

University of Iowa Football Media Conference

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Phil Parker

Press Conference



PHIL PARKER: Thanks for coming. I appreciate the time and effort that you all do. Just to give you a little bit of example of what's going on. We have two practices left to go in spring ball, and as I look at it as a defensive unit, I believe we've made progress. Guys are growing. Obviously we have a lot of new guys. We do have some experienced guys. They're doing well.

You look at the defensive line with Kelvin and Jay and what they've been doing there, trying to put the pieces together there along with the linebackers with Seth doing a great job with the linebackers and his crew. Not too many new guys there.

Then in the back end just trying to put in the pieces to make sure that everybody is on the same page. We're probably not where we want to be at this time, but we've seen growth, and we're looking forward to in the summertime getting to preseason and seeing where we're going from there.

Q. With some of the new faces in the safety, Tyler Brown and Anthony Hawkins and all those guys, how have they progressed, number one; and number two, how important was it for you to get guys with multiple years of eligibility to really learn your system and to kind of take shape here over the next couple of years?

PHIL PARKER: Well, there are two things. They're coming from a different system, different coaching, different responsibilities. It's like a different language to them. I think that Tyler Brown has done a really good job adapting to what's going on.

I think you look at Hawkins. He's a great athlete, and he has a chance to play multiple positions for us. The good thing about it when you have Lutmer there as an experienced guy that can help both of those guys out, I think it really helps. I think the more and more we go, the better they're going to get. I've seen great strides in both kids that are new kids in there, but it helps being with experience.

Getting them in here in January, February, March, and before we start really getting into spring, there's a lot of information they have to get there and a lot of things they aren't getting yet just because it hasn't happened.

Q. A lot of new faces up there defensively. What have you seen in particular from the defensive tackle so far this spring?

PHIL PARKER: Well, obviously, Bryce Hawthorne is a guy that he's been banged up a little bit, but we're really counting on him. He's been a stable guy for us.

I think you look at Devan Kennedy. I think he's done some good stuff in there. The other guys that we sit there and talk about are Luke Gaffney is doing really well. Will Hubert, he's doing a good job, because they're consistent, they know what it is, they've been here. They've been here and doing the things the right way, what we're doing, so I'm really happy the way they're moving.

But I think in due time we'll get some more guys in there that can help us out so it's been good.

Q. I wanted to ask about the linebacker position between what we saw the other day. It looked like Jayden Montgomery and Cam Buffington will be the two in the 4-2-5. Do you expect Cam to take over the Mike role? Do you have Jayden moving? What's your expectation there?

PHIL PARKER: I think we have flexibility in both of them, and Seth has done a great job of making sure they get reps at both positions.

Cam was banged up, so we moved Montgomery over to Mike, and then that gives us an opportunity to maybe put Derek there, DeLong there. There's a really good group of how we spread it out to play the Will backer, the Mike backer, and then obviously sometimes in 40 defense we got the Leo backer in there. They're all interchangeable. It gives you more depth as you have it.

You have six good guys over there that you can rotate in. You'd like to have Ries back, but he's doing a good job trying to get back on the field. So I think we have a good solid group right there.

Q. Zach Lutmer kind of played all over the place defensively in the secondary for you guys last season. Do you have a sense of is there a position that you would like him to play in particular this season, or do you feel comfortable moving him around again?

PHIL PARKER: Well, I think we'll do that, and it would be the best -- like, who is the next best guy to go in the game? So if we're looking at some of the guys in the depth chart that can go in there and play cash because he's played cash, he's played free, he's played strong. Right now his main focus right now has probably been the free safety position right now.

But when you have other guys that can jump in and do the cash, like Wallace does a good job of going inside. You got Watson that can go ahead and play the inside. Both of them can play outside. They can play inside. So it comes down to, like, who is going to be the next best guy to put in there? Can Tyler Brown go down there and play the Cash? Then do we take Hawkins and then does he play the strong and let Lutmer take the free?

There's a lot of moving parts right there. We got to find out what the best fit, because when it comes down to it, I want my best five guys on the field.

Now, can Lutmer play all of them? Yes. Do I need to put them out at corner? Probably not right now based on my depth at corner that I feel real good about. It's all going to change, and I think it's very smart and he understands all the spots, but it's all going to come down to who is available, you know?

Q. Two guys that we heard a lot of good buzz about in December were Iose Epenesa and Jacob Wallace. How have they built upon their springs, and what you do expect this season?

PHIL PARKER: Iose is doing good. He's making progress. Obviously he's a young kid that has a lot of expectations on him, and I think he's done a good job as far as improving.

There are sometimes you sit there and say, hey, I wish he was farther along, but I think he keeps on working. It's not like we're playing a game this Saturday. So making a lot of plays on the ball, and he's done a really good job, and he's very not an up-and-down guy. He's very not emotional and stuff like that, but very good player. I think he's growing, and he's got a chance to play a lot of football for us.

Q. How have you seen Deshaun Lee grow these last couple of years? Especially it felt like he really ended last year strong.

PHIL PARKER: Well, Deshaun, it's amazing coming back. There are some things obviously how much his leadership has actually been, the way he goes. You talk about the leadership in the back end between a Lutmer and Deshaun Lee of how much they can give to the other guys in the room, because they've been through it. That's been very positive for us. I like the way he's growing.

He keeps on growing, and that's with the rotation comes in and helping the younger guys, hey, to reach their goals to be just as good as the starter. I think he's done that job in a good way.

Q. I wanted to ask about Kahmari Brown and the defensive line. With the numbers that he was able to put up at FCS ball, what kind of expectations do you have for an athlete that comes in with that kind of résumé and how they're able to blend into your system?

PHIL PARKER: Well, it's hard for everyone. Going back to the safeties, when you come in and are learning the different language basically, football is football. I get that, but what we're asking our guys compared to what they were asking him, probably has to be a little bit of difference. We're a little bit heavier. There's a little bit more understanding how to take on blocks and stuff like that.

He has been an asset. He is improving. Is he where we want him? No, nobody is right now. You have to keep working. It's a long project. By the time we get to September or whenever we play the first game, hopefully all these guys have a chance to get in there, but he's done a good job.

Q. Along those same lines, you added a number of FCS transfers, guys who are moving up a level. What makes that player or a prospect that fits well with your defense? I guess just from the team perspective, the culture of Iowa, what makes that a player that fits at Iowa?

PHIL PARKER: Well, sometimes when you get a guy that has a little bit more hunger, a guy that he's played and he's shown that he has played at a different level, but still at a high level, but they're still going through a learning process of how we coach, what are our expectations and what we expect them to do.

So I think it's kind of nice when you get those guys that have a little bit of hunger, you know what I mean? They want to prove themselves, but they still have -- everybody has a long ways to go.

Q. With Deshaun being kind of that more established guy at corner, who are some of the other guys do you feel like that are in contention for the starting cornerback spot across from him?

PHIL PARKER: Well, I think Watson has done a good job. Wally has done a good job. Wallace, as I call him Wally, but he's doing good.

Godfrey has done a good job. Godfrey played in the Nebraska game, and he made two excellent plays out there. So to see his growth as we're getting more depth at the corner position, it allows us to keep probably Lutmer inside. Those are the main guys.

Q. I wanted to ask about the (audio disruption) --

PHIL PARKER: (Audio disruption) -- Tyler Brown, I think he's done a really good job. Some of the other guys, like the Hawkins kid, I think he's done a good job. But if you are going lower than that, they're still learning the system.

So the comment on those guys right now, I don't see them right now. They're still trying to learn step one before step two comes along.

Q. Phil, you have had countless great leaders on the defense throughout your career here and especially over the last few years. You lost a ton of leadership on the defensive side. How do you challenge the right guys to emerge in those leadership roles, and how do you coach guys to just find their voice and to be able to lead you guys as you transition to that next step of leadership on the defense?

PHIL PARKER: Really to become a good leader, you have to perform on the field. So you look like a guy that -- for example, Buffington, he's a really good player. When you have a really good player, is he vocal enough, or does he lead by example? That's a leadership by example.

Lutmer has been around enough. He's very confident. He's more of a vocal guy. Montgomery, another guy that's been around. A dad that coached, knows the system, all that stuff, and the leadership that they give. Now, you want everybody to start growing, but if you are going to be a leader, you have to do everything right.

Deshaun Lee, he's been here. He's been around. He knows what it takes. He's seen other guys in the leadership role. You can see how he's getting more activated in the leadership role, but he's still has to be good to be a leader. Good football players are good leaders.

Q. Following up on that, when we talked to Lutmer at the beginning of spring he mentioned that you and him have talked about him taking that step throughout winter and even into last season, him starting to become that vocal leader. I think back to the Mic'd Up that was published by --

PHIL PARKER: There was a Mic'd Up? (laughter)

Q. He did a Mic'd Up couple of weeks ago that was published.

PHIL PARKER: I had no idea. Is that right?

Q. We got to hear the vocal side of his leadership kind of really shine in that. Have you noticed that? Is it a gradual change?

PHIL PARKER: I've seen it. Lutmer is very quiet. When you are young and you had some other leaders that are in there that are more vocal, he didn't say very much. Now he's more mature. He's more confident in doing that, but I probably need to check that podcast or whatever.

You can tell. He's a leader. He takes the team, and they're breaking it down. Hey, he knows the points that I want to put across, because I'm giving them to him in the meeting. He reiterates that to these guys, and I think he does a good job in his way. He's not a real rah-rah guy, but he gets his point across.

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