

Penn State University Football Media Conference

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Coach Matt Campbell

Press Conference



MATT CAMPBELL: First and foremost, let me just thank everybody for being here and certainly all your support here in the last two months. It's been a whirlwind in a lot of different ways, but really appreciate all you do and the coverage of obviously Penn State football.

One little nugget I want to say: Obviously happy National Women and Girls in Sports Day. A girls' dad who's the father of two student-athletes, a senior track athlete and a sophomore basketball and track athlete, and obviously have eight wonderful and amazing women that are leading in our football program and on our current staff. We're really grateful for each and every one of them.

The last two months, like I said, has been a whirlwind in a multitude of different ways. It's the last time I probably have seen everybody in one place at one time. It's been a lot, and it's been a joy to watch this thing come together.

I would say the beginning part of it was trying to figure out, unify and align a football team, and we put a lot of time and effort into both our Penn State roster and then, as a lot of you have covered us know, there's been about 55 additions to build a football team for this current football season.

I feel like we went with the mentality of not wavering from who we want this football team to be, what the value systems of character -- man, young men that love the sport of football, young men that love Penn State, and I would say most importantly, young men also that know and understand the value of an education from this institution. Those core values were really critical for us to kind of build this football team forward.

I think the second piece of it has been putting a coaching staff together. I know you'll get a chance to meet a lot of those guys this afternoon, and I look forward to you guys getting to spend some time with them.

But really with a very similar value system. Men that understand the value of the growth and development that it takes to develop a football team, first and foremost,

certainly guys that have a great passion for teaching 18- to 22-year-olds, and then I'd say the last piece of it is understanding that this is bigger -- this is a transformational journey, taking a young man from man to man is still critical in college football, and making sure that we had a coaching staff that's aligned and unified to those values and to those goals.

Those are really what we've been doing here over the last two months, and we're really excited to be finally off the road here the last couple days to be back with this football team. Our team has been training, and we're about three and a half weeks into the training journey for this football team.

Obviously the next big step is winter conditioning here in the next couple weeks, and then the opportunity to get into spring football, so I know we'll get to see you guys a lot at that point, as well.

With that said, I'll open it up to questions you guys may have for me.

Q. You mentioned the whirlwind. I was just wondering what these two months have been like for you, your staff, but also, how do they compare to when you took over Toledo and Iowa State? What has been unique about the last two months?

MATT CAMPBELL: Yeah, I think the uniqueness has been just the landscape we're in is so completely different, and that's not a positive or a negative; it's just different. Obviously when you took over the last two programs you didn't have a transfer portal.

The Toledo job you kind of came in in a situation where you were currently on staff. I would also say you didn't know what the heck you were doing. You were 31 years old, and a lot of you guys may say I don't know what the heck I'm doing later on at some point anyways. But the reality of that is that was its own experience.

I think the Iowa State experience certainly helped. It was very similar. You kind of came in, and again, I think sometimes you can have a sense of ego and entitlement sometimes in coaching. You guys probably know that,



where you think you have all the answers.

The reality is you don't have all the answers. I think what Iowa State taught me is you have to go in and you have to figure out what was going on, what are the positives, what are the areas of growth, and how do you make the right moves moving forward.

I think that's what I took that I learned from my Iowa State experience into this experience, that you don't have all the answers. You certainly know who you are and what your vision to build a program is, but how do you know what are the right moves until you know where they're at, where we're at and where we need to move ourselves forward to.

I think that's probably the carryover or similarities taking over here. But I think the difference, obviously, was probably the player acquisition piece. How do you build a current team to move forward? How do you build a foundation? Again, there's probably some areas that you wish you didn't have to deal with, and then there's probably some other areas you're really grateful that you had the ability to deal the way we were able to deal with to build the best team we possibly could to move ourselves forward, and this team has got to be a great foundation for the vision forward of Penn State football.

Q. You talked about the whirlwind of the last two months I guess it was. What are the next few weeks going to be like? You touched on that a little bit, but can you go into a little bit more detail, and how difficult is it to shift gears from acquisition, building a staff, to the nuts and bolts of getting this team ready?

MATT CAMPBELL: Well, I think it's just the world we live in. Whether we just got here or not, it's a whirlwind no matter how it slices, just with the transfer portal, high school recruiting in January, and to be honest with you, coming back, and I think no matter where you're at in college football today, there's going to be some newness to your staff or to your team.

I think that part of it is a reality of college football today. I think the exciting part of it is if you love coaching, you love being around the players. Player development is what your absolute joy of what you get to do.

I think all of us couldn't wait to get back and be off the road and be around this football team. I think the next big piece of this is what we're going to be -- to be honest with you, the fall will challenge, were we able to align and unify this football team as one team. One team, and what does that look like. How do we understand that our mission, our goal is bigger than us.

We sit in the proudest football tradition in all of college football. Do we understand that it's about those that came before us? Do we understand what we play for is bigger than us?

Man, do we understand how do you -- all the other things that come with football, situational football, getting in the best shape of your life, playing for each other, all things that are critically important, and to me that's what's awesome about this time of year is you really get to sink into the foundational building blocks of team and what success looks like in the fall.

It's these dark days that nobody ever gets to see that are the critical moments and the critical time to begin to build football teams.

I can't wait. I think our staff feels the same way, of just really getting back around our football team and beginning to build team.

Everybody uses the buzz word "culture." Culture is not words; it's how you live, it's how you act, it's how you carry yourself. We get to begin to build those foundational blocks within our program, and we're excited about that.

Q. You just mentioned the pride and the tradition with the program. How do you harness those relationships? I'm curious as to the feedback you've gotten and how many people have reached out? What's been that message so far, and how do you utilize those resources?

MATT CAMPBELL: Yeah, I still would tell you, I think those resources are the superpower of Penn State football. Our greatest gift is those that came before us. It's still one of the absolute joys that you have walking in that facility every day and you see the names that have played and coached and the tradition that has come before us.

I'll be honest with you; I've really tried to work really hard and will continue to work really hard at unifying and aligning our history, our former players back involved in our football program, because I think it's so critical. It's what makes Penn State football really special. It's what has made the greatest time and the greatest eras and the greatest moments in this history of Penn State football. It makes it an honor to represent every day.

I know that I need to continue to build that into our football team. We're going to need everybody, and certainly our past coaches, our past players that want to come be a part of this, and we're excited about that.

Q. You mentioned the coaching staff earlier and

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

building that all up. On the offensive side, you brought a lot of those guys with you from Iowa State. What made you think that Taylor is ready to be the offensive coordinator and that those guys are ready for that kind of a jump up to Penn State from Iowa State?

MATT CAMPBELL: Yeah, I would just say this: I think when you watch the success we've been able to have offensively over the last two years, especially with the type of teams we had at Iowa State, I think no matter who we played, where we played, what it played, I think we really gave ourselves great opportunity to have great success offensively.

I think Taylor has proven over his two-year period to be one of the up-and-coming bright minds in all of college football. I think he's got a fearlessness as a play caller, and yet the reality of football today -- sometimes I think we can get lost in offensive and defensive production. It's team. You have to have offense and defensive coordinators and special teams coordinators that understand how we win is win in team football, complementary football.

I think that's one of the great things that it's been awesome to be a part of his growth journey even the last two years, to watch how he's handled games.

Man, there's going to be a time where we're going to have to win the game 9-7 and we're going to have to play to the defense, and there's going to be times where you've got to go win and you've got to win 43-42. We played Miami two years ago in the bowl game and had to win 43-42, and you've got to make the critical calls in the moment, and you've watched him really kind of mature in terms of who he's become as a play caller, great leader of people.

Again, when you put the coordinator title to any of these coaches, I think you're expecting a gentleman and somebody that's got unbelievable leadership ability and the ability to align and unify a group, and Taylor has done a great job of that.

Q. We've seen you all over campus since you got here despite all the effort of putting together a roster and coaching staff. You were just at the hockey game when they had 75,000 people here inside Beaver Stadium. What have you learned about the power of Penn State? How much support goes behind some of these efforts? You've brought a lot of people that don't have Pennsylvania connections; what has their response been like to seeing this?

MATT CAMPBELL: That's a great question. I said to Pat Saturday night after the wrestling match on Friday night

and Saturday's hockey that it's really two of the greatest collegiate sporting events that I've ever been a part of.

I'll start with the wrestling. To watch Cael and his team, to watch this fan base, man, just to watch the excellence that it stands for and to see the fan base be so educated on what's going on, even within the match, was so powerful to watch.

It was really one of those moments that you're just like, wow, how special is this place, the fans, the people, the leadership, the excellence of Cael, the excellence of the young men that are competing, how they competed, how they carried themselves. It was awesome.

Then on the flipside, obviously, for the first time to be in Beaver Stadium, to be able to watch that place fill up, it kind of gave you chills just walking out on that field and seeing how special of an environment that is, to watch Guy, to watch that team compete and play the way they played last weekend.

I would say the same thing. I think the excellence of the competition, what they stood for, how they competed at the very end, I think all those things were great for our players, our staff, everybody to watch and witness, and I think those moments, the more we can do that as a team, the more we can do that as a staff -- again, it all goes back to we only get 12 guaranteed Saturdays in college football, and you have to use all your resources to understand what it means to be your best.

We deal with 18- to 22-year-olds. They're going through a lot. It's not always easy. But when you understand it's bigger than you and you understand what you're playing for is bigger than you, then it gives you a chance to be your best, and I think our staff and our players are learning that every opportunity we get to be engaged in this great community.

Q. Matt, with bringing Rocco back over from Iowa State, how important was it for you to bring that quarterback over, and how does that affect how you build your team, given you have an established veteran in that position?

MATT CAMPBELL: Well, I think the one thing about Rocco is I've always felt this about the quarterback position. I feel that the quarterback and the head football coach have to be tied at the hip. I feel like they have to be tied at the hip because their leadership is so critical to the entirety of the football program.

I think that's even more today than ever in college athletics, and I think we see that in the National Football League.



We're getting two teams getting ready to play on Sunday that their quarterbacks have played great, and they've kind of exemplified the attitude, the effort, the demeanor and the mannerisms of the head football coaches, and it's why they're having success, because they're tied at the hip.

Rocco has always been that for us. Tough, gritty character. I don't think any quarterback in college football coming back has won more times with the last possession of the game than what Rocco Becht has during his time as a starter.

I think for him, what I believe Penn State football is: Integrity, character, class, excellence, grit, he embodies every one of those traits.

To me, I just felt like that was such a critical opportunity for him to finish his career with us and the start of Penn State football and to get somebody that I truly believed embodies what the excellence of this football program has stood for both on and off the field, and I think those things are critically important.

Rocco is a 3.6 student in his business school. He's graduated. Man, his education is really important to him. He's one of the greatest leaders I've ever been around. He played last year. This poor guy had to play with a torn labrum on his non-throwing shoulder. He had to get shot up every Tuesday and Wednesday just to practice the last four weeks in his throwing shoulder and play, and the guy gave us every chance to win every one of those games every step of the way.

He's as tough and as competitive as any football player I've ever been around.

I think he brings those traits with him, and again, I'm really proud of what he's about, and I'm really excited for him to continue to lead and grow within our football program for sure.

Q. Can you take us through your defensive coordinator search? Obviously Coach Heacock retired; did you expect to bring him here? What made you settle on Coach Lynn being the right option to morph what is a staff that includes guys from Iowa State but also from here and elsewhere?

MATT CAMPBELL: Yeah, great question. It was interesting, obviously this whole process with the Penn State opportunity for myself happened really fast. We had actually gotten to the point at Iowa State where Coach Heacock and I, before we went into the season, kind of were on a year-to-year basis about just talking about where we're at, what do you want to do, do you want to keep

going, and he had kind of said before the start of our season this past year that he thought this might be it for him.

Uniquely, we got to the Monday after our last football game at Oklahoma State and had a long conversation and just said, hey, Coach, where do you think we're going to go and where do you feel like we want to go with things. On Tuesday morning we talked and had breakfast, and he said, man, Matt, I think I'm going to retire. So you fast forward, and everything kind of gets crazy for the next three to four days.

He kept teasing our team that he might have another COVID year of eligibility. So when all this went down, we got here on Monday, and after the press conference, I think it was Monday night, I called him, I said, hey, do you want to use any of that eligibility.

He thought about it for a couple days and called back Thursday, Thursday evening, I think, and just said, hey, I don't think I can give you what you need. I feel like retirement, being with my family, I'm ready to do that. So we certainly understood it.

Now, I'm going to try like heck to keep getting him around here and having some of his wisdom, and really from that point on, you kind of went and said, okay, what's best for Penn State football. Where are we going? What are the right names? What are the right people?

Honestly, the first name that came up was Coach Lynn. Obviously from talking to some people that I have great respect for to even in-house of some of our own coaches that had come with me, just felt like that was the No. 1 target for the style of defense we wanted to play, for somebody that understood Penn State football, that wanted to be here, that wanted to be a part of this program, that had a passion for Penn State. I felt like that was critical.

Obviously it took a while to get to where we got to, but Coach Lynn, for him to have to kind of financially give up some things to get here, to kind of come here with purpose and integrity, I don't know if I could be any more excited to be able to lead with him.

Him and Coach Broomfield were together at the Houston Texans. We had hired Coach Broomfield, our safeties coach, from the Houston Texans to come back to Iowa State, which is where he was an alumnus of, and those guys had an incredible relationship, so that made me feel really good about it. I know Terry and D'Anton had had a relationship prior to, so that made me feel really good about it.

I think from that point on, it was just a process of trying to get to, is this right for you, for your family, is this the right time.

Schematically, I think we see the game very similarly. But I think most importantly, you talk about leadership, excellence, what do you stand for, do you believe in the development of 18- to 22-year-olds, how do you see us winning the game, can we be a great team together, and then I think all those things were no-brainers for us.

Q. When you look back on the transfer portal process, it was rapid fire for a lot of us, too, trying to figure out what you guys were targeting and what you needed. What is your role, your involvement with the portal in terms of working hand in hand with Derek, and what are your general thoughts on the 39 transfers you guys were able to bring in?

MATT CAMPBELL: Yeah, that's probably one of my favorite things because it's my responsibility who comes into the program and building the program, both holistically for right now, and then obviously where we're going.

It was exhausting. There was probably a lot of sleepless nights and there was a lot of -- it was going fast and furious. But I think the biggest thing that we tried to do a great job of and maybe where we had a little bit of advantage is trying to figure out first and foremost before we worried about the portal was what is happening with our own football team.

That was a challenge. You're talking about our team had been kind of, like, picked at for the last three months. You can certainly tell that, as you guys are finding out, there are really no rules in recruiting, so it certainly looks like they've been recruited for the last three months, and yet the reality of some of those guys deciding to say, you know what, Coach, we love Penn State, we want to stay here, and we want to lead forward with you, and that was really huge.

I give Terry a lot of credit. To obviously the success to have some momentum leaving the football season was really positive, and some of those guys, you saw how they played in the bowl game, and a lot of those guys are the guys that demanded and decided that they wanted to come back and lead forward.

I think knowing who was coming back was critically important because it allowed us then to say, okay, how do we go build a team. Let's not just acquire team, let's build a football team and build a team where -- we just got done talking before we came over here, where I think you see, it looks like a team. It's not senior-laden heavy. It's got good

layers. We're young in still some areas. We were able to get with some guys with some years that culturally fit us.

I think the biggest thing I told you guys at the beginning. We cannot be willing to just take talent without character. We have to lay a foundation to who Penn State football wants to be and where we want to go going forward and making sure we dotted every I and crossed every T.

I think, again, where I thought we did a really great job is making sure that not only were we finding the right guys but making sure once we built the team it was the right human beings that fit us.

I think structurally, we're definitely going to have that because, again, that's where the head coach -- an X receiver has got to have these values; a Z receiver has got to have these values; a left guard has got to have these values. Man, an interior D-tackle has to have these values.

I think that's the nice thing, and I think that's what has helped us really whether we were at Toledo or Iowa State or here, is clearly defining what you're looking for, not only as a human being but also positionally, and then to recruit to those value systems, and I think that helped us a lot, too.

Q. You just talked about D'Anton, a former Penn State player, and why he's here. We kind of learned what you felt about Terry at your introductory press conference, Terry Smith. I wanted to ask you about a couple other Penn State guys that are on your staff: Dan Connor, Trace McSorley. Why was it important to you to make sure they were part of your first staff?

MATT CAMPBELL: Great question. I mean, I think one of the things that I really enjoyed after our press conference, the last time I saw everybody, was really Tuesday -- Monday night and all day Tuesday and really into Wednesday morning, was to interview and to talk to every single coach in our program, because again, I think you have a vision of how you want to build your staff, but until you get to talk about who is currently sitting within a staff, who can help us navigate a pathway forward -- I met with Dan Connor, and it took two seconds to say, this human gets it. He is Penn State football, what he stands for, what he talks about excellence looking like, what's gone well, what are some of the areas that need to move forward.

I think Dan was so articulate in where this program is, why he loves Penn State football, what it did for him, and honestly, how he envisions this program moving forward. It was such a great match.

I think Trace, the same thing. I think Trace is just starting

how special his career has got the ability to be. You talk about one of the winningest quarterbacks, and in my mind I kept thinking about him and Rocco have very similar traits of, like, the human being and what they're about and the impact that he could have in a positive way on Rocco.

There's been times I've got to Trace, like man, what have you seen, like give me some insight on your thoughts on what's gone well, what hasn't gone well, how do we move ourselves forward.

I think those have been huge wins for us. Alan Zemaitis has done the same thing in terms of the recruiting office, and his experiences both as a player here -- we were just talking about Coach Paterno's camps back in the day and what that looked like and evaluating the East Coast recruiting and some of the things that he talked about, to just the impact that he's already had on recruiting and what it means to play here.

So we're really fortunate. The gentlemen that decided to stay, they've been huge inputs, and we're really grateful that those guys have stayed put because to me, I think there's a great identification on how do you build program, what do you believe in. Those guys embody it.

For me to be able to have that wisdom, to have that experience, to have living proof of what the power of Penn State excellence looks like on our staff, it's been really fortunate to have for me.

Q. Just wondering if you could discuss your philosophy about spring practice. Do you believe in a competitive spring game? Also, has your family joined you here?

MATT CAMPBELL: Yes. Let's go two and then I'll go to one. One can get me in trouble; two won't. My family is here, so we're finally settled in. Last Thursday night I came off the road recruiting, and we're actually in a house, so it felt like I was a normal human being for the first time in two months.

To have them here has been awesome, and they're off to a great start, which I'm really grateful. Again, this community has wrapped their arms around us, and I appreciate that.

Spring practice, I am a huge believer. Anytime you have 15 practices, the unbelievable value of what spring practice has to look like, especially as you build a team, I think critically important.

I think what I've always believed in that 15th practice is what does that look like. I do think it's critically important for us. Pat and I are deciding how we'll do the Blue and

White game and what that'll look like. We'll certainly do something, and that information will get out here hopefully next week in terms of what that will look like.

But I think it's really important for our kids to be in that stadium with our fans. I don't want the first time Rocco Becht to throw a pass is his first game in there with fans. I think it's really important for this team to be able to get out there.

Again, we've got a lot of guys coming off of injury, so what does that look like. How do we go practice? But I think for our fan base to see us on that field and for us to be able to be out in that stadium with our fans, I think, before we play a game I think is absolutely critically important.

We will certainly do something. What that'll look like probably will base a lot on our health of where we're at at that point, and then making sure we do a great job of getting out there and getting great work in, no matter what it is. We've got to make sure we get value out of that 15th practice.

Q. We're so accustomed to seeing Nick Singleton and Kaytron Allen lead the way at running back. Can you tell us what stood out to you about Carson Hansen, a guy you're obviously familiar with, and then James Peoples coming over, as well, those two? Then if I could tack on a little Savon Huggins, what stood out about him as a position coach to you, and what do you think he can do for his room?

MATT CAMPBELL: The first thing I asked Savon is does he have any eligibility; can we use you a little bit. I know we lost these two big, good-looking guys that had great careers here at Penn State. But we're excited about Coach Huggins coming on board.

I think the first thing I would say about him is just from a gentleman that, number one, regionally has such a great understanding of this region; number two, went through the recruiting process in a really high way, the No. 1 recruit in the country, went through recruiting and had his ups and downs. I think that's what I love about Savon is, like, why do you coach. It's like, man, what I learned through my collegiate journey.

I think you can tell the respect that he had at Boston College to be able to be retained over three different staffs I think says a lot about his character, who he is, what he's about. It shined through in the interview process.

We felt like we hit a grand slam in terms of getting Savon to come on board, and his family. They fit us culturally, and I certainly believe they fit the Penn State way of doing

things.

I'd say the next thing about that room, Carson Hansen, Carson is one of those guys that played as a true freshman for us at Iowa State and came in, and we asked him to do a lot as a true freshman. Was a 3rd down back, and his role kind of exploded as the season went on.

Then I think you saw him really start to take off his sophomore and junior year. He became the absolute workhorse, became the one -- just was a guy from a physical standpoint, was one of the most trusted players in our football program. Probably had we played a bowl game would have rushed for well over 1,000 yards this past year. He's durable. He's tough. He's physical. He's got great vision. He's got the ability that if you need him to carry the ball 40 times in a game, he can do it. He's a guy that's a single-wing high school football team where the guy was doing it his whole high school career.

I think what you'll get from Carson is a guy that's about as trusted as you're going to find. He's a great downhill runner.

We were really excited when the James Peoples situation came into play. James we knew of, and as their season ended and his name was going into the transfer portal, there was a lot of excitement from our end because we thought, man, could we get a great complement to Carson, a guy that, as well as a great downhill runner who's physical, and man, he's a really impressive build, but also has got that kind of ability to hit a home run anytime he touches the ball. He's got great receiving ability. He's got the ability to be a great catcher out of the backfield. He is physical enough to block on 3rd down, and he's also a guy that can run inside and outside and has the ability to do really special things.

I think what you feel like is you've got a great one-two punch. And then where does Quinton come? Where does he go? One of the things I've challenged him is physically taking his body from 195 to he should be a 220-pound tailback. He should be a big, physical tailback. I'm really proud of him. I think we weighed in today, he was 209 already, so I think he's a guy that's been totally bought in.

Again, we all mature differently, and you come off a great bowl game and the success he had in the bowl game, and I think you see a guy that's, like, determined to do special things.

I'm excited about the competition. Obviously we get Cam Wallace coming back. I think Cam finally getting healthy and totally being back into play, I'm excited about what he brings to the table. You talk about a first-class human

being.

Then obviously with Sheffey coming on board and honestly just what he's done, for a young pup to be in here in three weeks and physically hug you and watch his body keep coming forward, we thought that was a big win for us, just what he's about, his pride being here and being a part of this program.

I like that room. We're excited about it. I think there's a lot of competition. I think it will all sort itself out as we kind of work through spring ball and fall camp, but to have those guys, those top three guys who have proven it -- Cam, a really talented guy that I think injuries have kind of delayed maybe some of the maturity that he's wanted so far in the program, and then a really talented young freshman, we're excited about where that room has got the ability to grow forward into.

Q. You mentioned D'Anton Lynn a little bit earlier and I wanted to ask you a follow-up on that. You mentioned the identity you want to play with. His defense has been pretty varied over the last three years as to what its identity is. I'm curious from your perspective, what do you view as your identity, and is that versatility a part of what you're looking for from your defensive coordinator?

MATT CAMPBELL: Great question. You know, I believe in multiplicity. I think sometimes we can get lost in the what are we. What great teams are, what great offense and defenses do is they highlight the players and the playmakers on each side of the ball. That's what they do.

I think the thing that I love about D'Anton Lynn is his variability, his ability to have consistency, and I think you see a confidence that his defense plays with, and you saw that at UCLA, you saw that at USC and the improvement that they were making during his time there. But you also saw the ability to structurally dictate and navigate the pace of the game at times because he could vary the fronts, he could vary how the run fits were looking.

I feel like you have to -- man, in college football there's injuries every week. Man, who's the best player, what are you defending on defense. Man, some teams are 10, 11 personnel and you're going to defend it one way. Some teams are 12 and 13 personnel, and you've got to defend it another way.

You're talking to a guy that had to evolve defensively from trying to go be a 4-2-5 guy with not guys that are good enough to do that in the Big 12, and you found out real quick you'd better change, and you reinvented ourselves defensively, and we found a way to play defense in the Big

12.

Well, if you watched us, we had to reinvent ourselves the last two years because the Big 12 all of a sudden became a 12 and 13 personnel league where you had tailbacks and all of a sudden everybody was playing like we were with tight ends and kind of wanted to smash you.

Man, we had to figure out, that middle safety looked good when you were playing all these spread teams, but when they're running for four to five yards a pop, man, how do you get that middle safety out of there and get him into the fit. You just had to grow and adapt.

I think a lot of it for me was awesome to be able to go through the evolution that we have. Football is cyclical. It always is going to be. The more you have the ability to defend everything and then have the players that give you the ability to defend everything, I think that's really important. But you also have to have the guy at the top that can be able to put those guys in place to have that kind of success.

That's my biggest thing. You guys will hear me say it probably, and I'm sure I'll get a lot of heck for it as we go forward, but players, formations, plays. Who are the players? What formations are we going to get in? It doesn't matter if it's offense, defense or special teams. And what plays are going to get called. When you don't play by that model, I think it's really tough to have success. When you do, highlight the players, put them in the best position to be successful, and man, let the players go win the games on Saturdays. Those are how you have to play football, and it doesn't matter in what phase.

Q. You just did the breakdown for the running backs room. Now could you do the rest of the roster?

MATT CAMPBELL: Where do you want me to start? (Laughter.)

Q. You just said, players, formations, plays. Who are the players on this team? Just the wide view, where did this roster get better in the last two months? Who did you bring in, leaders, that sort of thing? Who are these guys?

MATT CAMPBELL: Honestly, I think a lot of that, I think it's unfair until we -- the one thing we're all, at least in our football building, all of us are going through, there's a common thread, and it's change. Until you go through change and really know who we are and what we are -- you may have been one thing at Ohio State or one thing at Iowa State or even one thing here, but we're all going through the same common denominator, and that common

denominator we're going through is change.

How you handle change and how you grow through change I think will really dictate who those players are. Do I feel really good about our roster? Boy, I do. I feel like I think we have a really competitive roster.

I feel like we gave health to the quarterback room here, from top to bottom. I feel like we were able to do the same thing with losing some great players at running back.

I think at tight end, you bring in a Mackey Award finalist, and you pair it with Rapp, who's one of the best tight ends in the country, then another NFL tight end in Gabe Burkle who tears his ACL in the Tennessee game, now you'd say he's one of the top 10 tight ends in all of college football.

Cooper Alexander was one of the highest recruited tight ends in the country coming out of high school. We feel like that's a room that's got great flexibility and ability.

At wide receiver, I think, again, you look at the production of Sowell and Eskildsen and what that group has stood for and then the talent of Koby Howard and Zay Robinson and Karon Brookins, and I feel like there's competition there; how does that competition evolve, who comes out of it, what is their top-end ability.

I think that's an area we feel really confident in because man, for the last 10 years, that receiver room at Iowa State, that's been our staple, and I know we're coming to a place where we've kind of got to reshape that a little bit and bring that back to life.

I think Terry's excellence in terms of keeping that corner room together, I think you guys know how special that corner room has got the ability to be. Those guys are young. Those guys are talented. Jahmir Joseph, you can go down the line, Zion Tracy, A.C. Collins, what those guys got the ability to be.

But the competition that's coming out of that room is going to be nothing short of excellent.

We totally reshaped the D-line. I think my vision, our vision, bigger and physical. This is the Big Ten; you've got to stop the run. We've got to be big and physical in there. I feel like especially on the interior portion of the defensive line, I think we totally reshaped things.

Coach Malloe was a huge help with that, obviously, coming over from UCLA, and D'Anton, those guys putting that together, but to have Dallas come on board and what he did at Utah, see Ollie in terms of the physical presence of that room, and depth.

I think there's three or four deep that we feel like there's going to be great competition. How does that room grow itself forward? Does Ty Blanding take another step forward? Man, that's going to be great to watch.

I think defensive end, it started by keeping that young talent home. I think getting loane to stay home was huge. For that kid to start in the Big Ten and play the way he did last year was nothing sort of special, and I think he's an anchor.

Max Granville, where does he continue to go? To be able to add the pieces we were able to add around that to create competition, again, three deep was kind of our mindset. We'd better be able to create it in this league, to be able to play our schedule and be able to be our best every Saturday, and how does that room grow and develop.

You saw that, man, we hired two big-time defensive line coaches. Coach Malloe to really be centered around the interior piece of it, and man, Christian Smith was the D-line coach at Northwestern, and I think everybody that watched that D-line play the last three years and saw how that group grew you'd say is as good as anybody out there.

To have two guys, one to coach the edges and one to coach the interior, we've got to be good up front, and we've got to do great things there.

I'd say the O-line, I know I didn't talk about that. I think we feel as good about that room as any room. Man, to be able to keep those guys, to get Donkoh to come back and what he's about, that guy, you want to talk about who's the leader, he's the leader. 3.8 student, one of the best players here, has got a chance to be one of the absolute best players in our football program.

Cooper Cousins, what that guy is about, what he's got the ability to become. He's nothing short of elite.

Man, I think there's going to be great competitions at center. You've got Dom Rulli coming back. He's meant a lot, a senior here, loves this place and what it stands for.

Trevor Buhr we thought was one of the best interior O-linemen in the entire country coming back next year and has started for two years and has played as good a football as anybody.

I just think you look at Malachi Goodman, there's another unbelievably talented football player, I think has got high-end potential.

There's almost two and a half deep on that O-line, and I don't know who the starters are going to be, but they're going to have to go earn it, and we're going to have to see who can consistently be the guys. But I think there's great talent in that room.

Man, linebacker, Tony Rojas, we were really fortunate for Tony to come back and want to lead our football program, coming off of surgery, getting himself ready to rock and roll.

I think Tash has got a chance to be one of the great linebackers of all time here. I love his video. I love what he's about. I'd go to fight with that guy right now, today.

I'd like Dan Connor and him to lead the time out at times.

You take that group, and you bring in then some of those Iowa State guys. The years those guys had, I think they played as good as any linebackers in the country last year if you look at the second half of the season with how those guys played with Ebel and Bacon. Those guys are really talented, high-end football players that are going into their senior year.

Then at safety, I think the same thing. Marcus Neal, I don't know if there was a better defensive player in the Big 12 last year. I think what he brings to the table, his physicality, his toughness, his ability to play sideline to sideline.

Jamison Patton, what those guys bring to the table is experience and toughness and I think a great sense of character, and how does that safety room kind of shape out behind those guys. It's going to be really fun to watch.

I think to me globally, and I'm not even talking about special teams, you've got one of the best kickers in the country coming back. We did a great job of adding a great punter. I think Blaise has got a chance to be a great long snapper.

I think there's competition and there's the ability to grow, but we've got to go grow, and we've got to -- like you guys know, like every coach in America is going to tell you how great their team is forever. I'm saying the opposite; we've got really great talent, but we've got to go forward. We're all going through change. We've got to figure out who can do it the most consistently, who can be trusted on 3rd and 1, who can stop the run on 4th and 1, who can run the ball on 4th and 1 on the goal line. Man, who can do those things really good; that's what's going to be really fun about where we're about to get ourselves ready to go into.

You asked to go through it, there's a little bit of it. And I'm sure I missed a couple along the way.

Q. To stick on the defensive side, you mentioned Ikaika. You also have Tyson at linebacker. Those guys were Power Four coordinators last year. How do you convince them to join the staff? Then you also supplemented both those spots with Dan Connor and Christian Smith. How did you land on that dynamic? How important was that?

MATT CAMPBELL: Yeah, you know, and I think those are, again, it's all about the people. I think sometimes we get so lost in our world on titles. It's about aligning the team and the people together. To me, that's one of the things that I least know I can look myself in the mirror and we brought the right leader of young men into our football program.

It's hard to find in college football. It's hard to find because it starts with the coaches and it's equally with the players. Who wants to come together, go to work and not care who gets the credit? Ooh, buddy, if you can find that, you've got a shot. But I think that was the starting point for me.

You're right, Coach Veidt did an unbelievable job at Cincinnati the last two years, rebuilding that defense and what they were able to do, and excited for him to come on board. Coach Veidt's history with us at Iowa State, recruited a lot of those guys, was a great developer of the linebacker position. To have Dan want to stay on board and those two be a great one-two punch, I think that's huge.

Obviously Tyson's ability in the state of Ohio and his recruiting ability and what he's done there has been exceptional. Then I think you flip it over to that D-line. For Coach Malloe to want to come on board, I think you'll find out real fast, he's an energy giver. He's a guy that fills this room with unbelievable energy. He cares about people. He cares about kids. His purpose is far greater than any title, and I really appreciated that.

Christian is the same way. Christian was one of my first captains as a head coach at 31, 32 years old at the University of Toledo, and I've watched this guy become one of the absolute great coaches right now in our profession on the D-line. To have him coaching those edges and knowing how critical the development of that defensive end position is and that D-line position, I just think it would have been a mistake to just have one defensive line coach.

I think they're just too different today, the interior D-line and the exterior D-line, I think you need two really good coaches that can help those guys develop and be their best, both from a recruiting standpoint and from a

developmental standpoint. I think it's absolutely critical.

We got really fortunate to get both of those guys to decide to come here and be a part of this.

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