

October 8, 2013



An Interview With:

**COACH KIRK FERENTZ
GREG DAVIS
PHIL PARKER**

COACH FERENTZ: I'll say a couple of words then pass it on to Greg and Phil.

Obviously the bye week. It was a tough loss last week. So we have the bye week coming up right now, and basically try to get the guys rested a little bit and let them recharge. Give us a chance to pay more attention to the younger players who haven't played a lot. And then the guys that have played try to detail them a little bit more.

Obviously this week gives everybody a chance to get caught up academically, hopefully get ahead a little bit. And with a little bit of luck maybe some of them can get a home cooked meal over the weekend, since they don't get that opportunity on Thanksgiving any more.

We'll start practicing this afternoon. Just try to see what we can do to improve the team on the field during the bye week, certainly, doing some work on the next four games. We've got a four game block coming up. And obviously recruiting, too. So that's kind of what's on our docket right now.

I'll take a couple of questions and turn it back over to Greg.

Q. With the mild injuries will you hold them out of practice this week? (Jared Aaron, KGAN)

COACH FERENTZ: We'll be cautious. We've been really fortunate this year thus far, at least. And watched a handful of guys Saturday. But I guess we'll continue along that line, so the fact that all the guys have a chance to be pretty good by the end of the week. If with were playing

Saturday, we'd probably be in trouble. But hopefully by the end of the week, early next week we should be good.

You lost Weisman Saturday. Why no LeShun Daniels? (Marc Morehouse, Cedar Rapids Gazette)

COACH FERENTZ: It's just tough to get the guys in the game, and we didn't have a lot of possessions, a lot of snaps the way the game was going. Probably not the best time in the world. Damon stepped in and did a great job. He's been playing well.

Q. Is that because the game went towards passing, was protection a concern? (Marc Morehouse, Cedar Rapids Gazette)

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, that doesn't worry so much with him, at least. I think that's one thing he does a pretty good job of. That wasn't a big issue, no.

Q. Will all of your staff be out recruiting this weekend? (Tom Kakert, hawkeyereport.com)

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, we're going to use Friday -- probably be a little bit -- have more guys traveling for more time the next bye week. We just figure we have a four game block, three of the four teams are totally new preparations for us, new staffs, since we've been here and they've been there.

So good chance for us to do some research this week, and try to get some things in line, and then focus on recruiting a little bit more next bye week.

Q. What do you feel about where the team is at? (Steve Batterson, Quad-City Times)

A. I like this team. We were all disappointed with Saturday, that wasn't much fun. It would be great to go into the bye week with five

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wins, but we came up short. Played a really good football team. So that's disappointing.

The big thing is this team's really worked hard. We have great leadership since last November. They've been a lot of fun to work with and coach. They're working hard, trying hard, put in a lot of effort on Saturday. We'll lick our wounds a little bit and see what we can do to improve, and try to play our best football here the next four games our focus will be.

Q. You mentioned the preparations you have this week, do you hope to have a game plan for next week installed a little bit earlier? (Brenden Stiles, hawkeyedrive.com)

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, that's one thing about the bye week, we'll have it done sooner than we would normally, but as far as presenting it to the players, probably more so on Sunday. We don't want to do too much too soon. But as a coaching staff we have the chance to get a lot of work done this week, and take advantage of that time.

Q. Will you spend extra time on punting coverage this week? (Tom Kakert, hawkeyereport.com)

COACH FERENTZ: We'll cover all the special teams, not more in the past. But we'll keep working special teams.

Q. Your improvement always continues. Do you feel this team has a pretty good edge on its identity? (Andrew Logue, Des Moines Register)

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, we certainly know more about our team now than with did six weeks ago, starting with the quarterback. Greg can talk a little bit more about that. We had no idea going into it. You think you do, sort of, but until the guys started playing you don't know. I think we have a better grip on things. And we're better offensively just anytime, most teams are if you're balanced, there might be exceptions to that rule, but most teams play better if they can do both.

But that game -- you get into games where you don't do both, and that's the reality of it or situation in a game where you've got a short amount of time and a lot of yards to cover, but that's football. I think we're improving in all the areas.

Again, we had a tough defense on Saturday. If you look at their games against Ohio State, Michigan and Wisconsin, three pretty good teams, a year ago they averaged 14 points a game in regulation, 15 if you count over time. Hopefully we'll score more than 14. But that's the reality of it. That's one game, so we have to keep working. We've been making improvement and the body of work I feel good about.

Defensively, yeah, eliminate big plays is certainly -- if you're going to play good defense you have to eliminate the big play and we've got to do a better job of that in the next six weeks.

Q. Now that you've seen the video, what was the difference coming out offensively after the first half? (John Patchett, hawkeyemic.com)

COACH FERENTZ: Basically we went 4, 5 or 6 possessions without doing anything. And then we had two possessions where we took it and scored. We actually led the game and had momentum at halftime. I tried to explain to the team that sometimes when you play good teams, there's no way to predict what's going to happen or how it's going to happen. So you have to keep playing. Our game with them last year was a little bit like that, too. We weren't exactly lighting it up, and we got it to where it counted and pushed it into overtime. You play a good defensive team like that you have to keep chipping away, if you can get some rhythm going it's a good thing. And we did on those two possessions. It's hard to do, they're a tough defensive football team.

They didn't change dramatically. They played well. They played well on those possessions we scored, too. It's tough to score on those guys.

Q. On special teams, you have situations where you put younger guys out there, and it's their one opportunity to be on the field. Do you caution against over thinking? (Brendan Stiles, hawkeyedrive.com)

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, there's really not -- typically as much to think about on special teams. That's usually the reason younger guys can play on them and excel. Go back, guys like Clark Sanders, that were playing a lot in special teams before they could play well offensively or defensively. But it's not just helter-skelter, either, run around like some kind of crazy person. You

have to -- you have to fit what's within the scheme. There's still that opportunity that we need more guys to step up and do a good job. But we're going the right direction. We went backwards, too, on that phase. But I'm judging six weeks, and I think there's room for improvement there. I think we have reason to be optimistic.

Q. You obviously have backups, but how much did you miss Kevonte? (Andrew Logue, Des Moines Register)

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, it doesn't help. Anytime you lose one of your more experienced guys, and we've always been that way. Even you think about 2002. You take Dallas Clark, I'm not comparing those two guys, but you take an experienced good player out of your lineup and it affects you. We typically don't have another guy just like that, although VandeBerg jumped in and did a good job and showed some signs. Anytime you lose your most veteran guy, and the guys that were injured Saturday, most of them were veteran players that have played pretty well here, but that wasn't deciding the game.

Q. Do you think Kevonte will be able to fill all those roles or will he have some limitations? (Andrew Logue, Des Moines Register)

COACH FERENTZ: We'll see more next week. I'm optimistic.

Q. How strongly do you believe this current team is better able to handle the issues that plagued the team last year? (Pat Harty, Iowa City Press Citizen)

COACH FERENTZ: I think we're a better team right now. But time will tell. Everybody wants to predict the future. I know that's part of -- the fans, the media, everybody. But there is no way to predict the future. I'm just saying, I think all of us feel this is a better football team. We're a more capable team right now. But every year is a new adventure, every game is a new adventure, what have you. But we like the football team. We're on the right path right now.

Q. Did Saturday's fake punt cause a deeper look? (Marc Morehouse, Cedar Rapids Gazette)

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I think I indicated that after the game. If you pressed me today I'd say we may never return a punt again,

just because when you do that, the blockers you have need to turn and go with those guys to shadow them. When you do that you open the door. And Michigan State did a pretty good job of taking advantage of it, to their credit. What helped us a couple of weeks ago, we paid for on Saturday, and it cost us a field goal and a possession. So, yeah, I may be leaning towards where you never see us try to return one again. We may just try to catch it and keep it off the ground.

GREG DAVIS: Just to tag team what Kirk was saying, we took yesterday and went through a huge quality control day looking at various different things. And we set up marks that you need to hit to be a productive offense; looked at different plays. We also spent quite a bit of time talking about personnel. Where we thought we were at the end of August, where we are now. So yesterday was all about looking in the mirror and trying to decide what we had done well, where we had fallen short, etc . . .

Then today we moved our attention to Ohio State, so we broke up as a staff offensively and spent all morning breaking down Ohio State. We'll work with the young guys this afternoon and as Kirk mentioned we won't present an Ohio State game plan to the players until Sunday, even though we'll be working on it as a staff.

Q. You mentioned looking in the mirror right now. When you see what you've been able to do, specifically with playing more up tempo, throughout parts of the season, anyway, is that something you're looking into doing more of here and into the season? (Brendan Stiles, hawkeyedrive.com)

GREG DAVIS: Yeah, I think we have played more up tempo. But I think each game is a little bit different. We didn't play as much up tempo against Minnesota as we had leading up into that ballgame. Part of the reason was Minnesota was a game that we put a whole lot on the quarterback at the line of scrimmage. And it's hard to play a bunch up tempo when you're asking the quarterback to get in you in certain plays versus certain looks. We had some success with the up tempo the other day, the other afternoon against Michigan State.

So it's something we'll continue to do, but

we're not going to become just a team that runs to the line and tries to snap it. We do want to play fast, faster than we have. I think we have done that. But each ballgame will be a little bit different about how we approach it.

Q. Is Jake what you expected when you named him quarterback or more? (Jared Aarons, KGAN)

GREG DAVIS: I think I mentioned in August, it's hard to evaluate quarterbacks until you hit them. And you don't do that in spring training and fall camp. We felt like Jake had the ability to extend plays, make some plays with his feet. But you're a little bit unsure, because you never know in fall camp . . . do they step away from that tackle or do they make that tackle. You also never know how he's going to react to live blitz. You blitz a guy in spring training, and fall camp, they're not going to hit them, so they have a tendency to hold the ball to the last possible second, and that's not the way it is in the real world.

I've been very pleased. The first scoring drive the other day, I think three out of the four completions they came after Jake. He had hot balls to Damond Bullock, that he got out of his hands, saw the blitz.

We're pleased with where he's at, pleased with his ability to make plays with his feet, that's something that he's picked up several first downs. When you look at our third down conversion we're much better than we were last year at this time. Part of the reason is his ability to make plays with his feet.

Q. How are Beathard and Sokol developing off the radar screen? (Andrew Logue, Des Moines Register)

GREG DAVIS: Extremely pleased with both of those guys. C.J. Beathard, I've said it, and I told him Sunday, we'd like for him to play more. He's got an extremely quick arm. I think he also has the ability to make some plays with his feet. But it just hasn't been one of those deals.

Both of those guys have taken to their role extremely well. Not that they're satisfied, but they're continuing to work hard and staying involved in the game plans during ballgames. I'm pleased with what they've done to this point.

Q. Are you looking to do more things this year in your offense than last year? (Kyle Hughes, KCJJ)

GREG DAVIS: We have a lot more depth. Just like Kirk mentioned VandeBerg, I don't even know what he looked like at this time. He stepped in and has really done a nice job. He's got more maturity than you think a young guy would have. Riley McCarron has also done a good job. We've got several tight ends. We've got more guys that we feel like we could play, and that's a good thing. And we've got more guys I think that can fill different roles that we did last year.

Q. Are the tight ends being utilized like you'd like in your offense? (Kyle Hughes, KCJJ)

GREG DAVIS: We've got three or four guys that we're rotating through. And I really look as the last part of the season, I look at their roles to pick up as we go. But we are not having to depend on them quite as much as we did last year, quite honestly, because we're getting some more production out of the wide receivers.

Q. When you were hired, you talked about never having a tight end with the qualities that C.J. Fiedorowicz had. How would you evaluate him right now? (Todd Brommelkamp, Voice of the Hawkeyes)

GREG DAVIS: C.J. is one of those guys, he is one of those guys that can play attached to a tackle and that's really what I was referring to, the guys that I had been around were all wide receivers that we had made into tight ends, so he's just a different style guy. But he has excellent hands. He's a guy that can bang around backers just like the touchdown with Bullock the other day. Two good players banging it around the goal line. And Jake threw a nice ball and C.J. separated and caught the ball. We're pleased with what he's doing. We want him to do more as we continue on.

Q. You mentioned a look in the mirror type of day, how much reflection does it take when you have your running game taken away from you? (Jared Aarons, KGAN)

GREG DAVIS: Well, we've got to look and see why -- we went into the ballgame with the idea that running was not going to be releasing -- we look at tape, more than once, and we see what they have done against other quality football teams. So we went into the ballgame with the idea it wasn't going to be easy. And they did a great

job. And then the game kind of dictated, quite honestly, that we had to get away from it. The last series that we had was 18 snaps. So if you take 18 snaps away from 61 snaps, there's about 40 snaps in the ballgame. So we weren't able to settle in and keep pounding. Typically that's when the running game gets better and better, when you can really stay with it. But we knew it was going to be tough.

Q. Do you have an internal rule of thumb where you come out with a game plan before deciding you need to turn to a different page (John Patchett, hawkeyemic.com)

GREG DAVIS: Yeah, I don't know that it's just a rule of thumb. Part of it is what's happening. It's a team game. Part of it is what's happening on the other side of the ball. Part of it is time of possession. But we want to be balanced. We're not a team that's built to throw 50 and run 30 times. We want to be a balanced team because we can protect better, which we've done much better this year, protecting the quarterback. So that's what we're always going to shoot for.

Q. Your wide receivers are much more improved. Are you getting what you want out of the quick? (Marc Morehouse, Cedar Rapids Gazette)

GREG DAVIS: If you look at the numbers, it's not crumbled too bad. Yeah, we need the quick game, quite honestly, to be an extension of the run game. So when we're sitting up there and the box is beginning to be loaded and we can flip it out to a slot receiver on a quick out for six yards, like we did the other day to Damon, for us, really, those were runs. For us to be as good as we can be the quick game has to be good. And hopefully that sets up something down the field. We're trying to take more shots than we did last year. It would be nice if we hit some of them. We want to continue to let the defense know that -- the safeties are good, we'll take our shots.

Q. Is there is a game where you reached the idea number of reps to get Powell involved in? (Brendan Stiles, hawkeyedrive.com)

GREG DAVIS: Well, I think it will be more and more as we go along. Damon came in -- obviously Damon is a special guy. And -- but he was not here in the spring. He was not here in the summer. He showed up about three days

before camp. So it's been a process. Obviously we didn't have to teach him how to run fast, he brought that with him. But, as the season has gone on, the other day he actually caught the ball and went 40 yards down the field and that was encouraging. But we want to continue to bring him on, because he is a guy that can do things with it after the catch.

So I don't know that there's a magic number right now, that he gets five or six catches or touches, but we are aware that he is a guy that we have to keep bringing on, there's no question.

Q. Jake looks like a kid who really is sort of a learning machine. He doesn't seem to make the same mistake twice. I think the only common -- against Northern Illinois, waited a little bit, against Minnesota on the interception he waited a little bit. Is he seeing things as quickly as he needs to? (Marc Morehouse, Cedar Rapids Gazette)

GREG DAVIS: Yeah, he is a learning machine. As I said before, he takes courses I can't even spell. He's very bright. He doesn't make the same mistake twice. The play you talk about, you mention the reference to Minnesota, there's no question he came off the fake. It had nothing to do with arm strength. It had to do with the place we were on the field he wanted to see more than he needed to see. Tevaun had run the double move on the safety off a run fake and that just comes with more and more reps. But the throw he made the first third down of the third quarter to Damond Powell, from one hash to their hash, over in front of their bench, that was a big time throw. That was a big time throw against good coverage. We're not concerned with arm strength. The more and more he plays -- and he's pretty unflappable. He doesn't get too high or too low.

Q. The offense, is it a matter of getting better? Do you still need to recruit better in certain positions? (Pat Harty, Iowa City Press Citizen)

GREG DAVIS: I've done this a long time. You're never happy. You always want the guy that somebody else has. The running back or receiver, the tightened. So we need to continue to recruit.

At the same time I think that one of the reasons the receivers are better, the second year in the system. I'd be remiss if I didn't say that Bobby Kennedy has not had a big part in making

the receivers better. His energy and his understanding of what we were trying to do. But we're getting closer, and we're making strides.

Q. Defense knows what Mark Weisman's intent is. Does that make Bullock key, that he can do more? (Marc Morehouse, Cedar Rapids Gazette)

A. Damon has really improved the last couple of ballgames, the numbers in the one game may not reflect this statement, but sometimes we see things hopefully before they happen. The last couple of ballgames he has pretty well. His blitz picked up, his vision. I think earlier in the year he was looking for some home runs and not following his mark, but the answer to your question, I think we will be better as we go when we have -- Damon brings something that's a little bit different. And we need both of those guys working at a high level to be able to get what we want out of them.

Q. Jake does a little with everyone, even going down to the defensive side of the bench. Is this something you encourage? (John Patchett, Hawkeyemic.com)

GREG DAVIS: The leadership of the quarterback, and I tell quarterbacks all the time, it has to be natural. I've had quarterbacks that their way of talking you probably couldn't repeat on Sunday morning. And they were very productive that way. The kids loved them and that was just them. Jake's probably not like that. Jake is much more, you know, come on guys, we'll get it going or whatever.

But you've got to do it your way. And I think until you're the quarterback it's hard for that to happen. So he went through spring training, we alternated every two reps, he went through the fall camp. I think now we're seeing more of his personality come out throughout the team.

PHIL PARKER: Good afternoon, just want to kind of talk about a view of the last six games. It's great to have a bye week right now with some guys banged up. We'd like to be 6-0. We're sitting there, the same situation we were last year, but I think our defense is much improved. I think our kids are definitely committed to the game. I think they've been playing tough. The effort has been great. And this is a good week here to give us preparation for Ohio State here in another week and a half. And get started on those guys and

then maybe take a peek at some other guys down the road. I think everybody is doing well, healthy-wise. I think it's a good time to have the break, and I think it's going to help us.

Q. Why do you feel better about this 4-2 than that 4-2 last year? (Jared Aarons, KGAN)

PHIL PARKER: Where we're at right now we're 11th in the country in defense. We're 8th in rushing. I don't think we gave up a run over 15 yards yet with the first teamers. We gave up one 25-yarder one of those games up there on some guys that were number twos. We gave up a 25-yard run. We have given up 16 big pass plays, that switch is over 20. If you calculate that, consistent with that, it would be 32. And if we do that we're well below the big plays that we gave up last year, uncontested plays, I think.

I feel good about the group, the chemistry. I think we have more depth. I think there are more guys capable to go on the field to perform at a high level to win.

Obviously last week was a challenge for us and we'd like to have that one back, but you can't have them back. I just think we're very comfortable with the guys we have. And I think they're playing at a high level.

Q. When you're facing a third down, what is your thought process as far as sticking to your base versus going to a nickel or dime package? (Brendan Stiles, hawkeyedrive.com)

PHIL PARKER: If you're short you're going to keep your base in there. It's going to be a short one, probably a run play. Third, four, five and six, sometimes you already kind of know what they like to do. You kind of like the guys to go up front a little bit more. Sometimes you pressure when it's a little bit longer, and sometimes you just go ahead and play coverage with a little bit of extra pass rush going.

It's definitely determined on what they do. And what we think their routes are going to be and what their pass percentage is going to be and who they like to go to. And sometimes you want to keep your nickel base, a nickel in the game or you want to go back -- or stay with your base.

To me it varies. It's hard to take Anthony Hitchens off the field, because he is one of our better players. That's something that we always talk about. This week in the last couple of days here we went over a blitz tape. Went over the big

plays, runs and passes. I think we had 15 runs that were over 8 yards. That's a decent number. And then I think just the big pass was only 16.

You try to evaluate what was wrong in those situations. We've been doing the blitz -- actually blitzing. We're 73-percent when we blitz. We gave up three touchdowns on 59 -- I think it was 15 percent blitz overall. You give up three touchdowns and then it's a low percentage. When you look at it, you look how many good plays came out of it. It's a balance. You've got to watch what you're doing.

Q. Are you blitzing more than last year? (Marc Morehouse, Cedar Rapids Gazette)

PHIL PARKER: No, right now it's 15 percent. We had 384 snaps, blitzed 59 times and we're 73 percent on our blitz package. And then third downs obviously we're pretty good on that right now, we're ninth in the country with that. And we've done a better job of getting off the field on third downs.

Q. Your front line was doing a good job of getting to the quarterback, was Michigan State countering that? (Andrew Logue, Des Moines Register)

PHIL PARKER: In seeing what we did, they probably got the ball a little quicker. But it comes back to really when I look at what we do and how we execute, that's where it comes down to. And we have to do a better job at executing. The farther you go into the season the more exact you're going to have to be in your coverage, the more exact you're going to have to be with the ball snap. They're going to do some things and pressure you, and move the pocket a little bit with the quarterback dropping back a little bit, buying some time. But you've got to keep on mixing it up, show blitz and bail out. And then sometimes you've just got to go.

Q. Do you see using your corners more? (Marc Morehouse, Cedar Rapids Gazette)

PHIL PARKER: I think you've got to get up there and play them. I think there's a couple of times that you'd like to get those guys a little bit closer on the third down, four and five, make sure they're up there pressing, making sure they can throw a tight throw, see how well he can execute. And I thought last week he did a great job of executing. I thought that was probably the best

performance he had of the year. And I thought it was the best performance that the receivers had in the games that we saw this year. Obviously we saw them all. But I think that was the best performance. They made plays. And the one B.J. we had him covered, he caught it, 20 yard smash route, we knew what the play was. But a couple of guys we had double covered and they execute. Credit to them. They have good players and they created the situation where they succeeded.

Q. Are you pleased with the defensive line rotation? (Brendan Stiles, hawkeyedrive.com)

PHIL PARKER: I consider Cooper a starter. And there's opportunities for him. He's a different type of guy inside compared to Carl Davis and Louis is just a hard charger. I think Coop, in my mind is a starter, in our opinion. Mike Hardy has a little bit ways to go, but he deserves the quality time. I thought he went in and did a decent job. But it's hard to replace a guy, Dom's been there a while and the experience, and he's playing at a high level. And to lose him so early in the game kind of hurt us a little bit. But the next guy has to step in.

Q. What do you think about Hitchens? (Steve Batterson, Quad-City Times)

PHIL PARKER: His commitment to the game, his effort. He plays full go all the time. Practice. He recognizes the plays. And he's played a lot, downhill a lot more. I think he's done a great job of going in and studying the game plan and understanding what they're doing to him. And he's really done a really great job. Last year he had a lot of tackles. This year I think he just understands where the play is going, sees it faster.

Q. How much has the defensive line helped Anthony and James? (Marc Morehouse, Cedar Rapids Gazette)

PHIL PARKER: You go out and protect them guys, and make sure the offensive linemen don't get on top of them. In both places I think the defensive line has definitely improved. And the linebackers have definitely improved their position. If we can just get the secondary up to par we'll be all right.

Q. Assess Mike Tanner and John Lowdermilk? (Tom Kakert, hawkeyereport.com)

PHIL PARKER: I think they've improved since the beginning of the year. This game is probably a little bit more challenging, there's a few plays they left out there. But I'm very pleased with what they're doing, and I think they work good together. And they do a good job controlling the secondary. They're very committed. So I'm real pleased with them.

Q. When you have something happen to a single player, getting beat on coverage, how do you address that? (John Patchett, hawkeyemic.com)

PHIL PARKER: Yeah, every guy is different. It's how you handle it. As far as how you coach them, how they can take coaching. What kind of coaching can they take and what you need to improve on. Most all of the stuff that you've seen on film and evaluated, a lot has to do with a lot of fundamental technique, staying in your back pedal, understanding what you have to do, your alignment, how far back are you, when do you open up, how close do they get to you. It's a challenge to go back and play corner on the receivers, when they're going to have some time when they 6-man, 7-man protect, they're going to have time to run a couple of double moves on you. So you have to be good on your fundamentals, sometimes it's based on your alignment, how deep were you when you started. Did you take a false step off the line when he took say step. All these thing play into it. And you have to be perfect with it. The more you do it the better you get. I think both -- between Lomax and Desmond and B.J., B.J. has made a lot of good plays, and some he's given up. That all goes with the position that you're in. You're on an island, everybody sees it. There's a lot of guys up front making mistakes nobody knows about it. But once you give up one back there everybody knows about it. You've got to have a good memory, a good file cabinet and remember the things you need to remember and be able to pull them up of splits and alignments and formations, and have a short memory when things go bad for you, you've got to be able to drop it and go to the next play.

Q. Jordan hasn't played corner the last couple of games, is it something you try to gradually work him back in? (Brendan Stiles, hawkeyedrive.com)

PHIL PARKER: I think Jordan is cleared to play. I think he's still not moving the way he

was. He's a little bit Rusty. So we're just trying to gradually get him back. This week will be a good week to try to give him some actual work the next couple of days against each other and see where he's at.

Q. How do you rate Desmond's situation against what he was thrown into, how do you rate his performance? (Andrew Logue, Des Moines Register)

PHIL PARKER: He's done a good job. The one thing when he came into camp. He gave great effort. He loves to compete. He doesn't care who he's playing against. He goes out and does what he does. But there's a big learning curve for him a little bit. Everything that he sees is for the first time. Some things, you give up some plays that he's got to sink a little more, just for him to see it more and more, and see it at a faster pace will help him out. I think he understands that. He's got to make sure he builds his memory bank and make sure he can diagnose a play when it's going on. I think he's done a very good job for a freshman to come down and play like he's doing, he's done a decent job.

Q. James Morris, how much does he help you? (Marc Morehouse, Cedar Rapids Gazette)

PHIL PARKER: I think they're all doing it. We've been able to do a little bit more, because of that. I think they read the box pretty good and understand the offenses pretty good that they go against. So it's a lot easier doing it with all three of the linebackers on the same page with the secondary, and up front guys. That's really made us a little bit more flexible on some of the defenses that we call.

Q. Are you getting what you hoped out of the Meier and Alston package? (Tom Kakert, hawkeyereport.com)

PHIL PARKER: Yeah, I think so. I think we need to keep on working it this week. We'll probably do some more of that. I think Nate's done a great job at the left end. Like to get him in there more in other situations, definitely got to work more on that.

Q. You guys have done a nice job against running quarterbacks. What is the key to stopping those guys? (Kyle Hughes, KCJJ)

PHIL PARKER: Exactly. There's a lot of different options. It's leverage. Football is very simple. You've got to take leverage on the ball the way you go to the ball. And it's leverage on the angles and it's leverage in your position, just like if you were a wrestler or anything else, it's all about leverage. And it's the leverage about up front, controlling the line of scrimmage, it's how you attack the ball and make sure you've got great leverage, your inside, outside. And then obviously your body position is a big part of it. Do you have the feet where you need to be where you can move. And I think we've done a great job of guys having great leverage, that's -- the whole game is leverage.

Q. Ohio State is really good at finishing drives, averaging 50 points a game. What's made their offense so efficient? (Jared Aarons, KGAN)

PHIL PARKER: Good players. We've got some good players. The quarterback, the running back, receivers. I'm from Ohio, I think back in the '80s they used to have good players, too. I think they just got a good system and they believe in their system. But I think the players help them finish it.

Q. What's the most difficult part about facing new coaching staffs in three of the next four games? (Steve Batterson, Quad-City Times)

PHIL PARKER: The difficult thing is staying focused on the one you have next. And that's the thing that -- my biggest focus right now is Ohio State, obviously Purdue, we'll probably have a similar situation. And you have a cross over with this game a little bit, but we're looking at their defense, so it really doesn't help us. We take a peek on those guys to have a little idea. But really my focus is on Ohio State, evaluating what we did in the last six weeks and what they're doing now. So the hardest thing is trying to stay on task.

Q. Fast pace offense, you guys seem much more set with that. Did you practice that in camp? (Marc Morehouse, Cedar Rapids Gazette)

PHIL PARKER: Yeah, it's a lot easier. There's nobody in a panic situation. You can get the calls done quicker. And there's no more huddling in college football. The kids get rested a little bit more, they don't run back to the huddle,

run back to position, you're saving a lot of time and effort that's being wasted.

Q. How do you assess Reggie Spearman? (Tom Kakert, hawkeyereport.com)

PHIL PARKER: I see a talented player. He's got a great ability and I just like the way he goes about his approach, the game of football. He was a good player in high school. And he's done some good things for us.

Q. You have one year in the box and how you're back on the sidelines. What is the advantage there? (John Patchett, hawkeyemic.com)

PHIL PARKER: Direct contact with the players. Ability to relate to them and I've got a better feel for the game when I'm downstairs on the field. I like being around the guys. I want to make sure I get in front of them and make sure I get my point across when I need to get my point across. The faster you can give them feedback the better off you are.

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