

University of Iowa Football

Media Conference

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Phil Parker

Press Conference



guy and the two transfers. Can you talk me through each of those three guys and what your impressions have been thus far of those three, Hawthorne and Pace?

PHIL PARKER: Welcome, guys. Thanks for coming out. I know that this is a great time of the year.

Where we're at defensively -- obviously we lost a lot of guys, and I think the good thing is the group we have working right now, different spots between the linebacker crew, the defensive line, and the secondary, we're pleased with their growth.

The biggest thing right now is trying to find the younger guys and try to get them on a wave that. They have a chance to get in the game and they have to be ready to go. Very pleased with the way people they are working right now.

Q. You have some big shoes to fill at linebacker. How have Jaden Harrell, Karson Sharar, Rexroth, that group and the group behind them continued to develop?

PHIL PARKER: All three of those guys are doing a good job. Every year you start going back and say, Hey, the guys that left before you, look at Jay and Nick and Fisher. Those guys took off, but who led those guys? You had Campbell before them. Then you start going back. Every one of these guys are good players as you're going. It's time for these guys to step up. I think they've been doing a really good job.

You look at Montgomery. He's done a good job and really like what Karson is doing. Those guys are working well, and obviously there are some other parts in the back end. We lost some guys in the back end. I think with a guy like Lutmer having a chance to play a little bit more out there. Koen is doing a good job. Obviously X is doing well. TJ is playing well in the back end and Deshaun.

Just the growth of how they're doing and how they keep on improving every week and every practice has been really well.

Q. You know what Ethan Hurkett and Aaron Graves bring to the table, but there's some projection maybe with Max Llewellyn and how he can be an every-down

PHIL PARKER: Hawthorne and Pace, they're coming from good programs, and they played a lot of football where they have. I think they're going to be able to help us out. I see those guys getting into the mix right away. I think they will give us depth, but you can see them rolling them in even on the first series or whatever it is. They've done a good job.

Graves has been doing it so long. You've got Pittman -- has been a little bit injured a little bit and backing off -- but he is doing well. Very happy with the inside guys. I think Max has really improved. He's been playing both sides. I like his progression. As you get older and mature and you start understanding the game a little bit, he's been playing very well.

I'm happy where they are right now. We're good inside. The development on the other side, Hurkett, he's an established player -- he hasn't practiced very much -- but has good leadership. He's been out a little bit. Brian Allen, if he can come back and help us out, it would be good. We're not where we want to be yet, but we're getting there.

Q. I wanted to ask kind of along those lines of the defensive line, losing somebody like Yahya Black, who was an underrated nose, really did some damage for you as far as taking out blockers. Do you have a player that can play like Yahya, or is this going to be kind of by committee until somebody kind of establishes themselves in that regard?

PHIL PARKER: Well, obviously when you lose good players, you want the other players to come in. What we did is we did help reinforce ourselves with the portal, so that has helped in the depth area. I think it's going to take all four guys to help us out a little bit and playing a little bit maybe a little bit more of everybody.

He played a lot more than some guys at some point, take more snaps, but I think with the rotation nowadays you still have to have the rotation up front that's very important. I think the depth that we did in the portal and bringing guys in like that is going to help us.

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Q. I know you mentioned Koen, Zach, and those guys and, of course, TJ and Deshaun. Some of those younger guys that have now been around for more than a year, Jaylen Watson, Rashad Godfrey, what have you seen from them at that cornerback spot?

PHIL PARKER: I seen some growth. Obviously last year was their first year here, and Jaylen got a little bit more playing time than Godfrey. You start working at it. There's another guy that we flipped over a year ago was Mota. He came in. He really can jump. I've been impressed with him.

So there's going to be some guys competing. If we can get five or six guys getting ready, obviously do we have enough guys in the back end? We're probably going to have to be open to bring other guys in to help us out in the back end to have a full team.

Q. Kind of along those lines with the secondary, it seemed like there were maybe a few more big plays given up last year than what would be kind of characteristic for you guys. What do you attribute that to, and what's the key to kind of correcting that this year?

PHIL PARKER: I think sometimes you have to go look at it and evaluate it. Obviously, we gave up way more than we usually have, but our standard is a little bit higher than everybody else's about giving those up. So when you give them up, you know, why?

I think sometimes where we try to press too much and try to say, Hey, did we have to make that play? I think let the plays come to you I think is a lot easier than saying, Hey, I got to go out and make a play.

Sometimes it's like that. You give up some plays that you shouldn't, but overall you're 11th in the country in scoring defense, something like that -- it's still good -- but it's not as good as we like it.

So we have to work on that, and we're obviously going over here the last 13 practices. We probably give up a little bit more than I would like, but I think it's been very competitive in the spring. You know, they're doing a real good job against us. They're trying to get our eyes all over the place, and you slip and miss a guy, and all of a sudden it opens up for an explosive play.

Our philosophy is, don't give up the explosive plays, and hopefully two or less and hold them to 13 points. Hopefully you have a chance to win a game.

Q. I want to have you bring me back to Super Bowl Sunday and where you were when you see Cooper DeJean, one of your former guys, returning interception for a touchdown in the Super Bowl. What's your reaction like in that moment?

PHIL PARKER: It was kind of interesting. I don't really like watching the Super Bowl unless you have somebody in it, and obviously Cooper was in there. The play kind of reminded me a little bit of Rutgers his sophomore year. A very similar play that he picked off and ran for a touchdown.

You could just see the way he moved around. He read the quarterback a little bit, and as soon as he caught the ball and cut across and he's probably going to score. Just like any kind of punt return that he might have had in Minnesota. Same type of deal. The guy has a great talent, has great vision. Just a really good football player.

I was happy for him. For how humble he is and for him not even thinking he could play here at some time when he first was coming out and probably coming out of high school. Can he really play here? To see him grow as a person and to see how he excelled, he wasn't starting at the beginning of the year, and then all of a sudden now he becomes the head of it, and I'm really proud of the way he handled himself in that situation. I'm sure Philly is too.

Q. You brought up Alex Mota, who is a few weeks into moving over to the other side of the ball. If you watched him at Marion, anyone in this room knows you can plug him in a spot, and he was going to perform. If you could talk about the process of him flipping over to the other side of the ball, and I know he's battled some injuries the last couple of years too.

PHIL PARKER: Yeah. When he came over, obviously he had a wrist problem, and he was trying to practice with a club on his hand and stuff, so it was a little hard for him.

In the last two or three weeks, I see the progress, what he's done. He's made some really good plays. He's starting to get comfortable with what he has to do. It's a little different on offense. They give you a play, you have to do it, you have to adjust.

It's different. You know where you are going instead of reacting. I think he's doing a really good job and improving. It's going to take over the summer and camp to say, Hey, this kid has a chance to go out there and compete.

Q. I wanted to ask about Xavier Nwankpa moving from strong to free safety and why you think that's a better



fit for him?

PHIL PARKER: I think it's another opportunity. We had some other guys that were trying to get on the field over there, and I think sometimes if you want to try to bring him down in the box, a bigger guy, it would be helpful I think to bring him down there. I wouldn't say a linebacker depth at times. I guess we would bring him down, and I think he can see more. I think he's more comfortable there at free safety.

With Lutmer and Koen being on the other side, I think it was just a better fit. I think he's happy there, and we have seen real big improvement with him the last three weeks. So hopefully we get him healthy and get ready to go for the summertime.

Q. It feels like most years in recent memory you've known who your No. 1 corner might be. Maybe it's Riley Moss or Matt Hankins or Cooper DeJean or Jermari Harris, but this year I don't know if it's quite as solid. When do you usually know if you have that No. 1 guy at corner, or do you have that guy yet?

PHIL PARKER: I kind of don't like to always give the answers to the test. I like to keep them on just like I keep my wife off balance when I'm coming home.

I think there's some guys that made some good improvement. I'll go back to TJ Hall. The progression that he's made from the first time that he's in there starting until he played a lot last year off and on all of a sudden until where he is right now. I think he's probably made the biggest jump of talking about being exact on every play.

He's not perfect. Nobody is perfect, but I've seen the biggest growth from him where he is starting to count on, Hey, I expect him, and the leadership is even better. I could say that about all the guys right now, the five top guys that's over there out there playing right now holding the other guys, the younger guys, and demanding what the expectation is on the field. So I would say right now probably TJ, but Deshaun Lee has done some really good things. Just seeing the growth, but he would probably be the top one right now.

Q. I wanted to ask about two of your guys that have played a lot last year and more in the subpackages, Koen Entringer and Zach Lutmer. Lutmer was in a lot on dime. It seems like those two are really kind of ascending players, that they had some really good moments. In what ways do you think that they can make that next step, and what do they bring quality-wise to the field that would suggest that they're kind of the next in line of a lot of the great players

you've had over the last few years?

PHIL PARKER: Out of those guys right now I just think the way they've been -- their movement. You can go out there and start watching. The improvement they have in their footwork, and then obviously some things that you might not be able to evaluate just by the way they move around, but the way they diagnose plays and to be able to read the run, pass keys and understanding what plays are being run against them based on the formation, based on the motions. Just the growth of the knowledge of how to prepare for practice, how to prepare for a game. These guys have really grown.

One thing about Lutmer I would say he needs to be more vocal. Koen, I don't think he's going to have a problem being vocal. I think he's taken good leadership over there.

You've got to drag it out. You have to make sure they're talking. Communication is a big part of it because usually I don't care where, you look at the film, and you are going to say, hey, the guys that usually screw up mentally, that's what happened. Not too many times are you going to be beaten physically. It's going to be usually a mental lapse. Playing any team, they're trying to get you off balance, trying to control your eyes.

I think the eyes are the most important thing. Then I think your feet are. Then your feet and then your hands and to be able to be on balance.

Going back to Cooper, he was really special at that. I see that in Lutmer, and I see it in Koen, and they have ability to go down and play the catch. They have the ability to play free safety. They have the ability to play strong safety.

Moving them around sometimes is good, but sometimes it could be overwhelming too, so you have to watch how you handle it, you know, and don't wear them out.

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