

Hoosier Happenings

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Turning the page

Indiana hopes to open a new chapter in Hoosier football history by using experience and accountability to win on the field

By Ken Bikoff

Bill Lynch has been itching to get back on the field ever since his Hoosiers trudged off the gridiron following IU's blowout loss to Purdue in West Lafayette last November. That defeat not only brought what had been a nightmare of a season to a close — it signaled the start of new day for the Hoosier football program.

A changing of the leadership in the locker room was the first sign that things would be different, and the players who are returning for the 2009 season and beyond went into the off-season workouts with a new focus and dedication. The sting of that loss at Purdue has been hovering over the program, and the players want to make sure they won't have to endure another season like 2008.

There is a tangible change to the program, as well. The North End Zone facility, which has been under construction for the last two years, is finally ready for the Hoosiers, and the opening of the facility has the entire athletic department excited about the future. Indiana moved into its new digs Aug. 1, and the improvements have put a hop in everybody's step as fall practice nears.

Inside Indiana spoke to Lynch over the summer to talk about what goals were set for the summer, the changes in Ben Chappell's confidence and the excitement surrounding the team's move to the new facility.

Inside Indiana: What kind of goals did you set for the players to achieve before they return for fall camp?

Bill Lynch: The thing that is so important in the summertime — and some people don't understand the rules of it — from the time they walked off the field during the spring game, that was the last time we were able to coach them until Aug. 7. It really is on the leadership of the team. That's something that is really going to help. The weight staff and the athletic training staff will be around, but we, as coaches, can't be around. Going into the summer, the position coaches meet with their guys and set out specific goals they would like to see them reach. As an overall team, we just want to continue what we developed in the off-season. In the winter and the spring, I saw a commitment. I saw an accountability. I saw leadership. I saw improved work ethic. Those are things that certainly are going to be the core of our success. They've got to just continue to improve and work in those areas, then do the individual skill improvement their position coaches have challenged them to achieve.

II: Have you seen a difference in QB Ben Chappell's confidence now that he knows he's the starter and doesn't have to look over his shoulder for serious competition?

BL: I think Ben is a confident young man. He's very smart. It shows up in his academics. It shows up in how his teammates think of him and how he conducts himself off the field. There's a maturity there. Physically, there's a maturity, as well. The guy who came in four years ago and the guy who is here now are very different. He's a big, strong man. I think he has more confidence in himself, and I think that's the way he will play.

II: Has DE Greg Middleton been more determined since the end of the season?

BL: I think he has been a motivated guy this off-season. He certainly has worked very hard, both in the weight room and in his conditioning. He wants to have a big senior year, and he has worked that way.

II: How will DE Jammie Kirlew's leadership help the young defensive tackles?

BL: I think it's really important. Deonte Mack is a very good leader, too. He's inside with the tackles, whereas Jammie is outside with the ends. But there are some young guys on the outside, who need the leadership, as well. Fred Jones, Eric Thomas, Darius Johnson, Kyle Kozack... those are all guys who have a chance to be real good football players. I think it will help Jammie being there from a leadership standpoint.

II: Do you have higher expectations for this group because they've been playing together for so long?

BL: No question. I keep saying this, but your best football teams have their seniors playing their best football. We have a large group of seniors who have played a lot of football, and they have to have their best




Photo by A.J. Mast

year. I don't think there's any question that the expectations are there both from a coaching staff's standpoint and the players' standpoint. They've looked forward to this since last November. I think they've worked hard.

II: How disruptive is it going to be to the program to have to move at the start of August just when you're getting ready to start camp?

BL: We're going to learn a little bit week-by-week about when we're going to be able to really get in there. I think they're on schedule and if they are, we should be going in at the end of July. It will be very well-coordinated to move everything over. The weight equipment will come in on certain dates and is assembled, then there will be some equipment from the current weight room that will go over. The technology part of it will all be new, and there will be a period when that will be in and we will have to be trained on it. That's such an important part of coaching these days.

II: Are you happy with the timing of when you're moving? It seems like mid-summer would have been more convenient for the program...

BL: We've waited 49 years or whatever it is. We're so excited to go in there that whenever they tell us to go, we'll be ready and waiting. 

For more of our interview with Indiana head football coach Bill Lynch, order the 2009 Inside Indiana Football Yearbook by calling 800-282-GOIU. Our exclusive preview will be available everywhere on Aug. 10.

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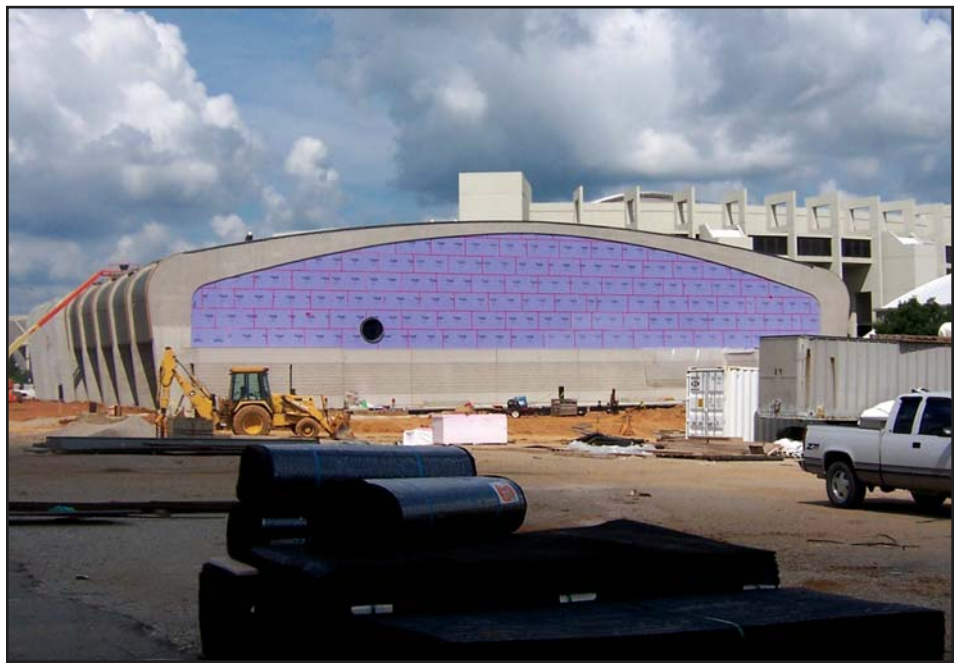
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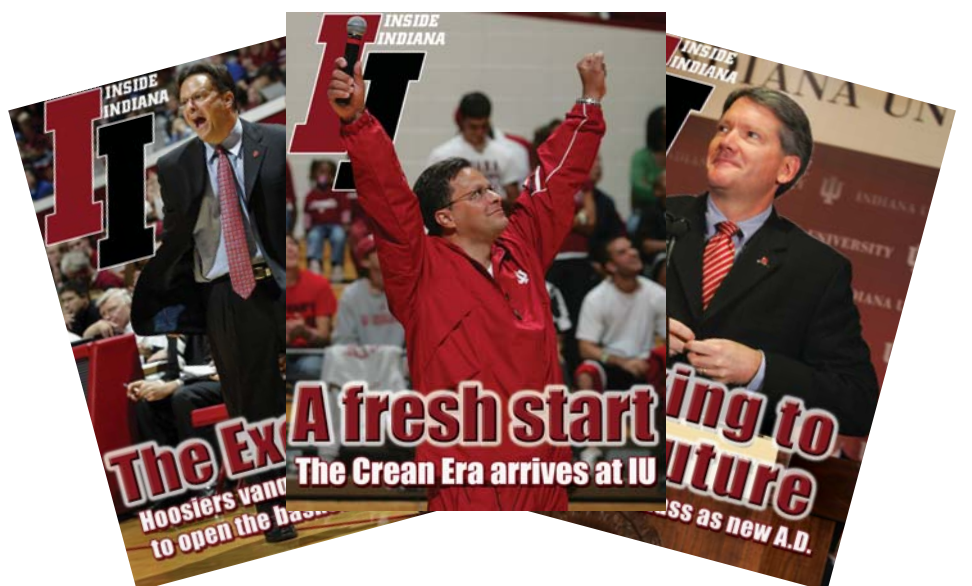
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