

July 28, 2014



An Interview With:

RUTGERS COACH KYLE FLOOD

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Kyle Flood. Coach, an opening statement.

COACH FLOOD: I'd like to start by thanking everybody in the media for everything that you do to promote our student-athletes, to promote our football program, our university, and certainly the Big Ten Conference. It's an honor for me to lead this team and this group of young men in our inaugural season in the Big Ten.

It's even more of an honor for me to get the opportunity to coach young people like the three that I have here with us this week.

I'll start with Darius Hamilton, our starting defensive tackle, somebody who came to our university with a lot of fanfare and has lived up to every bit of it. He's playing for us, starting the football games since he got to Rutgers. Toward the end of the last year, I thought we started to see the dominant defensive lineman that we knew we had recruited and knew it was just a matter of time.

So we're really excited. He's had a great offseason. He's bigger than he's ever been, and we're looking forward to seeing him compete in this conference.

Michael Burton, our starting fullback, is really a throwback type of football player. He's a do-everything fullback, somebody who blocks for us out of the backfield, certainly can catch the ball out of the backfield. We hand him the ball, he can run with it. A 3.4-plus GPA in communications. A 4.0 GPA last semester. And really one of the true leaders on our football team.

And finally, Lorenzo Waters, our starting strong safety who has been starting in football games now for us for three years. He graduated last semester with a 3.2 GPA in a double major in political science criminal justice and somebody

who is really the quarterback of our back end and one of the reasons why I think we'll be much improved. He's really the next in a line of what has been many really high-level players in our defensive secondary at Rutgers.

We're excited about the season, but we're excited about our football team. It's a football team that, on offense, brings 10 players who have started in football games for us, a significant amount of experience. And on defense, a defense really that brings nine players that have started for us in games and a lot of players who have had a smaller role.

So I think it's a little bit more experienced team than we had last year. It's a little bit deeper team in some areas than last year, and the type of team that I think we would want to have to make this move into the Big Ten Conference.

Over the last year, I've gotten this question probably more than any: How do you feel about being in the Big Ten? And my answer to you would be this: It feels right. I think it's only right that Rutgers University, one of the original colonial colleges, founded in 1766, one of the top 25 universities nationally, one of the top 50 universities globally, the birthplace of college football, a school that's been to eight bowl games in the last nine years, 33 players currently in the NFL, and we've done that, achieving in the top tier of the APR the entire time.

So to me, as I look at our football program and I look at the Big Ten Conference, I see a tremendous marriage. I don't think there's any other conference in the country that we would want to play in, the premier academic athletic conference that the Big Ten is, and I don't think there's any better choice that the Big Ten could have made than to add Rutgers University. And with that, I'd open it up for questions.

Q. The question I have, seems like the move of Maryland and Rutgers to the Big Ten happened almost overnight. There wasn't any kind of speculation or run-up to it publicly; it just kind of happened in a span of a few days.



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Rutgers Coach Kyle Flood

When they came to you and first said, hey, we're contemplating making this move, from a football standpoint, what were the things that went through your mind about taking your program from the Big East, the AAC, into the Big Ten?

COACH FLOOD: I think the first part of your question, when they came to me and they said that, when Tim came to me, I said perfect. That was our first choice. It was the conference that, really, we felt like the culture at Rutgers belonged in.

When you talk about the premier academic conference and then the school that has the academic tradition that Rutgers does, it was really our first choice. But if you think back to that time, it was a little bit like musical chairs, but there weren't enough chairs for everybody. So certainly we were excited to be in one of the premier conferences.

From a football standpoint, our program has always been about winning championships. That's our first goal. And since becoming the head coach I've tried to schedule very aggressively. In my first year we scheduled a home and home at an SEC school. We were fortunate to go on the road and win, and they were fortunate to win when they came to our place.

So I don't know that that much has changed from a football perspective. Certainly we've got a lot of respect for the programs here in the Big Ten, but again, we've played good football for a long time here at Rutgers.

Q. I'm wondering, what are some of the recruiting challenges Rutgers faces specifically, how it relates to Penn State and given the proximity you guys have to the Nittany Lions in what's typically has been a very strong recruiting area for Penn State?

COACH FLOOD: I think recruiting is always about finding the right people for your culture. I think that's where it begins and ends. Certainly as we recruit, we recruit what's called the State of Rutgers. And the State of Rutgers begins in New Jersey, but it also includes southeastern New York, eastern Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, and we've always traditionally recruited Florida. So that's been our recruiting footprint, and that will not change.

What I will tell you is the Big Ten schools, whether it's our neighbor to the west, our neighbor to the south or any other traditional programs in the Big Ten, have always recruited New Jersey. And that hasn't changed. And what's important to me is

that we find the right players that are right for Rutgers.

I would tell you the one thing that changed is we've seen some more interest from some non-traditional areas. Last year we signed a tight end from Texas, a tight end from Minnesota, a quarterback from Michigan. So to me, that really has been the biggest change because those players I'm not so sure would have been as interested in playing in the Big East, but they're certainly interested in playing in the Big Ten.

Q. Coach, have you talked at all or looked at Nebraska? A few years ago they made this move to the Big Ten. How much did you study kind of how the transition has gone for them and who else have you talked to from other teams that have made these conference transitions?

COACH FLOOD: I've been fortunate to, this past offseason, hire a gentleman to be my offensive coordinator by the name of Ralph Friedgen, and Ralph has a lot of different experience in different schools and in different situations. He's somebody that I've had conversations with about getting ready for this season because it's not about making a transition; it's about preparing for the season.

I think what you speak to is the preparation for the different opponents. We'll play 12 teams on our schedule this year that are different from the teams we played last year. Some we have some familiarity with, others we don't.

So I think for us, it's been really about doing the best job we could at doing all the prep work leading up to the season, and we started a little bit earlier this year. So that would be I guess the answer to your question.

Q. You talked about scheduling aggressively. How much are you looking forward to playing teams like Ohio State, Michigan State, and Michigan this season?

COACH FLOOD: We're looking forward to competing for championships. And if that's what the schedule is to give us an opportunity to compete for a championship, then we certainly look forward to it.

I think to have some of the more storied programs in the history of college football in your conference and to play them on a year-in, year-out basis because they're in your division, I think we

welcome that. We're looking forward to that test.

Q. When you talk about Big Ten football, define what you mean by Big Ten football. What do you see that sets it apart or makes it unique?

COACH FLOOD: To me, Big Ten football starts with physicality, and I think you had better get your program ready for the physical battle that is going to happen up front. You look at the teams in this conference and whether they're traditional offenses, spread offenses, for the most part they're offenses that want to run the football and stop the run. And those are two things that we've always started with at Rutgers.

And certainly on offense, we want to be balanced. And to be balanced, you need to be able to run the football when you want to run the football, not just when the numbers dictate.

So I think if you ask me about the Big Ten conference, the first word that jumps into my mind is physicality.

Q. With all the great talent, high school talent that has come out of the state of New Jersey over the years, do you think now, with that Big Ten umbrella, you're going to be able to go in these homes and actually be able to get commitments from these great athletes in New Jersey?

COACH FLOOD: I don't think there's any doubt. I think we've done that. I think sometimes some of the players we've recruited have come with a lot of fanfare, guys like Darius Hamilton, and sometimes we've had other players who've come to Rutgers with not as much fanfare but have really produced on an elite level. Guys like Devin and Jason McCourty come to mind.

When you look at recruiting and you look at the players that enter a program, for us, the most important thing is the right fit. If we can find the right player that fits into the Rutgers football culture, the Rutgers University culture, that player will thrive. And whether it's three, four, or five years later, that player will be a better player for it, and he'll help us win championships. And while he's doing it, he's going to prepare himself for the NFL. I don't think you have 33 players in the NFL by accident.

Q. I just wanted to see what the process was like in terms of bringing Ralph in as offensive coordinator, how long you had

been looking at him for, and just what went into bringing him in?

COACH FLOOD: Coach Friedgen and I didn't really know each other. We had some mutual friends and acquaintances. But it really started two years ago. I had reached out to him about the offensive coordinator position, and the timing wasn't right. I know things have been written about why the timing wasn't right, but for him the timing wasn't right.

And then when Ron Prince had the opportunity to go to the Detroit Lions and be the assistant head coach and the tight end coach, I said, you know what, I'm going to reach out to him again and let me see if we can make it work this time.

And we flew him in, had the opportunity to spend some time with him. Talked about everything, really just from personal philosophy to the depth chart, the personnel, to recruiting, to what we thought we needed to do to be successful, and ultimately it ended up being the right move.

I know his wife was certainly in favor of him going back to work, which never hurts.

Q. You alluded to all the guys you have in the NFL right now, whether it's Logan Ryan, Duron Harmon, back to Devin McCourty. What's kind of created the pipeline between Rutgers and Foxborough?

COACH FLOOD: You know, that's probably a better question for Coach Belichick than for me, but I would tell you this: I think the reason those players have been successful, it really starts with having the -- choosing the right player out of high school and then having a program that you can develop them in, to have a defensive system that prepares them for the NFL. All the things that I think we do.

And then I think one of the things that is very attractive to Coach Belichick and to a lot of coaches in that league is they know when they get a Rutgers football player, he's going to be ready to be a professional. He's going to know how to prepare. He's going to know how to take care of his body. He's going to know how to practice. He's going to know how to do all the right things to get ready for a game because there's very little room for error.

And I think we've got a good system for doing that at Rutgers, and it's allowed those guys

to be successful while they're with us and then even beyond in the NFL.

Q. Want to ask about your quarterback situation. Gary Nova had an up-and-down season last year. How are you going to approach that going into the start of preseason camp, and who are some of the people you're looking for at that position?

COACH FLOOD: Gary will go out with the first team when we go out there for the first practice. And if we had to play a game today, Gary would be our starter. I haven't officially named a starter yet.

But Gary's done an excellent job this offseason of really improving his decision-making. It's never been about making the throws for Gary. Gary can make all the throws. He's got excellent arm talent, the ability to locate the ball. He's athletic to move around in the pocket. So it's never been about that.

It's really just being a consistent decision-maker, and I think he is really taking to what Ralph has been preaching. He went through 15 spring practices, threw one interception in 15 practices. I think that was a good start.

I think he's had an excellent summer program. I think he's done a good job of leading all the other players on offense. And now he's got to take that into training camp and make sure when he shows up first day of training camp, he's a better player than he was when we ended the spring game.

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