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An interview with:

COACH PARKER

COACH PARKER: Good afternoon. I guess we're halfway through spring ball right now, and the guys are playing with a lot of enthusiasm and learning a new system -- not really learning the new system, but learning the new positions and in some cases getting used to the coaches. But I think it's been going pretty good so far.

Q. How has the defensive line looked and developed this spring?

COACH PARKER: I think they've made a lot of progress. First couple days they were just learning. I think right now they're starting to understand the defense a little bit better, and I think they're doing a good job. They've made a lot of progress.

Q. Could you talk about how Coach Wilson was talking about Nico Law floating a little bit?

COACH PARKER: One thing about Nico, he's an aggressive guy. That's why we recruited him. He was aggressive on film, and he likes to run around a lot. He's going to be around the ball. Just need him to slow down a little bit mentally and need him to catch up a little bit, but he's improved the last week and a half.

Q. What impresses you the most about the guys up front?

COACH PARKER: I tell you what, they all look like a guy that came out -- Spears really came out and did a good job in the last week or so. And Joe Gaglione is really a solid kid at the left end right now.

But there are some other guys inside that are really doing a good job. Lowery is doing an

excellent job. Cooper has really improved. So it's just a learning process just getting out there.

A lot of them are young, and trying to understand the footwork and their assignments right now. A lot of them are showing everybody that they're willing to learn and giving great effort. So we're happy with that.

Q. How much do you value the versatility up front? A lot of people seem to be moving around.

COACH PARKER: Right now with some guys out, it's kind of hard. Sometimes we have eight or nine guys, sometimes ten. All depends on what the class situation is. I know Steve Bigach is playing end sometimes and sometimes he's playing tackle. We just have to do it for a practice situation right now.

It's good for them. It could happen in a game. We've played guys at different positions. I know Joe Gaglione played on the left, he played on the right before, and he played inside. So I think you've got to have a little bit of guys doing a little bit in the spring time to help him out, so it doesn't, in the fall it's not a big surprise.

But I think they're all just trying to adjust to the practice situation.

Q. What are your thoughts on playing an actual spring game whether you have a running clock or whatever versus what you do now?

COACH PARKER: I think the problem with it right now is the depth chart. How many people you actually have that can play and depends on how many running backs you have.

I've been both ways. I prefer the way we do it right now, because you get a little bit more extra practice than actually a game. I don't think you get all the situations that you need when you get into a spring game. So it goes back and forth. What do we need is really what it comes down to.

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Q. What are you looking for Saturday in terms of your defense, performance of players or anything like that?

COACH PARKER: I want our players to come out, and I think they have been playing with great effort. I think we've seen guys learning and having a little bit of excitement which has been positive. I just want to see our defense come together and get a little chemistry, knowing each other and what they expect. I think if you've been to practice, it shows what they're doing.

So really what I'm looking for are guys to keep on improving and working together. I think it's been fun for the last week and a half so far.

Q. Your linebackers don't have a lot of experience. Do you feel like they've solidified themselves to be established as starters?

COACH PARKER: You're looking in the middle at James Morris. He's really improved even over the last year since last fall. He brings a lot of excitement in the knowledge that he has. So he's definitely a leader, in my opinion, at the linebacker position.

Kirksey has done a great job outside. He's very athletic and makes a lot of plays and with Hitch there. So they're all pretty good. But I see Alston, Quinton Alston really coming on as a back-up. He's done a great job there. But to me I'm looking for Cole Fisher to move up a little bit and help out there. So you're really looking to see how far along they're coming to learn the defense, and how fast they can play. I think they're doing a good job.

Q. James moved last year, played both positions and has improved over Tyler Hansen. Do you see this as his position?

COACH PARKER: I think he has the capability of playing both, so depending on your depth, and if you want the best players on the field, if he has to be the back-up will, he'll be the back-up will if that gets our best players on the field. So it's all going to come down to you play three linebackers right now, and tough figure out what is the best position.

If Quinton can go back and play well, he can do that. You've got to move a guy out. But I think James is the one that can do both and has done both.

Q. Kirk and Greg Davis talk about what the offense can do and do best. Will the

defense be that way with the flexibility to shift if you have a strength here or there?

COACH PARKER: I think you always have to figure out a way to put your best players on the field if it happens to be in certain situations. If you have to put a nickel guy in and an extra defensive back in situations, then you do so. But you want to make sure you have your best 11 guys on the field that are going to help you win. So that's where we're trying to look at it too.

Obviously, offensively they can create it and make decisions on what they do, but it's the same thing on defense. We're going to look for the best guys that can help us play. If it means we add another secondary guy, then we'll add another secondary guy.

Q. You mentioned there are some things that a defense can do to help a defensive line. What are some of those things?

COACH PARKER: One thing about it, we play a seven-man box a lot of times. So we can cheat a guy down, help him out, put a little more pressure on the corners a little bit on Micah Hyde, and B.J. and Castillo. It looks like they took the challenge. So they're going to be exposed a little bit more. So we'll try to get another guy down there to help him out, all depending on the situation. Try to add a guy or move a guy up front a little bit. That's what we're going to try to do.

Q. I'm sure your corners love to hear that, right?

COACH PARKER: Every corner thinks they can play man every down, and they've done a good job. But it's not a game situation yet. It's still practice. We've still got to wait to be seen yet.

Q. How much will you be able to tighten that cushion on the corner? Something Coach Wilson talked about, maybe getting them closer, playing more press?

COACH PARKER: We've got calls in there that are designed to get them up there. Depending on certain formations and situations, that's we want to do, a lot of times that depends on down and distance what we want to do. But I think we have some talented corners that can take that challenge on and they might be better press guys than they are off guys. So it will have to vary and mix it up depending on situations in the game where you're at, and how you want to play them.

But definitely, when you get up there and press them, it lets the safeties a little freer, run to the ball, and help in the box a little bit more.

Q. From a defensive standpoint, what have you seen different from the offense this time last year, for example?

COACH PARKER: Well, a little bit what we've seen is probably, I guess, not much different. They still give the same formations. They still come out with the same personnel groupings. They might call some things differently to understand that. But it's probably a little bit of what we've been practicing a lot of hurry-up offense a little bit so that's a challenge.

But that's what we see all the time, probably four, five times a year that we're going to see it, so that helps us a little bit. And we've done that in the past too. So we've probably done that a little more than normal.

Q. Shane hurt his Achilles last fall. Is this new injury related to that or something different?

COACH PARKER: I'd let Kirk talk about that. Shane DiBona you're talking about? I don't know. Ask Kirk about that.

Q. How about your leaders on the defensive end. Is Micah Hyde stepping up this year?

COACH PARKER: I think he is. We put some pressure on Micah Hyde to be a leader, and you have Tanner Miller that's come on and made some plays in there that's standing up. So I think both of those guys have a chance to lead from where they're at.

But Micah Hyde has definitely stepped up and made some plays in the spring so far. Obviously he's been here long enough so he should know what's going on.

Q. What can you do to help perimeter defense? Last year Kirk brought up containment quite a bit. What can you do to help contain?

COACH PARKER: You have to practice and understand where your help is at. Sometimes when you're rushing a passer, you have to make sure you keep on the up field shoulder. If you're the contain player, you have to contain. We do some drills at practice for that. So I think it's just a lot of concentration a little bit.

Q. Do you find yourself kind of roaming over into different position groups or do you try to balance your time among the three?

COACH PARKER: I seem to walk around a little bit more with the defensive line and linebacker groups a little bit and more the inside runs, 9 on 7 groups and spend a lot more time up front. I'm very familiar with the back end and understand what's going on there, so more of my focus is up front.

Q. Earlier you were trying to decide if you were going to stay on the sidelines or go upstairs during games. What did you decide or have you?

COACH PARKER: Right now since we've been practicing, I've been staying on the field. But I'll probably be upstairs, I think, just kind of get the big picture. When I first came here, I was up in the box, and I was in the box when I was at Toledo. So it will probably be a little bit different. Probably be away from the crowd.

Kirk might want me up there, I don't know. Just to stay away from the officials.

Q. Have Dominic and Carl been able to practice much?

COACH PARKER: No, they're just rehabbing. I think sometimes you can take a lot of mental reps watching practice and understanding. I just remember Sean Considine didn't take a practice snap at all before we played Penn State, and he made the trip and started the game. He played very well in the game.

So I think the mental reps are just as important as the physical reps. It's probably good for them, especially with Carl, just understanding the whole scheme of things. It's just going to make him a better player. So they're getting just as much reps, they're just mental reps and it saves their body.

Q. Outside of your front four on defense, are you pretty settled on starters right now on defense?

COACH PARKER: I think the back end still has some things to figure out on the front four. There are probably going to be four to maybe seven, eight guys up front that have to rotate in. So are we settled at any position, no? There are always guys that keep on improving.

Jordan Lomax was a guy that came on

and really improved since last fall. So it's kind of wait and see a little bit. It's fun, because there is nobody saying I'm a starter. I don't have to do anything. You look at James, and he's probably practicing the hardest of them all. He's been a starter for over a year and a half.

Q. How is Hitchens fitting in at linebacker?

COACH PARKER: Hitchens is doing very well. For him, he's very explosive. We recruited him as a running back, and possible at defensive back, and he came in here and he has great athletic ability. He does have a pop, and I think he's doing a great job.

Q. Anything you've seen from Kirksey?

COACH PARKER: Kirksey is very good. He's missed the last couple days here because of the death in his family, but I think Kirksey's a guy that's very emotional and physical at the point of attack. We're really looking for good things for him to happen.

Q. What do you do at the end of spring practice? What do the next three months give you time to do?

COACH PARKER: I think we keep evaluating. We'll go on and get the guys in the right spot and making sure that we probably do a little better on defense than what we did in the spring look at the cut-ups a little bit and see what we can do better to move on to the opponents for next year. Then, obviously, anything else that we want to add for next fall.

Q. Can you talk about Joe Gaglione? He went away for a year with a shoulder injury, and he came back to work his way into the lineup a little bit. Can you talk about his progress this year?

COACH PARKER: Well, Joe's definitely going to play for us. He's very stout and very strong. He can really set an edge. For Joe, we've just got to keep on being more consistent. I think he's doing that in the spring time, and to me, he's shown a lot of improvement in that area. So we're really excited about him being in our front four starting out.

Q. In what ways will your defense be different from the Iowa defense in the previous years?

COACH PARKER: Different? I don't know.

Q. To the fans.

COACH PARKER: Hopefully they see it differently. It should be a little bit like we talked about, a little more pressed on the outside a little bit, all depends on third downs. It might be a little bit different. But our goal is to make sure we keep them from scoring. So, hopefully we look back and play pretty good defense. But don't want to go too far from being good.

Q. Do you think the defensive line is experienced adequately to play a two-gap on a consistent basis, or do you think you'll adjust that as time goes on?

COACH PARKER: I think that's the way we've usually been built is to play a little heavier on the up front. We will add guys to the box a little bit, whether it's a secondary guy or bring a little bit more blitz, but we're going to make sure we help those guys out up front.

Q. You said blitz?

COACH PARKER: Yeah, sometimes you have to, but, yeah. We need to help them out. We need to move them. They can't always be sitting targets. That's what we've tried to do in the past.

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