

Big 12 Conference Football Media Days

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Iowa State Cyclones Matt Campbell Press Conference

MATT CAMPBELL: I'll start off saying really just grateful for you guys hanging around here today. I know it's late in the day, and I'm last here, but really appreciate what you guys do for the Big 12 and certainly those of you that cover our program, what you do for Iowa State football. Really, on behalf of Iowa State University and our football program, I am honored to be here. We have four great young men that have come with us, four fantastic seniors that I brought with me today.

I'd like to talk about these four guys because I think they have been pillars of excellence within our football program. Two of them on defense. First is senior defensive tackle J.R. Singleton, who is a fifth-year senior in our football program, has really just been a phenomenal young man that's had great success within our program, a great senior starter for us.

And then a senior middle safety for us in Beau Freyler. Beau is a young man that was a junior captain a year ago and what I would deem as one of the young men that's given our football program and certainly our defense a warrior spirit in terms of how he goes about his business and certainly what he stood for.

Then on the offensive side of the football, we're grateful to have two great receivers, two senior receivers here, that are representing our program. First is Jayden Higgins, 6'4", big outside wide receiver, a young man really half of the season I thought was maybe as special as any receiver in college football, really played great football for us.

And then also senior, again junior captain a year ago, in Jaylin Noel. Jaylin, just like Beau, a four-year starter in our program, a guy who exudes a standard of excellence in every single thing he does.

Really proud of the young men I brought with me today. Proud of our football team coming back. There's a group



of 18 seniors that have led the way since January. They've been phenomenal in their approach to our football program. Really took a lot of confidence from last year's football season. Spearheaded into the offseason this year, and really our focus has been really our best becoming the standard. And I think when you have so many guys coming back that have played football in our football program, learning how to be your best in everything you do as you prepare for the season, to have great confidence going into the fall, is really special, and this group has been nothing short of exceptional in what they've done.

So excited about our football team and look forward to answering any questions you would have for me.

Q. You've been obviously really close with these Iowa State teams, especially even going back before Purdy, but you've been very close. What do you feel like this team needs to do to get over the hump? And as far as building out the program and the future of it, how secure do you feel about your future at Iowa State?

MATT CAMPBELL: It's been an unbelievable ride here. This is going into my ninth football season here at Iowa State. The first part of that question, I would say, is not only close. We've been there. We've been able to get to the Big 12 Championship game. We've been able to win the regular season conference and we've been really close in a lot of other seasons.

I think as our young team coming off a rough year in 2022 and the way our team and football program responded last year, it was really fun to watch this football team come back to really the standard of who we are and what we've been and what we've been has been really special.

So from that point really excited, and the future of it, you almost take every season one day at a time and one opportunity at a time. Like I said at the beginning of this, just really grateful to be at one place for nine football seasons and the ability to lead something that I think has stood for something that's really special for college football.

Q. As much as I wanted to ask you about your tight ends a third year in a row, you had a top 15 rank in



rush explosives and pass explosives. Iowa State is always a move chains success rate animal. Where do the explosives come from? Will we see it again?

MATT CAMPBELL: The explosiveness comes when you have explosive players. And again you went into last season so young that even you saying that stat, which would have shocked me a year ago just because you didn't know who we were, you knew we had really talented young players, how fast could they mature? But when you talk about certainly the play of the true freshman tailback a year ago in Abu Sama and what he did. There's another true freshman, Carson Hansen, both those guys took the bulk load of snaps at the tailback position, were able to create explosive plays.

You look at the receiver position and what Jayden Higgins became through the entirety of the last football season, end of the last season, dynamic playmaker. And couple him with Jaylin Noel. And then you talk about the true freshman tight end Ben Brahmmer, who we feel has a chance to be as special as anybody.

Then you put that around Rocco Becht and watch what he evolved into from where he was as a redshirt freshman, kind of forced into the starting position to, man, by the midpoint of the season this guy's got a chance to be really special and this guy has a chance to be dynamic in his ability to be a great facilitator of the football to those guys. That's really what occurred last season.

And obviously, yeah, you want to see that continue to grow forward. And I think when you have those players, and some of those players being so young, to see them now grow into their position, it's going to be really fun to watch this fall.

Q. You have a great relationship with a guy like Scott Satterfield and Tyson Veidt, who recently came to Cincinnati. Walk us through what that process was like and your relationship with both of them and how that move came about.

MATT CAMPBELL: I would just say, for me, one of the responsibilities that I feel like as a head football coach is not just to your players and getting them to reach their full potential and be their best, but I feel like it's equally my responsibility of our staff members and continuing to help them get to their goals and aspirations.

And Tyson was such a great anchor for us defensively at Iowa State and what we became and what we've been able to do. Tyson has been with me for nine years. Our nine years at Iowa State and then prior to that was with us for the three years at Toledo.

And obviously Scott and I were together at the University of Toledo. It felt like, number one, close to home back home for Tyson, and, number two, utmost respect for the Cincinnati football program. And, number three, the utmost respect for Scott. I just felt like it was a great opportunity to maybe at least help bridge that gap. Tyson, to his credit, did a great job interviewing for the job, and Scott I think made a great hire. I think they're going to make a great team together, for sure.

Q. In his first season as a starter, Rocco Becht surpassed expectations. How do you see his trajectory moving forward and where can he continue to rise as he heads into his second season as a starter?

MATT CAMPBELL: I think the biggest thing for Rocco is when you finally have videotape of yourself in game action to be able to go back and as an individual and collectively as a coaching staff, go back and really work through, man, what went really well, man, where are you really having success and how do we grow forward. And to me, that is the great reward of coaching and that's the great reward of playing; you're either getting better or you're getting worse.

And to me it's a confidence factor, I think, of playing in those big game moments and being the guy with the ball in the hand making all those decisions, and I think we saw really from the midpoint season on, this guy just really start to flourish and have comfortability in the role of being the starting quarterback.

And I think the other thing is really just the ability to do the common things in an uncommon way. Sometimes I think we get so enamored in all the other things, but taking care of the football, distributing the ball where it needs to go based on what the coverage dictates. Man, in those critical moments, can you be flawless in execution. I think some of those things are what you hope is the next step for Rocco, from going from a redshirt freshman to going into a redshirt sophomore season.

Q. How important is Abu Sama's success to Iowa State as a whole? Do you think he can build off last year well?

MATT CAMPBELL: Yeah, I think when you looked at our football program over the last eight years, when we have been able to run the ball with great success, we have been a really, really dynamic football team.

So when you ask the question how important is Abu, and I would just say our running back room in general, the growth of that room -- because it's still a really young room,

you're talking about two true freshmen a year ago, Carson Hansen being the other one, and you talk about Dylan Lee, a true freshman. We did pick up a veteran, Jaylon Jackson, that came in this year.

But you talk about the growth of that room, we think it's as talented maybe as top to bottom as what we've had at Iowa State. But to watch that room really take a huge step forward is going to be critical.

When you have great balance offensively -- I just heard Coach Gundy talk about it -- man, you really force the defense to have to defend the entire part of the football field. So I think really, really important for us. And again when we've been at our best we've been able to run the football as good as anybody.

Q. I can't remember if 18 or 20 starters you could conceivably have back. How difficult is that to return that many guys in this day and age? Rosters turn over so quickly. Just the novelty of having so many veterans back.

MATT CAMPBELL: I think it's really hard, Barry. And you face challenges, unique challenges that have been just so different from when I started even at Iowa State to where we are today is, a place like Iowa State, the only way you're really going to have success is retention and development.

We just are not going to ever be the people that have the most money or most NIL money. We'll have to be the team that develops our players better than anybody.

And again, when we have been at our best we've been older and been able to keep our guys and get older. Just a great credit to our coaching staff right now, I think a great credit to our senior leadership. We've got a great locker room.

I think there's no way we would have been able to keep or retain the players in our football program and the quality of players in our football program if we didn't have a great locker room and they believing in the coaches and they believing in their teammates and themselves. So we're really fortunate for what we have.

Q. You've imported a couple of Bison guys. First the addition of Tyler Roehl and Eli Green. Could you give me a bit of background on both what their additions could mean to your football team.

MATT CAMPBELL: I'll jump one year back. We were fortunate to bring Noah Pauley, wide receiver coach this season before.

And my history being at Mount Union and certainly our lineage of success and having so much respect for the North Dakota State football program over the years, it was a great starting point when we had some job openings to start there.

Noah really came in and did an exceptional job. I think if you look at our receiver room from where we were when he came in to where we are today, man, we're really special and a lot of credit to Noah Pauley and what he's done in terms of development.

And I think the same thing I would say with Tyler. We not only bring a football coach that's got an exceptional football mind as an offensive coordinator, but you also bring into the running back room, this really talented running back room, a player that was a phenomenal player from Oklahoma State that understands what it means to play at his best to play in the National Football League and to watch his coaching journey.

He didn't start right back there, had to work his way back from the ground up, and fit the mentality of our coaching staff and what both of those coaches have meant to us has been nothing short of exceptional. They brought energy and they brought our same belief system and how do you love, care, serve and empower our players to be the best.

Talk about Eli Green. We're fortunate. That came out of nowhere and all of a sudden a young man that had relationships on our staff, we knew a little bit about Eli from afar, but I think just the ability for us to get a young man that again has played winning championship-level football, a guy that's certainly his role and success within that Bison program was having tremendous success in his work ethic. It's been a great addition to our football program. We're grateful for all three of those guys.

Q. You spoke really highly of Beau Freyler in the past, anchor of your defense, of your program. You called him a warrior for your defense today. I just wanted to ask you, where does he get those character traits and why are those so valuable for your defense?

MATT CAMPBELL: I think what we ask that middle safety position to do in our defense is really unique, and I think there's people that have tried to replicate our defense at times, and maybe have struggled because that position, in my opinion is the key to success.

And what we ask Beau to do, man, fit the run like a true linebacker and yet have the speed and skill to cover in the secondary, that's such a unique skill and trait.

I think the thing that's been really rewarding to watch Beau, Beau came in here started his career running down as like the L-5 on our kickoff, which is not the easiest place to play. That's physical football. And a guy that led our team in special teams tackle as a true freshman and really by the midpoint of the season earned the right to be on the field on defense.

How Beau goes to work every day, what his work ethic in the weight room is, what his commitment to being an authentic leader to his teammates, I think if you asked all our teammates, the guy that's there for all of our kids, the guy that's, man, willing to help others and willing to servant lead our football program, they come back and talk about Beau.

He's not only a guy that leads by example, but he's a guy that's an unbelievable servant leader, willing to pull others with him. To me, I've always defined excellence and greatness by your ability to bring others up with you. And nobody has done it as great in our football program as what Beau has done for us.

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