

2011 NFL Draft: One-on-One with Ricky Stanzi

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As he waits in anticipation for his name to be called this weekend during the 2011 NFL Draft, former Iowa quarterback Ricky Stanzi found some time this week to speak with *HawkeyeDrive.com*. The Ohio native reflected back on his time as a Hawkeye, and discussed what lies ahead for him in the NFL.

When Stanzi is selected in this year's draft, he will become the first Iowa quarterback to get drafted by an NFL team since 1992, when the Buffalo Bills took Matt Rodgers.

Below is the complete transcript of Stanzi's interview with *HawkeyeDrive.com*:

HawkeyeDrive.com (HD): First, I was wondering if you could just describe your routine since winning the Insight Bowl and how the preparation has gone for you over the past four months up to this week.

Ricky Stanzi: Right after the season ended, the first kind of step was finding an agent. So after that was done, and going back to Iowa, I trained with Coach Doyle, but obviously separate from the team. It was really just our draft class kind of training together. Then I had the Senior Bowl pretty quickly after the season ended, and so I kind of trained a little differently getting ready for that. That was just like getting ready for a game. You know, it's the same idea with practicing and playing a game.

That training was a little different than the combine

training, which is more speed stuff. All the drills that they're going to put you through at the Combine, that was very specific-oriented training, so our routine changed up a little bit, but we were always trying to work on our position-specific stuff at all points. So we were throwing the ball, making sure the guys were getting catches, making sure we were getting throws in, and defensive guys working on their stuff also. It was a fairly new routine, but at the same time, it kind of felt the same because we were in Iowa and it was with all of our buddies on the team.

HD: I've heard you mention before about not being in a comfort zone. How has that been going through everything and knowing that the routine you have in place now is different from what you got used to in college?

Stanzi: You know, I guess changing it up a little bit is always good. No one's really in their comfort zone when we're going through the draft process and the training because none of us had done the Combine before or been to the Senior Bowl, so that was all new to us and that training, and not being training with Iowa really, it was more so training for how we would get ready for an NFL Combine, which is almost like a simple set of tests and that you have to pass them when you get your times, and then after that, you don't do them anymore.

It was new, but like I said earlier, being with your friends and being with your teammates and coaches that you've been around, it's similar and easy to get ready for, then you have to go out there and perform. It was a good chance to do something new, but at the same time, be with teammates and be with coaches.

HD: You brought up the Combine. Tell me what that was like going to Indianapolis for that, meeting every team in the league and them wanting to know pretty much every little thing about you they can possibly find out.

Stanzi: Yeah, it was definitely a pretty cool process to be invited to. I was honored to get a chance to go there and talk with teams, and just kind of talk football with them, but let them get to know you and just be yourself around them. There are certain things you can control and then obvious things you can't. You can't control how much a team likes you or how much you fit their need at that specific point. So if you really go out there and give them as much knowledge as you have about the game, and then once that's done, you just kind of sit back and let the process happen.

There's not a whole lot you can do to influence people's decisions when really all you can do is let them know how much you know about football, how you work around the team, around teammates, what kind of leader you are, and that kind of basis, that's really the best thing you can do for yourself throughout the whole process.

HD: Reflecting back on your time at Iowa, now that you've had some time to reflect, what did you take away from the whole college experience?

Stanzi: Playing for Iowa was a huge honor. It was everything I thought it would be, and then some. I know Coach O'Keefe told me that when I got done playing football here, I would understand the game of football a lot better and I would be able to talk about it more and just know the X's and O's. He was telling the truth because everything that I've learned since high school has been a huge help for me in this whole process of going through the draft and then talking with teams and coaches and GMs, quarterback coaches, everybody.

Playing for Coach Ferentz and playing for Coach O'Keefe and training with Coach Doyle, it was awesome. I wouldn't trade it for anything in the world. I think they're the best at what they do, and for me to have a chance to play under them was awesome. I will never forget it and I will always be very closely tied with Iowa, and I'm very thankful for what they've

done for me.

HD: What does it mean to you then to know that you're going to be the first quarterback they've had at Iowa since taking over in the late 1990s that will be getting drafted by an NFL team and having a realistic chance of making an NFL roster and playing for a long time?

Stanzi: I think of it as doing them justice and making them proud, really. I want to show that what they taught me at Iowa has been a huge help and has really made me the player I am. There's no better way to do that than to go out there and make them proud and play well on the field, be a good teammate, do a good job off the field. That's the biggest thing that I could give back to them, to just go out there, play well, and make a name for Iowa football players in the NFL like pretty much most of the guys have done since the day they left Iowa.

Guys like [Chad] Greenway and [Bryan] Bulaga and [Robert] Gallery. You can go down the line. Bob Sanders, Dallas Clark. There are tons of guys who have done that. Just to be a part of that is really what most of our goals are in this draft class, to get out there and do well at this next level and do that because the coaches at Iowa have prepared us for it.

HD: I had an opportunity to talk to Coach Ferentz last week and asked him what he saw for you in the NFL. He used the phrase "developmental quarterback," saying that like at Iowa, you'd come in, learn the ropes, and eventually get an opportunity to prove yourself. How would you assess yourself and the strides you've made over the last few months since your career at Iowa ended?

Stanzi: From here on out, it's a huge learning process. It always will be. Now it's just kind of feeling out where you are and what situation. I have no idea what situation I could be in next year. You don't know if a couple of quarterbacks go down and you need to play or if you're in a situation where

they have a guy, and then another guy. You're just kind of sitting back there in the third spot, and you're just learning.

I'm trying my best to just keep an open mind and whatever happens, happens. I want to always be ready. Whenever I get an opportunity, whenever I get a chance, I want to do good and make the team look good that drafts me obviously. I want them to feel like they made the right decision and to put trust in me to go out there and play well for them when I'm given the opportunity. That's the biggest thing, to always be ready for the opportunity, and I want to stay focused on that.

HD: Now I imagine you're probably not paying too much attention to the hoopla, but I want to ask you this: Two teams I've heard your name linked to are New England and Indianapolis. Both have quarterbacks that will be Hall-of-Famers someday. Would you feel comfortable going into that sort of situation where you know you won't start right away, but then you consider the guy ahead of you on the depth chart is a Tom Brady or Peyton Manning?

Stanzi: Yeah, absolutely. Like I said, any situation is really the attitude that you take with it, whether it'd be a situation like that where you step in and you're behind Hall-of-Famers. That's a great opportunity to learn. It really is. There's probably no better way to learn than sitting behind a Hall-of-Famer. If it's not that, if it's a situation where you have to step up and play early, or whatever it may take, then you have to adjust.

You can't really just have one comfort zone with how you want things to go because everything is an unpredictable business. You really don't know what's going to happen. You have to be ready to be on call at all points in your career. So that's kind of my mentality. I want to be comfortable in any situation, but I'm not afraid to be out of my comfort zone and in a situation that may be a little tough. That's part of the

game. That's what you signed up for.

HD: What are some of the areas in your game you have been working on given some of your conversations with teams?

Stanzi: One thing that I think you're always trying to improve is whatever you're doing, can you do it faster. That's a huge thing, because obviously at the next level, it's going to be that much faster. So just speeding things up, but staying in control and finding ways to speed those things up, whether it's your drop or your release. Just little tweaks here and there to help out your game. That's kind of where I've been now, is how can I do what I'm doing and constantly improve it, and then from there, try to learn as much as I can, and then go ahead and improve it again. That really has been what the focus has been.

HD: What would you say is the best advice you've gotten along the way here, whether it came from a former Iowa teammate, a coach, or just a close family member or friend of yours?

Stanzi: I think the best thing that you could ever be told is to just always be ready when your opportunity presents itself. I've been told that since high school, and Coach Ferentz talked about that, my parents have talked about that. It's just kind of an almost cliché thing. You hear it all the time, but really understand what that means. What I'm trying to get at is knowing when they say that, it means working really hard every single day. Even if you're a back-up or third-string guy or if you're the starter, always having something that you think you can improve on and just be ready for your opportunity when it presents itself. If you keep thinking that way, you end up helping yourself out and putting yourself in a good position.

HD: Now this week, I know it's a three-day event, but do you have any plans set up for this week? Will you be watching the draft, or trying to avoid it completely until you get the

call? What will be going through your mind as the moment approaches?

Stanzi: Yeah, I'll be at home in Ohio with family and friends. It will be on and I'll be around it. At the same time, I'm going to try my best to not be too anxious or beat myself up mentally over it. There's going to be a certain amount of nervousness, anxiety and excitement. This is a process that we've never gone through as players, so there's obviously the unknown. But at the same time, I don't want to get caught up with what team or what round. Just kind of let it happen, and then once you get on a team, in two months or two years, it's not going to matter in what spot you get drafted. What's going to matter is did you show up and do your job every single day. That's really what the main focus is.

HD: Do you get motivated at all by hearing some of the hype not built around you, but around other quarterbacks in this year's draft that many suggest are better than you and/or will be picked ahead of you?

Stanzi: I think you have motivation from certain things, and there's always different ways to motivate yourself. But I don't really get too concerned with where a team has a certain guy or where people have another guy rated. That's kind of out of my control. It's not something that will help me get better. My focus is what can I do today to make me a better quarterback? What can I do from a footwork standpoint or from a throwing or mental standpoint to make myself a better quarterback, so when I get my chance, I can go in there and perform well.

If I'm worrying about that reporter or that analyst saying that this guy's better than me, that's one thing that once again, you can't control. Thinking about it or trying to prove that person wrong, that's kind of the wrong mentality. You want to prove those people wrong, but you want to do it without really thinking about it. The way you do it is just

constantly getting better at your position, at quarterback, at everything you can do.

HD: Just want to clarify here quickly how much time you've spent between being in Iowa and Ohio and how you've divided that time up?

Stanzi: I've been in Iowa for the most part. For all my Combine training and then a couple of weeks after that, I have been in Iowa. I'm in Ohio right now for the draft, and I've spent the last week-and-a-half here. I've been training here just to stay up on things while I'm here. I'll go back to Iowa to train after this. I'm not sure what's going to happen with the lockout, so I'm kind of playing it by ear at this point.

HD: You actually just got into my next question here, which is about the lockout. What do you have planned for yourself here assuming the lockout (at least initially) prevents you from working out at the team facilities or from meeting with coaches and what not? What would you be doing?

Stanzi: I think right now, you just got to try and find a spot to work out and always be training. I think that's the main focus. Find a spot, let them work it out, and that's one thing you can't control, when the lockout's going to end. The best thing for us players to do is find a spot to work out and continually improve.

HD: Once the draft ends and you finally have a team, what's in store for you beyond that point? What do you envision for yourself going forward?

Stanzi: It's kind of hard to think about it right now exactly, but the main focus is to always improve. The first thing is when you get that team and you get to that organization, you want to earn the respect of your teammates, the coaches, the whole organization. You want to show them you're a guy who is a hard worker and takes his job serious. That's kind of the main focus from there. It's hard to predict what exactly will

happen, but just staying on your toes and being ready for anything. You can always look consistently for ways to get better.