

# University of Iowa Football

## Media Conference

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### Phil Parker

#### Press Conference



PHIL PARKER: I would like to welcome everybody. Thank you for coming this afternoon. I'm sure that you know this bye week you have a lot of time to get your honey-dos done. I know I have had to go out and cut the grass a little bit and edge it. I know I got some of my stuff done. That's a beautiful time by yourself.

Anyway, I just wanted to welcome you guys and just talk to you a little bit what we're doing in this bye week. We're trying to evaluate a little bit of our self-scout and the things that we're looking at.

Obviously, some of the things that we're looking at is -- the biggest thing I look at is a lot of the explosive plays, how many we're giving up. I think it's a total of five.

I think big plays that we're giving up, we gave up 18 as a total, and that's a 20-yard pass or a 15-yard run.

Then, obviously, I think there's 24 chunk plays, which I call in between 10 and 14. You try to evaluate that and see is it the defense? Is it a guy? Are we in the right defense, or are we losing -- some of it's just basic leverage, football leverage that I always talk about that is so simple.

The other things that we always look at is our efficiency. Our efficiency is we're talking about every down and distance. You go first and 10. Are you second and 7?

If you are second and 8, we have to be successful at third and 4. I think over time we've been pretty good.

I think the last couple of games that we didn't hit our numbers that we expect to hit. So I think that is something we've definitely got to work on and see what we can do to improve that.

Another area that I think, in the red zone, we're doing a pretty decent job in the red zone as far as points entering into the red zone. I think we can do better a little bit. I think there's some opportunities out there.

One other thing is I look at is third downs. We were 67%

overall on third downs, but then if you add the fourth downs into it, you know, we gave up too many fourth downs. Might be one. Might be two. It kind of drops you down a little bit.

Just an opportunity to get off the field, and we didn't do it. Take-aways are down compared to what we're used to. We had some opportunities. We didn't take care of those things.

We're working just like everybody else. Very happy. Pleased the way the guys are working. Obviously, this is a week that we can get some of our starters a little bit of a rest and work some of the younger guys. By talking about some younger guys really that are really impressive that have stepped up that maybe not be in a starting position.

You look at a guy like Higgins or Craig or Graves, as young guys that are getting a lot of reps. Then another thing we have Terry Roberts that was in there, and then is he back out. We ended up putting Castro, who's really kind of filled in and did a really nice job for us there in a couple of games when he was playing the cash position. Then we flipped Cooper back outside to a corner.

That's kind of where we're at right now, and it's preparation for after we did our self-scout. It was really looking forward to seeing the next opponent and working on those guys.

And then obviously this thing that comes up every year is recruiting in the bye week. Very disinterested sometimes. It's like an interruption thing, but it's things you have to do to make sure you go out on the road in recruiting. And I'm sure a lot of us are going to be out in schools and watching some games.

I'm sure you guys are real happy that you guys don't have to go to games or have to do anything this weekend. Right? Kind of. Honey-dos?

I'll open it up to any questions you guys have.

**Q. I have a question about Cooper, and cash is still a relatively new position as far as being a prominent position in your defense. Most of those guys, you know, Monte and Dane were safeties, and you played them at safety. He is transitioning from corner to play in this hybrid position. How challenging is that for him**

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**and for that position? Then, also, what kind of progress has he made as a true sophomore basically doing what he is doing?**

PHIL PARKER: Go back to first thing, we had him at corner, and I think what you really mean was he ended up in corner at the end of the Kentucky game. He can play -- when we first recruited him, we recruited him as a defensive back and didn't know exactly where he would fit in.

He has the ability of playing actually corner cash, I think strong safety, can play free safety. I think he can play multiple positions back there.

For a guy to be a sophomore and do the things that he can do and understand what he needs to do I think is really good. It's really an elite -- in my thing, just looking at him and saying how can he do all this stuff?

He has great balance. He has great football awareness. He sees things, and he is always on his feet and has always, what I say, play with good leverage.

I'm really pleased the way he goes. He has great ball skills. Some catches that he makes during practice that are what I call freakish. You know what I mean? One-handers behind and all this stuff. You say I'm sure he can play multiple positions, but he is definitely mature enough, hard worker. Always in the film room or always working.

I used to see him in the summertime all the time just going out there to the indoor trying to work on his footwork and stuff like that. He does a good job. A lot of those guys do.

**Q. Was there a single point where you realized Cooper, this guy is special?**

PHIL PARKER: I guess when you go out there and you are with these guys every day, you kind of get used to what you are seeing. My expectations of him become higher every time he goes out there. Obviously, he started real fast and started going to it, and I think he is still improving. I think he has a little bit more to give even. That's the way you look at it.

If you look at it, everybody wants to be perfect. Even if he makes a play, you want to be perfect, right?

And nobody is perfect. Everybody will say you can't be perfect. But you can try to be perfect. If you get to try to be perfect, you can be excellent, right, instead of just going around and being average.

**Q. Phil, a couple of the players last week talked about doing a better job winning first down against the run. How much of a concern is that for you moving forward?**

PHIL PARKER: Yeah, any time. I think you start talking about looking at how you are going to stop the run and make it a manageable third down, and that's been an issue for us.

I think we've done as best we can right now. It's getting down. Are we doing the right things? Do we have the guys in the right spot? Are they putting us in different formations and getting different guys in the box and trying to do that, and we're trying to solve those problems and making sure that we're not putting guys in position that they can't make a play.

Now, I think you can look at every play, and there's mistakes sometimes all over that nobody really sees. I just think we need to improve our fundamentals. The more you improve your fundamentals and they become a natural thing, then I think that's when everything comes together and you have a better chance of stopping them on first down.

**Q. Look at all three games in Big Ten play. I think you have allowed points on the opening drive. All of them have been long drives. Michigan I think took a lot of time off the clock. Illinois, 17 plays maybe. Is that an issue for you, do you feel like, or why do you feel like that's happening?**

PHIL PARKER: I think we have to really to go back and look and evaluate when you could have got off the field on third down. We could have got off in the Illinois game on third down, and we were going to get off the field, and we got a penalty.

Some of the things, sometimes the guy makes a good catch. Sometimes the guy doesn't play with very good technique. Sometimes it's a shitty call, you know what I mean?

Those things you just have to keep on working at. The guys that we're playing against, I think are on scholarship too. They're trying to win too. It's very competitive. The sense of urgency to make sure you're exact, and you have to be to perfect.

**Q. Nothing you're doing differently on the first drive of the game as far as like --**

PHIL PARKER: No, I don't think so. I always think it's important to stop the first third down. There's no question

about that. That's how you see the game going. Usually it depends on how you react to the first down and how well do your guys know the team that you are playing?

I think that's an issue. If you don't stop the third down, I think sometimes kids say, oh, God, no, here we go again. You know what I mean? I think you have to do a better job. I have to do a better job of getting them in the right positions to make those plays and to help those guys out.

Usually a first third down in a series I think is very important.

**Q. What have you seen from Jay Higgins this year?**

PHIL PARKER: I just like his motor, the way he goes. Very flexible. He is aggressive. He is very serious, and he is mature. I think he just loves the game of football. You like that energy.

He brings a lot of energy to the defensive unit over there. It's fun to have him around. You like him to be on the field, and he has been in some spots where he had to come in there and help us out. I think I can see more of that here in the future.

**Q. Coach Ferentz has talked a few times about concerns about depth at cornerback with a lot of different injuries. How would you assess how TJ Hall, (indiscernible) Jamison Heinz, and others have developed behind Riley, Cooper --**

PHIL PARKER: I guess you look at Heinz and TJ Hall, they've been working. This is a good week that we had. The last two days of practice they got a lot of reps here to show that they're improving and stepping forward to what they have to do.

Are they exactly where I want them to be? No. I mean, that's why they're 2s, right? Hopefully we can push them and keep on pushing them.

We have another six weeks to go with these guys after the bye week, and they need to improve just like the first-teamers need to improve, just like we do as coaches need to improve.

If you're not evaluating everything, and the kids have to take it to, hey, they have to look at it. Am I doing the best I can? Can I do better?

Just like any game that you go into, it doesn't matter whether you win or lose. You are always looking at the plays. Don't worry about the plays that you played and that were really good plays. Look at the plays you didn't make

or have an opportunity to make. Then go back and look at the plays you did make.

You made a tackle. Could it have been better? Could you have been in better position? Could you have tackled them faster, quicker if you would have went through your progression faster? You always evaluate. That's what you do as a coach. It's a never-ending battle.

You critique. We critique ourselves as coaches. We critique our players every day. It's a business. That's what it is.

If you don't and you stop doing that, and if a kid doesn't want to be coached or doesn't want to be critiqued on his technique fundamentals and stuff like that, then eventually I think guys don't coach them anymore. He is not listening.

I think all of our guys are coachable, and they want to be coached, and every kid that's trying their heart out every day to go out to practice and the film room, whatever they do, whether it's in the weight room or taking care of their bodies.

**Q. What kind of a lift can Yahya Black bring to you now that it seems like he is on track to play at the end of this month?**

PHIL PARKER: I think obviously you had a big asset that got hurt in there early and has had a little bit of an affect on us of a guy getting enough reps and making sure that we don't wear out the D-line.

He is going to add something to us. I don't know how much he weighs now, but he is a good-looking dude that can help us out.

I think the first couple of days of coming back I don't think he was just going each drill one-on-one, whether it was blocks drill. Was he doing to get better? Then we have the team. He is getting better. We still have another week and a half. I think he will be ready to roll. Hopefully he does have a chance to get there and help us.

**Q. You mentioned Deontae Craig earlier. What have you seen from his development? And, also, Ethan Hurkett getting opportunities.**

PHIL PARKER: I've seen both of those guys work really hard. They go hard every day in practice, and one thing about it, I see the maturity a little bit with Craig as far as the way he is going about his business and the way he is moving on the field. He gives us another opportunity to put another guy in the field that has a chance to make some plays.

Hurkett is the same thing. I just like his demeanor all the time. He is a hard worker, goes hard. We're always trying to make these guys improve. Wherever they're at now, I want them to be better by tomorrow, you know? That's the way we think.

**Q. What have been your impressions of Nwankpa in the first weeks, and how do you think he can fit in the defense the second half of the season?**

PHIL PARKER: Every day he picks something up. Every day. Today I thought he actually practiced at a higher level. Do I think he has a lot more upside? Yes. Is he getting there? Yes.

He has to grow up faster, which is hard. But I'm very happy and pleased the way he goes about his business. He has done a good job. He knows he can improve too. That's a good thing.

The good thing is when you are sitting there watching him practice, you start seeing things now that show up and say, eventually. I don't know when, but it's going to happen.

**Q. I don't know how much you know about Ohio State, their offense.**

PHIL PARKER: I'm from Ohio. (Laughing.)

**Q. Looks like a really dynamic offense. We won't get to talk to you before the game, obviously. How is this different from any challenge that you will have seen maybe in a long time?**

PHIL PARKER: I think Ohio State has had great players since I was a little kid. They have had a lot of NFL players on the team.

We're just going to have to -- they're going to motion and shift and trade. They have athletes that they can get the ball to, a dynamic quarterback that can get the ball to them. They have good running backs. They have a good offensive line.

When you start seeing all that, you really have to play well. They're a well-coached team. I don't know what their averaging. Something maybe around 50 points a game or something like that. I don't know where they are as far as Big Ten thing is. I couldn't tell you that right now. I think they're a really good football team. It's what we've seen on the film.

You've got to practice well, and you have to play well, and you have to be in the right spots. You have to have eye

discipline just like any other game. You have to play with great leverage, I think.

Leverage is a word that we throw around, but leverage goes from everything about your base alignment and if three or four guys go over this way, well, you better -- that's the enemy. Let's move our troops over there.

If they go the other way, you switch it over. You got to know how to line up and make sure you're leveraging the formations and leverage the ball when you are going to tackle it. You have to play with leverage when you are defeating blocks. That's what you do. Right?

Same thing with defensive backs. You are getting blocked. You have to get off blocks. Same thing as a back end. Same thing as a linebacker. Same thing as a defensive line.

You have to separate and get off blocks. You can't make the tackle. If you are tied up with somebody that's blocking you, it's hard to tackle. I think. But you've got to be around the ball to make a tackle. That's one. You have to be around the ball to intercept the ball. You have to be able to recover it, a fumble. If you're not around the ball, you can't recover a fumble.

We're preaching the guys run the ball. I think our guys are really working hard. They look at it and say, hey, they're all in. It's really a great, great atmosphere the way it goes.

The way we're practicing today was good. I thought it was really good.

**Q. You look at Quinn Schulte and his impact. He made some pretty big hits just right away. Seems to be in pretty good position throughout the season thus far. In what ways is he similar to some of his predecessors like Jack or Jake Gervase and some of the others who are walk-on --**

PHIL PARKER: Brett Greenwood. He was just here yesterday.

**Q. With Pat, yeah. How is he like those guys, and how is he different, and what kind of --**

PHIL PARKER: Very similar to I would say Brett. I categorize him in that thing. Very quiet. Doesn't say very much. Just goes to work. Understands what you are asking him to do. He works for perfection. That's what he is trying to do.

Is he the biggest guy? No. Neither were other guys, right? What he does in his preparation and the way he goes



about his business, is he doing it the best he can, and he has done a really good job. That was another guy that I probably forgot to mention that was a guy that's just your starting safety for the last six games, and he has really done a good job for us.

**Q. How much does losing Jestin Jacobs kind of impacted what you want to do with your defense just because of what he was able to do in space?**

PHIL PARKER: It's hard when you lose a good player. It's hard for him going through that and for us to be able to do it. The good thing about the way we approached it, we had a lot of guys playing a lot of different positions. We would move the guys around. Campbell used to play outside. You have Benson that played outside. You had Higgins to play outside.

I think, with doing that, that really helped us in the long run right now, not knowing that we're going to have him out for the rest of the year, but that was a benefit that Coach Wallace thought it was important for him to keep on moving those guys around to make sure they got experience to go out.

It's hard to go ahead and say, "Hey, you go up there and get in there, now you're playing this position," when you were playing a Will back or playing the mike back. I thought that was very beneficial for us to do that and a lot of times in preseason.

**Q. Do you ever feel like when your offensive unit is struggling that you need to take up more of the slack, or do you ever say that to your players? Or do they just internally feel that when they notice that they need to make a play to win the game as opposed to just playing their position?**

PHIL PARKER: My thought about the way we coach on defense is we're looking for perfection on every play. So I don't care what the score is. I could go off and we could win the game or lose the game. Everything is going to go on to what's happened to that play and how did you do.

And I'm going to evaluate you on that play: Are you giving me enough effort? Are you giving me hustle? Are you in the right positions? Are you making the right communications? Are you making mental mistakes, critical errors, leaving a guy open when you have a man-to-man? Those are the things that we coach on.

That's all that we can control what our guys are doing. That's our job. They all know it. Our job is to go out there and play the best that we can play to our ability. I think they've done that.

I see no guys ever sitting there questioning anything that's going on about -- all they do is worry about, hey, you get off the field and get to the bench; let's make sure we cover our stuff that we need to cover, and let's get it corrected as fast as we can and make sure that we're giving them enough information to help those guys on the field. That's the way we look at it.

**Q. You've allowed ten points or less in five games. What's your kind of evaluation of your defense right now, and how much better can you get? Especially playing some pretty explosive offenses in the second half.**

PHIL PARKER: Well, I'm always looking to make sure that they're playing better than the week before. You start looking at how many points you give up. This many, this many. That really doesn't matter after a while.

Hey, did you win or did you lose? That's what it comes down to a little bit to everybody in the outside world. To me it's the way they go about the game. How good this team can be? You know, don't know. Don't know. I think they still have room to improve to even be better than where we're at right now.

I think we gave up some cheap explosive plays that might have led into a touchdown or something like that. Obviously, you go all the way back to the Michigan game. You know, there are some things out there that we left on the table that I thought we could have done a better job.

I'm still going to preach to these guys that, hey, we need to play well, and our standard keeps on going up every time you become a better football player, a better game. I want you to play your best game always on the next time.

**Q. Logan Lee and Terry Roberts went out with injuries last time. Do you think they'll be back with Ohio State?**

PHIL PARKER: I think so. It's a football game. You get halfway through the year, some of these guys -- you look at Terry, possibility of being his last year. I'm sure that he wants to come back. The faster you get back, you only have six more guaranteed. I think guys do what they have to do to get back.

I don't know exactly what's going on with both of them, but I'm sure that there's nothing major.

**Q. What do you see as the next step for Jack Campbell?**

PHIL PARKER: Next step? I think later today we have a



position meeting, and I think he is going to be in there. I think that's what you are asking. What is he going to do next? He might in class.

**Q. Next step of his development.**

PHIL PARKER: Jack is -- I think what he is he is a unique guy. He is a full-go motor guy all the time. I don't know. We played him a little bit as a money backer last week.

The kid can do a lot of different things. Just let him keep on going out and keep leading. How far can he go? I don't know. I don't have that vision. If I did, I probably wouldn't be sitting here as a coach. You know what I mean?

He is doing all the right things that he has to do, and I'm really happy and pleased the way the leadership is with him and Benson. Really I think we've got good leadership all the way across the board, from top to bottom, everywhere in this building.

Thank you, guys.

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