

University of Iowa Football Media Conference

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Iowa City, Iowa, USA

Kirk Ferentz

Tyler Barnes

Press Conference



go.

This has been a good week for us. Now it's getting a little bit different.

College football continues to change, and this is one positive change, actually, because we're basically sequestered to the barracks here for the next month, and our players are here, we're here, which is really an unusual combination in December, but it makes a lot of sense.

We're taking this month to -- especially this week -- having a chance for the players to reset, recharge a little bit, get their house in order academically, all those kinds of things, and then having a chance to sit down with the position coaches. They're all sitting down with their guys individually and talking about the season and looking forward, that type of thing, so setting the table a little bit there.

There is nothing to report right now. I imagine some things will happen over the course of the month. That wouldn't be unusual. Hopefully, like last year, we don't have a lot of transition, but we'll wait and see how that all works out.

The only one to mention right now, I know Jackson Stratton went on social media and talked about it, but Jackson left the program. Unfortunately he's had some interesting health challenges, internal digestive stuff, so he's had a rough year physically, getting the nutrition right, and he's lost a lot of weight, all that type of thing, so he's had a really rough year.

He's gone home. He's going to graduate in December. He's taking the rest of his classes online. I want to compliment him because he showed up here, I literally met his mom and dad here a year ago July or August, whenever it was our first-year guys reported, and little did I know at that point, nor did he. Now he's probably more surprised he ended up starting for a couple games for us and got a couple wins for us.

I am appreciative of him as a person and the job he did coming out of the bullpen. I wish him the best. I think he's contemplating playing another year, so we'll see how that all goes.

Then recruiting-wise here, Tyler is going to come up and

KIRK FERENTZ: Good to see everybody.

It was a good weekend, obviously, and a good finish to the season on a Friday. One bonus there is that we get a little bit of time to get away. The players didn't have anything until yesterday morning outside of their academic requirements. It was good that way.

We are pleased with Friday's game - I mentioned that afterwards -- and it was nice to be able to sit back and watch everybody else work on the weekend and we had a chance to relax a little bit.

A couple words about the season and Friday's effort. Overall I am proud of our guys and pleased with their effort. It has been a good team to work with, certainly, and it has been week-in and week-out, and I've mentioned it several times, it has been that way since January. These guys have been an exceptional group to work with, the leadership has been strong and the way they work together has been really good.

The thing about this team, every week they've prepared well, handled camp, handled spring ball, summer, all that, but week-to-week, they prepared well and competed all 12 times about as hard as you can compete. We came up short a couple times, but it wasn't for lack of effort or paying attention to detail, all those kinds of things.

It was rewarding in that regard, and in a lot of ways like 2008. I think the biggest difference there is the teams that we lost to were all ranked teams. I told the team a couple weeks ago, my guess is two of those teams will be Top 5, and that's where they both sit right now.

The teams that we lost to were really good teams, and sometimes that's the way that goes. It was a special group, and we're all looking forward to finding out where we're going sometime this month coming up and then getting ready. I'm sure it'll be a good opponent, and I'm sure we'll be underdogs again. That's typically how bowls



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he'll go into deep depth, but the biggest thing is recruiting has changed a lot, and you guys know that better than I do.

The signing day used to be people would fax stuff in and we'd take phone calls starting at 6 a.m., all that stuff, and it's a very, very different process than it used to be.

I think it's a lot similar in a lot of ways, too, in that it's still the crux of building a team. It really is important. It's an important thing. Each and every guy that joins our team, we're excited about it. We spent a lot of time trying to research players. We did it a little bit differently. We do our own evaluations, don't go off magazines or this guy said or this guy offered a guy. We don't do that. We try to be as thorough as we possibly can.

It has worked well for us. That's kind of our formula. Hopefully we're adding 18 players, actually 22, that we feel really good about.

We're excited about that. We don't mass recruit. We don't send out 300 offers. I don't know how you get to know a class by doing that. I think our coaches do a really good job of doing their homework, getting to know the guys and looking for the traits that we think are important.

There's obviously requisite physical things that you have to have to play football at this level, but I think our standards are probably a little bit different than others and maybe we accentuate certain things that maybe other people don't. So I am pleased with the way the coaches went about it.

Tyler is the guy that coordinates it all, and that's a nightmarish job quite frankly, and then on top of it, the other component which has always been this way, at least in my 37 years here, it's not the coaches recruiting but it's a lot of people that help recruit, and one thing that hasn't changed, if we can get a prospect on campus and if we can get him here on campus with their parents, I think we have a better chance of gaining traction, and that's because so many people help sell it.

One kid comes on campus for an official visit, the exposure they get to all kinds of people on campus, whether it's professors, academic counselors, and they give a lot of time, personal time up to help us recruit, so we're very appreciative. It's truly a team effort. We are happy about that.

We feel good about the group overall. I think we addressed the things we were trying to address and we feel good about that. Then we'll continue to look around and see what we can do to keep supplementing the roster, but I feel good about that.

The other thing of note, and I don't think it's been shared

with you, but we expect 14 of them to start out in January, so signing day changed and this will be the biggest number we've had of guys coming in in January. Some schools pretty much make it mandatory, at least that's what I hear talking to our prospects. It's a question that's frequently asked of us, do you expect the players to come in in January, and our answer is no, we don't. It's not discouraged, but we don't necessarily sell it and certainly don't mandate it. I don't believe in that.

It's funny or interesting -- maybe not funny but interesting with this roster reduction stuff, I remember talking to Ray during camp out there before we started practice one day back in August, and football is becoming a business, college football. The business of college football has truly become a business, and from a business standpoint, it is like, it would be smart for us to mandate it. But that flies really in the face of what we believe in in recruiting.

We like multi-sport athletes. We like guys that are parts of teams that are playing basketball or wrestling -- competing on the wrestling mat, involved in track, involved in baseball.

I always tell prospects, Josey Jewell didn't get here until August. He played baseball for Decorah. I believe they won the state championship. He showed up in August. He's the only three-time captain in the history of this program, which again, it was 1889 when that started.

It's more about the back end. It's more about an entire career, not your first 10 months on campus. You build a foundation when you get here, but we're not counting on any player to come in and save our team in year one. Big picture that way.

Anyway, all that being said, that's just part of the new landscape. Tyler will fill in all the blanks, but I feel good about the class, I am enthused about them and eager to start work with them, but first things first, we have the month of December in front of us. I'll throw it out for questions.

Q. Kirk, two-part question. When do you plan on doing your individual meetings with the players? Again, I know it's early, it feels like, but with the portal and everything, when do you do those individual meetings?

KIRK FERENTZ: That's actually what we've been doing or are doing right now. We'll get together as a staff tomorrow afternoon and just pull in information, see what's going on. Obviously if there's something dramatic, I think I'd know that by now, or at least at this point.

It's all preliminary. I just mentioned, college football has

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become a business, and one thing I encouraged our guys during the season is there's a business time and there's a football time, and hopefully everybody is here to play football and really be part of a team. So take care of business when it's business time.

This is a business month for everybody. That began a long time ago, but hopefully our guys haven't been too active. But there's going to be poaching and all that stuff going on. That's just part of what we do right now.

When I say we do, I'm not including us, but college football collectively. It's all going on.

Q. You talk about how important it is to get players on campus, and I know the recruiting calendar has changed almost yearly at this point, but with it only being open two weeks and it goes to the middle of January, how do you plan on attacking the portal when you talk about getting the guys on campus and doing all that? Do you have a preliminary idea of how you're going to go about that?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, you have to be active in the portal. It has been helpful to us. I think about a guy like Jacob Gill, I'll mention him, who's been with us for two years, and doesn't have franchise numbers, if you will, putting it in those terms, but the value he's added, I'm talking about the leadership on our football team, he's a big part of that. He embodies everything you want in a football player. He has been such a great contributor.

We're always looking to help our football team. We will be. It is interesting, whatever the window is, it's pretty quick in January. We may be playing cards and watching soap operas here the next couple weeks, but I know what we'll be doing early January. We'll be very active in that.

So yeah, it's a whole new world. This is another twist and turn of college football, and I don't know if it'll stay like this moving forward, but we'll deal with it as it comes just like you do everything else.

Q. What is your message to recruits that ask about your future as head coach here, and are you definitively -- sounds like you are, definitively going to coach the Hawkeyes in 2026?

KIRK FERENTZ: Well, yeah. I hope so. Unless you know something I don't know.

I just tell them the truth. I feel really good. I had no idea what it feels like to be 70. Now I do, however many months it's been. It doesn't feel any different than when I was 60. I feel good physically. I've got permission from

my wife to keep doing this, and it's what I like doing. I really like it and enjoy doing it.

Unless we just screw this up beyond repair, which we're trying to do right now in college football, I don't envision stopping anytime in the near future. It's what you do. I don't golf, and when I did, I stunk, so I don't see going back to that. That's irreparable, too. My golf game is just awful.

Q. I was curious, with the evolving landscape of college football, the expanded playoff, how, if any, the way the program views its goals have changed because from when I have heard, when it was a 14 playoff, the goal was Big Ten Championship. Now you could argue that it's easier to make the College Football Playoff than it is to win the Big Ten Championship. Has the way the program views its goals changed at all or your messaging? Is it the same, different? How have you approached that?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, our goal has always been to win every game. If we've got games scheduled, we're going to try to win them. That's kind of what I'm referring to.

I saw this coming years ago just when they went to the four, and I think I said on record, I preferred the two-game thing, only because as soon as we went to four, that's where all the focus went, and a lot of bowl games were considered, quote-unquote, meaningless, insignificant, all that kind of stuff.

It flies in the face of the way I guess I was raised. The beauty of the game is competition. The beauty of the game is building a team and being part of something bigger than you. If that's your end goal -- the one thing it hasn't changed, only one team is going to come out on top. No matter how we slice this thing and dice it, it's going to be one team is going to win the championship.

It used to be two that got to compete for it, now it's four, then it went to 12, and it's going to keep expanding. I get that. But our program goal, we want to win anything -- if we're going to get beat, we're going to try to win.

But the bigger picture, the three things that have been important from day one are graduation, first and foremost -- I know everybody says that but it is true. The second thing is being a good citizen, a positive citizen hopefully, on campus, the team, anything you're a member of. The third thing is maximizing your football experience. To me, it's as simple as that. If we're doing it right, some years we might have a realistic chance to get there, and then other years maybe not.

I think it's a trap if you start chasing all of those exterior

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things, me personally. All you can do is do your best and try -- we're trying to do our best each and every week, and it breaks it down to the day, just maximizing days. But that's all you can do.

If you're good enough, you're good enough, and if you're not, you're not. Other people, we've have plenty of people judging us. It's never been an issue, fans and other people on top of that. And you can't control how people view you, either.

But I can assure you we're trying to win. That's our goal is to win. But it's a bigger picture than that, too. Because again, ultimately only one team is going to win. I do know that. In the NFL you have a one out of 32 shot. In our deal, I think there's 68 teams in Power Four schools? What do they call the other ones? Group of Five, okay. So Group of Five sometimes whatever number that is, and their odds are probably a little less than ours.

Only one team is going to come out happy. It's like pro football. Figured that out a long time ago.

Q. Kind of along those lines, almost existential with the sport itself, this year we saw more firings of quality coaches, experienced coaches at midyear. Basically when they lost their third game and they were not part of the playoff you saw people get fired, which really never happened before, and then you're also seeing somebody leave a team that's going to the playoff, as opposed to I don't think we would see Mike Vrabel leave the Patriots for the Giants, for instance, on the eve of the Wild Card round this year.

Do you think that an expanded playoff - not even 16 but potentially 24 - would curb some of that, where you're going immediately into a playoff round and then there's also the chance of lasting longer through the season, that three losses wouldn't preclude you from being part of it, or is that just going to change the dynamic in a different direction like this all has?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I really haven't given that part thought, like the next expansion, how that's going to impact things.

But the thing I can comment on is there's no question things have changed, and it is the business of football now. The clear takeaway -- I don't know who the first guy fired was. Maybe it was James. But the clear message here is win. Like win and win now.

I'm smiling up here because I probably wouldn't -- if this was 27 years ago or 26 years ago, I'd probably be on that casualty list, too, and ironically, 27 years, good, bad or

indifferent, I'm still here. People have varied opinions on that. But that's one of the ironies I find.

The other irony - maybe I'm amused by it - but everybody talks about our staff from the '80s. We were all assistants. We all got hired at decent places and we were all assistants, and I'm thinking about Barry, I'm thinking about Bill Snyder, I'm thinking about Bob Stoops. Seemed like we all did okay. And Dan McCartney probably did a better job than any of us at Iowa State because Iowa State was a really low place. K-State was way down there, too. None of us were head coaches.

How many assistants have been hired this hiring cycle? But that takes -- you've got to do your homework, and you've got to have some guts to do that, too.

The world is different, that's all. We didn't have consulting firms back then, either, I don't think, back in the '80s. How we've improved. They're making money, though. Those consultants are making money. Good for them. Everybody is finding a way.

I'm going to turn it over to Tyler. Tyler has done an unbelievable job as general manager, and I joked about it being a hard job, but it is a challenging job because he's basically on the phone all the time, like all the time. But that allows me to go play, too, so that's a good thing.

I'll turn it over to him and he can give you a lot of details about the class. Thank you.

TYLER BARNES: I appreciate everybody coming out today. It's kind of crazy to think this is the 10th time I've been back, the 10th time I've sat up here in front of you guys and talked about our class.

A lot of it's probably going to sound redundant and the same. That's good. That's how we like it. We like uneventful signing days. I was not on the phone until 3 a.m. this year like I was last year with one of our guys. Glad I was. Glad he's here.

As coach mentioned, we brought in 22 guys today and as coach alluded to a little bit, it takes a village when we're building a recruiting class. It's two and a half, three years in the making.

When you get guys on campus, it's not just our coaching staff, our recruiting staff that's back here. We use our academic staff. We're with admin working with him. It's people all across the building and the community when we're taking them around, so it really just isn't -- I know you get to hear from me and talk to me. I do have an idea next year, we've two of our recruiting staff members back here,

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Delayna Cotton and Rhett Smeins. Spaulding snuck out.

I want to do a panel, right, do like Coach, and I address everything for a little bit and then I'll let you guys ask them all the questions. I'll see if Matt will let us do that.

But in all seriousness, it does take a village, and I think my first full year where in a high school recruiting class I haven't been hands-on in everything day-to-day. I've got an awesome, awesome recruiting staff, and Scott Southmayd, who's back in his office, they handled so much more of it this year than has ever happened, and that's mainly -- my role has changed. There's a lot of different things that I've taken on in this general manager role, which I love, without a doubt, but when it comes to some of the day-to-day granular stuff, that's going to fall on Rhett, Delayna and Matt and Southy. But I do love it.

As Coach said, the new era of rev share and NIL and agents has been exhausting, but it's fun. You still have to create those relationships, and ultimately that's how you're going to end up filling out your class.

Before it was just agents with portal guys. Now it's agents with high school kids, and it's a transactional world. There's no doubt about it.

We still have -- while we've adapted and adjusted in how we want to build this class, there's still our core values that just aren't going to move.

Money is definitely a part of it. At some point you're going to have to have that conversation even with the high school kids and their parents. This is the first year where I think parents truly are knowledgeable about how this all works.

So it is part of it, but when we find a guy we want to offer and we feel good about him and his second question is, When can I talk to the GM, he wants to talk to me for one reason. It's not to develop a relationship; he wants to know what the package is going to be.

It's kind of made it easier to move away from guys, too. You can sift through who you really want to go after and who you want to get.

With that said, you know, the 22 guys we have coming in, we feel great about those guys. It's another Midwest-heavy class, if you will. It typically always is going to be here. As Coach mentioned, a lot of multi-sport athletes. But when it comes down to character, what their household looks like, it's a lot of the same of what we've had here in the past.

When you have 27 years of experience and 27 years of

proof that this works, we're going to keep doing it that way. I'd love to open it up for questions for you guys and kind of go from there.

Q. I'm curious what it's like building synergy with Tim in terms of what he's looking for in a quarterback, what you guys are finding and who you're reaching out to. What did you find in the quarterback you signed today, and where you guys stand in terms of the quarterback room? Do you want to add to that through the portal, through possibly a late signing?

TYLER BARNES: Yeah, the first thing you knew with Tim is time. Like a lot of meeting time because Tim is going to talk a lot, which is one of his biggest strengths, and I'm not joking. I think he was with Tradon four and a half hours watching film in the offices. That's why guys love Tim, because his passion, his energy. If you can't notice it and feel it, we're definitely on the wrong guy.

But we had a young man that was committed to us for a little bit over a year who de-committed in the summer, and we had some guys on the board we felt good about. Tim probably didn't want to hear at the time, but my biggest thing was let's be patient, let's go into the season and let's see some senior film on guys. There's going to be guys that rise. There's going to be guys that are at schools where maybe the season is not going well and there could be some coaching changes.

I'm glad we did. We watched six to eight guys we kind of honed in on that we really presented to Tim. I probably had Tradon as my top guy. He's a bigger kid, 6'4", 210 right now, really live arm, whippy arm, can really throw it. His stats, if you go back the last three years, are pretty gaudy. It's kind of incredible.

Didn't get a chance to meet the kid and talk to him, and that was a tough one, because Boise State at the time, they had their hooks into him pretty good, and we haven't really recruited Utah. That was the last guy we actually went out to visit in Utah was Zach Wilson, another quarterback.

But the biggest thing was trying to build that relationship, and then once we got him here, just as Coach says, once we can get a kid here, especially a quarterback or an offensive player and you put him in front of Tim, you feel pretty good about your chances. The same can be said for Mark. When we got Mark here last year in the winter, I knew about two hours into that meeting with Tim, okay, we're in a good spot, we're going to get this done.

In terms of the quarterback room, right now we feel good with where it's at. We'd love to get Tradon here early.

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He's going to stay and play basketball this winter. I'm going to continue to poke him a little bit. I know Coach says we don't push guys to come early. I'm going to keep trying to push that one and we'll see what happens.

Unless there's some type of movement in our room, we feel good about where we're at and we plan to roll with the guys we've got in there.

Q. Got a nice cornerback out of Omaha. I know his brother plays for Nebraska. What are you getting in Darion? His senior film just has playmaker written all over that one. And when did you start honing in on him?

TYLER BARNES: I can't wait for you guys to interview Darion because he's going to definitely be one of the best interviews in the class. If anybody has already talked to him, energy is through the roof, and he's just a great kid. Coach Woods has known that family for a long time, going back to Northwest Iowa, so we always knew about Darion, and thank God he's a die-hard Hawkeye fan because I'm not sure we're going to be able to sign Darion if he isn't because you can see his senior film, this kid is pretty talented. He can run. He's long. He's a really smart kid. Again, the passion and energy he has is unmatched with anybody in this class. There's no doubt about it.

But we're excited to get him here. He'll be one of the 14 guys that are here in January. I think last year when we played Nebraska here, I'm pretty sure, I could be wrong, you can fact check it with Darion, I'm pretty sure he sat in the Nebraska family section, because his brother is on the team, wearing Iowa stuff. That's how much of an Iowa fan he is. I wouldn't recommend that, but that's who Darion is.

You're not shocked because when you meet his brothers, his dad, his mom, you're not shocked at what type of kid he is. Really excited about him. I know Phil is excited about him. It'll be good to get him here and rolling in January.

Q. Curious with the offensive line, you've brought in the five of them, I believe they were all committed pretty early, but how did that process go in getting them? Did you expect to bring in that big of a class at offensive line, or did it just kind of happen?

TYLER BARNES: Yeah, we knew we were going to take four with the possibility of a fifth, but once we got them here, we felt good about the group.

Coach Barnett is unbelievable in the process. He is very targeted in his approach. He knows exactly who he wants. It's taken a few years, obviously, for him to get that room where he wants it to be, and the last two years it's been

pretty dang good now.

George knows what he wants, and he's going to go after it. There's no fluff and no frills with George. He's very straightforward and very honest.

The group as a whole, they're a good group. I was telling Chad earlier, it's funny, Gennings Dunker is our best recruiter in the building. There's no doubt. I wish I could hire him right now. But anytime somebody is on campus, if at some point they're with Dunk and he's got a whole audience back there, Dunk just being Dunk. We had five different hosts for the five guys in June for their visit, and somehow both nights I think all five kids ended up with Dunk by himself somehow.

But he tells me every day, "I wish I had one more year to be around this O-line group." You guys are going to have your hands full, but they're a lot of fun, and man, they're going to be good. And he's correct.

These five, completely different personalities. But seeing how close that group has gotten just throughout the fall is pretty impressive. You have Colin Whitters who's in town, you have Owen Linder who would come over by himself every once in a while for games. Same with Gene Riordan, and they'd go stay at Colin's house after the games.

Those guys, you see groups get tight before signing day and before they get here, but this group is unlike any group I've seen. Like they are super, super tight. And you love the group.

You have size, you've got length in that entire group. Obviously, Carson was the first guy that committed to us in the spring of '24. He's the first guy that got it kicked off, that got it rolling, and he could go anywhere in the country if he wanted to.

But you love the versatility you've got in there, and it's going to be fun to get those guys here, too. Just a fun group, and I'll keep Dunk updated on how they're doing for sure.

Q. I wanted to ask you about linebackers. Certainly the importance is there, but when you're going with a cash secondary that you're playing two at a time and you've now got, I think, 10 scholarship guys plus a walk-on who's been playing a lot in Nolan DeLong, what's the idea behind taking three this year? He's had eight in the last three years and all of them are high-level guys. What's the thought process behind taking those, and does that apply to special teams and other areas?

TYLER BARNES: For sure, it's a good question, and actually by our budget, we're still down a body in that room. I don't think we'll get there to fill it. I think we'll roll with what we've got.

But a big part of it is special teams, and Coach Wallace will be the first to tell you, he walks around the building reminding everybody because when we have this budget set, everybody needs one more spot, right, and people are always like, well, take it from the linebackers, and Coach Wallace will be the first to walk around with our stats and how many reps everybody has played in games and show, hey, these guys are all playing the majority of special teams.

It got to the point this year, we kind of always budgeted to take three. That was always the plan. Lucky for us, we hit it on our first three, which typically doesn't happen very often, and three guys you feel really good about, three guys that are pretty different in terms of who they are and their play style, and three guys that, in an ideal, we'd love to redshirt everybody. You guys know that. It would be great to redshirt the whole class. Kind of just depends on injury history and what happens there.

But for us, the special teams component is the biggest portion of it. Then, too, it's a physical position. You've seen the last couple of games we had some issues in the secondary and we're more base defense, and the more you can get guys that are versatile and that can do a little bit of everything, the better off you're going to feel.

I think all three guys are going to stick at the linebacker spot. I'd be surprised if they moved. But again, three very different personalities, too.

You have Julian, who is a freak. He's a freak show. He's a big kid who's had a great last two years at West High but kind of quiet demeanor, kind of quiet in nature. Then you have Kasen, who has way more personality than you think and probably looks like your prototype Big Ten linebacker, and then you've got Billy, who might be the second best interview behind Darion Jones, who's a wildcard but such a good kid, and he looks like what we've brought in here in the past, the Christian Kirkseys, that they're going to need a year to develop but you love the length. You love the way he plays, flies around, but he's going to need the weight room a little bit.

But three guys we're excited about, and I know Seth feels really good about them, and then guys it was well documented were trying to be poached by different schools around the country. Those guys had their pick of the litter, too, and all three guys stayed committed and stayed loyal

to us. So it's a good thing, obviously.

Q. You mentioned being a lot more businesslike with the recruiting nowadays. What do you look for in a kid, especially with this being more of a developmental program, that you can tell that kid is going to stick around for one, two, three, four years even though he might not play right off the start? How do you tell and project that far in advance that the kid is not going to go transfer out if he's not playing for a few years?

TYLER BARNES: I don't think you ever know for certain, especially in this day and age. It still comes down to, we're going to talk to everybody we can in the school. We still rely on high school head coaches. A lot of places don't. They're going to say who's your agent, I'll talk to your agent, and you work through recruiting there. That is part of the process, but that's way down the road for us.

Then you have to get them on campus. You've got to get a feel for who they are, what their family is like, the dynamic there. Again, the multi-sport thing is huge.

Chad just mentioned we have eight four-stars. I didn't even know that. Again, we don't recruit off of rankings and stars and all that, and that's great. I'm glad we can celebrate it. I don't get any type of raise or neither does our recruiting staff for that.

But you have to dig into who the kid is, and at some point you're going to figure out if their values match ours. Now more than ever, you can figure out real quick if their values don't match ours. If the money and the numbers are the most important thing, that's not who we are.

We have a bunch of guys on this roster that if they wanted to hit the portal, they're going to get paid a ton. Same with our staff members. There's not a single person back there in the hallway that hasn't been offered a job with more money or more prestige somewhere, but there's a reason we all continue to stay here and don't leave, and that's true with our players, too.

A big part of it, too, is when we get guys here getting them around our players and letting our players feel it out, too, like hey, what did you think of this kid. Do you think he's going to fit. Do you think he's a guy you want inside your locker room every day. We take their feedback just as much as anybody else.

It's continuing to be diligent, and call us old school, call us slow that we don't offer too many people or are as quick as other schools, but for us, it's a recipe and a formula that's worked for us, and we're obviously going to continue to stick with it as much as possible.



That's the same in the portal, too. The portal has just expedited. It's speed dating on steroids where you've got to do all that while you're trying to figure out who it is, get your hooks into a kid. But you have to do it at a faster clip.

Q. I wanted to ask you about Julian Manson. He could easily play tight end for you guys --

TYLER BARNES: He could play a few spots for sure.

Q. A few spots, yes. How do you go about that process of figuring out your best is here or your best future is on the other side of the ball?

TYLER BARNES: One of my favorite camps I've ever been a part of, so Julian (Juju) came here going into his, I want to say, sophomore year. Had never played linebacker in his life, had never really gotten to a point where he had to be physical and strike somebody. Jason brings him in and is like, hey, let's get him a helmet and we're going to make him play linebacker.

I just remember laughing because when you meet Juju, especially young Juju, you don't see that ferociousness or that violence that you see on film right now, and we stuck him in one-on-ones and we get to the end of camp and we're pretty physical here. Part of our camp is can you match our physicality and can you be okay with it.

It shocked all of us when Juju was just striking guys, and we're like, holy crap, like this kid has got a chance now. He still was a baby rain deer at that point, growing into his body. At that point that's when Juju started playing defense and linebacker was the next year at West High.

Then you see his body grow, right; I promise you KB is probably just sitting there waiting, like come on, Juju, come on down, we'll put your hand in the dirt. But until he proves he can't do it, we're not going to do that.

The same could be said for Jack Campbell. I've got it on record, his sophomore or junior year I thought Jack was going to be a D-end. I didn't think he moved well enough. He hadn't put it together running around on field, and then you saw his senior year, I was like, all right, this guy is a linebacker.

Trust me, there were conversations in the building about people wanting to move him to D-end, and I was like, Coach, this guy is like an All-American linebacker; what are we talking about. Thankfully we stuck him there.

You've just got to see how their bodies progress when they get here, and if he can't do it at linebacker for some

reason, I'm sure he'd be a heck of a D-end. But I know myself and I know Seth; we're going to keep him at linebacker and see what he can do. It's just part of the evolution. We'll see what happens there.

Q. We saw one of your juniors walk on Senior Day. Do you have a sense of how many early entry departures you would have? I know you need to know the roster count, so how many portal openings would you say you would expect to have come January 2?

TYLER BARNES: In terms of early entrants, we'll see. This is the time of year where they get a chance to sit down with their position coaches, Coach Ferentz, and if I need to get NFL feedback for them, I will reach out to 12, 13, 14 teams and just get an idea where they are grade-wise.

You never know until you really get the feedback. I know we have a couple underclassmen that could probably test the waters if they wanted to, and we've got no indication that they want to, so we think they'll be back.

The portal, we have an idea what we want to do spots-wise, and you guys follow us closely enough that I think if I gave you guys 10 minutes as a group, you'd probably come up pretty close within perfect of what our needs are. But a big thing, too, is this is the time of year where all our starters, all the guys that have been played the last 12 games, they're not going to do much the next 12 practices or so. They'll be out there, but it's more about getting the young guys rolling.

When you can see some of these young guys take steps, that's going to alter maybe what we think we need. Chad, I mentioned to you earlier, even going into the Nebraska game, I think we had a couple spots earmarked at certain spots, and coming out of the Nebraska game, I was like, actually I think we're going to be all right.

So you have to see young guys develop and guys take the next step. But we'll see. You guys will be tracking it. You'll see what's going on with their offer-wise, and you'll find out soon enough. Sorry, I can't give away all the secrets.

Q. For you guys as a recruiting staff, how difficult is it to be able to put together a plan when again, you don't know who's going to end up entering the portal, whether guys you want to pursue, guys that end up leaving the team, what spots are going to be available, and with the new portal window that I wish they would just settle in because it seems like it just changes every single year. How do you approach making a game plan, sticking by it, and how quickly are you

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

going to be able to adapt if a guy leaves unexpectedly or you get some traction with a guy that just ends up entering the portal? How are you as a staff collectively approaching this?

TYLER BARNES: Obviously it's fluid no matter what it is, and that's a big part of my job is going into every season I've got our scholarship chart and I've got a million different color codes for certain things, and there's some that are flight risk on there, right. You hear from different guys on the team, you hear from people in the building, you can see their demeanor. It's like, okay, this kid might not be here come January. So you're building out your roster and your needs based on those. And you don't want to lose anybody, but come this time of year, everybody talks in this building, and the players are great, but they're horrible at keeping secrets.

At some point it's going to get out and you're going to have an idea, and then it's just a matter of getting to this time of year where you have kind of those exit interview meetings.

The portal is different this year. One signing day is way too early. This is wild that it's December 3rd and I'm talking to you guys about our high school class. But two, it's unique because we have this whole month of December and the portal doesn't open up for a month from today. There's just a lot that could happen.

But you have to be fluid. That's something I'm looking at every single week, and you're talking to Phil and you're talking to Tim and you're talking to the position coaches, and you have to be open and honest with them, like hey, I think so-and-so, I've heard this, what kind of beat do you have on this kid who I think he might leave, and we talk about it throughout the year, and certainly after our last game we have a full staff discussion where we're trying to plan for that.

For the most part, you have a good idea. There's going to be a surprise or two every year. It just happens. But you've just got to be able to adapt and adjust quickly. There's a couple of spots right now we don't plan to take transfers at, but that could change in the next five to ten days because something could pop and we're going to have to kind of rearrange our strategy, and that's where Rhett does a great job helping my build our transfer board and kind of stacking that, and even spots we know we're not going to take guys, you've still got some names on there just in case.

Q. I want to ask about Luke Brewer, someone highly recruited, reclassified. How did that recruitment unfold from your end?

TYLER BARNES: Yeah, it was an interesting one. I can't remember if I was with Rhett or someone else, but during fall camp, I was like, Luke is an older kid for his grade. He's already kind of done what he wants, and we weren't going to take a tight end in this class. We were going to wait until '27 because we had some guys we felt good about, including Luke, and I was like, maybe we should just call him and see if he wants to completely reclassify.

It was not more than two days later, he reached out to us. Somebody else had the same thought as us, a staff, and kind of got that rolling in his mind.

I think he took about two weeks to really fully make the decision on whether to reclassify, and I think we were probably in a good spot for Luke in the '27 class. I think when he ultimately decided to reclassify, we were probably running third, maybe fourth in his recruitment. I'll let you guys ask Luke. I don't really know what to pinpoint that really pushed us ahead, but I know once we found that out, we were full steam ahead on Luke just trying to make sure he understood, we're not recruiting anybody else in the '26 class. We actually have no other '26 tight end offers out. You're the guy. We want you here.

Being a local kid, having a sister be here on the softball team I think certainly helps. He comes from an Iowa State family. He was kind of the oddball out. He was the one kid that was a Hawkeye fan for some reason, and glad he was.

But I think just getting him here, and obviously getting his teammate Eli Robbins will be here in January, committed, as well, and I think that kind of helped. Just getting him around Abdul, getting him around Tim and trying to get him here as much as possible, feel more and more comfortable.

If I told you that I thought we were leading for Luke three weeks before his commitment, I'd be lying to you. Like I'm pretty sure we were third at that point. I don't know what switched it, but we're glad we got him for sure. He's a great kid, and he's going to come in and do big things here.

He won't be here until June since he's reclassifying, but it'll be good to get him here.

Q. I wanted to ask you about defensive line. You bring in two guys that are probably more developmental types, at least it'll take a year or two before they can really have their full impact, but also you look and you say, you're losing four starters plus a rotational guy. That seems to be one where you're looking at, "okay, portal, what do you got to offer here." How do you feel about the development of a couple of the classes that you've brought in, and is there a spot or two on that



front that you feel like you need to supplement at worst or possibly grab starters from in there?

TYLER BARNES: I think realistically, I don't think I'm giving up anything extravagant here, we're probably going to look for one inside and one outside guy in the portal, realistically.

But we have a young class of guys that are redshirt freshmen right now you feel really good about. You have lose Epenesa which everybody knows about. While we may be younger next year on the D-line, there's just guys you really like and guys that are promising.

Again, this next three weeks for those five guys, lose and those redshirt freshmen, are going to be huge. They're either going to love KB or hate him because they're going to get every rep in the world to see what they can do. They've had great falls and they've really pushed along their bodies physically to where they're supposed to be at this point, but we see enough of them in fall camp that we felt good, hey, should we take two or three high school guys, we kind of had it slotted to take three, and we kind of went back and forth, back and forth.

But what we have in the room, again, it's young and not a ton of experience, but there's guys you really like in what we've seen. Obviously that's going to be a position we're going to look to hit the portal on for sure.

Again, I don't know if it has to be an All-Star or a starter. We've just got to find the right guys.

KB likes to play an eight-man rotation as much as possible, so it's going to be by committee just like it's always been in that room.

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