

University of Iowa Football Media Conference

Wednesday, December 4, 2024

Iowa City, Iowa, USA

Head Coach Kirk Ferentz General Manager Tyler Barnes

Press Conference



KIRK FERENTZ: I'll say a couple of words about the game Friday, some things in general and offer a couple of thoughts on the recruiting class. General Manager Tyler Barnes will fill you in on all the details. He certainly runs the race from start to finish and has a lot of depth and perspective on all this stuff. I'll turn it over to Tyler here in a few minutes.

It was good to have a weekend off for everybody. I think everybody was tired after the game on Friday. Really tough, competitive football game and pretty extreme circumstances. Nice for everybody to have time to get back and just kind of relax a little bit. Some guys went home. Other guys just stayed here, but gave them some time.

We'll take this week to recover a little bit. Light workout this morning. We'll probably go on the field for a little bit on Friday, but not much football this week and try to give everybody a chance to get caught up on things, catch their breath, and recharge a little bit. I think that's important.

As I said Friday after the game, it was just a tough, competitive, hard-fought game. Both teams competed at a high level. Again, I think the biggest take-away is the little things a lot of times are really important and sometimes defy the statistics at the end of the game. I thought our guys did a lot of things well.

I'll start with ball security. It's still the most important statistic in football. We've done a good job of that all season long. Certainly the other night that was a factor.

Got to give Jackson credit there. His game stats weren't overwhelming, but protecting the football, made good decisions, good judgment out there.

Special teams jumped out. The punt before the last turnover, huge punt by Rhys, and again, tough

circumstances.

I'll point out the plus-50 punt that Nestor killed just inside the goal line. That was a play that we blew on Tuesday in practice and had to repeat it right at the end of practice. Circled back and got it and got it right. Certainly it showed up on the game.

Little things like that that don't go maybe noticed by some people. Obviously, Kaleb's effort on that touchdown was phenomenal, but probably something nobody noticed, Nick DeJong did a great job on that. He was playing the right tackle, next man in. His guy didn't rush like we expected him to or hoped he would, so Nick stayed engaged in the block, and that along with the perimeter blockers allowed that thing to get going, and Kaleb did the rest on his own.

So you can't help but notice Kaleb's great effort, but the little things that assisted the start of that play really made a big difference.

I other thing I would mentioned too is just the job our specialists did in the weather conditions, whether it be the snappers, the holders, the punters obviously, the return guys. It's a little tricky in those kind of circumstances, that kind of condition. Our guys really played flawless there.

So all those little things to me were really a matter of the deciding things for us and just really proud of our guys the way they fought through it.

Really happy about the way we've been playing in November and talk to our guys every year about that. November is a month where people are sore, you're tired. Got a lot of guys injured. Next-man-in stories. Weather is going to be unpredictable. Two weeks ago we had beautiful weather and a game that went by script, and the other night we had tough weather and a game that didn't go by script. So just kind of emblematic of the way it is in November.

To me the teams that can focus through those things tend to do a little bit better. Proud of the guys the way they played this past November and really have got a nice streak going since 19 right now. We're going to try to keep building on that.

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that. So happy about that.

The guys have played hard. They've played competitively, and the good thing is we still have one more opportunity to play again. Really excited about that as well.

It's a real important time right now for everybody just to step back a little bit and let things settle. A lot going on, and I addressed this a couple of Sundays ago come off the last bye week we had.

As we look forward, our guys are living in a world that's very different than ten years ago. Players have always been thinking about the NFL, whether it's seniors, it's right around the corner for them, NFL opportunities. With that comes agents, and then certainly nowadays you have underclassmen thinking about it more readily than maybe ten years ago. That's one more thing.

Then clearly things have changed now with the portal, NIL, revenue-sharing, roster reduction. There's a million things going on, and a lot of people giving advice on all those topics too. My encouragement a couple of Sundays ago is let's put all that on the shelf, and that's what you have early December for.

Right now our guys are taking time and working through some things. I know some guys have already made announcements about what they're going to do, and that's what this time period is for.

There's not a lot to say right now until things settle, but hopefully we get back going and get going in earnest when we know where our bowl trip is going to be on Sunday, and then we'll start shifting our focus a little bit. Hopefully we'll be settled by then.

My point is there's a lot going on out there, and I applaud our guys for putting it aside for those last two weeks and just focusing on finishing strong. So happy about that.

The reality of it is, and it just kind of leaps or transitions into this recruiting class, we're looking for guys that are going to fit well in our environment, embrace the things that we think are important, and we only recruit guys that understand hard work is necessary to be good at anything.

I talk to our guys all the time about if you are going to get something that's worth it, you got to earn it. That's a degree. Nobody is going to hand you anything in the classroom. Certainly out there on the field nobody hands you anything. That was evident Friday night. If you want to playing time, awards, all those kinds of things, you have to go out and earn it.

We're trying to find guys that we think can embrace that, understand that and embrace that. Our job is to help them understand that better as they get here, but it all starts with that. Obviously there's a talent level that's requisite. We're not a big height, weight, speed team, but we're looking for guys that have the ability to play possession, play their positions well and do things at their position, add to the football team.

Obviously character I think is a huge part of the component too because it's a tough race to run to be one of those seniors. 24 seniors got announced Friday night. That's a long, hard race, and it takes character to do that. So that's a big part of it too.

If you look at two of the guys that are noteworthy guys on our on football team, when you talk about Jay Higgins, we've talked a lot about him, his story. Waited behind a really good player in Jack Campbell. When he got his opportunity, he took it and ran and did an unbelievable job.

You think about Kaleb. Even going back to August I wasn't sure who our best running back was of the three. I think it's pretty evident right now, but it's evident because he made that happen. Not us. He made that choice. Really got focused year three. The maturity, the experience, all those things came to his benefit. He did a wonderful job.

So those are the kind of stories that are fun. That's what we enjoy in coaching I think and being around players like those two and all the other guys we get to work with. So it's that's the best part about it.

That transitions into this class. We have 17 guys coming joining us today. Really excited about that. 15 full scholarship guys and two guys that are preferred walk-ons. We think very highly of all 17 guys. I think they embody the things I just talked about.

Tyler will detail these guys a little bit, but just big thing for us is we're eager to get them here on campus. It's been fun to get to know them, get to know their families, and have them get to know us a little bit.

It is a long, extensive process. Tyler is on the front end of each and every step of it and does an awful lot of work behind the scenes, but it's not an accident how things come together. We're excited about the guys, and it will be great to get them here, whether it be this spring or next June. Really good to have them join us.

You talk about stories about Kaleb's. You talk about Jay's story, and you wonder who the next one is going to be. There's opportunity for everybody, but all those things I talked about, they're really part and parcel to this whole

thing.

So, exceptional group of guys. Happy to get them here and believe they're all going to be great fits in our program. So eager to start that whenever it begins.

I'll just finish up by congratulating our award winners. I'm not going to list every guy, but it's unbelievable when you think about Kaleb being the Big Ten Running Back of the Year; Jay, Linebacker of the Year; and Wetjen, being the Return Specialist of the Year. That speaks highly of all these of those guys. Connor and Logan being first team guys. Going right down the list, all those guys have earned it, and they're tremendous young people. Happy for them to get that recognition. Well-deserved.

Q. Could you kind of evaluate where you kind of feel that quarterback position is right now and is that a position that you plan on addressing in the portal?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, we're definitely going to look and just see. Probably at every position, but there are certain things that are a little bit more important.

Anything we can do to help our football team, we're going to do that. But I've said this many times, and I know Tyler will say the same thing. We're not trying to build through the portal. If we can supplement our team, we'll do that.

Quarterback is a unique position, clearly, nationally so. We would be fools not to at least see what's available and see what might be of interest, both ways. Yeah, as it stands right now, we should have Brendan back. He should be full speed here for the bowl game. He could have played the other night. I don't know how effectively, but he could have played. He practiced.

Then Jackson has done a great job, and then we'll just kind of take it from there. I expect Marco to be -- the good news is I think he's out of that cast now, so he has a brace on. At least maybe we'll have three guys that actually play quarterback at quarterback. Imagine that.

Q. Now that Kaleb has declared for the draft, how do you kind of put into words the season he had and where he kind of ranks in the hierarchy of running backs you've coached?

KIRK FERENTZ: As we went into camp, I wasn't sure who our best back was. So it's kind of funny how it goes. I'll throw Leshon in there, too. He had a bad ankle, had missed a lot of time. You always are curious about the whole team how it's going to look and how it goes through camp, but that was a position that was a jump ball for all the guys involved.

Kaleb has always had ability, talent. He's always been a great young guy, but as I've said all season long, I think the big difference is this year he is just at a different level of focus. Again, just in generic terms, year three seems to be a magical year in general terms for guys in our program and certainly for him it was.

Everything he did was at a higher level. Being a teammate, everything about him. But the details, the way he prepared, and it showed in his playing too. He is more patient. Just saw things better. A little bit more patient, knew how to read things out a little bit better and more detailed with his footwork, things like that.

That's the fun part. The play he made the other night -- somebody said it the best on Friday night -- it was like Cooper's play, only it counted. But the impact it had, and you had to look at the replay a couple of times to say, How did he do that? He gets a lot of credit for a lot of that because that's just -- he's physically strong and, boy, he is using his strength now. He wasn't doing that maybe a year ago, two years ago.

Q. I wanted to kind of go back to quarterback just to see maybe what you might be looking for because you have the potential to have Brendan Sullivan back another year. Are you looking for somebody who is maybe younger that could be the No. 2 and build into that, or are you looking for somebody to walk in to compete for No. 1 right away who has kind of a proven track record?

KIRK FERENTZ: I think the general answer on that is we're looking at everything. Again, the whole idea is to improve our team as much as we can. We're not locked into one style per se because we do have different styles right now in that room and have had. We've won with both styles through the years.

We'll just keep an open mind and see what's available and not bound ourselves to any -- it doesn't have to be a FBS player. We're just looking for somebody that will lead the team and move the team. Brendan has done a good job of that. We're here to work with him. I think he has a really good future. Jackson is really intriguing, and Marco is a great young guy.

We have a great room, but if we can add to it, we'll consider any options as long as they fit our parameters.

Q. So it seems like everybody I've talked to inside the building say you're going to be back next year.

KIRK FERENTZ: Hope so. Do you know something I don't

know?

Q. No, it happens every year. People always say, Is this Kirk's last year? How can he come back with all this stuff going on, paying players? He's not going to put up with this forever, but it seems like you're definitively coming back next year?

KIRK FERENTZ: That's my plan, yeah. It seems like there's always stuff going on. Have you noticed that? You've been covering us for a long time. Somehow we just keep moving forward.

There's a lot of things that I won't say frustrated, but a lot of things really make you step back and think, like, That's interesting. The more the game changes, the more the circumstances change. It's still about being around good people. Our key is and I think what we enjoy -- I think I speak for our whole staff, when you get the right guys on your team, it's a lot of fun.

We're 100-plus population, so not everybody is going to be perfect, and we're not all going to be best buddies, but I think there's a mutual respect amongst our team and people in the program. To be part of that on a daily basis is pretty special. I'm enjoying that part of it.

There are things that frustrate you obviously at times. Injuries frustrate you, and you can't do a thing about them. It's just part of the game. I wish it was 20 degrees warmer the other night, quite frankly, but a lot of things you can't control. The good stuff is still the good stuff, and that hasn't changed, and that's the fun part about this thing.

Q. One of the good changes I think that the NCAA made was coaches are not on the road during December now, which seemed like a sane decision. How does that impact your practice schedule for bowl prep because in the past you guys basically just had to practice on weekends. Now can you operate differently?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I just talked about all the changes that players are experiencing over the last ten years, let's say. This is really random for us.

The end of a season is always a weird thing anyway for anybody that plays or coaches. When it's over, it's like, Now what do we do? It's one of those things. In the old days, yeah, old days being, like, last year, everybody got in their car or got on a plane and went somewhere. It's really strange for all of us to be in the building right now, to your point. So that's a great point.

I'm still trying to figure out what the hell we're doing, but

first and foremost, we're spending time with our players, the guys on our roster. Not physically, but just meeting with them, touching base, things that you don't have time for in season. Kind of do a sit-down that way.

Then what we'll start into the football. It's sitting on my desk on the top right-hand corner. It's my next file to go to how we're going to map out the month not knowing where we're going or when we're going, but I think the one take-away I can give you, which is good, we won't be up here at night hopefully because when you are doing recruiting and practice. I remember distinctly, just things that stick with you, going down to the Capital One Bowl in '04, getting on the plane, and I had seen maybe about 10% of the film I needed to see.

I got down there, and it was like Groundhog Day with video. Just felt so behind. I had gotten off a plane at 3 a.m. the day before coming back from Connecticut. So this is a more sane schedule. That's good.

There's a positive there. Good thing. That's in the good column. Anything else going in there? I don't know. No, it's good, so...

Q. You opened up by talking about all the continued changes that are going on in this calendar. How do you divide up your time right now between trying to retain players, go through meetings, look at the transfer portal, recruit the right type of guys for the transfer portal because we know that you don't throw out offers to just anybody, and then obviously practicing and preparing for the bowl game? Then is there any way that it could stretch out all of this process to make it a little bit easier on the coaches and selfishly the media a little bit?

KIRK FERENTZ: They're not thinking about you or us I don't think on that category. So Tyler can probably answer some of those better than I can, but you touched on something that I probably should have put in my points.

Part of the visits with our players right now is just finding out where the guys are at because I did ask them to put it off for two weeks. That allows time to think about it, ask questions. Are you happy with your role? Here's what we see. Everybody has an opportunity to excel and move up and all that kind of thing, but spending time with ours players is first and foremost because we want our team to be our team.

Then if we can supplement with guys that are great fits, you know, whether it's the two guys we picked up, Sullivan and Gill, this past summer. Go back to Nick Jackson, Rusty Feth. You get those kind of guys that come in and

just hit the ground running, that's a perfect match there. It supplements your team.

Yeah, Tyler can talk about the calendar a little bit, but to me, just as I said, it looks good. Hopefully in the real world here where our coaches will be home with their families next week eating dinner. That's a change in December. So there's some benefit to this stuff too maybe and maybe a little less time on the weekends coming in and practicing, that type of deal.

Although if recruits can come in, we'll be out there on the weekends, open house, but that's part of the enterprise too.

Thank you.

TYLER BARNES: Good afternoon. This is my eighth year now being in front of everybody talking about our signing classes. As Coach kind of hit on too, there's been a lot of change, not only in college football as a whole, but obviously recruiting. I have a lot more gray hair, maybe a little more seasoned.

Every year it's fun. It's fun to celebrate our class. There's a lot of work. It's two or three years in the making with all of these guys. It goes back to seeing these guys at high schools at their games, getting them on campus for your own camps, for junior days, unofficial visits and summer official visits now. I know I'm the one that has to talk to you all the time, but it really takes a village to put together a recruiting class from our coaching staff that does a great job to our support staff. There's some in the building here. Professors on campus, academic support. Then mostly our players. Our players are vital in helping us recruit and host guys when they're on campus, and we really look to their feedback.

It's a smaller class this year with only 15 scholarship guys. Two walk-ons, which is very different than years past. Obviously, the two walk-ons and that number being so low is due to the 105 number. As we're going through and trying to restructure or roster, there's not as much space as we once had. That's something that's definitely unique for us. Usually, we've always got 10 to 12 walk-ons that are committed at this point. This year, only having two is a little bit different.

It's really a Midwest class. We have 12 of our 15 commitments from surrounding states or within that six- or seven-hour radius. I think 11 of them are from Iowa or states that are touching.

Then we have a couple of guys from Florida, one from Massachusetts -- lives in Massachusetts, goes to school in

Connecticut. But it really is kind of a tight Midwest class. As a whole, it hit what we needed to. Right now more than ever, the fluidity in your roster, it's ever-changing. So you are trying to project what spots you need from a high school standpoint and from a portal standpoint.

Coaches have the tendency to overreact sometimes at any given point in the year, whether it's spring ball or fall camp based on what their room looks like, but you have to be in constant communication with Coach Ferentz, the coordinators, the position coaches on just what the outlook of the room looks like. Now more than ever, we've condensed those spots.

So right now, as you can imagine, Coach Parker is trying to get more spots on the defensive side of the football, and he showed me his algebra equation on his board in his office that I did not understand at all. That's what they're trying to do.

When I initially sat down and looked at what our roster was and budget was for each position on each side of the ball and you condense it down, you realize that 105 is still a lot of players, but going from 130 to 105, you are really cutting a lot of meat off the bone.

It's been a fun exercise. We're still talking through it as a staff and kind of figuring out where we're going and how we want to budget everything, but it certainly played a role into this class being a little bit smaller this year.

As Coach said, our goal is always to build through the high school ranks. Just like the NFL builds through the draft, our transfer portal is the NFL's free agency. We would like to go out and fill some holes if we have some. We'll do that with the transfer portal.

We will be active in the transfer portal. I will not get into specifics, and I know the question will come about what positions we're going after. You guys all follow me on Twitter. You can probably see some of the follows I have. You can probably put two and two together and figure that out.

That will ramp up on Monday. Obviously, there's some kids already in the portal, grad transfers. There's some kids that are coming from schools where their staff, unfortunately, got fired. So it's already started a little bit, but I think Monday the avalanche is really coming, and that's kind of when myself and our personnel department will dive into that with our coaches. It will be good.

One thing to kind of dovetail off what Coach was talking about with the calendar change -- having our coaches here in December and not being on the road for not only roster

retention, but when you are trying to look to kind of fill some holes through the portal is also a huge advantage. The last couple of Decembers have been pure chaos. You don't know what day it is or what's going on. You're trying to retain your roster and get ready for a Big Ten title game or bowl game. You're out on the road recruiting. It's just pure chaos.

I think this is one thing the NCAA did get right. It's a step in the right direction, but as a whole, I think the calendar maybe needs to be blown up and start over again, but not sure when that will happen.

With that I'll open up to any questions you may have about the class in general.

Q. Tyler, I wanted to ask about O'Lontae Dean. I know he was your most recent signee commit. I had heard that he had the idea of playing both offense and defense. I was curious about your thoughts on his versatility and play-making, but also had seen that Louisville made a little bit of a late push. Were you sweating?

TYLER BARNES: We usually have uneventful signing days, and I thought we were headed that way. I was actually at the basketball game with my son last night and didn't see Dix make the game-winning shot because I was looking down on my phone to a text I didn't expect to receive with some not-so-great news. So it was a later night than I would like to admit, but we got it done.

Tae is awesome. Actually Rhett Smeins, who is in the back of the room, we had Tae on our board as a running back for about a year and a half, and he doesn't have his film put on Hudl, which is interesting. Every kid in America does at this point. Rhett had brought up, "Have you watched O'Lontae Dean? Have you seen his defensive stuff?" When we put it on, it was like, 'Yeah, this kid is a little bit different.' He's a kid that plays everything from safety to outside backer, running back, to receiver. He can kind of do it all. A lot of the safeties we've had here that have been pretty good football players, you know, they had the ball in their hands in high school as well.

For us, he's going to be strictly a safety. Where he fits back in the back three, you know, we'll see. We really don't go out and try to recruit a strong, a free, a cash. We try and find the best safeties and then when they get here, we let Phil do his magic and see where they fit best. He certainly has some versatility. He's an awesome kid, big personality. He's a country boy, which is funny. He's from Tampa, but very country. Talked about, Rhett was it, he caught alligators? That's what he would do in his spare time, which is interesting. He has gigantic hands, so he

could probably grasp those things like that. We're excited about Tae.

Every year there's going to be some bumps in the road in terms of recruiting guys and some second thoughts, but his mom was great through the process. She wanted him to be a Hawkeye, and took a little bit of talking, a little massaging late last night. We got it done, and here we are. Yeah, sweating a little bit this morning, but when he signed, it was good.

Q. This is kind of maybe a loaded question. Number one, do you feel like you understand the job now more than you did maybe two years ago just because of how much things are changing? I know you said you would like to see them blow up the calendar and start over, but if you could see one realistic change right away, I mean, what would you like to implement? How this next month is going to go and how you divide up your time?

TYLER BARNES: Obviously things have evolved so much in the last three, five, seven years, but from the transfer portal, which we've always had a transfer portal. Just obviously it got publicized a lot more a few years ago.

Then you add in NIL into that, and that changed things. Now you have revenue sharing, which is certainly going to change things that we're working through with that.

I've been able to take a little bit more of a step back in terms of high school recruiting stuff. I've got a great staff with Rhett and Matt Spaulding and Scott Southmayd. Rhett pops through 200 guys a day. He's a machine when it comes to evaluating, and that helps because then I can take a step back and look at our roster and just kind of see the big picture of things. That's been a huge help.

We don't have a portal department where we're watching film all fall long. I was listening to I think it might have been Virginia Tech -- Coach Pry, the head coach there. I worked with him at Vanderbilt. He said they have everything ranked and listed out before the portal opens on any potential guy that could hit the portal. It's like what happens if 90% of those guys in that position don't hit the portal? You just wasted somebody's time watching all those guys.

We're in a world now where you hear whispers and you hear murmurs of who is going to hit the portal. You can stay ahead of things, obviously. You know, I love the idea of putting the team together. I'm a people person. I like talking to people. I love interacting with the kids and their parents and their family when they're on campus here and seeing how to whole puzzle is going to go together. I love

being around our guys.

It is different. It's certainly different. My role is, while there are a lot of things that are certainly the same, there are definitely things that have changed too. Really just kind of taking it as all these changes happen. I mean, I don't think the changes are done. It's going to keep evolving. You've got to keep an open mind to everything and kind of a fresh eye on how can we get better and do everything we need to do within the framework of Iowa football and what Coach Ferentz wants in his program? That's the biggest goal in mind.

In terms of the change – honestly, the best change they've made is not going out in December in my opinion. Just the craziness of we've got 128 free agents on our roster right now. That's the reality. It's what it is. Trying to retain your team, send coaches out to recruit, which it's a long season. If coaches tell you they look forward to going out in December, they're 100% lying to you. They don't want to go out.

Getting them ready to go out is always a challenge. Then you add in the portal and everything we've had the past couple of years, being able to keep them here and get face-to-face time with their guys and get a sense on where our guys are at and where our team is at, it's huge. It's a big deal.

This is a dead week for the first time too. This is different. We can't even have guys on campus this week, which again, is needed because this is the first week after the season is over to be able to spend time with the guys, but we're certainly going to have a bunch of traffic through here. We're not getting any weekends off. Sorry, Coach Ferentz. We'll definitely have guys on campus really the next two weeks until that dead period hits again before we go out to our bowl game. We'll certainly be active.

Then that could be high school-wise too. We have to move on to the '26 and '27 classes as well. We may or may not end up taking another guy or two out of high school and then '25 class as well.

Q. I wanted to ask about quarterback. Part of it is, the last handful of years it's been a struggle in the freshman part of things. The one you just brought in got moved to wide receiver almost immediately along with others who have transferred out. Then the portal, the results were the results. How are you evaluating quarterback? Are you evaluating it differently than maybe you did before when you were working with Brian or Ken or anybody like that? How much of a role does Tim Lester play in who you decide to pursue, whether that's in the portal or even somebody like

Jimmy Sullivan or Ryan Fitzgerald?

TYLER BARNES: When we evaluate quarterbacks, it's 100% going to be working around who the offensive coordinator and the quarterbacks coach is, absolutely. Styles are going to change.

You don't want statues back there unless he has just absolutely elite arm talent. Even then, you see it. I mean, football, it's an imperfect game. You can have a great O-line, but at some point, something is going to break down where you have to move a little bit.

Tim played the position at a high level. He's coached the position for a long time. He knows exactly what he's looking for and exactly what he wants, but he's also open-minded too. Obviously, we had Cade and Sully this year, two very different quarterbacks. Then you throw in Jackson and Marco. You have four different styles there that you can work with.

There are certain characteristics that Tim really wants to see, but a huge part of the quarterback thing that people don't really talk about is you can be the most talented guy in the world, but in between the ears is where it's all going to take place. Just having a chance to get guys on campus and dig through them and what they really know and conceptually, what can they handle. We'll go through four or five of our play calls and see if you can regurgitate it back to us and all the assignments and what you see there. That's a big part of it.

You know, the good news, it's different this year. Tim is actually not going out on the read recruiting. I took his place this year because he wanted to be on campus all spring with Jimmy and if we happened to bring in another guy to spend as much time as possible with those guys getting them into our playbook and understanding the offense. That includes Sully right now. Sully got near in June. It's probably drinking out of a fire hose all season. I think you're going to see big strides from Sully coming up too as he gets spring ball under his belt in and Tim being able to go around him and going through that.

Tim is a great recruiter. I don't know how many times you've had a chance to talk to Tim. He's full of energy. Really, really smart guy. I feel great about not just quarterbacks, but any offensive recruit we bring in here. Tim is absolutely going to meet with them because he knocks it out of the park. He's really good. He's good with family. He's a former head coach, so he knows how to go about recruiting, but for him, I mean, he thoroughly just enjoys talking to people. When you get on quarterback play, you have to put a timer on it because it might take a while. He's great in front of people.



I'm looking forward to continuing to work with Tim. We've got some guys identified in the next class in the '27 class. We're on to the '27 class, which is crazy to think about quarterback-wise, but quarterbacks are always the first ones to go. They're the earliest guys, so you have to stay a step ahead of it.

Q. Do you already know if guys like Logan Jones and Ethan Hurkett are coming back? There's probably others, but maybe --

TYLER BARNES: Yes and no. There are still some conversations taking place.

Q. How are you dealing with this 105 thing? You basically are going from 128 to 105? Is that what you are saying?

TYLER BARNES: Correct, yes.

Q. Do you envision having more than 105 in June before you get down to -- have you made cuts? Is it like "Hard Knocks?" How are you approaching this cutdown thing? A smaller class certainly is part of it, right?

TYLER BARNES: For sure. That's a great conversation. We've talked about it a bunch as a staff. We have to be at 105 by the start of fall camp next year.

I think there are a few different populations on our teams. There are guys 100 percent that want to go transfer and play somewhere else. There are guys that will want to stay and fight like hell to make the 105 and stay in the spring and go through that, and then there are some guys that may say, Hey, I'll go through the spring, but I'm going to call it and just finish my undergraduate degree and graduate from Iowa and not play somewhere else.

We've left the door open for everybody to come back in the spring. You certainly have to have those conversations to give these kids a heads-up because if they want to hit the portal now, you want to do it.

I've talked to some teams where they aren't going to tell anybody until the spring, which I think morally and ethically is kind of wrong because then that window is a little bit different than this window. There's tiers of guys. There's been a lot of conversations had and hard conversations. We told all these kids, We want you to be on the team, and we told their families, we're going to take care of you, and because of a rule change that we didn't foresee coming, we have to make some cuts and have some tough conversations, but we've left it open where everybody can

stay through the spring if they want.

If guys aren't going to go transfer somewhere else and play, then we would happily keep them through the summer too up until the fall camp date. There's a lot of guys that are probably taking the conversations they've had and thinking about it and talking to their families, but we'll know a little bit more I think once we get through our bowl game and have a better idea of where our roster sits at that point.

A big part of it, too, with the 105 is just practice. We haven't dove into that yet, but we may have to restructure how we practice because you're losing 25 to 28 bodies that you are counting on for scout team and how you go about it.

There's certainly some changes that I'm not sure if the NCAA really saw coming with this drastic cut, but again, everybody has to do it, and everybody around the country is probably having conversations similar to what our staff is doing right now. It's unfortunate, but it's where we are.

Q. Did you know Josh (Dix) made the shot (MBB vs. Northwestern) just by the crowd or --

TYLER BARNES: I did, yes. My son let me know, too, but I was still in disbelief by the text I got. Yeah, I was trying to process that. Not real happy about it, but yeah, it worked out. I saw it two hours later on Twitter. I saw the highlight of it, so it worked out.

Q. Terrence Smith, just curious how did that recruitment unfold from your end? What do you feel he brings to the program?

TYLER BARNES: Coach Wallace was the first person to bring up Terrence. He had a couple of offers, nothing crazy. He had been through the school and just sent a text to Matt and said, Hey, you do mind taking a look at this kid? We both popped him on. Terrence is a big kid. He's the first guy off the bus type of guy. That's who you want to play with.

Elite basketball player, really good hooper. Had some lower level Division I interest in basketball as well. We see Terrence. He has big hands, 50/50 balls are not 50/50 balls for Terrence. Those are 70/25 balls. He is really great at high-pointing the ball.

At the same point, he's still raw, too. There's a lot of growth that you're going to see out of him. Another really good kid. Parents are good people.

Comes from a high school where they historically don't

have a lot of D-I guys. If he were 30 minutes east in Chicago a little bit closer, he probably would have had 25 offers. How he didn't get more offers is kind of crazy to me.

He's a kid we're excited about. We've got a couple of bigger guys on the outside. Now the next goal is finding a guy that can really run. We're looking for speed. We talked about potentially taking two in this class year. We really don't lose anybody in the wide receiver room. Again, with that budget and everything that plays a factor into that, but as a big X possession receiver and Terrence can run, too. That's a guy you want to look for, and we're excited to get him here.

Q. I want to ask about the revenue share. Are you talking numbers with players? Now they're making all of a sudden these decisions about their futures.

TYLER BARNES: Not quite yet. We're getting there. That's something I probably spend a bulk of my day on every day. It almost gets tiresome looking at the same spreadsheet and moving numbers around and playing with models a little bit.

There are a couple of guys that have decisions to make on our roster that is coming here very soon, and they know that. It might play a factor into whether they stay or they leave.

But at least the good news is now we can go to guys, unlike the past and say, Hey, you might be a fifth or sixth round pick. You should come back, and money is always an issue for those guys. Well, I need to go get money. Now we can provide them money and maybe, Hey, you come back and increase your draft stock, and this small investment we're making in you turns into you making a couple 3-4 more million dollars by coming back.

We're not deep into the weeds in those conversations, but he it's certainly coming soon.

Q. Kirk has always been about telling guys, Hey, go finish out your senior year. This year is -- and the usual amount of players that are enrolling early for you guys --

TYLER BARNES: Seven guys. Yes, seven early enrollees as of right now.

Q. Is that going to be an off-shoot of maybe we need more bodies in the spring now because you're going to be down to 105 eventually? Maybe not this year, but years forward.

TYLER BARNES: We've talked about that. We've never pressed kids to come early. Obviously we recruit a lot of multi-sport athletes and usually guys that are pretty good at the other sports they play.

There are a couple of guys that aren't coming early that I would love to get here early, but I get it. I get what they want to stay for. But I don't think we'll ever make it a demand that you need to come early, but we'll certainly -- I think because of spring because you lose your senior class and you don't technically have your freshman class in, moving forward practice-wise, that's going to be an issue. I think we might encourage guys, but some guys they just want to stay and finish out their senior year, which we get.

I think you're going to see -- it's already started around the country, but I think more and more around the country you're going to see staffs really try and press guys to get on campus in the spring just from a body standpoint. Then after the season you have guys that have postseason surgeries. Your roster is really shrunk at that point.

This is an odd year for us to have seven guys. I think that's the most out of high school that we have ever had. We didn't push any of the guys to do it. It's a lot of the guys that's where it's turning to high school, too. A lot of guys can't wait to -- I loved my time in high school. I wouldn't want to go to college early, but a lot of guys are just ready to get out of high school and get started playing football.

We've talked about it, but it's certainly going to play a factor in some of the recruitments moving forward.

Q. Joey VanWetzinga is going to join his brother Rusty next year. What stood out to you about him, and what did that recruiting process look like?

TYLER BARNES: Joey is a strong, silent type. He doesn't say a whole lot. I think he lets his pad and helmet do the talking. Joey had been to camp probably two or three times on both sides of the ball as an O-lineman and D-lineman.

Joey is a powerful, explosive, tough kid. Kind of the epitome of how we recruit both sides of the football here. Initially we offered Joey out of a camp where he was playing D-line, and we didn't know which side we were going to take him on. We just knew we wanted Joey on the football team.

Obviously his dad is a head coach. You love head coach's sons. You know, it's funny. Joey is here all the time, and I think I've heard him say four or five words. On his official visit his brother hosted him, so we saw a little bit more personality come out of him, more trash-talking than

anything else.

He's your typical Iowa lineman. That's exactly what we're looking for. Kind of the strong, silent type. The guys that don't talk much and do what he does on a football field, those are the guys that scare you a little bit in a good way.

Q. I don't know how I'm the first one to ask about lose Epenesa, but that was another one that sounded like it was a little bit more, I don't know if contentious is the right word, but competitive with a few other schools. Two-parter here. Then it looks like you have a slew of tight ends coming in with three different guys, one of them being a legacy and a guy that could play wide receiver or tight end. So just wanted to ask about both those things.

TYLER BARNES: lose, I joked with Eppy and Stephanie, I wish you had more kids because then you wouldn't have enough time to go out and visit all these other schools like you do with lose. With A.J. and his sister Sam, they were always busy, and Eric. I was like, man, the fifth kid -- or the fourth kid, this is tough because now you actually can go see things.

That family is awesome. Sometimes when you are recruiting legacies and especially he's had two brothers here, obviously everybody knows his dad is a Hawkeye through and through, sometimes you worry about does this kid want to go do his own thing, and is this the one that's going to go forge your own path?

They were great through the whole process. That's the one where we let it play out. We knew we were always going to be in it until the end. Whether we won out or not, there were times we worried more than other times, but I think we got him here on a visit weekend. He wasn't here with our big official visit weekend. He came a couple of weeks before.

We had a legacy event where a lot of our alumni came back. I think just Eppy being around everybody and lose seeing how everybody operates around each other, and A.J. came back for that visit, which was huge. That visit really pushed things over the top for us.

Again, we don't pressure anybody. We certainly weren't going to pressure lose. We wanted him to want to come here on his own and not because his brothers went here and his dad went here.

It was good. I think he knew for a while even coming into that visit that this is where he wanted to be, but we, again, just let it play out. We had a lot of things working in our favor obviously with the family and A.J. coming back I think

was huge, too. Even we had to tell A.J., Hey, back off a little bit. It's okay. We need your help, but just tone it down some.

Obviously excited to get him here. He's one I wish were coming in January, but it's fine. We'll get him here in June and get him up and rolling.

Then tight ends, yeah. Mason, it is challenging recruiting a coaching staff's son. It's very different because you don't want to overstep your bounds. Sometimes Mase -- when I got back, Mase was a little kid. I've known Mase since he was 2 or 3. Sometimes you forget about him. Oh, yeah, Mason is here. He's in the building all the time.

Mason is a guy, we didn't know if he was going to be a receiver or tight end. I think we're going to start him in the tight end room, kind of Noah Fant-ish, if you will. He is a guy, he can really run. Awesome ball skills. Very fluid. He can just be a mismatch out there. I think it's a guy that Tim is looking forward to as a new toy to have in that room.

We had only set out to take two tight ends in this class, but we weren't going to not take Mason if he wanted to come. That was the conversation we had as a staff. We told the other two guys that's how it was going to play out. If it plays out this way, we are going to take Mason, and there's a chance he will be a tight end.

Thomas speaks for himself. Highly-recruited kid in the state. Thankfully comes from a Hawkeye family. They've had season tickets forever. Same with him. Kind of let that whole recruiting process play out. I think we knew we were in a good spot, but he was seeing the places he wanted to see.

Ultimately he made finally made the call. Eli Johnson is a guy that is from Wisconsin, but he's 25 minutes from Minneapolis. How Minnesota and Wisconsin weren't all over this kid before we got to him is unbelievable because he stands out like a sore thumb. He's 6'5", 225 pounds. Really good basketball player. Very good football player. Obviously once we all offered him, he picked up some traction. Those are kind of -- we've had a bunch of stories with tight ends like that.

Players all over the board, but specifically tight ends that are kind of diamonds in the rough, if you will.

We're excited about all three guys coming here. Abdul should be really excited. His room is young, minus Addi right now, but there's some talent in there. Obviously those three guys will certainly add to that room.

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