

I first must give thanks to and applaud my Hawkeye brothers for bringing heartfelt awareness to the longstanding issues within the University of Iowa Football program and for championing those of us whom had likewise endured discrimination and abuse during our tenure at Iowa. The incidents being brought forth today are of a caliber like those I had elucidated in years past. For years I have harbored resentment—not towards the University of Iowa—but towards the two men who made a deliberate, malicious effort to sabotage my career, ruin my life, and murder the dreams of my childhood through years of both physical and psychological abuse. Allow me to detail just a few of my own Iowa Football experiences.

Being an Ohioan athlete who was heavily recruited by the Ohio State University, I arrived at Iowa with considerable attention in the halls of social media. Before I had even set foot on the turf at Kinnick Stadium, I had been dubbed DJK and had acquired a following of hopeful and expectant Hawkeye fans. These developments were by no means of my own doing; I did not demand that such fame and recognition be thrust upon me. Unfortunately, it would be this attention that served as an underpinning for my relationships with Chris Doyle (CD) and Kirk Ferentz (KF). I came to the program young and enthusiastic, a diligent worker and congenial at heart, eager to make a difference; but, for reasons known and unknown, I was estranged by CD and KF. I was baffled by what was going on in the Iowa program. What had I done, as a recent high school graduate, to attract such anger and spite from two grown men? Why had they set out to break me? Surely, they had dealt with popular players before.

Chris Doyle relentlessly insulted and belittled me. I was fortunate and even grateful to be called only “soft”. On innumerable occasions, he labeled me a p—y, he labeled me as an entitled brat, and he proclaimed that I was “born with a silver spoon in your mouth.” Apparently, these taunts were warranted because my adoptive father was a hardworking physician and my adoptive mother was an attentive stay-at-home mom. I could not fathom how the financial status of my parents was a recurring point of contention with my football coach—especially considering that this man was making hundreds of thousands of dollars off of the blood, sweat, and tears of collegiate athletes while simultaneously shaming me for my own family’s success. In light of the many experiences that several other Hawkeyes have spoken about, such as telling other black athletes that he was going to send them back to the ghetto, I now wonder if this conflict stemmed from the fact that I did not meet his standards for who a young black male should be; maybe, in his eyes, I did not have it hard enough.

But what of the truth? The truth is that I was born into poverty. My mom was only fifteen when she gave birth to me, she struggled to put food on the table, and often she would not come home at night. I attended almost every elementary school in the Youngstown area because we were evicted every six months, my mother unable to keep up with her rent. By my estimations, my childhood was far from a “silver spoon” lifestyle.

Yet, Doyle did not care for the truth. He sought only to punish me for his ridiculous notions concerning an imaginary childhood and for his ridiculous notions on where a young, black male should come from. During a spring ball practice, where new recruits and their parents were present, CD ordered me to run around the practice field with a trash can on my head to punish me and humiliate me in front of my teammates, coaches, and recruits. In my time at Iowa and as a coach afterwards, I have never seen an athlete punished in such a demeaning way. It goes without saying that it was reckless and dangerous. This isn’t the cruelest punishment Doyle has ever doled out. A favorite and frequent punishment of Chris Doyle’s, log rolls were to be done until you had choked on your own vomit. Then he commanded that you do more. He is nothing short of a punitive, sadistic man. It is worth noting that thirteen young men nearly died under the watch of Chris Doyle in the name of a “punishment workout” for, what was seen by some, a poor bowl performance (edging out Missouri State 27-24 deep in the 4th quarter due to a Hyde pick six). As a nationally known leader in player development with his tenure is inexcusable; he should have been dismissed at that time.

During my time as a Hawkeye, the fans and community (Hawkeye Nation) as well as the media all seemed to be happy to have me—but not my head coach. Kirk Ferentz regulated what clothes I could wear. He pulled me into his office on many occasions to discuss my attire and mannerisms while out at Iowa City. While these “suggestions” were not official rules, it was an unspoken reality that I could be benched for failing to comply with Ferentz’s demands. He instructed me to be inconspicuous. He informed me that there would be no

compromise. He encouraged me to be less colorful in interviews. He told me that I would have to be more “blue-collared” if I wanted to fit in. “The less you say, the less you have to take back.” I loved everything about Iowa Football and was ecstatic to share it with the fans and the community. During my interviews, I always celebrated my teammates first. To Ferentz, this was inappropriate. When I did not act, dress, or talk the way he preferred, he would make up reasons to bench me for a quarter here or a quarter there. While athletes on other teams were building their stats in non-conference games, I rarely saw the field. I refused to conform my personality to Ferentz’s standards; I refused to give the canned responses he wanted me to repeat, and for it he had me banned from speaking to the media altogether. He printed out my interviews, made notes, called me in and dissected my every word. Why was he so hell-bent on limiting my expression? I understand that every organization has its rules, but I always felt that rules were against me. Every week it was something new: another reason to call me into the office, another reason to berate me, and another reason to punish me with my game time and my interactions with the media. What could I have said to make him so afraid? In retrospect, I now know: the truth. In one of our private meetings, he threatened me by saying “I don’t care how much pressure I receive from the media to play you; you’re leaving in a year and my contract just got renewed, so I’m going to be here whether I play you or not.”

In our last private meeting after the Minnesota game that he blatantly blamed me for losing, before I was ultimately dismissed from the team, he threatened me again, saying that if I did one more thing wrong to piss him off, he would share my file containing everything I had ever done wrong since I stepped onto campus with every single scout that inquired about me. However, if I didn’t piss him off, maybe he would consider not sharing any of this with NFL personnel. We all remember the incident at the end of my time at Iowa for which I take full responsibility. But let me be clear: I’ve never sold a drug in my life. The error in judgment was living under the same roof with an individual who was involved in distribution. It was an awful decision on my part. As far as drug use went, many of us indulged in extracurricular activities after beating some of our BIG rivals. There is no question about that. Was it right? No. Did it happen? Regretfully, yes. I will never deny that I was immature and irresponsible at times during my tenure at University of Iowa. I am not that person today.

Interestingly enough, KF’s hate for me was so deep and, in retrospect, there were so many red flags. On November 20, 2010, the Senior Day against OSU, during the Pre-game ceremony, when the seniors and parents walked onto the field to walk onto the sideline to shake hands with KF, KF conveniently avoided contact with my parents while shaking all of the other parents’ hands (Feel free to check the footage). Then, after losing to Ohio State in Kinnick Stadium at the senior dinner post game, my father, being the better man, approached Kirk Ferentz to thank him for the opportunities that Iowa Football had provided for his son. The response he gave to my parents was “Do me a favor. Tell Derrell I have one more thing in my pocket for him; I want him to worry.” He wanted me to worry and be afraid and that it was coming soon but would not elaborate further. My parents, and even my now 21- and 17-year old brothers who were eleven and seven at the time, recall this haunting exchange vividly to this day. On December 7th, 2010 the authorities raided my home, and I have no doubts, based on that conversation with my family, that it was orchestrated by KF. I was immediately kicked off the team and expelled from the university: no due process, no counseling, no treatment programs, and no second chances.

Despite KF’s best efforts to suppress me—to keep me in his doghouse and off the field—I still was able to leave Iowa with all-time school records on the field and in the weight room. CD took all of my weight room records down, they didn’t allow me to wear the tiger hawk logo in the senior bowl game I was selected to play in, didn’t allow me to workout at Iowa’s pro day. Contrary to their student handbook, neither the University, the team nor any of its representatives called or reached out to see how they could help me respond to the incident. Was I well? Did I need treatment? I was dead to them. To this day, I have yet to hear from anyone inside the program that promised my parents they would look after me. I had never been in trouble before this and up until this time had represented the University, the team, and the state of Iowa well. Where is the humanity?

I held my own Pro Day workout and only 3 NFL teams showed. Every team said the same thing. We understand that you made a big mistake; people make mistakes. But what concerns us is that CD or KF had not one single good thing to say about you. In fact, that told us why we should stay away. Just like KF promised, he blackballed me from a shot at fulfilling my dreams of playing in the NFL. After giving everything I had in the weight room and on the field for 5 years at The University of Iowa, after 20 years of working toward my dreams and because of one mistake, two grown men that promised my parents they would look after me actually had used their power—their privilege—to alter the course of my life. It’s taken me nearly 10 years to recover, to rebuild my reputation, and find peace in my

life. How deep does this animosity run? Just recently, a member of the current staff reached out to me to invite me to the ten-year 2009 Orange Bowl Championship reunion at half time of the Penn State at Iowa game on 10/12/19. One day before my flight was scheduled to fly into Iowa, that same staff member called me to inform me that KF ordered him to call me and tell me I was not welcome at the event. That staff member profusely apologized and stated he had no idea that after 10 years I wouldn't be welcomed. He and several members of the 2009 team stated that, without me, we may not have even been in that game.

So, is this racism? Is this strict, old school coaching? I cannot honestly say; however, going through this as a young, black male, I can genuinely say that whether it was their intent or not, I believe that race was a large part of it. I was just another black athlete and I wasn't going to be bigger than their program. I could be wrong; perhaps this is not an issue of race. If it is not a race issue, I ask all white athletes who suffered in a similar fashion under the heel of Doyle, Ferentz, and any other member of the coaching staff at the University of Iowa to come forward and share your stories. Together, we can be the necessary change that brings about the end of such mistreatment. If you are a white athlete and did not experience what we did, it is now your duty to stand with us and help in the fight against racial injustice. Whether it be strict and old school coaching, racism, or however you want to phrase it, it needs to become a thing of the past—not just in Iowa, but universally. There is no place for it in today's society.

Why the delay in response? Why bring this up now? I have learned from the past and I see the future is bright. I am very happy in my life and I have owned and made peace with my mistakes. At first, I felt what happens in Iowa is no longer my business; there is no need to look back. However, I was encouraged by former coaches and teammates that I must share my experiences to help prevent these issues from happening to young men moving forward. If I could prevent what happened to me from happening to any other student athlete at UI, or anywhere for that matter, speaking out is the right thing to do.

For future student athletes, regardless of race, I would take a very hard look at the current program before committing there until there is tremendous reform—from the top to the bottom. If you believe for one instant that KF does not have his finger on the pulse of his program, as he throws CD under the Hawkeye Bus, then you are blind. In fact, you can rest assured that there is not a thing that goes on in Iowa City that KF does not know about.

I am a coach today because I want to use my life's experiences to make a difference to develop young men the right way. In my wildest dreams I would not treat or humiliate ANY of one of my players in this or any way – no matter their race, color, or creed. My hope is that these events will bring attention to injustices like these and will prevent things like this from happening to future Hawkeyes and student athletes everywhere. I've made it my life's mission to use my experiences to help young men of all backgrounds to have a chance for success on the field and in life.

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