

April 9, 2014



An Interview With:

CHRIS WHITE

CHRIS WHITE: Good afternoon. Before I start with this year's class, I just want to take one minute just to talk about last year and how enjoyable it was for me coming here as my first year. I've been coaching for 25 years, and really that was the most enjoyable year I've ever had coaching. There's a lot of things that went into it. You start with the head coach, and I knew Coach Ferentz personally before I came here, and he's just a tremendous leader as you all know. The one thing that sticks out in my mind is trust with him, and what he does is he trusts his assistants to do what they need to do. He's not eyebrowing everyone. He makes you accountable, but he trusts that you're going to get the job done. That's a great feeling to have as an assistant coach.

We have a great staff here, guys who are very loyal to the head coach, they're loyal to the players, they care about their players, and I think the players felt that from us, and the players themselves just -- I've never been around a bunch of kids who are committed, competitive, doing the things we ask them to do. They bought in, and it was so much fun coaching these guys. I just wanted to put that out there before we started.

This is a new year for us, obviously. From all indications from the strength and conditioning over the past few months, Coach Doyle is very pleased with what's going on. Certainly the first six practices have been outstanding in the coaches' eyes.

I think the thing that sticks out to me with my players in particular, the running backs and the specialists, is that there's great competition. We have depth at the running back position right now. We have experience at the running back position right now. And we have some young guys who are

trying to make a move and earn their niche at the running back position.

We can talk about each one specifically as you go along here, but we're really happy with the running backs themselves. And then the fullbacks, they're the heartbeat of our football team. On offense for sure, between Macon and Adam, they just bring an energy and a physicalness, and the players just thrive off of that. Couldn't be happier with the fullback situation.

The specialists, we've got great competition there. Obviously Mike and Casey have graduated, and we have some questions that need to be ironed out here in the next couple weeks, and then into training camp with some new faces. We did bring in a junior college punter. We felt that Connor Kornbrath needed to be pushed, and it's helped Connor the first six practices for sure. Dillon Kidd is in heavy competition with Connor right now. Tyler Kluver has taken on the long snapping responsibilities. We have a young man coming in as a walk-on next year to help him, as well.

We've got great competition. Our guys are really driven. They're hungry, and I think that we just want to take it the next step forward.

Q. Speaking of the younger guys at back, who are some of the guys that pop out to you that you say this might be a guy that can help us next year?

CHRIS WHITE: Well, obviously Akrum Wadley and Jonathan Parker. They're different types of backs that I don't think we've had here in a while. They have explosive speed, quickness, make-you-miss ability. We feel they have the ability to take a play beyond its design, which obviously helps on offense where you can take a 10-yard run into a touchdown. Those two guys, we want to get a great evaluation of them. Akrum at the end of the season last year, he had an injury that required surgery, and he hasn't had the full

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off-season with Coach Doyle, but Jonathan has done a nice job for us.

Barkley Hill is healthy again. He had a nice scrimmage; we tackled the other day and he really did a nice job. He was physical, had some really solid runs there. So those are really the three young guys.

And then I'm thinking of LeShun Daniels, as an older guy, but he's only a freshman, and he's a special kid. From the way he came in and how he picked everything up and how he approached his business this off-season, he's kind of transformed his body a little bit. He's very muscular, as you know, but he's really worked on trying to be more flexible in the upper body and lower body, and I think it's really helped him out, and you can see it on the field. He's explosive, he's faster, and he's making better cuts.

Q. How do you want to share the load this year with the running backs? Early in the year we saw Weisman carry 30 times for a couple games, we saw Bullock hurt a little bit, then Canzeri picked it up at the end of the year. Do you have a better idea how you want to share the load?

CHRIS WHITE: I wish I did. It's a good problem to have, obviously, with the depth that we have. I think everyone in the room would agree that we probably wore Mark out a little bit. His productivity diminished a little bit after the Michigan State game. He stuck his cleat in the ground a little bit and hurt his foot, and he had a stretch for four or five games where we really didn't practice him a lot, and it showed on the field, and he didn't get as many reps. But I thought he finished the season well against Michigan and Nebraska.

But you know, we're trying to figure that out right now. That's a great question. Jordan coming in, providing a spark obviously helped. I wish there was one guy that could do it all, I really do. It would make my job easier, but all the other guys in the room would not be happy.

But I think LeShun is coming along, and we'll see what happens there. The young guys, we've got to find a role for them if they're going to be able to help our football team win games, which I think they can.

Damon Bullock is a valuable player on our football team, he really is. He does a great job in pass protection, he runs routes real well, catches the ball out of the backfield, and he's working on some things in the running game that we pointed out in the off-season that he needs to work on.

Q. With all this depth and experience, what do you do with an offense to expand the gameplan?

CHRIS WHITE: I've never called plays as a coordinator in college, but it's tough to do your game plan and say, I want this guy to run this play, I want this guy to run that play as you're in the flow of the game. What we're trying to do is specifically for the two younger kids, we're trying to find out where we can put them, whether it be in the backfield or whether it be in some of the fly motion stuff and sweeps and bubble screens and things like that.

But as far as the offense, the offense is the offense. We did a nice job off-season with research and development. We put in a few different plays, and what we're trying to do is even the tempo even more from all different personnel groupings, whether it's one tight end in the game, three wide receivers, two tight ends, three tight ends, we want to be able to play as fast as we can in all personnel groupings, which I think will help.

Q. What did you learn about Canzeri last year that maybe you didn't know last spring?

CHRIS WHITE: I always knew he was a talented running back. He was just kind of stuck because Mark was playing well early, Damon had his role as a 3rd down really one-back back, and we got to a point in the Wisconsin game where things weren't happening for us, and Jordan came in there and ripped off a run.

But you know, I've talked with him about things that were concerning with him. He's not the biggest guy in the world, but he's strong. He's 190 pounds. We felt that pass protection was a concern, and he's addressed that. But what I've learned from him is that he's a really good running back. He was instinctually probably the best running back we have in terms of seeing things and making his cuts and having the balance that we want with bursting through a hole. He's a talented kid.

Q. You mentioned Mark and Jordan here, the four guys below. Is moving Damon Bullock to wide-out something that's still on the table or does he finish up as a running back?

CHRIS WHITE: I know you guys have asked this question a lot. Damon is a running

back, and especially at this point in his career, to think you can throw a guy out from running back to wide receiver just because he's athletic and he can catch, I see what you're seeing, but it's a lot of work to it, and he's not really built that way. He's 205 pounds and he's got a running back body. He'd have a lot of work to do releasing at the line of scrimmage, reading coverage, all the things that go into being a wide receiver.

But we realize what he can do, and we're trying to get him isolated out there.

Q. What are the some of the things you look for at the punter situation?

CHRIS WHITE: We're trying to be fair to both of them. They're competing every day, whether it's in practice or specifically after practice. We're charting every punt, and any time we're outdoors we have to chart their hang times and their distances. We've got it all tabulated. Each day we'll give them their averages and hang times and distances and really where we feel those guys are. At the end of spring we'll let them know where we feel they are. It's not going to be a done deal until training camp. I know that for sure.

Connor would be the first one to admit it, he was inconsistent last year. He had some really fine moments where he punted the ball extremely well, but then there was times where his hang time hurt us. We've got to get more consistency out of the punter, and it's hard. There's a lot of windy games in the Big Ten, and we just felt that it was important for our football team, specifically our defense, where we've got to change the field with field position, and we felt we needed to have him compete against someone.

Q. Iowa has had a lot of success putting running backs in the NFL. Does that ever hurt you in recruiting?

CHRIS WHITE: Not that I know of. I think what we try to sell is our brand of football, and if you're a running back, wouldn't you want to at least look at our place, with our style, our offensive line? So I haven't heard that, and it might be out there. But as far as the kids we're recruiting, like Markel, he wanted to be part of this thing because we're going to feature 25, 35 runs a game, and from a pro set offense. I think that those true running backs want that because they know that you're not going to be in a spread system in the NFL. I don't know why, but I think that in the future there's some NFL running backs here.

Q. Is Mark Weisman still in the mix at fullback? I know with all the running backs it's different every game, but is he still in the mix with Adam and Macon?

CHRIS WHITE: We talked about that. Right now we feel good about our two fullbacks, Adam Cox and Macon Plewa. I'm not an NFL scout, but Mark's future is at fullback, I believe. I really do. He can go in there at the drop of a dime and play fullback for us. It's old hat for him.

So in practice specifically, we don't want him taking some fullback reps where he might get injured because that's a violent position.

Q. Kickoff returns, are you looking at Jordan Canzeri there? Are some of these other backs maybe in the mix?

CHRIS WHITE: That's a good question, too. We started off last year where we just had Jordan Cotton as the one returner with really two fullbacks back there, but we'll have a primary returner and Jordan Canzeri will be one of those guys for sure, and obviously Parker and Wadley will be guys. Damond Powell will get a shot. There's a couple wide receivers, Derrick Mitchell, Andre Harris. Those red-shirted kids, there's some talent there, and we really expect to have a really good returner back there.

So we will probably have two, one being the primary guy and the other being the non-primary guy.

Q. Kick returns last year was ranked overall 101 in the nation at the end of the year. Probably not what you're shooting for.

CHRIS WHITE: I don't know if we jumbled a lot up front. Some of it was injury related in the back end. If you really take a good look at the stats, there was a lot of situations where there were short kicks, there were squib kicks, sky kicks. Numbers lie, but we need to improve there. We hit some good ones. I thought we kept getting better towards the end of the year, and obviously in the bowl game that was big for us.

But there were some big returns that we had in crucial games like the Michigan game that really helped us. But we've got to be more consistent. There's no question about that.

Q. Is that the same with kick coverage?

CHRIS WHITE: Yeah. I really thought we were pretty good at the end of the year on kick

coverage. We found the right guys, and I thought that Mike did a good job of kicking. But early on in the year it was scary at times.

Q. How much of that is teaching guys how to cover kicks and then just finding the right guys to put in those positions?

CHRIS WHITE: Well, that's all we're doing right now this spring is trying to evaluate in competition drills in space; guys who can what I call transition from speed to balance. You've got to be running full speed and then all of a sudden there's got to be a point in time where you need to transition from going 100 miles an hour to be making a left- right-hand turn. We call it long stride, short stride. Long stride, as fast as you can, then you've got to start short stride and drop your weight. It's interesting the drills we set up, you can really identify guys who can transition right from speed to balance and guys who can't, who struggle with it, and that's the hardest thing you do. You've got to find out the top guys who can do that, and that's all we're doing in spring mostly. We're doing punt and then competition drills in space.

Q. When you get a running back, for example, LeShun, how much can they change what they are, what they come in as to what they finish as? Can you teach a guy or help a guy gain lateral movement? Can you help a guy gain flexibility, stuff like that?

CHRIS WHITE: Yeah, I think there's a whole lot, just from last year to this year we did a couple new drills that we introduced that are really helping, just showing up on tape. After the season was over, for each player that ran the ball, I made a cut-up of them from their best game to their lowest game, and we watched every single play. Mark was like 200 something plays, whatever. I graded everyone, made comments on everyone, and the bottom line was we didn't finish the runs well enough because we weren't in a good base. Our feet were together. We were stopping our feet and we weren't being able to move. So I just created a couple drills this off-season, and it's really showing up on tape. Mark has made some phenomenal runs, jump cutting, getting up in there, looking really fluid right now, and I really believe it's because of the drills we're doing.

I think if you couldn't help them, then coaching is overrated. I really think you can help.

Q. What about reads? Different guys see different things during a game, I'm sure

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they come back to you on the sidelines, you ask them what they see, they probably tell you different things. How much can the reads improve? I know they're similar, Mark going into his third year as a running back and I'm sure the reads haven't changed that much for him. How do you fix that, improve it, when you're really not tackling in practice, too?

CHRIS WHITE: I don't understand fix it.

Q. How do you grow it, I guess?

CHRIS WHITE: Well, it's just repetition. You've got to train your eyes. The biggest thing with our offense is hitting your landmarks and reading the proper linemen. For the inside zone specifically, you need -- young kids have a tendency to not, what we call, press the hole. They're impatient, so they get the handoff, they see what they want, they see where they want to go, and they go there right now. Well, you have to affect the linebackers and the defensive line so you need to push it up in there and then jump it or stay play side, if your read tells you to stay play side, if you're reading the 3 technique and wereach the 3 technique, we're going to stay play side; 3 technique doesn't get reached we've got to jump it back. I don't know if that answers your question. I guess it's just reps.

Q. Talk about what you're seeing from Marshall as you replace Mike Meyer.

CHRIS WHITE: First of all, he's a tremendous worker. He's great in the weight room. He's completely focused. He knows this is a huge opportunity for him, and he wants to take advantage of it. He's got a really strong leg, he really does. The ball jumps off his foot. He needs to work on his consistency. At times his ball flight isn't good and sometimes he doesn't get the lift on the ball he needs to, and he knows all that stuff and he's really working hard at it. He's a worker now, and he's a great athlete, too. I'm looking forward to seeing him compete in training camp with Mick Ellis.

Q. How are you able to be a very effective recruiter right out of the gate?

CHRIS WHITE: I don't know. There's ties back there. I've known a lot of those coaches for a long, long time, and that certainly helps. I think Iowa kind of sells itself. People don't believe that, but there is a perception on the East Coast that

might be a little bit different than here at times. I think perception is pretty good here, but the kids back there, first of all, they love the Big Ten, and now that Maryland and Rutgers are there, I think that's only going to help us.

But it's just building relationships with kids. This Twitter thing, my wife is so mad at me, it's all I do at night is I get on Twitter and message these kids. We are doing a really good job, I think, of putting creative stuff out there right now. Max Allen, really all he does is he's on his iPad and PhotoShop and everything, and we're just brainstorming how do we get to these kids, what do we do, and we try to come up with something different every day. The bottom line is once they get on campus, it's pretty easy, and especially once we get the new facility and everything, I think it's going to be even better.

But it's all about the people here, and it starts from the head coach. Coach Ferentz is amazing. He's great in home visits, and the families just feel comfortable, and they trust him, and that's what ultimately we try to do.

Q. You mentioned all the Twitter, PhotoShop, things like that. Is there a mentality of staying ahead of the game, doing things before the NCAA says, oh, you can't do that anymore?

CHRIS WHITE: I don't know about the NCAA, but we're trying to stay ahead of our competitors. These kids, all they do, they get the stuff from us, and then all of a sudden they tweet it out there and then your rivals, like whoever, Michigan, Ohio State, they see it, do you see what Iowa just put out. Before that -- they're too late, but we do the same thing, seeing what these guys are putting out. Just trying to get their attention.

But mostly it's information stuff, the kids like to see -- they like to see their pictures on stuff. That's what they do.

Q. You're noticing that buzz at least in the social media arena with some of the things you're doing. Are you getting that feedback from prospects, too?

CHRIS WHITE: Oh, yeah, it's great. It's fun. Again, Max Allen, I can't tell you enough how good a job he's done for us. And he's a one-man machine, too. He works -- the thing that's hard now is everything is individualized. Before you could send out mass mailings, but these kids want to see themselves in an Iowa uniform. They want to see themselves in like a comic strip or

something, and that's what they like. That's what gets their attention. That's not going to sell them to come here, but it's going to pique their interest, especially for my areas where it's far away, so they say, oh, I might go see Iowa.

Q. Mick is kind of off the beaten tracks, but I know a lot of kickers go to those camps. Is that a direct pipeline?

CHRIS WHITE: There's people you sanction as coaches, and Chris Sailer is one of those in the kicking business. Mick has gone to Chris for a long, long time, and I called Chris up and I told him we're going to have a scholarship for a kicker, and who do you recommend. Mick's name came up, the guys who were available at that time, and he had a really good junior year. He was a little bit banged up his senior year. In high school it's hard, too, sometimes you don't have a snapper or a holder. He's got a really strong leg, I know that. He's going to have every opportunity to come in here and compete with Marshall and Alden.

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