

University of Iowa Football Media Conference

Saturday, September 23, 2017

Kirk Ferentz

Postgame Press Conference

Penn State - 21, Iowa - 19

KIRK FERENTZ: Needless to say, we're all really disappointed with the outcome of the football game tonight, but I think I speak on behalf of the entire coaching staff, just incredibly proud of the effort and the toughness our guys played with. They just did a heck of a job. We told them at the beginning of the week they're going to have to really compete out there hard and play with tremendous effort and hustle every snap, and I think that's what the team did tonight. We played a really good football team.

That game is illustrative of what it takes to win in the conference. The Big Ten is a very tough, competitive conference, and I think tonight is a great illustration of that. It was a really competitive game. Both teams competed about as hard as you possibly can, and you know, a lot of different swings in the game, certainly the last two drives, both teams executed really well down the stretch. Just a lot of great efforts but a lot of players on both teams. We're disappointed with the loss; it's going to hurt for a while, but we'll move on. This team has had a great attitude and they've got great character, and we're going to push forward and get back to work here and flip the page on Monday.

That's kind of where we're at right now, and last thing I'll say is night games in Kinnick are always very, very special, and the crowd was just unbelievable tonight. We're very appreciative of that, and we've always had great fan support, and tonight was no exception to that.

Q. How do you guard against an emotional carryover from a tough loss like this?

KIRK FERENTZ: Just like when you win, there's a really good feeling that you've got to put that behind you after the 24 hours, and we'll have to do the same here. The guys expended a lot tonight, too. That's the other factor, energy wise, just energy. It was a little bit warm out there. So we'll take care of them and make sure we do our best, but at some point you've got to move on. Win, lose or draw you've got to move on and make sure we don't miss an opportunity next week.

Q. Do you see a parallel with the Big Ten Championship game?

KIRK FERENTZ: I hadn't thought about that, but yeah,



probably. You go right down to the wire, two teams slugging it out, and I mean, nobody left anything out there. I think everybody was totally spent.

Q. Why were things so difficult on offense? 1st downs seemed to get almost nothing.

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, first half especially I think we got ahead of ourselves a little bit. I think we were playing fast, faster than we should have, and we didn't have really good field position in the first half, either. That's for sure. I would say, at least in my opinion, they're an improved defensive football team. They were a good defensive football team last year. They look to be really strong, and you watch them on film, three weeks, they look good. Looking at them in person, they're to me playing at a really high level. They've got big, strong athletes. They're very talented, and they play hard, and they're very well-coached.

Q. When they blocked your field goal, No. 4 jumped over the blocker, what's your understanding of that rule?

KIRK FERENTZ: I asked the officials about that, and they said it was a legal play. It's a little bit of a gray area, I guess, but the officials said that they watched it and they felt like it was legal.

Q. Not many people gave you a shot in this game --

KIRK FERENTZ: Our goal was to get in the fourth quarter. You're the underdog team, significant underdog team, and the idea is to get there in the fourth quarter, however you do it. You guys watched the game. You can see they're a tough team to defend, and it starts with that running back. The quarterback is a really good player. I said that on Tuesday. But the running back is a special player. I don't know if I've seen many better or any better in my 19 years back here.

He's a tough guy to tackle. Looked like we had him stopped, and next thing you know he's going further down the road.

It's one of those deals. They just kept -- they've got a really prolific offense. They execute it very well, but our guys kept battling and gave us a chance to win the football game.

Q. If you look at the statistics without looking at

the score, you'd say blowout. Why was it not a blowout?

KIRK FERENTZ: Our guys fought, simple as that. That's the beautiful thing about football. There's a lot of ways to win games, and we knew coming into this game we would have to make it a team victory, which means having to come up with some plays in special teams, offense, defense. We didn't drive the ball consistently like they did, but we came up with some big plays at some critical times, some good responses, but just came up a little bit short unfortunately.

Q. You played the No. 4 team for 60 minutes. Does that give you confidence moving forward?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, one thing about this team, our team, is their attitude has been good going back to January. I've said that pretty consistently, and they've been good during the season. I thought we had our best week of practice last week. That's encouraging. I think we're learning that way, and I think a big part is we're getting great leadership from all of our guys. You look at our seniors, those three linebackers, you can go right down that list. But we've got a lot of young guys that haven't played, and you can only imagine what an experience like tonight would be for a guy like Alaric Jackson, who hasn't played a lot of football for us, or Nate Stanley. We've got a lot of guys like that right now. Hopefully we'll learn from that and be better next time we face this kind of challenge, which will be next week (laughing).

Q. Speaking of this week, many a time over the years you've talked about your 24-hour rule and watching games and so forth, but are you going to have to massage this one a little bit differently this week?

KIRK FERENTZ: We'll see. The biggest thing, again, twofold; the guys spent a lot of energy out there. They left it out there, and yeah, the emotional trauma, damage, whatever you want to call it after a ballgame stuff, it's hard to lose. It's hard to lose no matter how it goes, and it's always a challenge. But that's part of the sports, too. We knew we had 12 games scheduled. We knew we've got two more to go in this stretch, this six-week stretch, so that's all of our jobs is to move on once we get through the tape.

Q. Seems like there's a continuous growth from AJ. What are your thoughts?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, absolutely. AJ is really growing with each week. I mentioned some of the younger guys on offense, so that gives us a little bit more octane out there. We play better when we can rotate guys through, and Anthony did a good job, Matt has done a good job; I think he made some good plays today. So the more guys we get in the rotation, hopefully we can stay fresher a little bit that way and keep building on

what we did tonight.

Q. What was your view on the very last play?

KIRK FERENTZ: Well, you've got two choices, right, and we had been putting a lot of pressure on them during the course of the game and done a good job with it, so you roll the dice, but we didn't lose the game on that play. That was an excellent drive on their part. They really executed down the stretch when they had to. I thought their quarterback really stepped up in that possession, and you can say the same thing about us. We responded on our last possession, as well. Those were both really good drives.

Q. Was it a game of patience there with as much as they were blitzing? Did you think a big play would happen for you eventually?

KIRK FERENTZ: We were hoping it would. We started to wonder at some point. Yeah, we really couldn't get anything established in the run game or sustain anything, and that's always frustrating. But you get in games like that you just have to be patient, and we finally hit them on that last one, and it popped free. They were blitzing on our right side and we hit them on the left side. You roll the dice a little bit on those kinds of things, and I guess ironically you get two blitzes the last two plays, each possession. But that's part of football.

Q. How concerning is it that you couldn't set the tone early with the run game going forward?

KIRK FERENTZ: Well, every game is a separate entity. We're playing a team -- these guys won the Big Ten Championship last year, and I don't think that was a fluke. They have a lot of good players back, and in they're playing at a higher level, at least they were tonight, than what I saw at the end of the year. I don't mean that in a derogatory sense to them; last year they won the championship.

They've got a really good football team. We knew it was going to be a challenge and tough. I'm just proud of the way our guys stuck with it and came back in that second half and really gave us a chance to win the football game, so that's what that's all about when you get in those situations.

Q. You guys started blitzing more; was that what you were seeing as far as defensively going after it like that?

KIRK FERENTZ: You do what you have to do in each given game. With their attack between the running back and the quarterback, and I've been saying that all week, but it's hardly a secret when you play these guys. So we just felt like we'd have to get them off tempo a little bit, and it was pretty effective for the most part tonight.

Q. When you see a kid like Sam make a big play, he's committed his life to no guarantees --

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, Sam is a great guy. It's his fourth year in the program. He's growing with each and every step, and that was a huge play tonight, the one he made. It was really good to see that. Again, kind of indicative of the team effort tonight. We had a lot of guys do little things that would have contributed to the win had we come out on top. We didn't get the win, but those little things will add up to be really helpful for us down the road.

Q. Did you guys talk to the officials on --

KIRK FERENTZ: We did, yeah. They said it was a legal play, yep. They said it was a legal play.