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An Interview With:

GREG DAVIS

Q. How do you feel about the wide receiver play?

GREG DAVIS: Keenan is playing really well now. Not only with the football, but he's blocking better than he ever. In fact, Sunday I showed the offense a play that was an explosive run. The line -- James got us in the right play, the line picked up to start well. Keenan made it from a 12-yard play into a 30-yard play, and he was actually excited after the play. I told him the only reason I showed the play is that's the first time he's ever been excited about a block in his life.

But he has really done a good job. Obviously he's caught the ball well, and Jordan Cotton has come the last couple weeks and given us some explosive plays.

I think we finally got Jordan in the right place, which is, in our terminology, our sub-B position, and I think because of that, he's really beginning to play well.

Kevonte is playing like we thought; he plays with great passion. He understands the various parameters that he has to be able to get open, and I think he'll just continue to get better.

We continue to have some miscommunication problems versus some various looks and some things that we've got to get cleaned up this week as we head into the strength of the schedule.

Q. Kirk couldn't remember the last time that Iowa used a flea flicker. You called it out. What else do you have left in your offensive bag of tricks?

GREG DAVIS: Well, we have several things obviously that we haven't done that we've been working on. We actually installed that play in spring training, so we've had it for a long time, and

we were just waiting for a situation that we felt like it was ready for.

There's other plays like that that we'll continue to use. And the same thing with no huddle. We've continued to work no huddle. I think, who knows, over the last part of the season, but I think it will be a bigger part of what we're doing as we continue to go into the strength of the schedule. It's something we've jumped in and out of a couple times. But the kids have no problem with it, the execution of it, so I think that's something else that we'll continue to do more of.

Q. How do you foresee using Damon and Mark, carries, distribution, situational?

GREG DAVIS: You know, I'm not so worried about carries and things like that as things that we can do to affect the defense. For example, if we can put what appears to be a base formation, two backs, a tight end, two wide receivers on the field, with Mark being the fullback, Damon being the tailback, and then the next play the same grouping is out there, perhaps Damon is a wide receiver, using the personnel to best fit the situation is something we're going to have to do.

In terms of both of them getting carries, what we've always done and what Kirk has always -- you give them both opportunities, who gets hot, and then you ride that guy for a while. But it would be good to have two guys back there that have done it a little bit.

Q. Are the communication problems getting on the same page in the passing game just a matter of reps?

GREG DAVIS: It is a matter of reps, and there's only so many reps you can give them in practice to simulate it until it happens in a ballgame. We missed Kevonte on a breakoff route versus a blitz the other day. Again, it was the way the play was installed in spring training. But it's the first time it's come up live. We've continued to

work it each week. It was just a matter of the rhythm of what you can do on that particular route.

We missed a hand signal one time in the ballgame against a blitz situation. And all these are things that are not new, but they're new to that situation in a game. They've been worked on in practice, and usually what happens when the guys get to the sideline and you get them on the headset, Coach, I can't believe that; I mean, I understand. But they're things we've got to get cleaned up; there's no doubt about it.

Q. What's your comfort level with the speed of the offensive skill position players, in particular the wide receivers?

GREG DAVIS: Well, you would always like more. You would always like more.

I do think that as the receivers have gotten more comfortable and will continue to get more comfortable. They're actually playing faster now. I mean, any time you're out there thinking about what to do, where you should be lined up, what you do versus this coverage, this blitz, whatever, you're not going to play as fast.

I do think we're playing at a little faster tempo now, but we're going to continue to look for guys that are really hard to play one-on-one. I mean, when you get one-on-one situations, you like to be able to take advantage of it.

Q. Are you happy with the tight end progression so far?

GREG DAVIS: I am. Both CJ and Derby, Duzey, Ray Hamilton, all those guys have come in and given us something, both CJ and Hamilton gave us a big play the other day in various situations, Ray on a 3rd-and-3 and CJ on the second play of the ballgame. They've given us some explosive plays. And I think it's only fair, because my wife asked it so I'll be glad to answer it, she said, how come you didn't use that play again that you hit CJ on the second play of the game? Actually we did; we used it three other times in the ballgame. One was a sight adjust to Keenan, which he made a good play on; one was a different coverage.

But those guys will continue. But I've been happy with what they've done.

CJ is playing really well both with the football and without the football. A lot of the slant plays that have been productive through the first five ballgames can go -- you can go right back and he's given us an edge to be able to run the ball.

Q. Any concern that you haven't gotten Rudock in for game action?

GREG DAVIS: I mean, you'd love to. You'd love that your No. 2 would be able to get some snaps prior to getting into conference play, but it just has not set up that way. So if something happens to James, will I be concerned? Yes, I will be. But at the same time, we're not going to try to manufacture a way to do that.

Q. The moving parts in this offense, receivers, quarterback, where was their knowledge level with sight adjustments, and where is it now?

GREG DAVIS: Well, it was -- when we started in spring, everything was new. And not that they had not sight adjusted before, but definite kind of sight adjusts, there's ways the quarterback can move protection around and change things. So everything was new in spring training, and we've continued to work on that. And I think we -- I think if you asked them on a test, a written test, which we do, most of them would all have A's. But at the same time then you have to take that knowledge and take it out to the field when the band is playing and it's happening like that (snaps fingers).

Q. With Jake Duzey getting a lot more reps in the past week, just talk about what's moved him up the charts, I guess, a little bit.

GREG DAVIS: I just think the way he's practiced. You know, it's not anything -- we're going to continue to use multiple tight ends, but he's practiced really well, and he's got the ability to run. I mean, he can do a lot of the -- or exactly some of the same things that Derby can do. He can play wide out, he can play back inside. But it's more what he's done and what he's done in practice that we just felt like we needed to get him a little bit more involved.

Q. When you get a guy that's averaging seven yards a carry like Mark, does that kind of just open everything up for the offense?

GREG DAVIS: Well, any time that you can run the ball, your play action gets opened up. The opening play two weeks ago that Keenan made such a nice play on, direct result of being able to run the ball; the flea flicker last week, a direct result of secondary players supporting the run.

When you're able to run the ball, that's when you have an opportunity to fake and perhaps

get a chunk. The same thing with CJ's. All those explosive plays came off play action passes.

Q. I get a lot of people coming to me and say James is locking on, James is locking on right at the line of scrimmage. What is he coached to do and what is he looking at right out of the snap?

GREG DAVIS: We don't have enough time to cover all those things that he's looking at. You know, it depends run or pass, but obviously if you're talking about pass, the first thing that quarterbacks are taught to do is where is my protection problems because there's always an opportunity for them to be in a protection situation. So that's where everything starts.

And then after that, there's various kind of reads, whether or not we're full-field reading based on rotation or whether or not we're in a progression kind of read. I have not felt like James was locking onto someone through the first five ballgames.

The one thing that happens with a guy like James is that he does so much study during the course of the week, a lot of times he's getting a pre-snap tip as to what he feels like the defense is going to do, and that pre-snap tip will, in some cases, eliminate progressions. So a lot of times he gets through his progressions pretty quick.

But yeah, I mean, I don't think that's a problem. I mean, I think he's used his eyes to move people away, and it's something we'll continue to work on.

Q. Have you worked with -- 25 touchdowns last year, two so far this year. I'm sure he's okay with it because you won your Big Ten opener, but from the outside, people are looking at it and scratching their heads. Is it a big deal that he only has two touchdown passes so far this year?

GREG DAVIS: It's a big deal because I think we're all a little bit surprised. It's not a big deal in terms of what we are looking at or what he's looking at. I mean, would you like him to be better? Yeah, you'd like him to be better, sure. But at the same time, you're not going to try to force the issue. I mean, they're going to come within the normal flow, and we've had some -- we've had several situations where guys have been close to getting it in, they don't get it in, we've had opportunities. So we'll just continue to work with that.

But the thing that he's done so well is he hasn't let it bother him. I mean, he's just continued

to -- and probably mentally played as sharp as he's played all year in the ballgame Saturday in terms of the -- he doesn't get -- because it's not obvious, he doesn't get the credit for some of the things he does that don't show up in terms of getting us in and out of different situations.

Q. Run checks?

GREG DAVIS: Right.

Q. How does that work? He's calling two or three different plays in the huddle; is that right?

GREG DAVIS: Well, it works all kinds of different ways. There's situations where we'll give him a package of plays in the huddle that he'll go to the line, look at the defense and make a decision, and there's situations that we talk about as advantage checks. In other words, we're going to call a play that can be run against most anything, but versus certain blitzes, we have an advantage to do this. So both of those scenarios came up in the ballgame the other day where we had a play called, they were giving us a run blitz, he recognized it and put us in an advantage check.

Q. Have you always given your quarterbacks that much kind of leeway, freedom?

GREG DAVIS: All that could handle it. All that could handle it. And that's what you try to do in spring training and in fall camp is try to find out what they're comfortable with, and then you kind of work around their comfort level. But he's had a bunch of snaps, he's an extremely -- and he studies. He studies really hard during the week so that he can make those checks.

The other thing that's happening is we probably had -- in the red zone the other day, we probably had at least five passes that he checked off of and went to a run. Now, it takes a pretty mature quarterback to leave -- if your question was bothering him, it would take -- I mean, he had plenty of opportunities in the red zone to go to a pass, but he saw an advantage in the run, and he went to the run.

Q. Talk about the offensive line's progression. You said at the start of this news conference you hadn't given up a sack in a few games. Can you talk about what you've seen from them from spring to fall and now through

five games?

GREG DAVIS: You know, we had several new starters to start with, and nobody wants to talk about new starters, so I'll be glad to. But Scherff was starting at left tackle, Blythe was brand new, Van Sloten, even though he's an older guy, was playing. So we only had two guys that had really started a bunch of ball for us. And it just takes a while for that group to gel.

I think one, they've worked extremely hard. I think obviously Brian has done a good job with them, and they're just continuing to grow, and they're playing at a much higher level now than at any point in camp or in the opener, and I think that will continue to happen.

It was a shame that Blythe got hurt, but at the same time, it gave us a chance to play Andrew Donnal, and he played well, so that's one other guy that's now in there and that you feel comfortable that can go in and be productive for us.

Q. Did you see this kind of growth from them? Did you see that it could happen, that they would improve this quickly?

GREG DAVIS: Yeah, it was something that you hoped would happen, and you base that on how hard they worked in the off-season and how hard they were working during the week. But you never know until it goes -- until you go out and do it.

But we felt like before the season was over, they would be a pretty solid unit.

Q. Are you expecting Bullock to be available for Michigan State?

GREG DAVIS: Well, I think Kirk will probably talk about that on Tuesday, but we certainly would be hopeful that he will be.

Q. As you go through this weekend, at what point do you start shifting your attention to preparing for the Michigan State game?

GREG DAVIS: Well, there's a couple things you want to do on an open date. One is you want to go back and check quality control, see if plays are giving you what you thought they were going to give you. That's one thing that you want to do. You want to make sure that it's a great time to work the young kids. So today's practice scenario, the young guys will get a bunch of work in a bunch of different situations that you can't get in game preparation.

At the same time, the coaches are also already looking ahead at Michigan State. We

won't introduce a whole lot of Michigan State to the players until Thursday, and even Thursday it will be just an introduction, and we'll come back on Sunday and get a jump start.

But the coaches started Sunday looking ahead and looking at film of Michigan State.

Q. There's a lot of points that have been scored in college football, a lot of teams, but what's going on in your opinion?

GREG DAVIS: Well, most of the time those are spread offensive football teams. Where the field is spread and you're getting great athletes in one-on-one situations and you're getting quarterbacks that have thrown the ball so much more than even 15 years ago coming out of high school. They're so much better prepared in a lot of situations.

But typically it comes from that style of play, West Virginia obviously, Baylor, Oregon. Those style offenses are going to put up bigger numbers typically just because of the way they play.

Q. Do you see Iowa transitioning to that?

GREG DAVIS: Probably not. Probably not. I think, one, we've got to do philosophically the things that we believe in, so we will continue to use that as a part, as I mentioned, no-huddle and those kind of things. But we're not going to become a spread team. That's not our identity.

Q. What do you envision for Garmon and Smith, the two freshmen, moving forward? How are you going to give them snaps or get them snaps?

GREG DAVIS: Well, Greg was fixing to get a bunch when Damon went down, and then shortly later he went down. But he's healthy again, and the game will dictate how we use those guys.

Garmon is a guy that gives you a chance for a big play, and so we want to be aware of that and try to continue to get him in in certain situations.

But it's going to be more game time and opponent and what's happening in the game in terms of -- we're not going to set up some kind of, you're going to get the first series, you're going to get the second and the third, and that kind of scenario.

Q. Do you wait for defenses to, I'll say, catch up with Mark Weisman? He is a 235-pound fullback who moves probably better than people think. Do you wait for defenses to have maybe the next move to try to shut him down?

GREG DAVIS: Well, regardless who you're running back is, if you're being that productive you're going to look for defenses to start moving in that direction. And again, I think that's where hopefully your play action can take advantage, because whether or not they're either run blitzing to try to stop the run or they're trying to add an extra defender in the box by spinning the safety down or whatever, then hopefully that's where you can try to take advantage of what they're doing.

At the same time, good players, good backs, they tend to find a way to make yards if they get enough opportunities.

Q. Is that the next half of the passing game, take advantage of opportunities, say, and run blitzes? Saturday I think James said double corner fire, weird stuff like that, maybe take advantage of a blitz, make them hurt?

GREG DAVIS: Yeah, they did in the second half bring double corner, and it was something that we had not showed the kids, we had not seen on tape. And we had a couple opportunities. We tried to get CJ down the middle of the double corner fire one time, got hung up at the line of scrimmage, so there's some opportunities to take advantage of that kind of stuff, and hopefully as we continue to get better and to grow, we'll be able to do that.

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