

July 27, 2009



An interview with:

INDIANA HEAD COACH BILL LYNCH

BILL LYNCH: Pleasure to be here and back in Chicago, and really the kickoff to our football season. We're really looking forward to the season. This football team is -- really ever since the end of the year in November, has had a great off-season, and I think that's where it all begins. It starts with the leadership you have on your football team. I really like the leadership of this group. We've got some experience.

We have 35 upperclassmen, 17 scholarship seniors, and 18 scholarship juniors. So we have guys that have played a lot of football and understand what it takes, and they certainly have brought the young guys along through our winter program, spring practice, and I know this summer they've worked on their own.

I think that's really key. I think any good football team goes the way your leadership and your upperclassmen play, particularly your seniors. We're looking forward to big years from all those guys.

I think another thing that's important about this football team, as we know in the Big Ten you've got to be good up front if you're going win. We have now a situation with our offensive line, Jeff, our sports information director, shared that we have 84 returning starts in our offensive line, which is quite a few in college football today.

The thing that's important, a year ago we did not have a fourth- or fifth-year offensive lineman in our program. So we were playing with some kids. We had some injuries throughout the year, like everyone did, but gave some other kids an opportunity. So when they came back in the spring they thought of themselves as starters and had a great spring, and all those guys are back.

On the other side, on the defensive line, we have two defensive ends: Jammie Kirlaw and

Greg Middleton, that combined have career 36 and a half sacks, which I think is the most returning tandem in the country. So some guys that have been good pass rushers and certainly been a force in the Big Ten, they're both returning.

I think we've got some good young kids inside that will give us some depth. So I think we're better up front. And then the other thing that I think is so important is what we put around them. We've got -- I'll go to the offensive side. We've got a quarterback in Ben Chappell, and he's here and many of you are going to get a chance to meet him today and tomorrow morning. Great leader, outstanding student, and he's got some experience.

He started and played the entire game last year when we beat a very, very good Northwestern team. So he's had experience and has proven himself as a winner in the Big Ten.

We've got fine wide receivers, some young kids that played quite a bit last year that are back. It gave us the opportunity to move Ray Fisher, who was a returning player who had played very well for us in the past to go over and play in the secondary, when we felt like we needed some help.

In the secondary we have an opportunity to start three seniors, Austin Thomas, Nick Polk at safety, and Ray Fisher at corner. It's interesting, our three top kids in the secondary last year we lost to ACL surgery. Getting those guys back and moving Ray over I think is certainly going to help us there.

And then maybe as strong an area as we have on the football is our linebackers where we have three seniors and a junior, Matt Mayberry, Will Patterson, Justin Carrington, and Tyler Replogle. So kind of a quick overview. I really like this football team and the way they've worked.

I think the other thing is next Saturday on August 1st we're moving into a new football facility. I know Coach Brewster and the new stadium that they have in Minnesota is terrific. We're very proud of what has been built in Bloomington and the commitment from our administration to put

together what has not only changed the face of the stadium, but also the facilities we're going to work in with a 25,000 square foot weight room and a 22,000 square foot academic center.

So really there's a new face to Indiana football. I can't wait to get started when our guys get in on August 5th and get to work.

With that I'll open it to questions.

Q. With Middleton, what went wrong last year for him? How much confidence do you have that you'll be able to return to the 2007 form?

BILL LYNCH: There's no question he didn't have the kind of year he had as a sophomore. I'm sure there are different reasons for that, but we're kind of looking at that as in the past. I think from the time we got back and really got the off-season program officially going in January, he's been a different guy. He's had a great work ethic. I know our strength and conditioning staff have been very, very impressed with him through the time that we got going in January. He had a very, very good spring.

I think one thing that happened in the spring, as well, is we've developed some pretty good offensive tackles, so he's going against some pretty good football players every day, and I think that was -- led towards his improvement.

He fell off last year, but if the way he's worked at it in the off-season is any indication, we think he's going to have a big year here in 2009.

Q. Can you talk about the significance not only of the brick and mortar changes to the building, but all the University is doing to kind of change the whole game day atmosphere and give it a different feeling?

BILL LYNCH: Well, I think it's huge. Fred Glass, our new director of athletics, has done a tremendous job, and his staff. I know they have worked really throughout the winter and spring and now into the summer to change the face of not only the end zone complex, but the entire game day experience. And I think that's something that as the football coach and as our football players, they see a commitment, that football is important at Indiana.

The gameday experience is going to be different. That's a motivation to our players, and it's something that not only our current players but certainly in the recruiting process that is so important to us. All kids are looking for that "wow" factor. They can see it with the facility but they're

going to experience it when they come to a game this fall.

Q. Last year you had quite a few injuries. Would you like to see the schedule extended like Illinois is doing with a couple of open dates?

BILL LYNCH: Yeah, I think that would help. You know, it's a long season. The other thing that -- these kids work at it all year long now. It's unbelievable what we all ask of them and what they give. So you carry over what they've done in the spring and summer right into our fall camp, and if you play 12 straight weeks, that's tough on these kids. Physically it's a demanding time.

So I think if we can give them a week off somewhere in there it really helps. I think it's -- I hope if you give them a week off, though, it's later in the year. Last year we had a bye scheduled, but it was after the second week of the season. I don't think if you have it real early it helps you nearly as much as later on when the kids need a little break.

And there's a mental side of it, too. Physically it's one thing, but to get a little bit of a break from a mental standpoint for kids, I think, is important. And shoot, as a football coach, you love coaching football. You'd like to coach it as long as you possibly can. So if we could extend it a little bit, I think that would be positive.

Q. Along with Fisher, you had a bunch of other offensive players switch over to the defensive side. Was that more defensive depth as an issue or a natural transition for the players?

BILL LYNCH: A little of both. That's the great thing about college football. It's different in the NFL where you can go pick up free agents or make trades or draft. We have to make it work within the context of the guys we have in the program. I think it's important that you find the right fit for each kid.

And I think the other thing that I like about this team is they're all about understanding their role. I think it's a unique group that whatever they can do to help the football team they're going to do, and I think Ray Fisher is a perfect example. Here's a guy that threw up some big numbers as a wide out, but in all honesty he was one that came into our defensive coaches at the end of the season and talked about moving over to defense and playing corner. So it certainly wasn't

something we had to twist his arm to do.

Jarrold Smith as an offensive lineman had a couple starts last year. We felt like we needed some depth inside on defense. And he's a 300 pound kid that's not great natural strength and a tough guy. We asked him to make the move, and he said whatever can help the team. As a result, I think it's going to help him.

So I think each situation is a little bit different. But you have to look at the personnel you have and where you may have some weaknesses and certainly where you can develop the depth it takes to play in this league.

Q. As far as schemes go, are you considering any other changes or anything like that on the offensive or defensive side of the ball? How do you expect the pistol offense to help change games in the fall?

BILL LYNCH: Well, I think the biggest thing is whenever the season is over, we all look at what we're doing offensively and defensively and where it fits your personnel and where you have to improve. I think it really hit us on an offensive side. We needed to be more multiple in what we were doing. We had been exclusively in the spread, and honestly I think in some ways defenses have caught up with the spread.

I think the really good teams that have been in the spread have taken that next step. They've done something a little bit different.

We just felt like we needed that to get more multiple. With Ben Chappell being our quarterback, we knew staying in the spread every snap wasn't in our best interest. So we looked around, and I think the first thing we wanted to do, we wanted to be able to run the football better downhill running. That's kind of a cliché, but in the spread, a lot of things are lateral.

We wanted to be able to run some power football where we could have some different blocking schemes up front instead of being kind of a total zone team, and we felt the development of our offensive line. I say that, and we've got to prove it in the fall, but I really think we've made great advances there because the kids have worked so hard. We felt like we could run that kind of offense.

The other thing we looked at it - and I think we all know how important big plays are in football - you've got to make some big plays offensively, and you have to eliminate them on defense. Well, the one thing we were missing were some big plays in the passing game. We had gotten a little

bit spoiled for a couple years because we had a big receiver in James Hardy where we could kind of throw jump balls up there and he could make some plays. We needed to create some.

So we felt like getting to a downhill running game gives us a chance to have some play action pass where we could get it down the field that way. I think that's the biggest thing is the ability to run the ball a little bit in a different scheme and get play action pass. I think it fits our personnel.

On the defensive side, we certainly need to make improvement, but we like what we're doing. And I think that getting guys healthy and getting guys out there, and sometimes if you change too much, you never develop any continuity and the consistency it takes to develop young kids. We feel like our defensive staff have done a very good job of developing some of these young kids. Let's get them healthy and get them on the field and let them play.

There aren't going to be major changes in what we do defensively.

Q. Your team is the only Big Ten team that has two true road games in your nonconference schedule. Do you like the idea of having those games as valuable tests for closing with three out of five road games in your Big Ten schedule?

BILL LYNCH: Well, what happened with our schedule this year is we had a home game with South Florida, and they had an opportunity, and this was late in the spring -- I can't remember exactly where it fell. But they had an opportunity to start a series with Florida State. You can see from their standpoint that was a great opportunity. And anymore in contracts today you can get out of them if you're willing to pay some money. So we were able to move their game down the road. So that opened up a game for us.

It was very difficult for us to find another home game that was suitable at that point. So it was a little bit -- it generally doesn't happen that way. The other thing is we would like to get where we're playing a good BCS school as one of our nonconference games, and we'll like to get into a rhythm at some point where we get into home and home with that school.

And trying to find schools that are similar to Indiana and what we do from not only being a BCS school, but academically and all that.

Virginia was open, so Virginia was a great

opportunity. We've got them home and home. But in order to make it work, we had to go there. So that's really how that came about. We certainly would like to, as we go forward, have seven home games and five on the road. But it was one of those quirks as a result of the South Florida situation that we're going on the road for that sixth game.

Q. During the spring you went around to some of the fraternities and sororities on campus. Could you talk about what that was like and engaging the students?

BILL LYNCH: The sororities were a lot better than the fraternities. (Laughter) And there's a lot of truth to that. Shoot, they paid attention and listened. The fraternity guys wouldn't even look up from eating.

It's a case of reconnecting with the students, and that's one of the things that I know Fred Glass and his staff have really worked hard to get that connection with the students and get them to come to the game.

So it was kind of a goodwill tour of going out, and also listening to them about what can we do from a gameday experience that would interest them and have them come to the games. It was a lot of fun, and really got a chance to get back out and be around campus and kind of get the pulse of the students. We're around our football players so much, and you get locked into the 105 guys that you have and what they think. You forget on a campus with 38,000 students there's a lot of kids out there that are looking for other things.

It was fun, and hopefully it's going to pay off with more students coming to our game this fall.

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