

# Vrbo Citrus Bowl: Iowa vs Kentucky

Wednesday, December 29, 2021

Orlando, Florida, USA

Camping World Stadium

Iowa Hawkeyes

Defensive Coordinator Phil Parker

Defensive Back Jack Koerner

Press Conference

PHIL PARKER: Our thoughts and prayers go out to the folks in Kentucky with the tragedy of the weather. But, anyways, we are glad to be down here. Kentucky is a very good football team. They like to run the ball. They have very good skill athletes -- a couple guys that might be out. Really impressed with the run game with these guys, and obviously, we know Robinson from when he was at Nebraska.

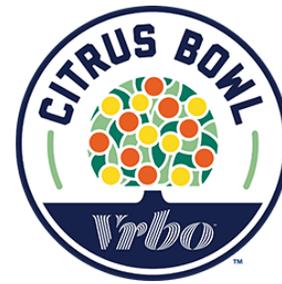
It's going to be a challenge for us. Well-coached football team by Mark [Stoops]. He's done a great job there, and we're looking forward to the competition.

**Q. It's a big developmental period. Any guys that have made strides, younger players that have jumped out at you during the Bowl prep?**

PHIL PARKER: There's been a couple guys that stand out a little bit, and most of it's our young defensive line, the guys that are coming through that's going to make a good impact here going into the springtime.

It has been a little bit of a challenge. You are coming down here and traveling. Now we are set on getting the game plan in here for the last couple days, and very pleased with the effort that they are doing. There's a long way to go yet.

**Q. Jack, no defensive back in the last 20 years has had as many solo tackles as you this year, not since Bob Sanders and Derek Pagel in 2002. What's your mentality there when you are approaching somebody one-on-one? And Phil, Jack is a former walk-on. What has he brought to this team in his three years as a starter now?**



JACK KOERNER: It's awesome to be up near some of those names I watched growing up. It's an honor for sure. As far as solo tackling goes, it's down to the fundamentals that we teach in practice every day, running through with leverage and just wrapping up and getting them on the ground. That's really all there is to it.

PHIL PARKER: To talk about what Jack has brought us as a walk-on, the determination, the mental toughness, the way he competes every day. He's a smart football player, understands the game, and really works hard and a great leader. Gets everybody in the right spot. He's good to have in the film room. He brings up a lot of good questions, and I think it's been a great pleasure for me to coach him.

**Q. When you look at Kentucky, what immediately jumps out at you? And also about Will Levis, have you faced a quarterback like him this year, do you think?**

PHIL PARKER: I think there's -- first of all, when you look at Kentucky, they are a well-coached team. I look at their offensive line, how well-coached they are up front. There are some All-American guys. The center is very good, the guy from Sylvania, Ohio, is also a tackle that's pretty good for them guys.

Obviously, the running back, it's hard for me -- I can't remember seeing him have negative yards, and that's going to be a challenge for us. I think he's a good running back and he can run well. That's what they want to do, run the ball, play-action pass and boots.

So, you are really going to have been to be eye disciplined and we are going to have game tackle, and going to have to make sure everybody has gap integrity and make sure we leverage the ball and probably pursue to the ball.

**Q. You mentioned Wan'Dale Robinson. What do you think has continued to transform and progress his game this season for him to be the player that he's been?**

PHIL PARKER: I just think the kid, they are going to want to put the ball in his hand. I think the things he does for that



team, he's got 97 catches or something like that, 94, 97, that's a lot of catches. There's times where they want to run the ball. They want the ball in his hands at some critical points.

He does a good job for what I see on film. I don't know what it is in the day-to-day practice stuff he does, but really impressed at what he's doing and how they get the ball to him and how he can change a game.

**Q. For both of you, so Matt Fagan is not going to play, it looks like this is Riley Moss's last game. Jack, you're a senior as well. Kind of like the end of an era in the secondary. What's it been like to coach this group over the years? And Jack, what's it been like to grow the relationship with your fellow teammates in the defensive backfield and go through this process with them as well?**

JACK KOERNER: It's just been awesome. Matt [Fagan] and I came on campus the same day back in 2017. We have been literally seeing our relationship grow over the years, not just on the field but off the field as well, and obviously the same with Riley [Moss], as well. Pretty much the whole room, I feel like the past two or three years the room has really came together and a lot of camaraderie in there. It's a brotherhood in there.

That's a testament to the way Coach Parker coaches us and brings us together. When we are in that room or on that field, we are all just thinking about football. We are locked in and just trying to do what's best for each other.

PHIL PARKER: I've been very blessed, being at Iowa for a long time. I think the last probably well-knit, connected group of guys in the back, one was 2015 where I think it was very unique to go into a room and talk to guys and watch the film and have good conversations about the game of football.

I think this group here that I'm coaching here the last two or three years are very experienced guys, and I think it has a lot of resemblance to the same team of 2015, which was a pretty remarkable year for us.

Obviously, winning ten games here, it has to do with a lot of the leadership in the back end and understanding what we have to do, and I think they have done a great job with that.

**Q. Specifically looking at Riley Moss, how has he grown over the past few years, and what advice are you giving him as he considers whether to pursue that NFL Draft route?**

PHIL PARKER: His progression over there, he's always had good speed and had a natural knack of doing things, catching the ball, and obviously that comes with a lot of practice and a lot of different sports that he was in.

Very excited the way he has matured and understands the game and gets better. Really like his toughness. As a corner, you don't find too many guys tougher than him, and I'm really impressed with what he does there.

Going to your questions about the NFL, this is one thing I don't like to get into the things about what the guys want to do, because everybody has to live their own life and they have to make their own decisions. If somebody comes to me and asks, I can give them my opinion.

But, I kind of let them guys do what they need to do to find out. Sometimes you just don't understand, like in college ball. College ball, once college ball is over, it really becomes a business and there's not a lot of -- to me, I think there's a separation and things are different.

As college players, you live together, you eat together, you practice together. You start going to pro football, you go home to your family after practice, you work in the day, and you're not going to class and doing other things. I think that's something he has to look at, because you can't come back to college. Once you're gone, you're gone.

**Q. You faced Levis at Penn State. How different is he now?**

JACK KOERNER: He seems like a much more mature player than then. When we played them last year, he was really more of a run threat to us. Getting the ball out wasn't necessarily his strong suit. So obviously he's matured a little bit, and he's been throwing the ball a little bit more.

And that's obviously something we're looking at.

But, whenever you play against a quarterback that can be mobile, get outside the pocket and extend plays, you have to stay diligent in coverage, and the D line has got to be diligent with the pass rush and everything. He's definitely a dynamic player, and we'll definitely be having to slow him down.

**Q. A lot of the redshirt freshmen defensive linemen got thrown in there, played a lot, played well at times, and you mentioned some of their growth. Was there anyone that maybe took that jump, like a Lukas Van Ness or Yahya Black in the last few weeks that makes you feel like, okay, they are making that stride, that jump that you need?**

PHIL PARKER: I think both of those guys have really done a good job. One, you can tell with their pad level, is how low they are staying. Obviously for big guys like that, it's hard to stay low, and I think [Yahya] Black has really done a good job in coming off the ball a little bit lower and not standing up when he comes off the ball.

But I think that both guys, the knowledge of the game has grown and their ability -- these guys are big guys, and they can move. We are excited about the future. I just talked to them the other day. These guys are, I think, redshirt freshmen, and pretty impressive for those guys to be at this stage and playing in a game like this. To have a three or four more years with these guys is a real blessing for us, the maturity that they have in the last probably two weeks of what they have done.

**Q. Welcome to Orlando. Just wanted to hear from both of you guys, how has it been since you arrived here, and what do you look most forward to doing here in Orlando?**

JACK KOERNER: Obviously, the weather has been great coming from Iowa. Much warmer down here, so that's been awesome. Just kind of walking around the city, it's been really cool. It's always cool to just be in a different place.

But at the end of the day, we are focused on the game because Coach Ferentz, what he's been preaching in the team meetings is the most memorable part about Bowl trips is winning the game.

He talks about how his most memorable Bowl trips -- he doesn't remember anything before the game. It seems to be after you win the game that you start to remember all the fun things that you did throughout the week.

That's kind of the mentality that we are carrying through all these things that we are doing. It's fun, but at the end of the day, we are worried about the game and getting the victory.

PHIL PARKER: I concur with that a little bit as far as the last time we were here, I think it was 2004, I forget what team it was or what coach it was -- might have been LSU, right. I don't know who the coach was -- it was Nick [Saban].

Anyways, that was a very memorable game. I remember it so much, one of my buddies on the last play of the game, he grabbed my dad. My dad had a pacemaker, and my dad had to go get the pacemaker fixed after that game, because he squeezed him too hard after that play.

But to answer your question over here, this really for us as

coaches, we are trying to put the game plan in. Obviously, we ran a lot of the things that we are doing practice-wise, and the meeting times that we have, we don't have the opportunity maybe as much as players to go out there and experience the Orlando area. We'll get out here maybe and have dinner and get back to the room and get up early and start going to bed.

Right now, I have a lot of -- a lot of things, understanding how the -- you have to get around the hotel we are staying in. I have learned how to do that real quickly and know where our meetings rooms are, so we can get to the film room. That's about all the defensive and offensive coaches do.

Thank you guys, all, and hopefully you guys enjoy the rest of the weekend.

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