

University of Iowa Football

Media Conference

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Tim Polasek



TIM POLASEK: It's been an exciting spring. Things have moved quickly. My wife just got here last night and we're sleeping on an air mattress until tomorrow. The football facility is a lot better than my new home.

I'll open it up for questions.

Q. What's it been like working with this group for the first time?

TIM POLASEK: Oh, phenomenal. The culture that's within that group that I think has been established a long time ago and who we are from a -- not necessarily it's got to be a run-first offense, but we are going to run the football, they go about their business pretty good. The emphasis being right now in the spring of just trying to develop as much depth in competition as we can to try to solidify who's No. 7, who's No. 6, who's No. 8 has kind of been the main focus. Not that we're ignoring the top guys because everybody can improve, and within that that's kind of been the central theme, just go out there, compete and improve, and then we've got to have some young guys step up and establish themselves in a position where they can get into a competitive situation with one or two guys.

Q. Last year there was a lot of shuffling with this offensive line. Do you see it right now as they're more settled into the positions, or have you moved them around a lot to see who may fit best where?

TIM POLASEK: Yeah, we're in spring ball right now, so we're always going to try to control adversity that could come up during the season, so we're moving some guys around a little bit just to get them some reps with some what-if situations. But honestly match-ups and injury dictate how guys are going to flow. When I watched the cut-ups from last year, it was pretty evident there were six, seven guys that were going to play, and that might have required some movement.

I don't think that stresses them. A lot of the techniques at tackle and the run game are similar to the ones at guard. Sometimes center is probably the biggest challenge, being able to bring a guy in there and play that doesn't have the familiarity with the quarterback position.

To answer your question, you'd love to have 10 guys and say the left tackle is backed up by player B and the left guard -- the truth of the matter is we have to have

our five best out there at all times, whatever five are available.

Q. This is a position you haven't coached before and you've obviously got two Ferentzes here for consult, but how much do you feel like you've kind of grasped this position and taken it over and taken charge of it?

TIM POLASEK: Well, I think I've grasped it quite well. I felt confident coming into the situation back on February 12th in the interview. I think the process in which -- the way we go about things really allows for smooth transition into the meeting room.

When you talk in terms of what do we do daily, we meet with the kids, we practice. We just sat in there for four hours to watch the practice tape, or three hours, and whatever points that need to come up, it's a room that's -- we want to have a proactive room where everybody is kind of sharing information and we're all focused on our own area.

So that's been good. Every day my respect level for both Ferentzes is at a high level, but I gain more and more respect with their football knowledge, and just being in there, and it's been a really pretty smooth transition.

Honestly, the guys that hold you the most accountable are those old guys, the guys that have played a ton. Once in a while I have to look, guys, this is what you said in the past, that kind of thing. Yeah, Coach, you're right on it, so you look for a little bit of reassurance from those guys.

But every day we move further and further away from that, and I'm kind of attacking the process at what seems to be a good enough level right now, and we need to just continue to grind and keep improving.

Q. What is the biggest challenge for a new coach coming into a unit that's so experienced like the O-linemen?

TIM POLASEK: Well, I would say just matching up the vernacular. And I'm not talking about how we're calling a formation because they don't care. They need to know is there a tight end next to me or is there not a tight end next to me. I said it before, but sometimes we're saying things here that are exactly the opposite

at my last job where I was responsible for the whole offense. I'll give you one example: I must have said "scoop" three or four times, and they're like, Coach, what are you talking about. I said, oh, shoot, "slip" was a backside block, and dah-dah-dah-dah, so you get into those kind of things. And I've asked the guys to kind of just hang in there. But we're getting to the point now where it's getting to be pretty clean daily, and the more time that we spend in there, the better.

And it's just about me being detail oriented, providing notes to those guys, having some Power Point things, whatever it takes to push the program forward daily is what's got to be done, and if that requires myself and Brian Ferentz getting here at 5:00 for a 6:00 meeting, that's what we're doing.

Q. Can you give an update on Jackson so far and what you've seen from him?

TIM POLASEK: A lot of promise. I'll say this: We're seven days into it. I like his grit. He's an Iowa guy from a toughness standpoint, and me just coming in here and just kind of getting his background in the short time, a 15-minute meeting, man, this guy plays basketball, he's only played football for X amount of years, you're just kind of, where is the guy going to be at; is this a developmental kind of situation. I'm going to be honest with you; he's a pleasure to be around. He's a joy to be around. I like his work habits.

I think that he wants to be great. No matter how badly we want kids to excel and to win the Big Ten and all these other things, they have to have a burning desire to want to be great, and I see that with AJ. I don't know that it's consistent enough. The part where AJ can improve is late in practice. Can he be the same guy that he was at the start at the end of practice. He's one of those young guys that is providing some potential that we're going to need come middle of September, middle of October.

Q. Talking about Boone being a left tackle, that's something he had all of 2015 mostly and last year at the beginning of the year he was out of it and now he's back at left tackle. Is he a prototypical guy there?

TIM POLASEK: It's close, but from the standpoint of height, weight, measurables and movement skills, I think you're looking at a tackle. You know, that's one of the things we'll do is we'll go through an interview process at the end of spring to say, hey, Boone, is left tackle your best position, are you most comfortable there. Right now he's playing left. He seems to be off to a great start here, or we're in the middle. I think Boone Myers will come in here and tell you, and I hope that each of the guys that I am responsible for in this program will tell you I need to do better. I mean, we're

not going to settle. The expectations are high. What a job they did last year winning this award, right? It's the highest achievement an O-line can win, and it's an honor to be able to coach that group, but quite frankly that's in the past.

Kind of to circle back to what you asked, yeah, I think he's pretty close to prototypical. I mean, movement skills and his ability to bend and compete, and he's a long-levered kid. I think those things all kind of add up to being a tackle.

Q. A couple of your players said that they like your urgency, the tempo with which you're providing practice, getting to do your drills quickly. Is that something that you brought? Is that something you saw?

TIM POLASEK: My mom would tell you it's the way I've been since I was about five. Quite frankly, and that's maybe one of those interesting meshes, having the running backs and tight ends and fullbacks in the past, they're part of so much, right, in the scheme of things that I had been part of or we were part of that you kind of always were trying to move around to keep their attention. It's like with running backs, get them out of the meeting in 40 minutes, go walk through. That was kind of my approach. With these guys, they can kind of sit back, get their notebooks out. These guys are scribbling and writing and taking notes, and so it's just a little bit my nature to be honest with you, and I really like to see active bodies out there. I get on edge a little bit when I see too many guys standing around, and so we're going to go fast. We want to have a great deal of energy. We want to have an urgency, a can't-wait mentality in what we're doing. It's real simple with me. Compete and improve, passion, enthusiasm, have some energy and some urgency with it, and then be aware that your teammates matter.

Q. You talked a lot about the film, especially with the older guys. When it comes to someone like Sean Welsh, what stands out about him?

TIM POLASEK: He's a dynamic competitor. That's what I like about Sean. I mean, he's a tough -- tough-smart, right, those kind of things that were -- physical. He's got real strong hands. I'll say that for Sean. He is a powerful kid. His hand placements inside, he's going to have a pretty good shot of winning. I'm not up here to give credit. Heck, I'm just up here to answer some questions, but he's been trained really well at Iowa, and I think that he's able to apply some things maybe the young guys aren't yet.

Okay, that 3 technique is getting tight, I'm thinking the guy is going to cross-face. He can handle that because of his experience, so he's taking advantage of all the reps that he's had in the past. He's a big,

powerful kid that competes well, and I think he's worked hard to put himself in position going into his fifth year to be a leader in this program and to be a dominant player.

Q. Is that what you see from film study?

TIM POLASEK: No, not particularly. I wouldn't say that. One of the funnest parts about being involved at Iowa or being involved in this job is getting to know people and getting to know the kids. We're still working through that, and I work at it -- I'm trying to learn them all because I think it's important to have relationships with the guys. Coach Ferentz values that this is a people type of program in that we want to have strong relationships, so I'm not quite sure on that yet.

They all have met any kind of challenge I put in front of them as far as, hey, guys want you to go back and look at the Minnesota game; tell me what you learned from it. You'll get a handwritten sheet that looks like they've tried to be organized and that they've worked hard to make sure it's detailed out.

Q. How much has the pass protection come up? I think 30 sacks last year and 30 sacks the last couple years. How much has that been pushed on to your desk to tighten that up?

TIM POLASEK: I guess I haven't felt that to be honest with you. I'm not a numbers guy. I quite frankly don't care what happened last year. Besides, anything that we can learn from, I want them knowing those numbers. I appreciate you bringing it up to the point -- I can tell you this: Pass game and pass drills are half of what we do. I mean, if you looked at a practice script, you're going to see run individual, okay. Well, that's laid out for 14 minutes, and you're going to see pass individual for 12 minutes.

I think the better question there are the situations you're giving the sacks up, and that matters, and then just being able to line up and win your one-on-one battles is what we're focused on now.

And then take it one step further, how are they working together to pass off various twist games or stunts. Those are the things that our focus is, and you're not going to believe this, but it's all about knee bend and creating separation and pass pro, and we've got to do a better job daily, rep to rep, and we've got to find a way to stack wins up, more wins than losses.

Q. You mentioned the search for six, seven, eight guys. Who's kind of run to the front of the pack in that area and kind of what flexibility do they have?

TIM POLASEK: You know, we're not in position to throw a bunch of names out there right now. We're in the middle of this. I think in a week, though, it's going

to be pretty solidified as far as who's got the best chance to come in and compete. And so there's several guys. There's probably five or six guys that are fighting for -- I don't know that there's a magic number. We stay totally healthy, maybe it's six. Those are some things that I'm not in position to answer yet.

You know, you mentioned AJ. He's doing a nice job. And there are some more guys here, especially some in-state kids that are competing hard and moving the program forward right now.

Q. Last time we talked to you, you talked a lot about your past coaching in college, that you got your coaching start at Catholic Memorial under Bill Young. What did you apply from him, a Hall-of-Fame high school coach, and how often have you made contact with him?

TIM POLASEK: I stay in contact with him a great deal. When I student taught -- so it's one of those stories again, I really didn't have a place to stay, and so I actually kind of lived with him part-time for about six, seven weeks, and so the number one thing I learned from him was just preparation, and you can out-prepare and outwork people. There's a lot of people -- we've got to work more efficiently and all that, and I believe in that, but that's not who I am. If there's any kind of question as to if we're prepared or not, we've got to get it handled.

He taught me better than anybody, and it's something that I've really -- it's part of my philosophy, we've got to eliminate stress for the kids, and we've got to make them rise up in pressure situations. There's a big difference. Stress is anxiety, okay, and Bill taught me how you eliminate that for kids is by preparing them in every situation. You get as many reps as you can, the film room, all that, even from a high school standpoint. He was meeting with those guys and laying out the stressful situations so that he could turn them into pressure situations for those kids, and I've always admired that, and his son was my college roommate, too, so our relationship goes past -- a little bit of a second father type figure for me.

Q. You probably came to Iowa with an idea of body shape in mind. Now that you've been here and checked it out, how would you describe the prototypical sort of Iowa offensive lineman?

TIM POLASEK: I think they can come in all shapes and sizes. That's like recruiting. We've got to be open to everything. But I do know this: they better be able to bend. They better be able to run. They need to be smart, physical, okay, and they got to be tough. That's more the criteria than is he 6'7", 240 pounds, is he 6'3", 248 and can get to 295. We try not to lump those guys into a group. I can tell you this: I've been really

impressed with the way our guys bend and move, especially that first group is really athletic. That's probably the most critical point.

I brought it up in a recruiting meeting, and it was kind of my first one: Hey, guys, let's not forget we're still looking for athletes, and so that's probably the number one thing that has to show up with the inside and the outside game is that we've really got to be able to bend and move our feet and run.

Q. How unusual is Iowa's philosophy of the backside knee into the defender, and how early did you learn it, I guess, from Kirk and from Brian in the discussions?

TIM POLASEK: I actually studied it about a year and a half ago, and I've never told anybody this, but a high school coach had visited here and brought up some film and kind of was asking, how are you guys different, this, that and the other thing, and two complete different philosophies in what I've been involved in in the past. And the past is the past, but I think there's a lot of NFL teams that are taking parts of what we're doing and applying it, and you can see it in different blocks, but are pretty unique. Pretty unique in some of the things that we're doing, and I've really come to enjoy it and really it's a foundation that I think I'm going to have a hard time getting away from.

Q. What are your impressions of James Daniels?

TIM POLASEK: He can be good. He can be really good. He's a good football player. I've really been encouraged with his work ethic on and off the field. He takes time to do other things outside of football in the weight room. I think that's important. The one thing me and James keep talking about is how good can he be if he can get to the spot where he can step out in front and be a great leader for us. He's been impressive. He's had a good spring.