

**March 2, 2012**



An Interview With:

## **KIRK FERENTZ PHIL PARKER**

**KIRK FERENTZ:** Welcome, everybody. I'll make my comments real brief, answer a couple questions and then turn it over to Phil. We're obviously pleased to finally get our staff settled, which we did at the beginning of this week. We've been through a period of change. We all knew that was taking place throughout December and January, and one thing about change, it brings opportunity. I really feel good about the people that have joined the staff and where they're sitting right now. It's all about getting the right people on board, whether it be recruiting, adding staff members, whatever.

So really thrilled about that. Phil's news is kind of old news, but certainly on Monday we'll have Greg Davis available to you, and then next week both LeVar Woods and Brian Ferentz as well and they'll get a chance to visit with you. And then during the course of spring practice I'll make sure all the assistants are available, the guys that haven't had a chance to visit with you and we'll bring the coordinators back, as well, at the beginning of spring just to give you a chance to ask any questions.

### **Q. Have you made any determinations on recruiting territories for everybody?**

**KIRK FERENTZ:** Yes and no. I think we're just about there, which we need to be. But overall I don't think there's going to be a lot of big change. The coordinators haven't been overly involved with the recruiting process, and I don't see that happening a little bit. So what we've got to do now is nail down where exactly we're going to send LeVar and Brian. But we're going to stay within the

areas we've been working and see what we can do.

### **Q. Will Phil and Greg have a territory then?**

**KIRK FERENTZ:** Not officially, but Phil has got a lot of connections certainly in Ohio and Michigan, so we'll certainly try to play to those and certainly as you might imagine Greg has got strong ties in Texas. He's a native of Texas and coached there for a long time, so he knows a lot of people down there, as well.

### **Q. The defensive coordinator search seemed like a longer one. How did that work out?**

**KIRK FERENTZ:** It's pretty simple, actually. On the defensive side of the football, I had the luxury of having a lot of time to think about things. I talked about that a couple weeks ago. My mind went a lot of different places, plus in the month of December it really wasn't prominent in my thoughts. I was really more concerned with our recruiting and getting ready for the bowl game.

The thoughts I had there were kind of disjointed, and then certainly in January my thoughts started going that way a little bit. And in this case we had to move a lot quicker with Ken's departure.

Two different scenarios. The only thing I would say is I'm equally happy with the outcome, just really thrilled about both of them. I think I feel really good about just the direction we're heading right now.

### **Q. Will Greg be play calling?**

**KIRK FERENTZ:** Yeah, definitely, he will be a play caller.

### **Q. And QBs?**

**KIRK FERENTZ:** Correct.

**Q. Did you talk to Mack Brown about Greg?**

KIRK FERENTZ: We communicated certainly, as you might imagine. It was a little different with Phil, obviously, because we've had 13 years of working together. But in any circumstance, where you haven't worked with someone, you try to be as thorough as possible, and I'll address that a little more next week. But I felt really good about that. If I was going to draw a parallel, it would be a little bit when we hired Ron Aiken. I knew Greg but I didn't know him well. That would be a real stretch to say that.

But I knew a lot of people that knew him really well and people that I had a lot of confidence and faith in. It was almost a carbon copy of Ron Aiken. I had worked with several people that had worked with Ron. But yeah, that's like anything else, you try to be as thorough as you can.

**Q. No qualms? He was out of football for a year. It probably wasn't planned for him. Any qualms about that part of it?**

KIRK FERENTZ: No, not at all. You can ask him on Monday. I didn't ask that question, but I can just tell you this: He was out because he chose to be out. I would imagine he probably had a couple options. We're just really excited to have him just like everybody else here.

**Q. How important was the Texas connection to you when you wound up making this decision?**

KIRK FERENTZ: With every hire that we've made, it was more about what can they bring to our program. With both coordinators I think the first thing, most prominent thing, is can they lead the groups they're responsible for, and those are big groups obviously. That was first and foremost.

Whether a guy with experience, which Greg has had a lot of experience as a coordinator, Phil hasn't, but to me it's all about what do we envision them being able to do with our football team and how can they better serve -- help us move forward as a football team offensively, defensively, collectively, and that kind of leads me into where I'm going in this whole thing. I think both in Phil's and Greg's case, even though their backgrounds are very different, I feel like they're the same kind of guys. They're going to be able to command the respect of the players, give them good direction, and also be very, very good team players. I think that's a critical element of any

football staff. Certainly the coordinators have to be guys that are inclusive, are going to be willing to work together. I am leading into Phil now. I really think that's been one of the secrets of our success defensively. Over the last 13 years we've had a great defensive staff here, and I feel the same now. We've got Daryl with the secondary, that's a critical position in defensive football. And then I'd flip it around and say the front group is really important, as well. It's hard to be successful without a good defensive line. I think Reese is the perfect guy at this time. He's such a builder and encourager, and I think he's a perfect fit with a very young group. That's the youngest group we've out there. LeVar has a lot of great attributes he brings, as well. Those three guys in combination with Phil's leadership and direction I think really plays well for us. What most impresses me about Phil is what I've had a chance to witness first hand, 13 years of doing a great job with our secondary. Also very impressed with what he did at Toledo over the 11-year span and the associations he's had professionally with people like Norm Parker, Gary Pinkel and Nick Saban, three pretty good names in football.

But the bottom line is I think his track record is really what impressed me as much as anything. He's got a very sharp mind, very inquisitive mind professionally, and most importantly, his players have reflected his coaching on the field. They respond to what he's coached them to do, and they've gone out and performed in a really admirable way. They've done the same thing away from the building, which is a big part of college coaching. That's really why I'm excited about Phil's new challenge. I know he'll do a great job.

**Q. Is it still going to be 4-3?**

KIRK FERENTZ: I'll let you ask him. I'm dying to find out, too (laughing).

**Q. Was there more of a priority with Greg's connections there?**

KIRK FERENTZ: We'll utilize Greg's connections certainly. He won't be out there all four weeks in the spring I can assure you, unless he chooses to be. I'm not against that, but the biggest thing, I really want to make sure the coordinators can really concentrate on their football. It's especially true in season, and there's a lot of recruiting that goes on in season, and as

you might imagine there's a lot that goes into game plans, as well. What I've tried to do is free them up from the recruiting, not that they aren't recruiting but they won't be necessarily primary recruiters in a lot of cases because that to me is paramount in season because all of us get so -- I don't want to say distracted, but we get tugged in a lot of different directions. That's one difference from pro football. We all juggle a lot of balls, and I'd rather have those guys really focused on what we need to do to be successful that week.

To that point, too, Greg has got such a wealth of knowledge of the state, and he did a little scouting last year. As he sat out, he went around to a lot of different colleges and watched games, also went to a lot of high school practices and games. High school football down there is tremendous, so we'd be foolish not to take advantage of his background.

**Q. Was this a move toward quarterback development? I know it was there and it was on the uptick, but is this a move to get that consistency because that seems to be his calling card?**

KIRK FERENTZ: I think Ken did a wonderful job here, and one of the things I really think -- it became apparent to me, we're derailing here for a second, but when Ken parted, it became apparent to me, I don't pay attention to a lot of stuff, but it sounds like it was a lightning rod position. That's the nature of being an offensive coordinator. I think Brian said it as well as anybody that Billy O'Brien who led a record setting offense up in New England, any time they lost or didn't score, it was all Billy O'Brien's fault, and when they won it was Tom Brady and Bill Belichick. That's the way football works. That's the nature of being an offensive coordinator.

That's one of the things '02, '03, '04 we had very different quarterbacks, and he found a way of getting those quarterbacks to play to the best of their ability, and I think that's one of the things that really impressed me, and I'll say that on Monday about Greg. If you look historically they played with very different type of quarterbacks at his last stop and all the stops he's been. That's as impressive as anything. I'll stop here, probably getting Hines Ward ready for the bowl game if you go back and research what he did as a part-time quarterback. It was pretty impressive. We'll see what happens.

I'll shift it back to Phil. Just really thrilled to have Phil join us in a new position. You've got it.

PHIL PARKER: I'm glad to be here and I'm glad you guys made it with the bad weather out there today, so it's nice to see everybody here.

Really, I know you guys have been waiting to talk to me a little bit, so I guess if anybody has any questions you can start firing away.

**Q. The fact that the search did take so long, was that ever a distraction for you? Was it on your mind a lot during the days leading up to -- we just all assumed you were going to be one of the candidates.**

PHIL PARKER: Probably the biggest distraction at the time was Oklahoma when we heard the announcement, and then obviously in January, we're full steam ahead on recruiting, so that kept me busy and kept me focused on what I was doing.

I really never thought about it too much after that. I just was more focused on the bowl game with Oklahoma and recruiting.

**Q. When were you actually offered the position?**

PHIL PARKER: It was probably, like I say, late January. Late January, the last couple weeks in January.

**Q. How long did it take you? Was it one of those things that you immediately said yes, you wanted it?**

PHIL PARKER: I think when you're in this profession, and I've been coaching for 24 years with the secondary, that you always have goals set and what you want to do. And it just seemed like a good opportunity for me and for my family. I think when you look around and you have chances or other opportunities to go other places to be a coordinator, that I really wanted to stay here because of my family, and it just happened to be a great opportunity here with the opening of Norm retiring that I might be a candidate.

**Q. 24 years as a defensive backs coach. Was maybe just calling defenses and getting in that flow, was that something that Kirk quizzed you about or that you wondered about yourself?**

PHIL PARKER: Well, I'm sure that I really haven't called much of a play. I did in the past when Norm was out and doing game planning and doing checks and balances. It was a

conglomeration of the defensive staff working together that put the game plan together. But being responsible to make sure you're checking, dotting the I's -- crossing the T's. But it was a good learning experience for me at that time, and now it's definitely going to be different. We have young players, but we also have a young staff at each position.

I mean, you look at Darrell Wilson, he's been coaching the linebackers for the last ten years or so, so he's got a different role, so he's young and experienced at coaching there, and he's coached it before and he's played it, he's played in the CFL at corner and safety so he does understand the secondary. LeVar Woods, he's been a linebacker in the NFL for seven years, so he has a lot of great knowledge in there. But it still is different than coaching a position. And that's what we're working through now. And then Reese Morgan obviously switching over from the offensive side, understanding the offensive line play is going to help a lot and understanding the techniques, and he's a great technician, and I think he's a good addition there at the defensive line.

**Q. In what way will you be different from what Iowa has had over the last 13 years with Norm as defensive coordinator?**

PHIL PARKER: Well, I don't know how much is going to be different. We're going to stay in the 4-3. There might be a little bit more things, how we prepare, how we look at things. We may try to maybe get a guy down a little bit more than we usually do. But really when it comes down to it, you're still teaching fundamentals, and it's going to come down to getting off blocks and making tackles and keeping guys from scoring.

You look over the last ten years, our first two years probably wasn't a good example of what we have done in the last ten, but the last ten years, we've been pretty good on defense. And we're sound, we're fundamentally sound, and don't give up points. This year we probably gave up 23 or 24 points a game. That was probably the biggest margin over the last ten years.

**Q. How much does working under Norm make you ready for this job now, just what you took from him?**

PHIL PARKER: Well, Norm has been around football for a long time, so I do look at things. He gives a lot of great knowledge of how to look at things. He was a guy that obviously could look at a tape in different ways and understand

what they were trying to do to you and what things were going to be a problem. And so I think that's going to benefit me a little bit, how he looked at things. And one thing Norm did, he did keep it simple, and sometimes with these offenses, the way they are now in the Big Ten, which 28 years ago they weren't like this when I was playing, they definitely changed.

So the more they change and the more formations they give you, there's a lot more gymnastics as far as getting guys lined up on how to play and play fundamentally sound.

**Q. Immediately this year do your thoughts go toward defensive line because that seems to be sort of the hot spot for you guys?**

PHIL PARKER: Yeah, I think becoming the defensive coordinator, you're just not looking at the secondary and what kind of passes are thrown to you and how you're going to try to defend the passing game. But now you've got to become more involved in the run game a little bit more, not saying that they weren't involved in the support system in the defense, but now you've got to be a little bit more detailed in the overall big picture of looking at a defense and how can you guys stop somebody.

**Q. Has Norm given you any advice in transitioning to this role?**

PHIL PARKER: The advice he probably gave me was you've got to do it your way, the way you want to do it, because obviously it's your job, you're the one in charge, and you've got to do it your way, and you can't do it -- to me, just be yourself, and if I can just be myself and do what I do, then we'll see where it goes from there.

**Q. Did I understand you to say that the defense needs to catch up with some of the offense now?**

PHIL PARKER: Well, I don't know if it's that; I think there's a lot more imagination right now on offense as to what they're trying to do to get certain people the ball, and I think that's changed. They spread the game out a little bit more, and a little bit of it, there's a lot of quarterback runs nowadays. They're adding that in like option football. So some of it is almost going all the way back a long time ago where they're running option football, and they just happen to do it and they spread you out a little bit more, so you have to be

a little bit more sound and make sure everybody knows what they're doing.

**Q. Being a defensive backs coach for many years, will you be looking at maybe using more defensive backs on slot receivers where Norm has kind of used linebackers?**

PHIL PARKER: Well, one thing that I think when you go into it is you're going to probably look at the team different a little bit, when they come out in blue personnel and different personnel groupings against those slot receivers. But then you've also got to evaluate exactly who's going in the game and how much more will they bring at that position than the guy you already have there. So I think you've got to do a lot of evaluation on is the guy you're bringing in, and he's not a starter right now, is he going to perform just as well as the other guy that's in the game. So that's going to be something that we're going to have to work on and focus on and concentrate.

**Q. When this job became open, how confident were you that it would end up in your hands?**

PHIL PARKER: I don't think I ever really thought about it. I know that Kirk, he's a very thorough guy, and he takes his time, and when he makes decisions -- I know I remember when I first came here, was it 13 years ago, it was a long process in there, from when I first heard about the job until I was the last guy that was hired on the staff here when he first showed up 13 years ago. So I kind of knew his method and how he went through his procedures. He's a very thorough guy and does a lot of research on you. I knew if it was going to be inside that he was going to take his time, and he had time.

**Q. Are you going to blitz more?**

PHIL PARKER: Everybody has opinions. I was going to ask you if you could draw me up a couple blitzes and we could put them in (laughter.)

**Q. On a scale of 1 to 10 with 10 being the highest, how much authority or flexibility do you have going forward to make changes or input a little bit more?**

PHIL PARKER: Well, I think Kirk is still the head coach, so I don't think that I'm going to do anything too crazy. I'm going to believe in what I believe on defense, what you need to do, and I think over the last 13 years I kind of formed my opinions on what I like to do. And they're not too

much out of line with what we've been doing. I might add to one or two things over there. You start looking at what we've done in the past and how much everybody is asking about how much we blitz, then you look at the percentages when we do blitz, we're not bad, but we probably don't do as much as everybody else.

It's kind of interesting, you look at the championship game this year, and I don't know how many times you're actually seeing Alabama actually blitz.

**Q. What's your take on, I guess, what you can do from a personnel standpoint because it seems like next year a lot of young guys are going to have to come up and emerge?**

PHIL PARKER: It's a little bit like this: It's like the defensive staff, everybody is a little bit young and eager to move on and grow in their positions as coaches. And then obviously I think as our defense is very young -- we do have some guys on there that have played a lot, you look at Steve Bigach and Joe Gaglione, they all played. Carl Davis has played, some younger guys, Cooper and McMinn, probably hasn't played, but they have showed some great promise. So it's definitely up front on the front line they have a lot of room to improve. So that's one great thing to look at. Yeah, they're young, but they have a bigger opportunity to improve and have a bigger gap than that. And at the linebacker we have James Morris, Kirksey, Hitchens, he's played some football, all three of them have played. They've been on special teams for us. So it's not like you're getting a bunch of new guys. They have room to improve.

The secondary, we have at least five guys that have started at that position in the secondary and six that actually started the game in the back end. So there's a lot of experience as far as guys playing on the field. Now, if they can keep on improving and improve and improve, then we have a better chance of winning the games.

**Q. How much input did you get in position coaching moves, like Darrell moving to secondary or Reese moving over LeVar's hire? How much input did you give to Kirk?**

PHIL PARKER: I think Kirk had his own method in doing that. To me by the time I really found out what way he was going, he kind of let

me in on a little bit of that -- I didn't have much input at the time, because he made probably some decisions in his own mind probably months before.

**Q. You've gotten to see LeVar coached a little bit. Tell us about him as a coach.**

PHIL PARKER: I think LeVar has great enthusiasm in coaching. He loves the game. He loves the kids. And I really like the way he works with them. I think he's a great detailed guy. It's going to be great to be working with him.

**Q. You're going to want to recruit I imagine because you really made some headway in Ohio, and Iowa has a lot of Ohio kids. I think that's a lot you, maybe some Reese?**

PHIL PARKER: Well, there's a little bit of Ken O'Keefe was recruiting a little bit there in Ohio, too. That's one thing I didn't think about too much when we talked about it, but there's going to be some opportunities hopefully to get out there and still use my connections that we have. Whether that works or not, I don't know.

But being out there on the road a little bit more and seeing everybody, I'm not going to have that chance and opportunity like I did before, to see so many coaches and get information from people. But I think I still will be on the road some time in recruiting.

**Q. As a position coach working with the staff for so many years, now you go into the DC position, how do you think that will change your relationships with your colleagues?**

PHIL PARKER: Well, to me I think they're all great people in the room, so that makes it great. And I think Darrell Wilson and LeVar and Reese, I mean, they're eager, and I don't think it's really going to change anything with what we do. There's somebody who has to make a decision, and it has to be the boss as far as making the decision. But we're really working together, so it's no different to me than when we were sitting in the room here for the last 13 years.

And look at LeVar and Reese, they've been on the staff for a while, so they've been in the building. And maybe not in our room all the time, but I do know them, so I don't think it's going to change very much.

**Q. The defensive guys, the guys you had under your wing for I don't know how**

**many years, how did they take the news? Were they excited?**

PHIL PARKER: They were probably excited they have a new coach. But I think it's hard for me, too, not coaching a position specifically. It might give me an opportunity to go out and reach to the D-line and the linebackers, so that will give me that opportunity. But I did think about that probably two weeks ago in saying today I won't be sitting in that room over there coaching those guys like I used to.

Some of the relationships there are going to be a little bit different, but I really couldn't tell you whether they're happy or not.

**Q. You have the freedom to kind of roam it sounds like, to go coach up or implement --**

PHIL PARKER: Just kind of oversee, see how things are doing. It gives me a little bit better chance to evaluate certain kids that probably I wouldn't be able to see if I was doing my drills or working with my defensive backs that I'd have no idea what the D-line was doing at that time or the linebackers, so it's definitely giving me an opportunity to have a little bit bigger picture.

**Q. How important is it to know what a player can do?**

PHIL PARKER: I think it's real good because you don't want to put a kid in a position that he can't do. I mean, it's really not -- it doesn't make sense.

**Q. You said this was not the first coordinator job you've been offered. Did you say that earlier? Were you ever close to leaving here before this?**

PHIL PARKER: There was a couple times that I really had to think and mull it over. But it all came back to family. You know, my kids -- I've seen a lot of coaches out there over the 24 years that I've been around, talking to them, that they've been -- I know one guy specifically, he had 15 different jobs since 1990. That's hard for me. I didn't want that. When I first made the decision to come here 13 years ago, one thing I knew about growing up in Ohio, being in the Big Ten area, going to Michigan State and playing there and playing against Iowa, that the one thing that stood out to me, that coaches stayed here, and there was a reason for that. And not only because they

were winning, because this is a great city to be in, and to me it was an opportunity to bring my family here. The education and actually go through high school, through one high school. They went all the way through Wickham to, what is it, Northwest, and now they're in West High.

**Q. Was the possibility of getting this job something that maybe kept you here, too, later on?**

PHIL PARKER: No, never thought about it like that. To me it was just an opportunity to make sure my kids went through the same school system, and I thought that was important for me at the time.

**Q. This seems like a silly question, but will you be on the sideline or the press box?**

PHIL PARKER: Good question. I'm mulling that over right now. I really don't know. There's different opinions on both sides. I'm going to think that one through.

**Q. Have you gotten the chance to interact much with Greg Davis?**

PHIL PARKER: I've seen him a couple times since he's been here in the office, but they're meeting, we're meeting, so there hasn't been too much where we actually sat down and said, hey, what actually are they doing on offense and talked about what we're doing. They're just trying to get on the same page like we are on defense right now.

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