far as our relationship, I'm sure it's changed. He could probably speak more to that. He probably doesn't see his grand kids as much as he'd like to out of the office, because he's so sick of me he doesn't want to see me, so he doesn't get to see them.

Q. How comfortable are you coaching quarterbacks?

BRIAN FERENTZ: Like I said, I have no plan moving forward as far as where we'll be. I think we need to figure out what's best for the football team and attack it that way.

But of course, I would have almost zero comfort coaching quarterbacks at this moment as I stand in front of you; I've never done it. I've been around people that did it and I thought did it very well. It's like anything else, I hadn't coached the offensive line until I came here and coached the offensive line. I think what you do is, whatever you end up doing, just like when I coached the offensive line, you seek out good people and you seek out their counsel and you learn; and we're all students.

That's the exciting part of the challenge to me, too. I'm going to be doing a lot of things I've never done but that's how you learn how to do them. And you seek out good people that have done it in the past and done it well and luckily I know a few of those people.

Q. How did you find New England helped you learn how to formulate the passing game --

BRIAN FERENTZ: Sure. Until I was in New England, I had very little experience in the passing game. I just didn't. And then being thrust into -- I actually started on defense in New England, which was probably one of the most valuable times I've ever spent in coaching; to get the opposite perspective. And that's where I first got exposed to the passing game and the back end, when I was around the secondary, which was a brand new eye-opening experience for me.

If you want to talk about polar opposites on a football team, okay, you have your offensive linemen and then you have defensive backs. And that transition over to the offense and spending time around the guys coaching that aspect of the game, every day was a learning experience in so many ways.

But when it comes to the passing game, a lot of things that I learned very early on is football is football.

Whether you're running the football or whether you're trying to scheme up a protection in the pass game or a route concept, it's about attacking defenses. It's about creating matchups and exploiting those things.

And the trick to the whole thing that I've learned, and this is -- you guys may want to get your notebooks ready -- this is like an epiphany, okay. Defenses are trying to do the same thing, which makes the whole thing a little bit interesting. It comes down to basically, you know, who prepares the best, but certainly, who executes the best on Saturdays.

So my experience there was mainly just getting exposure to it for the first time, but realizing very quickly that football is football. Whether you're coaching offensive linemen, tight ends, quarterbacks, basically the fundamentals of the game are really similar in how you attack defenses. Basic things are pretty similar, as well.

Q. What do you think of the criticism of Iowa's offense?

BRIAN FERENTZ: I think what we have to strive for here, whether it's 2017 or 1999, it's always the same thing: We need to be balanced. I think with balance, that probably, takes care of some of those criticisms.

But it's like anything else; we had to lean heavily on the running game this year and that was apparent down the stretch. I think we had a 13-play drive against Nebraska. I don't know how many times we threw it. It wasn't many but we scored, so it wasn't predictable. But when you're stopped it becomes very predictable and that's just how it works and I think that's a criticism when you do the same thing over and over again. What we need to try to strive for and regain is that balance offensively, and that's one process we'll begin immediately. We've got to start by examining what we've done and figure out how to move forward.

Q. I assume starting with the complete bottom level at New England, is it unlike a freshman coming in -- you get stripped down bare and build back up. In this case you were around maybe the greatest coach of the generation, Bill Belichick and the best offensive coach in Bill O'Brien, and then of course your father, he's probably a Hall of Fame coach, too. Is it about applying and learning details at each step of the way to build you up knowledge-wise and how you formulate a plan? Is that kind of what you've been able to do all these years?

BRIAN FERENTZ: I think that's anyone's goal in any profession in anything you do. I've always been fortunate; I've been around great people and I've paid attention. I hope that I can execute certain things as well as those people did.

But one important lesson I learned right from the beginning, whether it was my father or any of those guys at New England, you have to be yourself and you have to be who you are. And you try to take the best of everything you've been around and apply that to what you do on a daily basis. But if you're not true to yourself and you're not honest, the players, whether they are kids or whether they are grown men, they are going to see through you pretty quickly.

To answer your question, yes, you absolutely try to take pieces from every one and you try to learn and be a sponge. I remember one of my first lessons in New England walking into Scott Pioli's office empty-handed, and in a very not-so-subtle way, I was reminded that you should have notebook at all times. And he was right. And since then, I've had a notebook at all times. Because you're always learning, you're always taking things in.

But I think what you do have to be careful of, and I see it a lot in our profession, is not trying to emulate someone. You need to be yourself, and that's all I'll try to be here.

Obviously my No. 1 priority is this place. This institution is very important to me. How we do things is very important to me. I'll try to take the best of everything I've been around, but certainly it's going to have to be packaged in a way that works for Iowa football and helps us achieve our goal of winning games at the end of the day.

COACH K. FERENTZ: So I'll throw it out for OTHER questions, but I can share this with you: Both Brian and his mom are very candid with their observations. There's a long track record of that, in the office or anywhere else.

Q. What is your plan for the rest of the staff now?

COACH K. FERENTZ: I think first thing's first. When Greg let me know his intentions, that set the wheels in process of trying to figure out who would be the best person to lead the offense. That's where my focus has been now, we have to make everything fit around it. That's really kind of what I've been focused on.

Q. Would you consider hiring a quarterback coach, is that part of --

COACH K. FERENTZ: Yeah -- everything right now. I think the biggest thing, my responsibility, is to make sure that we get everybody in the right seats. First of all, get the right people here. And we have an opening, so we obviously have to look at that position, and then, you know, go from there.

Q. Adding another full time assistant probably

happening --

COACH K. FERENTZ: Yeah, it sounds pretty much like it's a given. So I'd like to think that in a perfect world, it would have been, you know, in action as of today.

I think the guys that just got hired you think about around the country, all the staffs that got put in place, it would be easier to plan if you knew it was going to be ten or nine and go accordingly. We can't bank on that, but I will factor that in, certainly.

Q. Did Greg's decision surprise you at all? It seemed like he moved really quickly on this.

COACH K. FERENTZ: Yeah, two things. I developed a motto, I remember going home one night -- I can't remember what happened that day but I just remember telling Mary, if I ever come home and say I'm surprised, just hit me over the head with a pan. I've got to be out of my mind. Because nothing ever surprises you; you just never know.

In Greg's case, it's not a total surprise by any stretch, but nonetheless, I wasn't quite sure where he was at and we sat down last Wednesday, shared a couple pleasantries, but basically the first thing he wanted to let me know was he had come to that conclusion. Surprised would not be the right word, but just, you're just never quite sure how things are going to go. My first thoughts are, what a career he's had.

Q. Brian has reported to Gary (Barta), is that the same?

COACH K. FERENTZ: Absolutely. Nothing changes on that front, yeah.

Q. How are you able to fill positions so swiftly -- how does --

COACH K. FERENTZ: I think they have covered the relative part. We've already covered that ground and I'm sure there will continue to be -- same stipulations, was just covering the last thing, no different than what happens in wrestling, happens around the country and other places, as well.

As far as moving forward, this is really in my mind, we have not hired a new coach, first and foremost. It's really not a lot different than what we did when Norm retired. Thought about that long and hard and then decided Phil was the best person for that job.

I think there are a lot of parallels probably between the two circumstances. Thought about this option, that option, this option, but kept coming back to Phil and made perfect sense. I think Phil's done more than proven himself as a football coach in that role.

And there's growth involved, just like there will be

growth involved with Brian, but really, it was kind of the same process. So we have elevated. We've changed responsibilities. My way of thinking would be like switching the two line coaches, whatever. But we still have a coach to hire, certainly and that will be the next focus.

Q. Do you anticipate any other changes to your staff?

COACH K. FERENTZ: You know, with Greg's announcement to me last week, it opens everything up certainly and first consideration is, okay, who are we going to get in the coordinator position. Get the right position in that seat and that will work accordingly, what's the best way to move forward. Just like since last Wednesday, I've been considering everything and I'll continue to do so.

Q. Any other possibilities for coordinator?

COACH K. FERENTZ: Absolutely. I've been thinking about that for awhile, as in years, not months or weeks. Yeah, you have to think about that all the time, about all the spots on your staff, because you just never know -- to the surprise question, you just never know when someone is going to change jobs. In 18 years, we haven't had a high turnover rate. I think we probably compare pretty favorably nationally.

But nonetheless, it could always happen and you could lose good people and we have guys on our staff that have turned down other opportunities. You always have a list ready, always people that you consider. And there are a handful of people out there today that I would be very comfortable with. I just think Brian's the best candidate for this job at this point.

Q. When you look at the passing game, disappointing most of the year, a lot of times what people talk about Iowa is whether it's on defense or running the football, they don't do anything crazy, but you know what you're going to get with Iowa -- does that seem to be different where there's a lot of sight adjustments and seemed complicated at times. Do you anticipate changing anything --

COACH K. FERENTZ: Just like we did when Greg came in, we'll look at everything. We didn't totally wholesale change our offense, but we obviously gave Greg's preferences a lot of consideration and we'll do the same thing moving forward here.

Just to comment about last year's passing game. Fair enough, still as a head coach, I have to evaluate everything, and I still look at that in comparison to our run game in 2004. I'm not saying it was totally personnel driven but I think it was a big factor this year.

I would just encourage you to look back a year ago with

the same quarterback. We passed the ball pretty well, very successfully in '15, at least in my mind. I think what we did offensively, '15, is kind of where we'd like to be, if we can do that on a consistent basis.

I would suggest that part of this was personnel driven. No different than the run game in '04. Nobody was too happy about that, either. I think we were next to last. I think there were 117 teams playing football back then; we were 116.

I think you have to be really careful when you weigh and measure. Nobody wants to hear that, but that's part of my responsibility, part of my job.

Q. The father/son side of it, is there a different sense of pride when you move your son to a big position like that, and Brian's development as a coach the last five years, what have you seen?

COACH K. FERENTZ: Good things that have happened during your life, career -- I guess that's what retirement's for, and I haven't really given this part of it much thought.

My first objective was to try to find the person that I felt was best for leading our offense right now, and you know, that's where it went. But as far as his growth, I mentioned his time in New England, which to me is so critical. And I feel that way about just about everything; you need to get away from what you know and learn and be stimulated by outside sources.

I worked with Coach Belichick for three years; I know the routine and I know what the drill is, and I know just how much opportunity there is for growth. And there are days today -- one disadvantage of being a head coach is you get torn in a couple different directions. I think it would probably do all of us good, probably in every profession, if you would just take a year off and do professional development and be that guy that has the desk in the hall and do all of the grunt work that all of us did, more than 20 years ago, I guess.

That was a big part for him, certainly. And then just to watch his continued growth on a day-to-day basis, as a head coach, I like seeing it with all of our coaches and we have a lot of guys that are growing on a daily basis. That's what life is all about, young world. It's been good. As a dad, certainly you feel good about that.

Q. Is there a chance -- he stays coaching the offensive line -- like what happened at Wisconsin?

COACH K. FERENTZ: I wouldn't rule anything out right now. That's the scenario up in Wisconsin. It's been done up there. There's a lot of -- you could find an example of things just about anywhere, and some people might say age. I know of two coordinators in

the NFL that are younger than him. So you make all that stuff work. It just depends on, you want get the right people and who you best personally can add at this point.

Q. The coordinator position, you have called it the lightning rod position, and does it change your view?

COACH K. FERENTZ: Yeah, I did suggest he get another layer of armor to wear, and mentally and physically. It's not a new phenomena. Social media has really helped accelerate that, I guess. I don't spend much time there, as you know.

But I also sat, watched all three of my boys play at City. I went and sat in the stands. I remember especially in the early years where they were losing zero or one game a year, and everybody had a comment about every play called. As a coach, you've got headphones on and you're down on the field and you can't hear anything. But when you sit in the stands, you realize really quickly, everybody has an opinion about offense.

Q. A lot of ways, you're tying your legacy to Brian. Does that excite you in a way, having a lot of faith in him?

COACH K. FERENTZ: I understand the point there but I really feel that way about everybody we hire.

It's interesting, if you look at our staff, you know, one of the good things about getting older I guess is we've got three former players on the staff right now. Not that that's a requisite, but there's an extra connection.

This program, they grew up in this growing, so the meaningfulness of it all, I think it's impact a little bit accelerated -- not making a good coach but I think there's a little more at stake for them. You think of a guy like Seth Wallace who GA'd here for three years; so those kind of ties I think are good. You're always looking for the best people, the people that are really going to help.

To your point, everything you do as a head coach, you tie yourself to the people around you, whether it's your coaches, your players, the support staff, people that work here. And I think that's one of the great things about working here. I talk about our three people that help out, Rita, my assistant, Terry and Amy -- Amy picked me up at the airport in '81 with Bill Snyder's car. I mean, who can say that? Rita has been here for three coaches. Terry is our leaving out of here after 25 years; I can't believe her lack of dedication (laughter).

But that's why the fabric here is so unique, and that's everywhere on campus. I think we have something that's special. The point being, is it's not just a job to

them. It's part of their lives. It's important to them, meaningful, and when we win this year -- to me, that's kind of the culture that we're striving for.

Q. Nathan Stanley seems to be at the top. Is it a surprise? What do you see from him going forward and do you think that redshirt year or the non-redshirt year was beneficial to him?

COACH K. FERENTZ: If we didn't think it was beneficial, we wouldn't have done it. No regrets there. I think the reps that he got there, being the No. 2 guy for the majority of the continue, I think it will help him. But all that being said, it's like every position; it will be an open competition everywhere.

And that's one thing, our team, I'll share that with them next Tuesday. We start from scratch every season, whether we went 12-0 or 8-4, it really doesn't matter. You do start from scratch and that's probably true everywhere but I know it's true here. I don't know about a lot of things but one thing I do know is just how it works here. We have to start realizing we haven't accomplished anything. And Nate hasn't thrown a lot of significant passes yet, so we'll let those guys compete and decide on the field.

Q. When you had the conversation with Akrum, how did that go with you guys? He was maybe leaning, when we talked to him after the game.

COACH K. FERENTZ: Yeah, things all change year-to-year, certainly and the world we live in continues to change. A couple things I'd suggest that came to my attention later on, that I wasn't aware of it till all this stuff was done, I guess he was on one of the draft lists as the sixth-best back, which I don't know if that includes underclassmen, that's everybody or just seniors and all that stuff.

And interesting thing there, as you well know, all that draft stuff changes dramatically between January and April when the draft really takes place. It's amazing how guys drop, rise, all that stuff.

But that certainly would turn your head if you were a young person, certainly. And then there are a lot of people that floated around talking to players. I think that industry has become a lot more aggressive and proactive than they used to be. It's not a new phenomena. It's like criticizing play calling.

But all those things factor in, so you've got a lot of people telling you things that you want to hear and what have you. But we just try to talk in terms of reality, and you know, I think at the end of the day it's a little bit like Desmond and a little bit like Brandon. He wants to come back and enjoy being a senior and be a leader, which I think he can be. The growth that he's

demonstrated, it's been really fun to watch that. I think the best is yet to come as a player and as a person. That's got us all excited about him. He's a great young guy. He's got a good attitude, good energy, all that stuff. He still has to get bigger. If he can help himself, if he wants to play in the NFL, get bigger, which he will.

Q. What did you see from Michael in the depth chart right now?

COACH K. FERENTZ: Ojemudia? He's really the only guy left. We're down to three guys. Hooker would have been the fourth guy. So, just that's where we're at. We'll get Manny back, and we'll have great competition there, too. We're going to be young there.

I don't know who is going to be in this recruiting class yet, for sure, but those guys will have an opportunity to come and play. That question came up earlier: What do we sell? You talk about opportunity. You're a perimeter guy, offense or defense guy right now -- you create opportunity. Manny is a great example. I mean, he jumped in there and played in the biggest game of the year and did a heck of a job. He could probably do the same thing on offense -- and I think he's either a one- or two-star guy, but the guy is a football player.

I wish we had three like that, so we are trying to recruit a couple guys like that, and that's what we tell them, hey, come on, door is wide open for right now.

Q. Where do you think the recruiting class will end up numbers-wise?

COACH K. FERENTZ: I think probably 20, 22, somewhere around there.

Q. Bowl game have anything to do with Greg's decision?

COACH K. FERENTZ: I didn't ask him that and I don't know how long he's been thinking about it. Greg's a couple years older and now I have to be careful what I say because I'm an employer, but you start thinking about those things, I'm sure, at some point.

I don't want to share our conversation too far down the road, but it wouldn't surprise you. All of us think about our grand kids and our wives and things like that. I don't know if it had an impact or not, I really don't. But the biggest thing is what a great guy Greg's been, outstanding coach.

Q. When you look back, personnel aside, we know about injuries, but what has to change in the passing game in your opinion beyond getting guys healthy?

COACH K. FERENTZ: Yeah, those are discussions we'll have. My slant on the bowl is a lot different than some other people's. I think in some ways to me, it's a

lot like the Michigan game. We're playing a good team. You guys saw the players they have. They have got good players. You guys read the recruiting reports and they have got good guys out there.

So for us to win that game, it was going to be a tight window and there were three plays in my mind that were critical in that game. Otherwise, I think you go into the fourth quarter and you've got a chance for a heck of a football game. I think we've got a chance to win the game. Bottom line is we didn't make those three plays, so that's that.

Then it wasn't good, obviously. That's kind of the life we were living this year, considering where we were at, and you know, we navigated that window pretty well, back second week of November, we weren't able to navigate it on the second day of January. But that's where we're at, and hopefully we won't be at that point -- we weren't a year ago; we were able to throw the football.

Just going back to what we did in '15, that to me was pretty good football. And it was the same coaches, same guys coaching. A lot of the same players, but just we were missing a few. All that being said, I know this: Henry is not coming back. He won't be playing next year. George won't be playing. VandeBerg will, that's good news.

So we're always moving forward and we'll have a long discussion just like we have been every year. What's the best way to give our guys a chance to be successful. The one thing that Brian hit on, you've got to be able to do both. That's something we really believe in. It starts with the run game, but if you're not an option team, you can't just live on the run game. It's got to be both. Our good teams have had that. We'll keep chipping away.

Q. Is it more a case of doing better at what you guys do instead of doing all these wholesale changes?

COACH K. FERENTZ: One thing I can share, we will not be a spread team or a run-and-shoot team. We're not going to do that. It doesn't us. It doesn't suit our geography. That would be a good way to ensure I won't be around here a couple years from now, or maybe a couple months from now.

But it's not going to look dramatically different, but there will be tweaks and there will be adjustments and certainly I'll defer to Brian just like I deferred to Greg or Ken previous to that.

Q. How did he come out of the Bowl game --

COACH K. FERENTZ: Fine. He's obviously sore and hopefully he can play in the Senior Bowl. We have

three guys in the Senior Bowl; what a great opportunity that is for them, and hopefully he'll be able to go full throttle there.

Q. When you look at the defense and what Reese has done over the last five years -- approached that position and then replacing Jaleel Johnson and guys like him in the past, do you feel good about Brady and those guys that are going to try --

COACH K. FERENTZ: I do and that's one of the reasons we decided to play Cedric this year. Not that he played a lot, kind of like the Nathan Stanley question. But he was working with the twos every day and trying to push that forward so he would be in the mix. Not necessarily a starter; he's going to have to earn that job.

We'll give him an opportunity. Was one of the good December stories, did a nice job in there. We'll keep every possibility open. So we lose good players every position -- not every position but we've lost a lot of good players year-in and year-out, sometimes some guys are better than others obviously but you have to have other people step up. And to think that anybody is going to play at the level Jaleel will at that spot next year is probably not realistic. But I'm certainly banking on Nathan being healthier and playing better, because, it's his senior year. That gets back to the theme of everybody has to be playing better every season.

Q. Was the nepotism hurdle big in this situation?

COACH K. FERENTZ: I didn't get that sense but certainly we wanted to clear that because it's obvious, and that was obvious five years ago.

I don't think it's a huge deal and probably if anything it works against him in this position -- to your point earlier, it's a position of everybody has got an opinion about what he's going to do moving forward.

It's just one more thing that's going to be wrong -- first time we're three-and-out, first time we throw an incomplete pass. It's one more thing, one more log for the fire.

Q. Talk us through offering him the job and the process?

COACH K. FERENTZ: I've continually given this thought in all areas. You try to -- but then when the reality became apparent, when Greg told me that he was going to retire -- now it's more than just, okay, this guy, that guy, this guy; then you start thinking about it. You weigh and measure. Had to reach out and talk to people, at least I felt like the guys I would be interested in and I know enough about and I know who they are and what they are and what they believe in.

But after pretty careful consideration and deliberate consideration, it just made the most sense to me. I think that was the logical -- he would be more than ready. He's had opportunity at other places and I'm pretty confident he would have had more opportunity at other places, too.

Selfishly, whether he's my kid or not, I don't want to lose good coaches off our staff. There was no bargaining. I thought about it, and like I always do; I move like a tortoise, but this made a lot of sense to me -- I mean, 50 times smarter than I am, so that's a good thing. You'll all be glad to know that.

Q. Is the contract similar to others?

COACH K. FERENTZ: Yeah, he'll be treated like everybody on our staff. Guys that are five years here, have a chance for multi-year contracts and I don't see any reason why that wouldn't be the case. Doesn't mean his responsibility is going to change a year from now but as far as the contracts go, absolutely. Yeah, he'll be treated like everybody else, just like he has been for the last five years.

Q. Is everything signed, as far as Brian's contract is concerned?

COACH K. FERENTZ: No, nothing's been signed. He's a guy that went from this chair to that chair. He's going to have to move his office at some point. Gets a little bigger office. That's the good news. The bad news is it's right next to mine; that's not good. Right now, I've got to go down the hall. I don't have one of those, what do you call them, segue -- I don't have one of those. You almost need one in this building.

But he's still on our staff, so there's nothing official on this whole thing. We'll wait till we get everything together and then we'll figure all that stuff out. Right now we've got to go recruit.