

# University of Iowa Football Media Conference

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*Iowa City, Iowa, USA*

**Kirk Ferentz**

**Tyler Burns**

Press Conference



thing with their families. Really appreciative of that, appreciative of the prospects and families taking time to visit with us, ask questions, get their questions answered. Really happy about that.

As we move on right now, we're excited to get this process done. We'll go from there.

One thing I'd also mention, too, just about this class. I think it's been interesting, look at last year's class, they got on campus in June, the obstacles, challenges they've had to face to get to this point, to this mid-December date. It's been one of the biggest challenges for any first-year class that I can imagine. It's really commendable how they've handled that.

I would flip it around and say the same thing about this class, I think all of us do, about this recruiting class. We certainly had bumps back in March right on through. I can't say enough about the way the prospects handled it, about the way they actually delved into areas that they were concerned about or had questions about, asked good questions, both the prospects and families. Really they were digging for facts, not headlines. I can't say enough about that.

None of them flinched, none of them wavered. I feel really good. We've already learned a lot about these guys without seeing them on campus. That's certainly exciting.

This class is well represented. It's a pretty local class, as you know, all but one from Iowa or bordering states. You think about the pandemic, a lot of these prospects had ability to be on a campus before things shut down in March. More regional recruiting, if you will.

All that being said, we still feel great about it for this distance, Joey Labas coming from eastern Ohio. But Joey and several other prospects, they made the trip here, he and his family, made the trip during the summertime just to see Iowa City, experience it a little bit. We couldn't have any contact with him, but at least they were able to see it with their own eyes and ears.

Everything was outside in, standing outside the facility, getting a feel for Iowa City. That's a huge thing for us is getting prospects on campus, getting them into Iowa City, most importantly meeting the people here, interfacing with

**KIRK FERENTZ:** Appreciate everybody joining us and appreciate your coverage of the team.

I'll make some broad-based comments about the class, the process, then Tyler Burns, who is in charge of our recruiting and has done a really wonderful job, can share some good detail with you, probably fill in some things for you.

Just in general this is the 22nd year of doing this, 22nd class. I think we're all excited about this group certainly. It's always an exciting just period for the staff, support staff, everybody that works so hard to pull a class together. It was a lot of work, a lot of detail that goes into that certainly. Just really excited about that in general.

Excited to introduce this class officially. Things have changed greatly as we all know in recruiting, it's almost anti-climactic, a lot of Hawkeye fans know more about these people than we do. Nonetheless, it's a really exciting day for everybody.

Like I said, 17 players, we're thrilled with each and every one of them. Really anxious to welcome them into the class, onto the team.

Recruiting, it's kind of an interesting process. Really I think there's more art to it than science as you go through it. That's true in a normal year. This past year has been anything but normal as we all realize, things getting shut down back in March. We haven't been able to have any personal contact, yet in some strange way it just seems like we almost know this class better than any class we've had because we weren't coaching the guys on our campus, we weren't working with them on a daily basis. As a result, we had a lot more time. It's a different way of communication. Certainly all of us in the country realize that and come to appreciate it.

It really afforded us an opportunity to really get to know our prospects maybe on a deeper level than normal. Same

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them. This year it's done in a little different way, but I think the results have been really good.

A couple other things about this class. We're looking for guys that are leaders, good football players, but leaders. 15 out of the 17 have been captains, multi-sport athletes. Think about Cooper DeJean, he probably sparked our interest, the most recent commit as well, sparked our interests through basketball prowess. The football part took care of itself. That's always been important to us, something we try to identify during the recruiting process.

Just last and not least, a really special time for all the prospects. That's all across the country. To receive a scholarship, to earn a scholarship, that's really significant. I always tell prospects, nobody gives them out, they get earned. Our prospects have had a lot of help and support along the way. It's exciting for everybody involved, the high school coaches, parents, family members. It's just a day of celebration, rightfully so. Scholarships are hard to earn. I commend them all for that.

When this is over, we'll start the transition forward at some point. A handful of guys come in January, hopefully in January, then June for everybody else. We'll look forward when the time is appropriate to get them on campus and have a chance to work with them. We're really excited about that.

Last couple things here. Just want to congratulate all of our guys that have received recognition. I know the offensive and defensive teams now have been released. Special salute to Daviyon Nixon to be the defensive player of the conference and also the defensive lineman of the conference, that's a tremendous accomplishment. Speaks to the improvement he's made over 12 months. Really worked hard, played an extremely high level. Just happy for him for that recognition.

Happy for each and every guy that has been recognized. That's really a special thing, too. We talked to the team last night, just kind of gave them a quick update. We want the guys to get a little rest, try to recharge their batteries a little bit. They're in finals week. This has been unprecedented. We're trying to practice, getting ready to get ready for a game during finals there. Good thing there, the guys can turn their attention to finals, finish strong that way. As much as anything, give a chance for everybody to get rest.

I heard that coming in on the college sports station, they talked about they had four head coaches on during the course of the week. All the coaches referenced that their teams were a little tired, worried about their teams and staffs being tired. This has been an unusual year. I think

that's probably the most important thing right now, is our guys to finish their academics well and just rest, get some rest.

We'll figure out next week what's going to happen, what we're going to do. We eagerly await Sunday to learn our destination. After we do that, then we'll start at some point getting ready for our next game. We'll look forward to that.

Again, as I said yesterday, I am appreciative that we got to play eight games this year. It's been quite a deal. Hopefully we have one more in us, and hopefully we continue to improve as we go. Today is just a day to celebrate these recruits. We're thrilled to have them join our program.

I'll throw it out for questions.

**Q. This is sort of a loaded question. With everything that's gone on as far as recruiting restrictions, how much did having arguably the deepest class in the state of Iowa high school talent-wise, how much of that helped you establish that foundation for the recruiting class? When did you know the in-state talent for this class was going to be deep and special?**

KIRK FERENTZ: That's always a good thing for us obviously. That's one of the challenges at Iowa, is our population, a state that doesn't have eight to 10 million people in it. Common sense says there are less prospects.

You guys probably know this better than I, if you go back through the last 10 years, there's a lot more scholarship players playing in our program now going on to college. I think it really speaks to the coaching, in big programs and small, that our players and in-state players get to receive.

I've always felt the coaching in this state is outstanding. Football is important, as a general statement, in the state of Iowa to high school players. It's a real positive. Certainly helps if you don't have to cross state borders. No guarantees, but I think at least your odds go up a little bit. The familiarity with the program, ability to be on campus more, just follow the program a little closer I think is obvious.

I was remiss, we're really excited about the nine walk-ons that are committed to us. I think that's a really exciting group, really accomplished, good players. Again, all those things we just talked about, the character, the attributes, leadership.

When you think about a guy like Keith Duncan who is up for the Burlsworth Award. We awarded three scholarships last week to guys that are more than worthy, deserving.

That's always been a big thing for us. We're excited to have them join the program, too.

**Q. It's about to enter the wild, wild west phase, if it's not already there, when it comes to allowing players immediate eligibility, transfers. It could be a boom for you potentially or you could lose some players that way. How did that impact at all your recruitment throughout the fall? What is the next step come January? Are you going to be scouring, you don't live in the transfer portal, but scouring it for people, and your current seniors, those conversations?**

KIRK FERENTZ: We always try to be as smart as we can, look for prospects that might be able to come in and help the football team. Think about Jack Heflin this year. What a perfect fit he was with our guys, with our team, our defense. He's done a really good job. That's part of the reason we have a good defensive team this year. Yeah, we'll always keep an eye to that.

Now we have a little time here in the next couple days to have some conversation. I was asked that last week. I said I haven't really given it that much thought. A year ago it was pretty obvious that there is a possibility Tristan or A.J. Epenesa might have decisions. My sister could figure that one out. I don't know if there's as many clear-cut cases.

As we project, try to manage our roster, you always keep in mind there are probably going to be a couple guys that want to test the waters in the NFL. That's certainly their prerogative. A bigger factor than it was four years ago.

Bottom line for our aspect is just players have to follow their heart. If that's what they want to do, that's the best thing we can do. There's no reason in being here if they don't have both feet here, fully committed to it. That time comes for everybody. They make the decision to go.

To your other point, with the free transfer stuff looming, all that, the game has changed a lot. Roster management has changed a lot. We'll just try to be diligent. We're never going to build the team in that market. That's just not our niche.

**Q. You had one young man back off his commitment, talked about the racial bias as being part of the reason why he did so. How are you addressing that in recruiting? Are you trying to be proactive? Unfortunately there's negative recruiting in this business as you know. Have you heard it's being used against you? Are you trying to be proactive to counter that? How are you dealing with that?**

KIRK FERENTZ: I'll share this with you, I won't share who. I know from a very good source one of the head coaches in our conference called his staff back in the spring, said if anybody even goes down that road at all, thinks about going down, they're going to be leaving, they're going to be out of there. To me, that says a lot about the caliber of some people in our conference. I'll let that remain unnamed.

The prospect that you referred to, he lives about three thousand miles from here. I mean, I just don't know where he's going to get accurate information. That's what I was alluding to earlier.

As you might imagine, we had a lot of guys with questions, good questions. I plugged them for asking those questions. We encourage that. Letting us answer those questions. They did homework besides that.

I think that's really what makes me feel good about this class and about this team, right? They could have packed it up after the first two games. Didn't do it. Same thing with the guys that were committed to us, really seriously looking at us. They looked at facts, not sensational headlines. They didn't get caught up in all the stuff. They were looking at things of substance. I think obviously they walked away feeling pretty good about things.

Despite some rumors, we have a pretty solid program here, a lot of good people, coaches, players. It's been that way a while, I'm really proud of that.

**Q. How do you deal with that going forward with classes in the future?**

KIRK FERENTZ: We're going to continue to deal with it the way we have dealt with it: straight on. Just answer questions, encourage people to get facts, not sensational headlines, all this stuff that got all the attention. Let's look at the facts.

The other obvious answer, I've said this many times, we're going to try to continue to work forward as a program. I'd venture to say we've probably done as much as anybody on that front over the last nine months. Talk to our players, talk to the people in the building that are living it day by day, ask some questions. Good answers go to those guys because they're the ones that live it. A lot of coaches say a lot of stuff. Backing it up is a whole different story. We back it up really well here. I think that's one thing we're really proud of. 22 years, we back it up. You may not like what we say, but we back it up.

**Q. One of the names on here, a couple names caught my eye. You pick up three wide receivers. A young**

**man with Nebraska ties. Give me a sense of how important it was to grab those three young men. I notice no running backs in the class. Is that something on the grad transfer you might look at?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Potentially. If we can find another Mekhi Sargent, I would be thrilled. I've talked a lot about Chauncey, Mekhi. This guy is too good to be true. Just happened KB saw him in December. I can't remember who got hurt, somebody left, which happens in college football, guys leave, get hurt. We had an opening that spring. I circled back to KB, said tell me more about the guy you were impressed with. The rest is history. It was a lucky shot. I can't say enough about the kind of team member Mekhi is.

We'll keep an ear to the ground. We feel like we have a good group right now. I will share now, I was remiss yesterday not sharing this, Ivory, unfortunately, had an injury. You probably saw he wasn't dressed out on Saturday. Had an injury last Tuesday morning, non-contact. Unfortunately he's going to be a while. He has a serious injury. He'll be back for next fall. That was really disappointing and sad. But we'll be fine there.

To answer that point, this has been an unusual year. There are a lot of good players that have chosen not to sign in December. I wouldn't say it's a big number that we're actively recruiting, but a handful of guys we have serious interest in right now. We'll try to go through that, see what we can do to move forward there.

**Q. I know you don't pay close attention to rankings, ratings of players. Was this the year maybe that the offensive line stuff kind of clicked together, the success you've had putting guys in the NFL drew the attention of some of those premium prospects?**

KIRK FERENTZ: It's interesting. You would think on the surface that we wouldn't have a hard time recruiting linemen or backs, right? But you never know, right? You never know what's going to happen.

We're really thrilled. Some of the guys are highly recognized, I've been told. I did hear we were ranked higher than we have been in whatever amount of years -- only because on the Big Ten Network shared that with me. That's how I get my knowledge, right?

We don't worry about that. We worry about the guys. We evaluate them as we look at them, just make our own decisions. Most of the linemen were in camp with us. We got to see them work, their level of pride, mental toughness, all those kind of things. We're really excited about the group, feel really good about it.

Let me circle back, too, that last question. Talking about the prospects, mentioned Keagan Johnson, out-of-state player, whose dad played at a really high level in college, on outstanding teams.

Going back to Rob's question, as you might imagine, he had a few questions. I will tell you this, he has a deep appreciation of how things work on a football team, the level of commitment that's necessary, the work that has to go into it academically, football-wise, socially.

I think as much as anything, not that dads make decisions, that's he's approving of him coming here, I think that really speaks volumes. I'll just throw that one out there as a side.

**Q. You look at this list, there are some serious physical size in this class. More of a product of the training regimen in high school now, more guys being prepared once they get on campus immediately?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Kids are getting bigger every year, prospects are. The world has changed compared to 20 years, training. That being said, we have an eye for everybody, evaluate everybody, because it's still a game of quickness, still a game of aggression at all positions. The guy can't move, if he's really limited athletically, it's going to make it really tough to be successful at any position in the Big Ten.

We're not afraid. We can't be afraid of taking a lineman that might weigh 235, 240 in high school, then grows into a 290, 300 pound guy. We're not afraid to play with guys that aren't 320. Probably one of the smaller lines in our conference. We just have a little different philosophy on that stuff. We're just looking for football players, simple as I can say, that have enthusiasm and want to go play.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks for your time, coach.

KIRK FERENTZ: See you guys Sunday. Thank you. Turn it over to Tyler, who knows a lot more than I do.

THE MODERATOR: Tyler, if you want to start with an opening comment, then we'll go right into questions.

TYLER BARNES: I put out a tweet earlier said two, two and a half years in the making of this class. Actually I was wrong on that, going back to Griffin Liddle, about three and a half years actually, back to his freshman year.

It's been good. We're excited, proud of the guys that signed today. It's been an interesting year, a challenging year for a number of different reasons. Seeing those guys be able to celebrate and sign, see their dreams come true,



we're excited for them.

We'll have six guys that will be here in January, a month and a half now, a little early. We'll get those guys on campus, get going. Two linemen, Connor Colby and David Davidkov. Two receivers, Arland Bruce and Keagan Johnson. Two linebackers in Zach Twedt and Justice Sullivan. Know those guys are chomping at the bit to get here.

Every year we try to find multi-sport athletes, try to find leaders, try to find winners. Selfless, humble, hard-working guys. I can't speak enough about this class. It's been exciting. They stuck through it in the long run. Fortunately we had a good bulk of our class early on before the pandemic really hit, got some momentum going in March and the spring. Working off momentum I think is really important, especially in a year like this where we haven't had guys on campus nine months now. Won't have guys on campus at about 13 months at the current end of the dead period. We'll see if that stays put, we hope so.

Overall it's been a good year. We're really, really fortunate to have a strong regional base, as you can see from the geographic areas. 16 of our 17 guys that are either in-state or within touching states. One guy that was a seven-and-a-half, eight-hour drive depending on how fast you're going. Very different from years past. We're really fortunate that the geographic base is strong for us, we capitalized on that.

**Q. You maybe have seen a lot of these types of stories over the years. I noticed on Jaden Harrell today on Twitter, he posted a picture of the letter that he wrote himself when he was eight years old saying that his goal was to earn a scholarship to Iowa, he posted a picture of his first time at Kinnick with his dad. How cool is it to see those types of things, these guys that have wanted to be Hawkeyes for so long? Specifically with him, how cool is that to bring him onboard after he sets that goal?**

TYLER BARNES: It's awesome. I have a different vantage point in terms of my relationship with these guys before they get to campus, once they get to campus, as they finish. It's always incredibly humbling. I don't cry as much as Coach Ferentz, but you tear up at times when you see guys come here.

I don't watch Senior Day for a reason. You go back five or six years, you remember when they were in high school, their parents. You see them sign. After four or five years fulfill their dreams of playing high-level football, having a chance to move on to the next level.

I have nothing to do with any of that. I really don't. That's all the coaches that develop these guys when they get here, develop those relationship, push these guys to be the best football players and people they can be.

At the end of the day we've got nine guys from the state of Iowa in this class. Nine guys that probably grew up Iowa Hawkeye fans. I've seen pictures of these guys in Iowa jerseys at Kinnick when they were young. For them to fulfill their dream is incredible. When they run out in the swarm for the first time in Kinnick, every year I try to go out there for the first time, Thursday, Friday, they see their locker setup for the first time. How excited and giddy they are. On the phone with their parents, girlfriend, whoever that may be. It's pretty incredible, a feeling that's hard to describe. It's good for these guys. They've earned it.

**Q. What do you like about Jaden specifically?**

TYLER BARNES: We offered him early. Physical kid on both sides of the football, extremely productive, a really humble, quiet kid. Sometimes you like those linebackers that are a little quiet, they get on the field, wreak havoc. From a program that's been a successful program we know a lot about.

He grew up an Iowa fan. From day one kind of made it known where he wanted to be. Eventually ended up making the call. We're excited about that.

**Q. Congratulations on the class. I apologize for a bit of a loaded question. How important was the in-state class just in terms of establishing that foundation? When did you know the 2021 class in Iowa specifically was going to be special? Seems like the state is churning out more talent than ever.**

TYLER BARNES: Yeah, first and foremost thanks for the congratulations. I know it's probably boring for you guys and everybody else. When it's uneventful, that's what we want. Easier to sleep last night knowing there's not anything in the fold.

It's good for the state of Iowa, good for the kids in Iowa, good for high school in Iowa to get the recognition they deserve. Not every year is going to be like this year. Probably a very historical year in the state of Iowa. There are kids that can play football here. Good to see they got recognition from the Big Ten, some of the kids in state, all across the country, lower-level schools, getting some of those guys, I'm not sure how many guys signed today, but it's good for those guys.

I've said it before, I think it was a huge, huge advantage for us to have this type of regional base in a year where

there's a pandemic where we can't have kids on campus, can't go out and see them, can't have summer camps. We're big in terms of evaluation, getting kids on campus for camps. It's huge for us to get guys on campus, see our facility, interact with the support staff around campus they're going to be a part of in their everyday life once they get here.

With the state of Iowa, six guys already committed before the 2020 calendar year started, it was huge. Huge to have those guys, just the base built, have those guys help you recruit the next guys in line. I've said it before, if we had one or two guys at that point when everything got shut down, that might have been a little hairy, sticky.

To have six guys committed, pick up seven or eight guys in the spring, build some momentum, have those guys help you recruit, not to take anything from our coaching staff, they do a great job.

But nobody recruits as well as high school kids, nobody recruits as well as peers. When you have guys onboard that want to help you recruit, understand who you are, reach out to those kids, that's a really powerful thing.

**Q. You mentioned Griffin Liddle. You were after him really early. What is the challenge in keeping guys committed or interested when you are after them as a freshman and sophomore, keep them interested for two or three years?**

TYLER BARNES: We don't offer many freshmen. Some of the sophomore offers are going out more for us. We're probably still not on par for the rest of the country.

You have to be really special, we have to be really sure when we offer somebody that young. At that point it's strategic. You don't want to throw everything at a freshman or sophomore right away when they get on campus unless you absolutely have to. This might be your only shot.

The way recruiting worked out today, how many kids get on campus, how much it happens. Now we've learned a lot about virtual recruiting, what we can showcase from a distance, too. You have to have a plan in place.

He comes from a great program. Pat Angerer was one of the first guys to tip us off. When you play football at Bettendorf as a freshman, that's something to take notice of. Two dogs named Kinnick and Carver. They were all in. Strong, strong wrestling background. Dad wrestled here.

It's tough. Some schools want to get the name in the ring earlier with kids. Very have to at times. We also want to

find a way to formulate a plan, if we do this, what is our plan moving forward, how can we keep this guy engaged, strategically recruit the guy over a two-and-a-half-year period. If you're chasing him after two-and-a-half years, might get a little bit stale.

After commitment, we have to help turn the guys into recruiters. You committed to us for a reason. Help us tell the other kids and their parents. The parents get involved, too. Some of our parents are extremely active on social media, which is good. They're willing to help out and share their experiences as well.

**Q. Walk through the process of Alec Wick. Was a pretty late walk-on. Got the connection with Marv and Ed. A guy who didn't necessarily get a lot of looks from some bigger programs, certainly had a heck of a career down the street. What do you see his future role being?**

TYLER BARNES: First and foremost, I don't think you can ever, ever underestimate production. When you're productive, you're productive, whether you're a walk-on, scholarship, whatever level you're at. I could be wrong, I'm pretty sure he is the all-time leading receptions leader in Iowa high school football history, over Oliver Martin. I think T.J. Hockenson was on that list.

Sometimes recruiting is not an exact science, right? Guys get looked over for one reason or another. We knew about Alec. Coach Cook reached out about two years ago to say this is a guy you probably want to keep on your radar. He got hurt two years ago in the playoffs, missed a little bit of time. Had a monster senior season. When you got a guy like Ed Hinkel, all the contacts we have at Regina, for those guys to stand on the table about what type of football player he is. When you get to watch the state playoffs, you see what he did in the state title game, I mean, c'mon.

For us to be able to get Alec as a walk-on, that's just incredible. He's a good kid, unbelievable soccer player as well. It will be fun to get him here and let him battle. You never know what's going to happen.

**Q. On the wide receivers, did you find it a little bit, after the Holiday Bowl, easier to recruit skill position talent to this class? I know it's not easy.**

TYLER BARNES: Yeah, I mean, the guys definitely took notice. There's no doubt about that. They definitely took notice of that. We've always had a stigma, you hear all the time we run the football, big O-linemen, don't throw it, if so it's a tight end.

I think the past couple years have shown different, we will



throw it all over the place, run it, game plan is going to change week by week based on who we are playing, their strengths, so forth, but it certainly helps. I think you could ask all three of those guys, seeing the success that Ihmir, Tyrone, Nico last year, probably appealing to them.

It's good. All three guys have a little bit different recruiting stories just in terms of how they were found, what they can bring. All three guys are hungry. We initially talked about taking two guys. We had two that kind of jumped onboard. All three guys were already talking behind the scenes with each other without telling us, they already knew they wanted to come. Made it a little bit easier when we got to the third guy, this is where we're at, what do you think. Never flinched. They've been solid the whole time through.

It will be fun to get them all here. Brody is a 6'4", 205-pound guy. Skill guys don't grow on trees in Iowa in your backyard. He's a big kid that can run, multi-sport athlete, ball skills. Probably fits more of the outside X receiver.

You look at Arland who is in Kansas, had an unbelievable junior year at his high school where he was a wildcat quarterback. Talk about production, there was nobody more productive in the state. When Coach Copeland mentioned him, found him, what are these other schools doing. They're not even messing with the kid.

I think fast forward, you see him come up at Iowa, angry, saw what he did after he won his appeal. He is lightning in a bottle. This guy is dynamic, a Swiss Army knife, can play in the backfield, in the slot, punts, kicks, game-winning interception in the semis.

Keagan is interesting. Obviously his dad, two-time national champion at Nebraska. We were actually watching him in the room I'm in right now during scout school, right after his junior year. We popped him on. Obviously offensively you liked what you saw. What really stuck out to me was there were a couple clips on defense where he comes up and just wallops a couple guys, just smashes these guys. To see that from an offensive skill player, you love seeing that, right? To me that was the selling point.

As we researched him further, figured out who his dad is, we're going to end up offering this kid. Great. Probably going to go to Nebraska. Wasting our time. When you get him on campus, get to know him and his dad, Coach Copeland did a great job developing that relationship, credit to him.

Keagan wasn't going to be pressured to staying home. That speaks volumes when your dad played with the head coach there, two-time national champion, you're arguably

the best player in the state, coming to a state where there is one of your most hated rivals, I think that tells you everything you need to know about Keagan Johnson.

**Q. What kind of things, messages did you send to guys that had the questions like Keagan's dad? You kept this class together for the most part since June.**

TYLER BARNES: Yeah, I mean, with the whole class, we had to be open and honest. There were conversations similar to the conversations that took a place in this building with our current players. You couldn't run away from it. Had to hit it head on.

A huge credit to the class to stick with us, listen to our staff, listen to the players here. A lot of those guys talked to current players in the building, current coaches in the building. I think that shows you the type of kids we had. They talk within each other, too. Group texts, talking all year long, helping recruit each other. This is what was said, what did you guys hear. Just being open and honest and having those hard conversations went a long way with keeping this class intact.

**Q. You mentioned having six guys in this class at this time last year. You sit at one in the '22 class right now. Can you attribute that to anything other than the eternal dead period due to COVID?**

TYLER BARNES: That's probably part of it. I think initially right now I'm looking forward to next year. It's going to be a smaller class than normal anyway. When you throw in the extra year for our seniors, too.

Our roster is as fluid as it's ever been right now with everything taking place with the NCAA, the potential extra year, the transfer portal. News that you guys see every day that continues to just fill up with kids.

Again, last year you go back, we had six guys. How many of those guys were from the state or really close to? Not saying this '22 class won't be the same as the '21 class in-state. We have a pretty good number of offers out in the '22 class. We're not able to get these guys on campus the same way we were with the guys last year as early and often.

The '21 class, I feel bad for them. They got robbed of some time to get on campus. This '22 class, they're going to go 13 months in an extremely pivotal time of their recruiting period where they're not going to be able to get on campus, camp, have our coaches see them compete. It's definitely going to be challenging.

Now more than ever we have to be patient, be diligent

about who we're looking at, how we're looking, what we're trying to identify.

**Q. Colby and Davidkov are listed identical size. Obviously they're tackles. Their strengths as players, are they very similar in that way? Also what position do you ultimately see Cooper DeJean playing? Is that great that he has that kind of versatility?**

TYLER BARNES: Colby and Davidkov, they might be the same height, same weight. Davidkov never rocked a mullet the way Colby did for about a year and a half. Missing out on that there.

No, those are prototypical tackle body types you're looking for. We're fortunate one of them, just happened to be up the road in Cedar Rapids, grew up wanting to be a Hawkeye. Pretty sought after, too. He may not get the national recognition that Davidkov did, because he committed earlier than David did.

You look at David, he had a little bit of everybody in the country. Different recruiting stories. But when David came here the first time almost two years ago for a junior day with his parents, he told Coach Wallace, him and his mom two days ago, the first time we set foot in the building, we knew this is where it wanted to be.

Took another year of recruiting him, kind of sifting through the Ohio State and Wisconsin and Notre Dame courting him as well. As we really got into spring recruiting, we really tried to switch our plan a little bit on how we had to virtual recruit, what our plan was going to be to try to keep this class moving forward. We felt really good about where we were with David.

Ultimately it didn't come out of left field, but a little bit sooner than when we thought when he called, wanted to commit. When you have a guy like that saying his final four are Wisconsin, Notre Dame, Ohio State and Iowa. Kids are going to take notice that Iowa beat some of these historical bluebloods. That can get some of that momentum rolling.

We'll see if they both end up being tackles here. I think ultimately long-term that's where we'd like them to play. As you've seen, we had some of our best tackles starting inside, kicked out to the outside after the first year. It will be good to get them here, get them rolling. Fingers crossed that we actually have spring ball this year, get them a little bit of a head start in front of everybody else, keep them going.

In terms of Cooper, I've said a couple times today. I have to give a shout-out to my former next-door neighbor from

Oldebolt. He told me about Cooper when he was a freshman, talking about how great of a basketball player this guy was. I quickly dismissed him saying there's no way there's a Division I football player in your hometown. I apologize, Travis, I was wrong.

Fast forward a year, he's in his sophomore year playing basketball. I remember sitting in my office with Scott watching his basketball highlights. Six foot, 195-pound kid, jumping out of the gym. You're not supposed to move like that when you're that size.

Moving forward he comes to campus as a sophomore who played receiver his sophomore year before moving to quarterback his junior and senior year. He had a good camp. He had a really good camp. He ran well, measurements were great. As a receiver probably wasn't high up our board. At that point we kicked him over to safety.

As we watched his junior year of football, week by week watched what he did, take over games. I think it became pretty apparent that this kid is built like some of the guys we've had success with in the secondary here. How many high school quarterbacks have we had that have been really good DBs under Coach Parker here? Really sealed the fate.

I was fortunate enough to go out on the road last winter, went to one of his basketball games. Pretty quiet kid by nature. Good size, rocked-up guy. I think he had four or five dunks in that game, one of which he dunked over two guys, one was about 6'5". To see a quiet kid like that once he jumped on the basketball court, this flip switched, to see him operate the way he did. I was texting everybody on staff, this kid is an absolute no-brainer.

We'll start him at safety. We think that is where his highest ceiling is. We will see where it goes. But when you have a four-sport athlete, essentially all-state in four sports, is as great as him, it will be fun to get him here and see what happens.

**Q. We haven't brought up the quarterback class. Joey Labas had an interesting high school year, went 0-10 as a sophomore. Came back, won conference player of the year. When did he first come on the radar? What did you like about him? How did that relationship develop?**

TYLER BARNES: We knew about him last winter. Coach O. has the Cleveland area. He had known about Joey. Probably didn't get real serious about him until early in the spring. Once the dead period hit, once it was extended the second time, kind of when we had to make a decision.



We're not going to be able to get out and see these guys throw live in the spring. They're not going to be able to come to camp. A few guys on the board. When we talked about Joey's intangibles, he's a really good athlete. Watched his junior film, running around quite a bit. They didn't run him much his senior year, probably such a good football player, they wanted to keep him healthy.

When you go back and watch those two years of film, it verifies what you're looking for. He's a good athlete, decent size, 6'3", 210 pounds, with a good arm. He's a little bit of a gamer, has poise. When stuff gets sticky that's when he plays at his best. Having Coach O. get familiarity with that area. Ricky Stanzi works out in that area. For Ricky to put his stamp of approval on him, that's kind of all we needed to hear.

**Q. There are a couple other offensive linemen you have, Stephens and Gennings Dunker. Gennings was early, one of the first in your class. Beau is very competitive in the Blue Springs area for some schools. What do you think of them? Where do they fit in?**

TYLER BARNES: Gennings is hilarious, first and foremost. I'm not sure, I don't know if we put him out on Twitter. Did some Instagrams, did some 'did you knows' with our guys, asking them five questions.

One of them was asking them about their top three music artists. Dunk's first response was Britney Spears. I said no way. He actually has two Britney Spears shirts. He's doing an interview on one of those today. I'm not sure I'm supposed to say that.

We knew about that early on because we had Isaiah Bruce in the program. We knew about Dunk early on. Basically you're going to have to come into camp and earn it. We kind of new coming into camp, we knew we were going to offer. I am pretty sure he committed before Coach Ferentz got the verbal offer out of his mouth.

He grew up wanting to be a Hawkeye. Didn't matter who else was going to come. He was in. Really small town. That's credit to Coach Wallace. When you recruit Illinois, people think you have Chicago, St. Louis, central Illinois. There's a lot of small towns, too. Not everybody is going to travel those roads.

I think it started with Coach Morgan back in his day getting over to the western side of Illinois. Seth kind of picked it up. On his way to Chicago, well a little bit out of the way. For him to dig up and find him, the more you find out about him, so freakishly strong, a really good athlete. Does well in the offensive line room.

Beau was a guy we knew a little bit about. When he came up to camp two years ago, that's where he really stood out to us. At the time he was 323 pounds. A 323-pound high schooler, not supposed to move the way Beau did. We knew after that meeting we want to offer him.

When he committed, we weren't really expecting it. We thought he may take it a little bit further. But you saw from that camp to where he is now, he wrestled for the first time last year. He cut down at one point to 285. Now he's probably 295, 297. Looks like a different kid.

To have a high school kid be disciplined to lose that type of weight, keep his strength levels, he's just got a great attitude. He knows about the O-line tradition here. He has a great relationship with Coach Polasek.

**Q. How did you take Zach Twedt away from Iowa State a few miles outside of Ames?**

TYLER BURNS: That's a big credit to Coach Niemann actually. When he joined our staff, the first thing he wanted to do. Grew up in central Iowa. That was the first year we really replaced Coach Morgan recruiting the state of Iowa. Jay had recruited the state of Iowa, from the state of Iowa, first time out with the tigerhawk on. He was going through schools, making sure he was familiarizing himself with the coaches, where he was currently.

He mentioned that he thinks this Twedt kid might be interesting. We knew about Zach. When he committed to Iowa State, we let it go. I know people think we try to take their recruits, but that's not the case. We're pretty fair for the most part.

We got Coach Wallace involved. One thing led to another. He's been such a good leader. He's a vocal kid, a great kid. Another multi-sport athlete. It will be good to get Zach here. I don't know if there's anybody more excited about getting on campus next month than him. It will be good to get him here and get with our guys and get rolling.

**Q. I know this a little bit old news. I want your perspective on it. How did you as a staff handle the whole Arland Bruce in terms of eligibility? He puts on a good front, seem like a good, sharp kid. How tough were those conversations? How did you help keep him grounded with that type of situation?**

TYLER BARNES: Honestly we didn't get involved. There's nothing we really could do. We're watching it from a distance. I think it just speaks to the type of kid he is to stay humble about it. I don't know if the Patrick Mahomes tweet helped all. Two tweets he's had by Patrick Mahomes

having his back.

To have him stay on the team, be a scout team guy, wait patiently over something that's right, wrong or indifferent. Those appeals processes, something above my pay grade, something we don't delve into.

Such a weird year. Illinois still hasn't played high school football. Some states two, three, four different times back and forth whether they wanted to do it. For him to stick with it, when he had a chance to finally play, to see what he did to help that team win a state title is impressive. Most kids might have given up, moved back home. His high school team was playing. By the time he got released, his team was in a game or two I think.

For him to handle the way he did, have the maturity to do it, capitalize when his number was called, I think it shows you what type of kid he is. It was fun to watch. A fun year to watch. A different year where we have prospects all over the place representing different teams within the state playoffs. You're rooting for everybody, but you're also rooting for success. When you see him have the success he did, what he was able to do at the end of the year, that was pretty cool to see.

THE MODERATOR: Appreciate the time, Tyler.

TYLER BARNES: Absolutely. I appreciate you guys. Thank you very much. Hopefully we'll go somewhere warm on Sunday.

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