

4/10/2012: Kirk Ferentz/James Vandenberg teleconference transcript (premium)

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Below are written transcripts of Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz and senior quarterback James Vandenberg from Tuesday's Big Ten spring football teleconference:

Ferentz's opening statement:

"It has been good to get started, certainly. Just to make a little bit of a correction, we don't technically stop this Saturday. It is our spring scrimmage and what have you, but we actually have three more workouts afterwards. We're just a little over halfway. We finished up our eighth practice on Saturday. The reason we're doing it this coming week, we have the Olympic Trials here in wrestling on the 21st and it's just going to be mayhem in the parking lot with, I think they're expecting around 16,000-17,000 people in watching the wrestling, so we decided to make this our final scrimmage for the public at least.

"Our team is working hard. We've got a relatively young football team and we have system changes, staff changes, reassignments, things like that. So we've got a lot of new elements to the program right now and I think that has made it that much more interesting to everybody. But you know, overall, we've got a pretty young team. Relatively inexperienced, but the guys are working hard. We're getting some good quality work in so far and attitude I think has been very, very good.

"Overall, I'm very pleased with things, but we still have a real long road ahead of us right now, so it's good to be in the middle of things."

On playing scrimmages against other teams during the spring:

"It's certainly something to contemplate. I think we'd be open to it. It's a little bit of a logistic issue, but I think it would be something that would garner interest certainly from a lot of people. Certainly our fan base I think would be excited about it. But that's something, I've heard that proposal. I've also heard people talk about eliminating spring ball and having a six-week preseason, kind of like the NFL, and maybe integrate scrimmages in there, too. But we'll see what happens."

On the biggest qualities he looks for when recruiting offensive linemen:

"You know, the first two things that come to mind to me are guys that really have a lot of pride, take pride in their performance, and I think that's true of any good player, not just offensive linemen, and then a real strong work ethic is certainly important. We've had our share of success. I guess Bryan Bulaga was probably the furthest along when he got here."

"He was really a unique story in that he started quite a few games as a true freshman here and was a first-round draft pick after playing three years of college football. In fact, he was starting for the Packers in their Super Bowl championship game in what would've been his fourth year in college. That's really an exceptional story and really kind of went to the spectrum."

"But typically, you look at a guy like Robert Gallery that came here as a 235-245 pound tight end and really had to work hard to become a good lineman. Eric Steinbach was the same story. Then more recently, Riley Reiff came here as a defensive lineman and I think he weighed about 240 when he got

here, 245. He's getting a lot of attention right now, but maybe even more emphasis on Markus Zusevics and Adam Gettis. I expect both those guys will get drafted. I think they weighed 220 and 230 in high school. They're just guys that worked hard and after three years, they really gave themselves a chance to compete well in our conference.

"There's a lot of different roads to get there, but I think probably the biggest thing is you got to have requisite ability, certainly, and then the biggest thing is just a real strong work ethic and guys that take pride in their performance."

On whether the current NFL trend of moving away from a traditional running back will trickle into college:

"Well, there's no doubt that I think the pro game has changed a little bit in the last decade or so. Just look at last year some of the passing records that were set. There are some really good throwers out there. But yeah, I think there's still a place for obviously a good running back and if you've got one, that's a real luxury item. Tennessee comes to mind, the Tennessee Titans. But if you've got an exceptional back, I think most coaches, most offensive-minded coaches, are going to feature their players.

"If you've got a quarterback like [Tom] Brady or [Aaron] Rodgers or a Peyton Manning, certainly you're going to do what they do best. Those guys are exceptional. You don't get an opportunity to coach guys like that too often in your career and you're leaning towards their strengths. It just kind of depends on how your team's built. Baltimore still uses a running back pretty effectively and if you've got a guy that's a power runner, you're going to try to build your attack that way. If you have a guy that's versatile or can do things out of the backfield or from the wide position, I think you just kind of tailor, and that's what good coaching is. You tailor your system towards the players that you have.

"In college, if you can recruit towards a certain direction, obviously that's a good thing. In our case, we've had all kinds of running backs here over the last decade. You know, we've had a big-power, strong runner in Shonn Greene who won the Doak Walker. We had a guy in Freddie Russell who was probably the smallest back that we've had who was productive in 2002 and 2003. So I think it depends on the players that you have and you try to accentuate those strengths."

On whether more time has been spent this spring coaching coaches or players given the amount of change:

"You know, it was an unusual year for us. We've been so fortunate for 13 years to have the same coordinators. I can't say enough about the job that both Norm Parker and Ken O'Keefe did. Just both of them are exceptional people and exceptional coaches. They were here through the 1-10s and they've been here through the 11-1s, too. So they've been a huge part of any success that we've had."

"But that being said, I think the transition has really gone well on the defensive side of the ball moving Phil Parker up and then sliding guys around a little bit. They've really done a great job and for the most part, we're doing things similar to what we've been doing, so that hasn't been huge, but nonetheless, you don't want to minimize any changes."

"And then on offense, just real so fortunate that we've been able to get Greg Davis here. Just heard nothing but great things about him through the research phase of things and then obviously very impressed with him during the interview. Having him here and on campus for a couple of months, I just couldn't be more pleased. He has been a great fit, first and foremost, with our staff and with our players. After being around him now for two months, I can really understand why people that I respect so much have such great things to say about him."

"It has been good and the more dramatic change has been on the

offensive side, strictly with just the terminology and nomenclature. There has been a lot of learning. But the one thing, I went through this in the NFL, players tend to learn faster than the coaches in a lot of instances and that has certainly been the case here as well."

On how he thinks the Legends Division will shape out in 2012:

"I have no idea. Are we in the Legends? I guess we are. That's like so far out of my mind right now. I'm just really, like all of us, more worried about what's in front of us. We've got seven days left with our team here and we're just trying to maximize every bit. It's just such a critical time.

"I'll predict this – there will be a lot of good teams in our league next year, both the Legends and Leaders divisions. It has been extremely competitive the last 13 years. I expect it to be that way moving forward, too. With Nebraska coming into the conference, that makes the level of difficulty that much higher. I guess what's great about our conference each and every year, there are going to be some teams that are very good and other teams are going to rise up and really do a great job. To me, that's what makes it so exciting and great to be a part of."

Vandenberg's opening statement:

"Yeah. Spring ball has been going good. We're in our fourth week now. It seems like it has gone by faster this year than any year before. Learning a new offense I think has a lot of people excited on our team. We've had eight practices that have been good so far and we look forward to finishing off the spring right."

On what stood out about facing Michigan State's defense last year:

"I thought they were a very well-rounded defense, tackled very well. The thing that probably sticks out the most is they

covered us very well. Made it hard for us to take anything easy really and didn't let us get our run game going enough to where it was consistent enough to make them honor it. A very well-rounded defense, tackled very well and I just remember there was a lot of team speed out there. They rallied to the ball quick and covered our guys well."

On what the most apparent change will be in Iowa's offense from last year to this year:

"Well, I think obviously having a new play-caller, you're going to have some different tendencies, maybe what [Greg Davis] likes on third down compared to what Coach [Ken] O'Keefe liked, or first-down calls. But we know that we still want to be balanced running and throwing the ball. Our pass game has probably expanded a little bit and hopefully that will help us out on third-down situations."

On if the inconsistency on offense last season was puzzling and if there's a way to fix it:

"Yeah, I think that's something that we noticed as well going through the season. We knew we could play good football and we didn't do it consistently enough and I think that started with road games. That was something we struggled with and something that we really are working on this spring and this fall."

"We know that that's something that has to change because you can't be a good team in this conference without being able to win on the road, so that'll be the heavy focus. Playing on the road isn't that much different. You just got to concentrate a little more and that was something we weren't able to do very well last year."

On how he'd compare the speed of offense now from what it was last year:

"Yeah, I think that's something that Coach Davis definitely adds. I mean, he comes from a system that has kind of done it"

all and in recent years has really been an up-tempo, almost predominantly no-huddle offense, so that's something that we're experimenting with and something that we want to be able to do if need be.

"That's something that probably is one of the hardest things to learn right away running a new offense – going at that pace with all the new lingo. But it's something that we've been working on and something that we want to be able to do proficiently in the fall."

On the current receiving corps after losing Marvin McNutt from last season:

"Yeah, we have several guys returning that have some experience, starting with Keenan Davis. He's a really big target – actually, very similar to Marv – and obviously his role is going to expand a lot now that Marv's gone. Kevonte Martin-Manley is a young guy that did a really nice job for us. Got his feet wet for the first time and did pretty well, so a lot of things expected from him this year as well."

"To go with them, I think we have a very talented group of tight ends. We have some young guys, but we've got some guys that have been here for awhile with C.J. Fiedorowicz and Zach Derby and some young guys to go along in the mix. We've got a good plethora of people that can catch the ball and they've been doing very well this spring."

On if there's anyone fans should pay attention to during the open scrimmage on April 14:

"Well, I think just that tight end group as a whole has done really well for us this spring. They've come a long way, starting with the veterans, C.J. and Zach, who have played some valuable minutes for us. But some young guys like Ray Hamilton, Jake Duzey and Henry Kreiger-Coble, they've all been really catching the ball well and really expanding what we can do at the tight end position. So I think that's something that

has been really positive for us this spring."

On how the tight end position will now be used in the offense:

"Well, I don't think it's going to be that much different. It's just a personnel group of ours that we know we need to get the ball and they all do a good job of catching the ball. They're all big bodies that can get space. As long as they keep catching it, we're going to keep throwing it to them."

On facing players like cornerback Micah Hyde and free safety Tanner Miller in practice:

"Yeah, those guys are what makes practice enjoyable and difficult at the same time. Those guys are both experienced guys. I mean, Micah has been out there, it seems like forever now. Tanner as well. They've both done a really nice job. They make it very difficult, especially for young receivers. It's a great test to go against when they get in there with the 1s against Tanner and Micah. Just been doing a great job all spring making it hard on the offense and bringing some of those other DBs along as well."