

University of Iowa Football Media Conference

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Kirk Ferentz

COACH FERENTZ: Welcome, everybody. Certainly very pleased with last weekend's ballgame, not only the win but how we won the game, fighting through some real tough situations and I thought the guys really stayed together and fought through some bumps along the way. Happy about that.

Our football team has looked at this as a season of opportunity, and certainly our next opportunity is a very formidable opponent. We know we have our hands full with the University of Pittsburgh coming in here.

Our captains are the same four guys, Drew Ott, Jordan Lomax on the defensive side, and Austin Blythe and C.J. Beathard offensively.

Really thrilled to learn that Robert Gallery is the honorary ANF Honoree, and very, very fitting, the last time, one of the last times Robert was back here, I believe it was when he was honorary captain, one of the highlights he had being back here was riding in the Combine with his daughter. Since then, he's added a son, he and Becca have two daughters and a son. We are excited for him.

On the injury front, obviously Drew Ott and LeShun Daniels both left the ballgame the other day. Both guys are rehabbing right now. They didn't practice today but they are making good progress, and it would be premature to make any predictions how it's going to go. But they are making progress and we'll see how the week plays out on that one.

The other thing I want to talk briefly about is Derrick Mitchell and just give you a brief synopsis on that whole thing. When we arrived on Friday I was made aware of a letter that came from the university that afternoon to Derrick, and as you might well imagine, at that point, really wasn't too interested in investigating less than 24 hours from kickoff. We sent Derrick home at that point.

I had an opportunity to visit with Derrick last night and get more information, and after getting a full understanding of the situation, we were really pleased to welcome him back this morning. So he's back with



the football team and we'll move accordingly from there.

This is Week 3. It's a very important game, certainly, and a very important week for our football team. The team that we play, Pitt is an extremely talented team. They are a very tough, physical football team and return a large number of returning players, veteran players, guys that have great experience.

I think an interesting side note about this series, it's the fourth time we've played Pittsburgh now since 2008, and this will be the fourth time they have a different coaching staff. So it's kind of an interesting side note to it, and really where it pertains to us, it creates a unique challenge in terms of our preparation.

So we have been working hard on that, and we'll continue to do so. And basically what I told the team last night is you look at the University of Pittsburgh, their football team, from what we have seen from two games of them, we can anticipate this being a full 60 minute type football game, a very tough physical football game because they are an excellent football team.

We are off to a positive start. The real key for our football team now is to try to improve and make sure that we are looking forward, not backwards and see what we can do about taking another step forward.

Q. With Derrick's status, it was a code of conduct violation, and you specifically said in your release that it was not legal.

COACH FERENTZ: Correct.

Q. Do you anticipate there's no legal ramifications?

COACH FERENTZ: Based on what I know, yeah, that's what I fully anticipate and we'll certainly abide by whatever the university decides but I wouldn't have brought him back if I wasn't confident that there's nothing really much beyond what we were talking about right now.

Q. Is he healthy?

COACH FERENTZ: Pretty much so, pretty much so. I don't know if we would have played him the other day or not. We'll just see what it looks like this week.

Q. So sending the release at 6 o'clock or whatever it was last night, it was more of an acknowledgment?

COACH FERENTZ: There was a buzz out there and I wanted to acknowledge the fact that we did suspend him and we did send him home. He was not there physically. He was there briefly. We sent him home.

I think it's important for me to explain why, but we did send him home. It not the right time, and it's more timing than anything else. Quite frankly, I should have gotten to him sooner, but maybe I should have. But we are busy on Sundays, Mondays too, but we got to it last night and I feel very comfortable with what I learned.

Q. Will he be in the plans then this week?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, as long as things go as I would imagine this week.

Q. How did Derrick handle the whole situation?

COACH FERENTZ: That's just the way it goes. It's unfortunate timing and, I think our players understand that. We were over there for one reason, to play our best football game, and anything that's going to take away from that, it's not really a time for inquisition and discussion and what have you. We were going there for one thing and that's just unfortunate timing.

Q. About Pittsburgh, you've explained several times your non-conference scheduling strategy overall, but how did this series happen and what do you like about it?

COACH FERENTZ: I'm not 100 percent sure other than it's in an area, region that we recruit, not that we have done much in Pennsylvania. We have not had a lot of success in the Pittsburgh area and it's been a while since we've gotten players from Erie.

But to me it makes some sense, at least it's in the Big Ten region so to speak, and you know, I've got a little bit of a history with the program being there as a grad assistant in 1980, but that's not the reason we schedule them.

I think it made a lot of sense when the series originated and the way it's panned out, it's been interesting, if you look at especially the last two games or last year's game and this year's game, there was a real Wisconsin flavor to the ballclub a year ago and now you throw the film on there's a real Michigan State flavor to it. Wish I could say I was smart enough to anticipate that when we got involved in scheduling. Just one of those logical matchups.

Q. The yards for no yards on the punt – do you think that set the tone for the game?

COACH FERENTZ: Well, I think that was a big factor in

the football game and we've talked about our attention to special teams. That's something that it's all been important here. It's really been critical quite frankly, and we were not pleased with the way we ended last year and the consistency that we played with.

A big part of our success Saturday was the fact that Kidd did a great job punting and certainly for Riley to go down there and cover that thing the way he did. I shared this with you after the game, I think he was more proud of that than he was the catch, which really, as a coach that makes you feel good. Because we've had a history of having really good gunners here throughout the last 16-plus years and we got a way from that a little bit last year.

It all starts with guys being excited about it, taking ownership in it and realizing just the value and importance of those kind of plays. It was a great play by Riley.

Q. When you game plan, what can you take away from looking back at history?

COACH FERENTZ: The first thing we have done obviously is look at the last two ballgames. They have played two ballgames with this current coaching staff and when you watch those two games, you see an awful lot of the Michigan State influence. We looked at last year's film just to get a feel for the players and how they matched up against our guys a little bit, and then we have gone back and looked at our games against Michigan State. In some ways, it's like a first game almost but again the influence and it only makes sense. Coach Narduzzi is not a good defensive coach; he's an outstanding defensive coach, and he's doing a great job as a head coach, as well, but his influence there certainly is showing up on film, and not just scheme.

It's more than scheme. It's the effort that guys are playing with. They are just I tell you, they are really flying to the football. They are hard to block and if they get blocked, they don't stay blocked. Statistics, they are already starting to mount, it's not surprising, you can see that influence and impact.

There's still a lot of carryover offensively. They are still a very physical football team that runs the football extremely well. They look not exactly like they did last year but similar. They are going to come out and get after you. They are a big physical group up front, four out of five guys with starting experience. Looked like maybe a chink in the armor is the running back that got hurt, very good back that got hurt and this guy is averaging, whatever it is, 300 yards in two games, so pretty impressive.

Q. How similar are the quarterbacks?

COACH FERENTZ: For the most part similar but the guy we saw last year, he can run and he gets out there in the open, boy, he covers ground fast. That really jumped out at us in our preparation and then we saw it firsthand, as well. The other guy, maybe not as fast, but maybe a little bit older and a little bit more seasoned. So it's not a dramatically different challenge but I think, you know, we have to be ready for both, clearly. They are going to play the guy they feel the best about at that point.

Q. What do you say to a guy who obviously knows he made a mistake like that? You're angry at him, what do you say to Jaleel?

COACH FERENTZ: Concentrating, basically, in his case the ball is right there. That's the hard part. It's easier said than done. If your quarterback is doing a good job with the cadence, and they had a veteran quarterback and so again, it's easier said than done. But that's part of youth showing up in his case.

Q. What about the contributions of Jameer and Joshua Jackson?

COACH FERENTZ: Absolutely. Josh did it during camp. We just had certainly a need there, and he's done a great job. He's got a great attitude and for him to compete the way he did the other day, he's still got some things to learn, certainly that's encouraging. Jameer had it going there. George was very limited in what he could do last week and so I give him a lot of credit there certainly.

You think about a guy like Parker (Hesse) in that same neighborhood, he got called on early in the game and did a wonderful job competing, too. I'm really proud of those guys. It's part of football, though. It's going to happen more as the season goes on and we'll have more of those situations. I'll throw Jordan (Canzeri) in there, from splitting time to the sole honor back there and he did a wonderful job as well.

Q. How has C.J. been different, have you seen maturity and growth in him?

COACH FERENTZ: I've mentioned in the past, Thursday practice, it's kind of burnt into my memory bank a little bit and somebody looked it up, it was the week before Pittsburgh ironically, so he played a lot better Saturday than he did on Thursday, one of those deals.

I think that's an illustration of where he's changed. As a quarterback, you can't go out and have a bad practice like he did that day. Maybe wasn't that bad but was bad in my mind. Not for what you want on a Thursday. And I think that's really the story. I think really his grasp, what it is, to be a starting quarterback at a major school, and I think he's really taking that

responsibility to heart and he's done that, started last fall probably after that little period there. But since January he's been fantastic and really proud of him. We've had some ups and downs, he's done a great job and he has a great work ethic and he's done a great job leading our team.

Q. You talked about special teams from day one last year. Some of the mechanics in practice, there's that one gunner drill where guys are running a 40 yard Oklahoma drill. Talking to the guys, they seem to really like that.

COACH FERENTZ: They do. They enjoy the competitive drill and that is a competitive drill, keep score and all that stuff. Chris brought some really good drills with him when he came here. We were doing those drills a couple years ago. It's how you do things. It's really more so how you do things, the attitude you have and the pride you take in what you do.

Again it wasn't terrible last year. We did a lot of things well on special teams, but the consistency that you have to have wasn't there and that's the difference between winning and losing a lot of times.

Q. Do you feel good about the core group at linebacker?

COACH FERENTZ: I think we are developing a good core of guys. You mentioned Travis, he's kind of the bell cow of the whole group. He's been a ringleader of that group. That helps, too, when somebody takes ownership that way. Takes an awful lot of pride in what he does out there, transmits to everybody else.

Q. If LeShun can't go, who is your No. 2?

COACH FERENTZ: All hands on deck. Take it day by day

Q. What about the fumbling issue with Akrum Wadley?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, kind of like the special teams discussion. He's done a lot of really good things, too. The real challenge is to minimize those mistakes that are costly. It's one thing when a defensive tackle jumps off side for five yards. It's another thing when you turn the ball over and it's pertinent to the quarterback conversation where a guy touches the ball every play.

Just a responsibility that comes with being that guy. Or in blitz pickup, too. A lot of times that's a problem younger players have. But I think he's doing a good job there. It's just that ball security. To me it's all concentration. But he's working hard at it and he's committed to getting better.

Q. What about John Wisniewski has he been hurt,

and Jay Scheel?

COACH FERENTZ: He was hurt a little bit during camp and obviously Jay was. So those guys, thing to remember about both of them, they are very young players and they are working hard. They are going to factor in at some given point. I can't tell you exactly when. In the meantime, some other guys have gone ahead of them. That's competition. I think both those guys are going to be really good football players for us in the future.

Q. What does Tyler Boyd do that jumps off the page when you see him?

COACH FERENTZ: You know, I probably should think a little further before I say it, but just off the top of my head, I thought last year he was as good of a receiver as we've seen since the two guys we saw in the LSU game and those guys are pretty good. To me, he had that kind of talent, ability and smoothness and grace.

He just was a really gifted player when we played them last year. He played one game last week and he looks like the same guy. He's a really talented player and knows how to get open. He caught, what, 11 balls the other day. They looked to him for good reason. If you have a good player, you get the ball to him. On top of that, he's a good returner. They have got two very dangerous returners and he's one of them.

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Q. How key has it been for you guys to have Matt VandeBerg blossom into a guy that C.J. really trusts?

COACH FERENTZ: We thought we saw that coming in practice and I mentioned what we talked about, McCarron, I said during camp, I thought he was one of our more encouraging guys this August, he made a big jump from the spring. And Matt has been doing that on a steady plane.

You never know where the ball is going to go, and fortunately when it went his way the other day, he made some beautiful catches. I think C.J. is developing good chemistry with lot of guys, certainly not just Matt, but certainly Matt is in that club.

Q. Does your program need the night game, is it a status symbol?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't know if it's a status thing but

it's exciting. I think you know my preference, sure like them here better than on the road for obvious reasons. But night games are really special just in general. It's a great place to be, so we are excited about that. I think it's a great thing. I think our fans are excited about it, and hopefully we'll play well Saturday.

Q. Those kind of things, along with alternative uniforms, is that something kids like?

COACH FERENTZ: Never really thought to ask. I don't think it hurts us at all, that's for sure. I know playing well is attractive to prospects, it helps. Attractive to everybody really. Hard to argue on that one.

Q. Optimistic they will be back, given the nature of their injuries?

COACH FERENTZ: Oh, yeah, absolutely. We'll have a chance to know more Thursday or Friday. I think it's realistic. If they can't make it Saturday, hopefully the week after.

All that stuff comes down to a medical decision. We weren't going to put George out there obviously if the doctors said he wasn't playing. Then it goes to us afterwards, if the doctors say once the doctors say there's no risk here, then you still have to judge a player effectively and do him justice. That's a separate decision and discussion.

Q. The series, playing four times

COACH FERENTZ: In some ways, and it's interesting with Dave Wannstedt, he was a GA at Pitt before I was. He had beaten me by about three years I guess. Dave played there, he was recruited. I know he was a good player. I think a thousand miles away. And then in this case, Pat was a coach at Rhode Island, we both coached in the Yankee Conference in the 90s; there's a little fun fact for you, a little trivia.

Coach Chaney is a very accomplished offensive coach. He's done a great job. In a short time he's done a great job with them, too. There are a lot of interesting ties and that's kind of the nature of football I guess. Interesting how it's all panned out.

Q. How does game day routine change with a night game?

COACH FERENTZ: What we do is we shift our Friday night routine over to Saturday. So this Friday will be in a little different deal. Still practice in the morning, but meet with our guys later on during the day and we'll send him out to the movie, we always do that if we play a night game and try to keep them from playing the game that evening. And then we'll do our Friday night routine during the day Saturday, so usually have that done by noon or so.

Q. Where do you think this last Cy-Hawk victories ranks for you personally?

COACH FERENTZ: Our goal is to win the game, pure and simple, and we knew it was going to be hard and it was. Nothing easy about it. So we got that one.

And when we close the door on it Sunday night and started to focus on University of Pittsburgh. That's where our focus is right now. We have a big challenge on our hands right now.

Q. As head coach, do you always believe 1's against 1's in practice, and what is the benefit in that?

COACH FERENTZ: It's still sharpening steel, I guess, is kind of the principle there. I guess a way to increase tempo a little bit. You really get to measure players a little bit better that way, because if you have a veteran player who has played and a younger guy going against him, that's basically the level you have to get to. That gives you a little bit better appreciation that way, on the twos, to give them a more even field.

I've been around places where you just set up pins and knock them over every day in practice. I'm not sure how much better you get doing that. To me it's more about competing against each other. It doesn't always look pretty, but that's a downside and you have to understand that when you do it.

Q. What was C.J.'s reaction when told he was Big Ten Player of the Week?

COACH FERENTZ: He was happy but he's a really humble guy. He's a really humble guy and I think all his teammates were really happy for him, too.

And you know, it's a team award. That's how I look at it and C.J. would be the first guy to tell you. In fact, he may have told you earlier. Not that he did; I'll just make a prediction there.

Q. Rushing the last two weeks, I asked the offensive line and they say it's a running back stat. I asked the running backs and they say it's an offensive line stat.

COACH FERENTZ: We'll see what happens. They are going to come hard this week. It's everybody just being coordinated and I think right now we have a pretty decent vibe with everybody. Everybody is operating on the same page.

Q. What's the degree of difficulty in facing a team that will throw everything at you this early in the season?

COACH FERENTZ: It was a heck of a challenge last year. That was a really hard football game. Hotly contested, both sides, we had to come from behind.

There's nothing easy about that one and we knew that one going in and I anticipate the same thing here. Again, the coaching staff's changed but they have a lot of the same players back. Both their ends are really good players on defense.

They have a lot of big guys inside, they rotate, keep them fresh. They come at you hard. Just I've got a lot of respect for their scheme but I have more respect when I think about what Michigan State defense has been and what they are doing at Pitt. It's about the way they go about their business. They are tough. They contest you at every turn.

I think you're going to have to really earn it. They are very aggressive with their approach, and they have good experienced players, three out of four in the back end, middle linebacker is a veteran player, very good player and one of those new backers, I think he's an outstanding player, wasn't a starter last year. A lot of guys that can get after it and it's going to be a real challenge for our offensive football team.

Q. Is Marcell Joly next in line?

COACH FERENTZ: He's certainly in the equation. He's been practicing with our guys. Kind of whoever is healthy and whoever is looking the best in practice