

University of Iowa Football Media Conference

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Coach Kirk Ferentz

Press Conference



KIRK FERENTZ: Good afternoon to everybody. Appreciate everybody being here. I guess this is our official Media Day. We kind of had one up in Indianapolis or over in Indianapolis a couple weeks ago.

So just start out with a couple comments and then open it up for questions certainly.

I think for some of us, this is our 25th Media Day, August Media Day together, so certainly appreciate your efforts and longevity, and appreciate everybody's efforts in covering our team.

Sadly, just want to mention, a little bit tough to look at, there are two familiar faces that are missing certainly with Don Lund and Steve Batterson's passing, and both those guys were very thoughtful, very professional in what they did, and I just want to take a moment and recognize them and honor them for the great work that they did, and missing our interactions moving forward here certainly.

Beginning of a new season is always kind of, to me, exciting. I'm sure you're as eager and anxious as we are. I know as coaches and players, I think we all feel the same way. Share some commonality on that for sure.

I will talk a little bit about the gambling issue. I think as most of you know, there's an ongoing betting investigation going on that is underway currently, and basically it's an open investigation right now, so not a lot I can tell you.

We'll continue to cooperate, but our biggest thing right now is focusing on this season, and we'll handle each case basically individually as they come.

Really the way I look at it, there are two basic levels here. You've got the DCI involvement, which is obviously significant, but beyond that, as it pertains to our football team, the NCAA involvement, also, and the rulings that they'll make.

One thing I can tell you, I think it's become pretty apparent that sports betting is common in football in general, just

athletics in general. Based on an NCAA survey I saw a couple months ago, it's pretty prevalent on every college campus, not only with athletes but just general people, and certainly as I've learned the last couple months, it's a big part of what's going on out there in the general public. Although it's hardly a new phenomenon; just more available now.

As I stand here right now, the one thing it doesn't -- it can't be compromised, the integrity of the game, that's first and foremost. That's got to be protected, and that's where everything should start.

We will continue to cooperate. I think everybody involved has done a good job of that. That will be ongoing, and as we move forward, just hope that whoever is making decisions, they're thoughtful. Hopefully they're making appropriate decisions, and then being timely would be appreciated, as well.

That's basically what I have to say about that.

Transitioning to football, this is 20 plus years of doing this now, and really you go into each year with basically the same thoughts. Probably the one thing it does change is you're a little bit more appreciative of having the opportunity of being in a really good place and having the chance to work with good people on all levels on a daily basis.

I would take that back to my time here in the '80s, as well, the nine years we were here during that period. That really hasn't changed, and I think that's what makes this so enjoyable.

The reality is coaches are evaluated typically by wins and losses by the outside world, and I certainly get that and understand that. It's a given. When we line up, that's what we're trying to do. We're trying to win football games. Certainly that's our job and that's what we're all playing for. That's a goal.

But the bigger picture is really not many of our guys go on to the NFL. Not many of them have long careers. It's just a matter of statistics. Every one of them have a chance to graduate, and then basically what we're hoping is as they leave here, they're better prepared for their adult lives.



And really the satisfaction I think in coaching is when players come back to campus, whether it's a networking event, a legacy weekend, or just bringing their family by, whatever it may be, and just hearing the stories and hopefully hearing that in some way their experience in the program helped them be better adults, better citizens, employees, more importantly spouses, fathers, those types of things.

That's really I think what's most enjoyable, and I think the older you get, the more you appreciate that.

As far as preseason, we're basically eight days into it now. It was good to visit with everybody at Indy, and at that time a lot of anticipation. You can only meet so long, you can only talk about it for so long. At some point you got to get going on doing it.

So we got together a week ago Tuesday, had our first meeting, hit the field Wednesday, and finished our eighth practice this morning.

As I said back in Indy, basically every season is a new challenge, new start, fresh beginning. I really try and encourage everybody working with the players, our entire coaching staff, to look at everybody with a fresh eye.

I think it's especially true in high school and college coaching, although some of that in the NFL, as well. But players change, and they change sometimes dramatically, sometimes not as dramatically, but it's really just -- I think that's a fun part about it, just seeing how they do progress, how they improve.

That's what we're trying to sort out right now. As I said in Indy, I think we had a good summer program. Now we're eight days into it and like the way the guys are going about their work. We're certainly not game ready, but I think so far, so good, and the guys are moving forward.

One thing of note, I think this year is a little bit different, made note of that back in January, and certainly every conference since that time, with the infusion of transfer players, some new players, it's a little bit different dynamic.

It's kind of been enjoyable actually in a lot of ways to work with some new guys. One quick reminder, coaches learn from players a lot more than players learn from us sometimes.

Just our first day of practice, we got (Cade) McNamara out there running the offense, and probably about six false starts, six or seven false starts in the first day, and just not on me. You know, he hadn't worked with our team. He didn't work with the full team back in spring practice. He

did 7-on-7 and individual stuff, but no team work.

If I was a little smarter, maybe we would've done a cadence short or something like that in our meetings, but anyway, we worked through that. But it's just a reminder when you have new guys coming in there's a new chemistry, some new equations going on, and I think the guys have done a great job really adding to our football team.

Pleased with what I've seen thus far.

Just in conclusion, we're pretty much healthy. You'll see some guys not working tomorrow. It's mostly soft tissue stuff. You expect that.

In preseason camp there's nothing right now of note, nothing to panic about, so just to clue you in on that one.

Then bigger picture, I'm really pleased with the players so far. Their energy has been good. Their attention to detail has been good. I'd say the same thing about the coaching staff. They're doing a great job teaching our guys.

Really it's been a positive eight days, and what we've got to do now as a football team is finish up tomorrow. We'll do our Media Day activities this afternoon, meet tonight, look at this morning's film, and then we need to finish out tomorrow to finish basically that third block that we've had in our preseason period.

We're hardly ready for games, game action. You'll see that tomorrow. But I think you'll see a lot of good energy, a lot of guys doing some good things out there, and really the challenge is how we run the race here the next two weeks. We've got a good base established, finish up tomorrow, and then hopefully the next two weeks. (It will) Be two different types of weeks, but with school starting here a week from Monday but nonetheless really important weeks as we get ready for the season.

That's where we're at and I'll throw it out for questions.

Q. When we were in Indianapolis it seemed like you were either aware or knew that there were players who had bet on Iowa, and in the last two weeks there have been current players on the roster or on the roster last year who have been charged with, and among their deeds were betting on Iowa. Was that new information for you?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yep.

Q. And what is your opinion about that? And are any other current players under investigation with the

NCAA currently practicing?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, you know, it's like a lot of things, my answer would be, we'll see. We'll see. But right now, I know what I've read, just like you have. It's been kind of an interesting process. An outside law firm has handled internally for us, as I think you know, so they've been gathering information. They've been working on that in cooperation with the athletes, and some of the athletes have attorneys for obvious reasons.

At some point, all that information -- maybe it already has -- is going to the NCAA, and that will be reviewed by them. I mentioned the DCI level. That's curious to me only in that I've had a little time to think about it now. There is 49 states by my count that play football, have college universities that play football.

I think it's interesting that we're the only state I'm aware of, and I think it's interesting more than two colleges in our state. So it's kind of interesting how that all came about. I'm not excusing anybody that's involved.

And then also I assume they've maybe had charges against non-athletes, as well. I don't know that. Point there is I don't know a lot of things right now, and we'll deal with what we do know when it's presented to us.

As a coach, I'm really more concerned probably about the NCAA rules and where they fit in there in terms of eligibility, but obviously if their charges are pressed and somebody is convicted, then you deal with that when it comes.

It's kind of a wait-and-see thing, but we'll just let it unravel as we go.

Q. Building on a couple of things that you mentioned, given that only one state has been involved in this and there have been several players incriminated, one should assume, I would guess, that it does spread to many other states and the numbers are larger, and you mentioned the integrity of the game. Why should people believe in the integrity of the game when clearly athletes are betting on games?

KIRK FERENTZ: Well, I think the key point there is betting on our games, and to me it's a deal breaker if that is, in fact, proven to be true.

We'll deal with that when we get there, but I think as we move forward, I think at least in my opinion, it's been a learning process for me. It's probably time for new policies from the NCAA, and I think they already have addressed that. It's probably time to take another step.

I think they came out with something early May, late April. I'm not sure that's aggressive enough based on the world we're living in.

But everything has got to start there. That's not something you can -- it's not a compromise or negotiation. It starts there.

I would also suggest based on the numbers I'm aware of, it's probably a pretty small number in terms of the big scheme of things, but it doesn't make it right and there is way you can condone that.

Q. Noah Shannon put it out there himself a few weeks ago. What's his status?

KIRK FERENTZ: He's in a holding pattern like the other players, yeah. To my knowledge, no crime has been -- he hasn't been accused of any crimes, but he does have an NCAA issue to deal with, and we'll let it ride out and see what the NCAA has to say about it.

I want to go back on that, too, just to give you a little more. Noah is a really good example of this whole thing. It's given me a chance to step back a little bit and think about some things, and my wife has been involved in this.

Noah is one of the best kids we have on our football team. He's a strong, respected leader, tremendous young person, and has been nothing, from my standpoint, than a model football player for us. I'm really proud of everything he's done.

I'm proud of the fact that he did come forward and say, 'I'm not sure I want to go to Indianapolis. I don't think it's right right now, fair to our football team', and that gives you a little indication into his character, I think.

As I step back and look at it, consider this, if we went out and rounded up every kid on campuses who had a beer before they were 21, and I'm not saying it's the exact parallel, but I would suggest betting was a big thing in the '80s.

I remember the FBI presenting that to us in team meetings. I would suggest it's probably a bigger thing right now when all you have to do is look at your phones or watch TV, and I think you know what I'm talking about.

So we're living in a little different world. I think we have to ramp up our education. Me personally, probably have to do a better job there. And I would suggest there's probably going modification policies moving forward NCAA.

I don't want to speak for them, but I would imagine that might be the case, just like the NFL I think has a pretty realistic set of working rules. I would like to see ours hopefully model theirs a little bit closer. That's just my two cents commentary.

Q. How much and how often do you emphasize to your players the gambling rules?

KIRK FERENTZ: It's an annual thing. I think they know they're not supposed to do it. That hasn't changed. The world outside has changed, and I think I've told you before, I don't gamble so I really hadn't paid attention.

Whether it's good or bad, I have the ability just to kind of block stuff out that I don't care about, and that's been one thing.

I've paid attention since early May, and it's just amazing to me. It should not come as any surprise that this is true, that those stats that were in the survey, not just athletes, it's everybody. That's just the world we live in. I'm not saying we're ramming it down people's throats, but it's pretty easy to get there. It's pretty prevalent. No kidding we might have some guys involved.

I think we have to rethink our educational process, as well, make that a big thing.

Q. For the players who are in a holding pattern, what level of involvement do they currently have with the team? Are they practicing? Are they in team meetings?

KIRK FERENTZ: Every case is a little bit individual I'd say. I'll put it that way. With the exception of one, the guys are practicing; some are out because of injuries, et cetera.

The bigger picture I have to consider as a head coach is they may not be here on opening day or whatever, and it might be one day, it might be 11, 12 games. None of us know that. You've got to keep that in mind, too.

Out of fairness to our football team, we have to do what's best for the team, too. So it's kind of a flexible equation, if you will. It's a moving target, and that's where clarity will really help us.

Right now I don't know that anybody knows facts other than we are dealing with a situation.

Q. The education that you give to the players on a regular basis, does that include guidance that they're not supposed to use proxies like family members to be placing bets?

KIRK FERENTZ: I mean, gambling is gambling, I think. As far as I can understand it, no matter how you do it -- and one of ironies is, from what I can understand, these might've been better off going through bookies, which I know is illegal. That's what people my age did 40 years ago.

That's the irony of this whole thing, I guess. But all that being said, the world has changed. It's just like I would say it's not a direct parallel, but the drug usage or drug testing policies of the NCAA changed radically in the last five years, probably because most states have legalized marijuana.

Just kind of reflects the world we live in. I'm not saying I know what the happy medium is or where it should be, but it's pretty obvious that it's time for discussion about this.

In the meantime we'll deal with the facts and the circumstances we have to deal with. We're not running from that at all. But I do think as we move forward right now, it's one thing you're going to see changing.

My sense is the NCAA is very sensitive to that. I don't think they're oblivious to this thing. I think we've got new leadership there, and they seem to be a lot more in touch with what's going on today, currently, and that's a good thing.

Q. Has this situation like changed the way that you're preparing leading up to the season?

KIRK FERENTZ: Not at all.

Q. In the sense that some guys may or may not be available; have you ever been in this type of situation leading up to a season?

KIRK FERENTZ: No, and it's really not that big a deal right now, quite frankly. I'm not trying to be coy, but it just isn't. Noah is injured. He would be the most prominent player to my knowledge that's involved in this.

So as we got closer to games, let's say he was 100 percent healthy, which he's not, if we got closer to games, that's something we would have to weigh and measure, because if you don't if a player is going to be there, you got to get other guys ready to go. We're going to play regardless. We're going to play.

But right now, we'll wait and see. That's just the way it goes. So it hasn't really been a big deal that way.

Q. With Aaron's (Blom) situation, what's the plan



there?

KIRK FERENTZ: We brought a young guy in who was at Iowa Western. He's going to join us here from the Des Moines area. So anyway, he's joined us and we'll see. But we're a better team if we have all of our guys healthy, obviously, especially our starters.

Q. Switching to football for a minute --

KIRK FERENTZ: Oh, yeah. (Laughter).

Q. If you look at your offensive line, you've been pointing to that really since last year, about the youth, inexperience, injuries, as kind of stunting their progress a little bit. How have they performed through camp thus far? What do you feel like how your offensive line has performed?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I mean, that's one area I know a little something about in football; that's about it. I've been saying you really can't microwave maturity. You just can't do it. That is a position where maturity really shows up.

So again, nobody wants to hear it, but we've had injuries. We've had some unusual personnel situations. Connor Colby is a great example in my opinion. Connor was a really good prospect and he's a really good young man and he's going to be a really good player, but we threw him in there two years ago and he wasn't ready.

I mean, the bottom line is there used to be a time where those -- it was usually year three when the average guy got out there on the field.

My only point in bringing him up is like he is practicing at a far different rate than he was certainly even last year in my opinion. He missed the spring, so this is new to him.

I mentioned the newcomers coming in, but we also have handful of guys that had surgeries that didn't practice in spring ball, so this period has been really important for them, as well.

My point is he looks like a different football player than he did the last two years. I'm not saying we predicted that, but my feeling was, my sense was that we would see that.

Mason (Richman) is kind of the same way. Mason probably got thrown in there a little bit, perhaps asked a little bit more out of him than we had to, but is the way it goes sometimes. You do what you can. He did a heck of a job competing.

He'll be a better football, and Logan Jones will be a better

player. So start with those three. I'll throw (Nick) DeJong in there who is a little bit older.

So just that maturity factor is good, and then a guy like (Rusty) Feth comes in here who's played a lot of college football, a little different level of competition, but with every day he's getting better.

Long story short, I think we have some competition in the group, which we haven't had. We've been trying to survive. Now we've got competition, and maybe with a little bit of luck we'll probably be able to play at the tempo we want to play at.

That's our goal. We're not there yet, but I feel a lot better.

To answer the original question about where we're at, feel a lot better, and I think you'll see that tomorrow.

Q. There has been a lot of focus on the production of wide receivers over the past couple of years. You guys added a couple pieces via the portal. Have you talked about how to get them more involved in the perimeter passing game, and how do you take the next step to get back to the production level you want out of that group?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, it's similar to the offensive line in some ways, but where the ball goes is all a product of how they play us on defense. I think the good news is right now, Luke Lachey is a much better than he was a year ago. And then Erick All. We lost a really good player, needless to say, with Sam LaPorta. But then you get a guy like Erick All to join the team, so feel pretty good about those two guys.

(Addison) Ostrenga, he's in year two now so he is playing better than he did last year, and he played pretty well last year.

And I'll mention (Steven) Stilianos. You know, same thing. He came from a 1-AA school, and FCS school, so to look at him last year he struggled quite frankly, a little bit like (Zach) VanValkenberg his first year. Now you're seeing a whole different player.

We saw that kind of in the spring, but right now he is practicing like a guy who can help us, so all of a sudden I think we have some depth there.

So as that pertains to the guys outside, I think it just makes their job a little bit easier. They still got to do their job.

Nico (Ragani) has had a really good preseason. He's a little dinged up right now but nothing major.

Diante Vines has been injured in and out. Had all kinds of crazy stuff happen. He is having a really good preseason. We kind of thought that would happen, but it's got to happen on the field. Again, I think it's maturity, it's being around. His case, just staying on the field.

Start with those two guys, and then we'll see how the other guys help out. But I think so far, so good. At least we're in a little better situation.

It's really going to be about all 11 guys, and it's beyond that because you've got subs and all that, but feel pretty good about that right now.

Q. Speaking of those other guys, Kaleb Brown, was obviously huge, bringing him out of the portal and being a four-star recruit coming from Ohio State. Have you seen some of that talent flash through in the few days?

KIRK FERENTZ: I'm glad you brought that up, because yes, I have seen the talent. I think all of us have seen the talent, and it's flashed. That's the other key word.

I think what everybody needs to remember about him is he's only played one year of college football and really hasn't played much. I think he had one catch last year.

So if you look at some of the other guys that transferred, McNamara has got a resume, Erick All has got a resume. Kaleb doesn't. He was a really good prospect out of high school. I would say he is a better prospect now, but he's still a prospect if that makes sense. He just got dinged up yesterday, too, unfortunately after making a really good play.

So I think it was just a matter of time with him, too. But I think to expect the same out of him as maybe McNamara, All. You're looking at two different categories, but I am glad he is here. Great young guy and has fit in really well and he's working hard, so eager to get him back.

Q. The 11-on-11 practices, how has (McNamara) met, exceeded -- what have your impressions been about what he's brought to the team, I guess?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, once we got the cadence part down a little better. I keep forgetting about this, but quarterbacks don't play under center anymore so it's been a little bit of an adjustment for him. I keep forgetting we are in a new era of football, no huddles, nobody under center.

We're working through that, but he's been outstanding. He's just a really good leader. He's a good football player.

He's got good vision, makes good decisions. It's really been positive. Excited he's here.

Q. How is Seth Anderson progressing?

KIRK FERENTZ: Good. Kind of like Kaleb only further ahead than Kaleb. He's played more football. Lower level, but great young guy. We didn't get to see him in the spring because he was out basically the whole spring. Works hard, great attitude, and smooth player. He's got good ability.

I'm really -- I think I mentioned earlier, we'll know a lot more after two weeks. I think we'll know more next Saturday than we know tomorrow.

But I think in some cases, two weeks, and I'm thinking about a guy like him. I think every day is so important to him and these meetings, everything they do, they've got an opportunity to learn if they're really thinking right. Really excited about him. Good young guy, and we'll see -- what really matters is what they do out there in September.

But he's on the right path.

Q. What have been your impressions of Nick Jackson, now that you've been able to see him here versus on paper?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, we've got 10, 15 guys that didn't practice in the spring, and Nick didn't practice in the spring, even though he is going to school and finishing.

So now he's learning everything. It's like drinking through a firehose a little bit, but he is a pretty cerebral guy and he is picking it up fast. Great attitude. He's mature, strong, just a strong presence.

Yeah, I think he's going to be just fine. He'll be good.

I feel good about our linebackers. We don't have enough depth right now, and Karson Shahar is not working. You'll see that. Should get him back sometime next week.

He's a good prospect, but he's a prospect. He hasn't played enough. So we need to get him out there, get him working, and get him caught up. But that's part of the race we're on with those guys, too.

Q. On Kaleb Johnson, what all do you remember about recruiting him?

KIRK FERENTZ: I remember he was going to Cal. Like explain that, right? It's kind of random from Hamilton, Ohio; you've got to admit that. A lot of schools between

here and Cal.

With all due respect to Cal. I mean, Berkley, all that stuff. But it's kind of weird and random. I am just glad he's on our team. He is a great young guy. He's still young. He's still learning. Like he's got so much ability, and he's doing well. I don't mean to say it in a disparaging way, but he still has a lot more there, like just little things. Once he really figures that out -- Leshon Williams, just to compare and contrast, Leshon is practicing about as good as I've seen him ever right now. Like he's really doing well.

But that's experience, too. That's being out there doing things. In every position there are little things you have to learn how to do, and he's a willing learner so we're excited he's here.

Q. There have been some comments in the past about schools out west during the regular season, and now that you have some joining the conference, maybe two more, is this impacting your thinking about how much longer you want to do this?

KIRK FERENTZ: No, not that, but my first thought -- a couple things. My neighbor Jamie from Cleveland, sports junkie, played Division III football. Played at same high school at Chuck Noll in Cleveland, total sports nut. He says he's a software salesman, but I think he's in the CIA.

He texted me this morning, said he heard that scientists have reason to believe there's perhaps a team on the planet Mars that's playing college football and there are already three conferences negotiating with them about joining their conferences.

Things have changed certainly. I've never been a proponent of going out west in season. Bowl games is fine. But we'll adjust. We'll figure out how to make it work.

But to the other question, my thought a year ago was it's not that big a deal in our sport. We travel five times a year. Most of them are pretty easy trips. Our guys don't miss much class time. (An) 11:00 game on the West Coast is not ideal because the turnarounds are tough anywhere.

But the sports in my mind -- you think about the Olympic sports last year, especially if you're one of those two West Coast school teams where a home game is Iowa, Nebraska, Minnesota, the pressure it's going to put on those student-athletes, and they still say student-athlete, but just all those strains, flying commercial, the whole nine yards, that was my thought a year ago.

And it's interesting, I hear a lot of people talking about that now after this most recent wave, and I think that's another

issue that college sports are going to have to figure out and address because it doesn't make sense at all.

But that's not my concern because in football, it's not that big a deal. We seem to be driving this whole thing right now.

That's my two cents commentary.

Again, it doesn't affect our world all that much. It won't affect our players all that much, other than coming back from a West Coast trip and getting here at 6:00 in the morning, kind of like Nevada did after they left here last year. That's hard, but you make it work. You figure it out and make it work that week and keep going.

But it's all the other people that are being affected and impacted. I think they need to rethink that a little bit. That's just one person's opinion. Again, it doesn't affect my world a hell of a lot.

Q. How do you think that makes college football look?

KIRK FERENTZ: I mean, it is what it is right now. I think that's pretty obvious. It's been obvious, but it really became obvious probably last July, I think.

Let's just call it what is; it's entertainment, and I'm glad to be a part of it, don't get me wrong. I'm really enjoying that.

It's still collegiate in our program. That's a goal. I never want it to not feel collegiate to our players, and I worry about that a lot. I started worrying about that when the money got bigger because people get a little bit opinionated, they get a little bit less patient and a little grouchier and all that, probably because of gambling, and that's what I worry about for our players.

Just enjoy the game, enjoy the camaraderie, the teamwork. That hasn't changed, and that might be a little harder to try to keep that going, but that's the goal.

Q. Is that a hard thing to admit? I don't remember you saying that five or ten years ago that it's entertainment.

KIRK FERENTZ: I'm a senior citizen; I can say what the hell I think now, so what the hell. I mean, the world has changed so much.

It really probably started with Nebraska. They joined our league, and then the next thing you know we've got two East Coast teams. The Big Ten kind of changed a little bit, and then we blew it up two years ago or a year ago. I say "blew it up;" it's a reconfiguration, but we didn't start that one.

It's just there's a lot of momentum going that direction right now, so tying it in with my career, like you deal with whatever comes your way.

I wasn't necessarily in favor of the transfer portal and some of those things, but it's reality, so you deal with it and try to make it work in your favor and try to make it work better than somebody else can.

Q. You've got a clear QB No. 1, but has anybody emerged as that No. 2?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I'm make that one easy for you. (Joe) Labas has been out. He had a soft tissue injury back in July. So hopefully we'll get him back on the field right now, but it's clearly one, two, and then after that, hang on. That's kind of where it's at.

The good news is Deacon (Hill) is getting a lot of good work. The bad news is Joe hasn't been able to compete. So hopefully we'll get him back on the field here soon.

Q. You don't often see a 6'5" fullback. I know you talked about it this spring, but what about Hayden (Large) makes you think he can get low enough to be a fullback? Is he kind of cemented there? What's the fullback situation?

KIRK FERENTZ: We don't have a lot of options right now. Rusty (VanWetzinga) is the other guy, a true freshman, who's done a nice job, but that is his biggest challenge is getting leverage. That's the disadvantage of being tall.

But if you can bend a little bit, which he can, it's a matter of learning how to play, and it's true at every position. Height can be an advantage or disadvantage.

We all have our own challenges, and you figure out what works for you and how do you really make that go. But he's been willing. He's a smart guy, and quite frankly, he just ended up here. I can't remember the whole story.

But I'm glad he's here, and I certainly didn't envision him being a fullback, and it looks like a good path for him, so it's a pleasant surprise for us.

Q. Your thoughts on the growth of Logan Lee over the years on and off the field?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, Logan, I mentioned injuries a little bit early ago about how those can impede a career, and Logan has had a couple to deal with. First of all, he's like a 45-year-old guy. You know him; he's a 45-year-old guy on our football team, just so mature. Only married guy on the

team that fits. They probably got married 10 years ago secretly.

He's just one of those guys, really good leader, so positive, extremely hardworking, and I was telling a pro scout a couple days ago, when he got here he was a good player but kind of mechanical, and sometimes guys have to learn how to play, and that's how I would describe him.

He's doing good things, giving good effort, but it wasn't -- Dallas Clark was like that, believe it or not, as a linebacker 100 years ago, and then you get them in the right spot and then they just keep working it.

That's where the injury has impeded the progress, but as he's gotten the reps in, boy, he's really come on to be a really good football player, and just an outstanding young guy. Just a really strong, positive leader on our team.

Q. What have you seen out of Xavier Nwankpa, and just what are your thoughts on what he's done?

KIRK FERENTZ: He's doing a good job. He's out there competing, and still on the back end, (Quinn) Schulte is the veteran guy, if you will, kind of the stabilizer right now, and then we've got a bunch of other guys competing.

Xavier is doing a good job and making good progress. (Koen) Entringer is the same way. He's doing a good job, as well Castro has been practicing well, played his best in the bowl game.

That's kind of us. We've got some young guys coming along, and we've got an older guy like Castro who finally got some traction in that bowl game and really looked like a Big Ten safety, not just a specialist, if you will.

So I think we have good competition back there.

Q. On the depth chart you have Nwankpa ahead of the No. 1 strong safety. Is he pretty much practice exclusively there?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, those guys all kind of move around a little bit. If you're a safety, you've got to really understand both positions. That's something Phil (Parker) asks them to do. But if Schulte is in there, he'll be our free safety. He's the quarterback back there.

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