

University of Iowa Football Media Conference

Tuesday, October 13, 2015

Kirk Ferentz



COACH FERENTZ: A couple words about Tyler (Sash). We all learned about the medical examiner's report this morning, and you know, obviously regarding his death, his passing has been a very, very sad thing and our thoughts continue to his family and all of his friends. Very sorry to learn about the news there.

I know Steve updated you on the ticket situation, and in reference to that, just want to again say what a great crowd it was Saturday. We had a great homecoming crowd. And for our four games, the environment on the field has been fantastic.

So we are appreciative of our fans. Just really appreciate their support. They have been great on the road, at home. And hopefully we'll continue to be supported as we go along and looking forward to a good contingent up there in Chicago for this game.

Referencing last weekend's game, certainly it was great for the fans to be able to witness such a special performance by Jordan, he did just a fantastic job. I think that's a neat side game there.

Going back to last week, hard fought win, hard fought Big Ten win, and we expected that going in. As I said Tuesday, Illinois is a much improved football team on both sides of the football, especially up front. I think Coach Cubit has done a great job with that team and they played extremely hard the other day. There was nothing easy about that.

At this point we are really happy to be 4-0 in Kinnick. That's certainly something that is important to us, and right along with that, we have had four games that have basically gone down to the last possession or next to last possession. I think that's something, two areas that we didn't maybe fulfill our expectations last year, our goals.

So we're off to a good start. We still have a lot of football ahead of us, we know that. But those were both positive things for us and we are pleased to see that.

And then needless to say, very, very happy for Jordan and the recognition he's received. That's our fourth Big Ten award player, and as all of you saw out there, he really ran hard so just a phenomenal effort on his part

and he's a little sore and tired right now but he'll be ready to go.

It was a good win and now just like every other week, we had to move on and we had to do that starting yesterday. Captains are Drew Ott and Jordan Lomax defensively, Austin Blythe and C.J. Beathard on the offensive side.

Medically, four guys that didn't play, we had obviously Boone Myers and LeShun, they were all out. We expect them to continue to be out. Ike Boettger had to leave the game, and we are not optimistic he'll be playing.

And then last night, unfortunately it was confirmed after he went for tests that Drew did tear his ACL. So he's going to be done here. It was a great win for us, but the worst part about coaching football is dealing with injuries.

I've said this many times, but we get firsthand exposure to just how hard these players work on a year round basis, and they are doing it to have 12 opportunities. That's about all anybody's guaranteed as a college football player, so they work extremely hard to have those 12 opportunities to go out and perform and play with their teammates, and any time that's taken away, it's just a tough thing.

So it's a tough deal for Drew, certainly. He's a tremendous young guy. He's done everything he possibly can, and especially tough because he just fought back from that elbow injury, he's been playing less than 100 percent, pretty close last week and now this happened. As good as it was on Saturday, to get the victory, I think probably all of us had a little tough feeling on Saturday night just in expectation that this may not turn out well. That's where it's at.

Drew will have that addressed here in the near future. He's going to obviously stay with us and I'm counting on him to be a strong team leader. I know he will. But it's a tough thing and it's just part of the game, unfortunately.

So that was last week. And I said last week, you have to move forward each and every week and that's kind of where we're at right now. Our next challenge is

twofold. We have to go on the road again and we're playing a very, very good Northwestern football team, 5-1 record and they have good players. They are a veteran team. Their newcomers are playing really well for them and their veteran players are playing extremely well.

They are very well-coached. That's typical of Northwestern, certainly and also characteristic of them, they play extremely hard and they play well. So that's kind of it, and all three phases I'm talking about.

The thing that stands out to me about them, they obviously play very, very well on defense. They have got two very prominent wins beating Stanford in the opening game, beating Duke, and both those teams as it stands right now, those are the only losses they have on their resumé. I think that gives you the indication of the strength of this Northwestern team.

It's going to be a big, big challenge for us. We'll head up there Friday, and hopefully be ready to go on Saturday. It's going to take a great week of preparation and we'll have to be at our absolute best at 11:05.

With that, I'll throw it out to questions.

Q. Do you have to get another running back involved or can you keep riding Jordan?

COACH FERENTZ: We'd like to and we're going to have to; I expect we're going to have to. We're preparing that way. Next man in and next man ready.

Right now it's twofold. It's Akrum Wadley and Derrick Mitchell. Both those guys are fully healthy now, so I imagine we'll see at least one of them on Saturday, that would be my guess.

Q. Parker Hesse for Drew is next man in, he got some valuable experience against Iowa State, how do you see his progression?

COACH FERENTZ: We beat a very good Pittsburgh team with him playing every snap. He's worked hard. I'm glad we made the move back in December. I think every snap is certainly important but he's coming along, doing a good job. And to Pat's point earlier, I think we are going to have to get more guys involved in the rotation. Nelson will probably play a little bit more also. He got in there a little bit Saturday and we'll just keep him along. He's been playing.

So, that and Bud (Melvin) Spears is a veteran guy, a senior, and we'll do it by committee if we have to. Fortunately we still have Nate doing a great job at the other end, so it makes it a little bit easier to shoulder.

But when you lose a guy like Drew, not only an excellent player but also a very strong leader for us; it's

a big void. But this team has done a good job of handling adversity. They have done a good job of, if we are hurting a little bit here, other areas pick up the slack a little bit, and that's a positive of the team so far.

Q. When you say mix in, is it physical preparation, is that more important than mental preparation or is it a combination?

COACH FERENTZ: I think they are both really important. The only thing you can't do for a player, we talked about this with C.J., is you can't give him game experience, because it's still different.

So you do your best in practice and you learn from every opportunity being at practice or game competition. But getting out there and actually playing -- in this case, we were lucky in some ways that Parker has played as much as he has, so he won't be overwhelmed by that part of it. He'll have a big challenge this Saturday and he'll have more of it ahead of him.

Q. The offensive line prep this week, do you stick with what you did last week or do you move guys around?

COACH FERENTZ: The options are limited, which means a couple guys are going to have to do more than one thing. We saw that on Saturday, James jumping out there at right tackle. We'll just have to keep practicing several guys at several spots, because depending on where the water starts coming in the boat, that's where we've got to make the repairs and shift guys.

Those guys have done a good job at that. It was a tough on-the-job training for a first year guy, but I thought he really settled down and did a great job. He's going to be a really great football player for us. He's already doing a lot of good things.

Q. Pretty amazing, James Daniels came here at 17 years old, just turned 18. How fast is his growth?

COACH FERENTZ: It's impressive. I think you guys all know, I'm not a big fan of this coming out of high school early. I still think kids probably ought to go to the prom, maybe see their classmates graduate and go with them, which he did. He drove back for all that stuff. It's a credit to him. Not surprising if you get to know James. But to me, that's the way it ought to be. And then you go to college at some point.

And he came in here early, and one of the reasons I'm fearful of it, I think it's an awful lot. It can be overwhelming for a young person to try to come in here, especially when you're going to try to play Big Ten football. The best thing there that was reassuring to all of us was the fact that LeShun was here, so he

had a great mentor built in that way.

Even if LeShun had not been here, not so sure James wouldn't have done just fine. Did an outstanding job in the classroom this first semester. Really practiced well. He just seems to handle things pretty adeptly, so that's a rare trait.

Q. How did he draw that straw to go outside, as opposed to some of the veteran guys who were inside?

COACH FERENTZ: It's next man in. Again, we work combinations in practice. You're always hoping the roof doesn't -- the proverbial roof doesn't collapse. It was pretty close the other day.

Q. With the news of Randy Edsell and Dan McCarney losing their jobs, are you comfortable with this midseason stuff, it's almost like the NFL?

COACH FERENTZ: I think that's kind of the sign of the times unfortunately. I'm not a fan of it necessarily. But I don't know all the details either. So it would be really probably wrong for me to give any commentary on what happens in a specific school.

But in a perfect world, yeah, I think you'd rather see that not take place, for everybody involved. But all that being said, too, you've got to be realistic. The world we live in is changing daily. We see that in recruiting firsthand and it's true I think on every level, and that's one more example of it unfortunately.

Q. Your quarterback plays with reckless abandon, the way he runs, and he looked pretty banged up after the game. How is he feeling right now?

COACH FERENTZ: We have a lot of guys who are banged up right now. That's two really physical games. I alluded to that last week; I thought both their lines looked a lot better on tape. First game, they really played better, and their defensive group was rough and tumble.

We've got a lot of guys banged up right now. I'm not going to give you a count, but we have more than a couple. It's that time of year. We'll find a way to get through this game and then we'll go from there but hopefully everybody will be able to make it for the game.

Q. Do you try to caution him at all -- out-of-bounds, slide, things like that?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, we've been encouraging that, but he's got a competitive spirit, too, which sometimes pulls him in the other direction. But you have got to play the way you are, but certainly there are some times -- and I think he's done a better job of that in general terms -- this year of getting out-of-bounds or

getting down when it's not necessary to do something else.

But thinking about the touchdown run and the corner down there; he had his eyes on that pylon. Those are the kind of things that you have to really admire about C.J.

Q. Tyler Wieggers, do you feel confident in him and who would be his backup?

COACH FERENTZ: On the game field, we're confident in him. That's our motto. Tyler is gaining ground.

And on that whole topic, it goes back to the line or the other things. The biggest thing is, if this was April, I would be really concerned about a lot of things, or August 1, I would be still concerned. But we've had ten weeks of practice. I think we've seen a lot of growth with a lot of players on our team, not just guys that are out there playing on Saturdays.

So a lot of guys are growing and for us that's really critical because we don't have the depth that maybe some schools do, some programs do. So it's really important if our backups and guys behind the backups are not growing and improving, we are going to hit a void.

And thus far, we've been lucky to have a guy like Parker jump in and do such a great job. We've had guys pick up the slack; Cole Croston at the offensive tackle position. So that's something you hope is going on at all positions.

But going back to Tyler, he still has not had that game experience. So whenever he does get out there, it's going to be different, and if it's at the end of the game and we're able to, that would be great. But you don't have that many chances during the courses of the season, especially in our conference. You just don't get many opportunities.

Q. A lot of coaches talk injuries a lot, not making excuses, but they go on and on, you always take a different approach, is that because of your next man in philosophy?

COACH FERENTZ: It goes back to what I said earlier. The few things I would rather not have to have exposure to are discipline issues and injuries. Injuries more so because usually discipline is the unfortunate, usually somebody makes a bad decision, an immature decision, bad decision, bad judgment.

So at least there's something, usually it's brought upon yourself, you kind of get what you deserve a lot of times. But injuries, they are usually nobody's fault. It's just the way it is. It's part of football and it's part of any

sport for that matter. If you're competing and doing something that's really hard to do. And this is a collision sport.

There's not always fairness in life, and there certainly isn't in sports when it comes to injuries. That part is really hard. All that being said, we all know that. I'm older now, but all of us that have ever played realize there's a chance you could be injured. So we all sign up for it and we choose to do it.

Really to me, it's counterproductive to dwell on those things. I can assure you this, Drew will be a great leader for us this Saturday. He won't be playing, but he'll be there on the bench with guys encouraging them. He was doing that the other day. That's just the way he is. That's the way he's wired and built. If you can't do something well in one area, then you find another way to help out. That's how we want our guys thinking for sure. Drew will be a great example that way.

It doesn't do any good to cry about what you don't have and what could have been and all that stuff. It's really kind of counterproductive. So there's really no sense talking about it. I know our guys get the best medical care possible and that's really important. We've got to push on, too.

Q. Is there anything new with Jake Duzey?

COACH FERENTZ: He's climbing the ladder. That's good news. He looks better every day, and one day may not look as good as the next, but he's climbing the ladder. I can say the same thing about Tevaun, I'll tell you that, but he's not going to be ready. He may be dressed out and warm up and that type of thing, just like we did with Jake a couple weeks ago. But based on what I'm seeing now, I think we have a realistic shot of getting him back after the bye, which would be great.

Q. About coaches getting fired midseason, what do you think it says about Universities. I imagine you preach to your players not to quit, but universities are saying we're not going to let you finish.

COACH FERENTZ: I won't disagree with that. It's kind of like speaking for other people. You don't always know what other people are going through and experiencing, and I don't pretend to know all the details. Especially this time of year, like I'm not really good on current events right now. I'd get killed in a game show.

In general terms, I agree with you wholeheartedly. We talk to our players all the time about sticking it out, pushing through. You face adversity, you work through it. But again, I'm not passing judgment on anybody. I'm not there. I don't live there.

Q. C.J. said during the game that he didn't even know who was playing offensive line.

COACH FERENTZ: Probably better off that way. If he thought about it, it might have unnerved him a little bit.

Q. Can you talk about shuffling guys in and out, and Brian got an award this week.

COACH FERENTZ: Times have changed. You know, somebody threw that on my desk. I don't know Brian was too concerned about that quite frankly.

But to your point, we try to practice with that in mind. But it's not realistic to think James Daniels is going to get 60 percent of reps at that position because he's trying to learn the guard position, too. But we are getting a little thin right now, so whoever is available. We try to keep our guys flexible at all positions. Some guys really are not very good at that and then you just leave them in their spots and try not to rock their world.

We talked about Cole Croston back earlier in camp, and Cole for whatever reason just seems very comfortable left or right, Ike Boettger has that ability. So if you have a player that has that kind of flexibility; and we try to practice that way just in case scenarios take place, which inevitably they do, so at least there's not panic out there.

Again, thing I was most pleased about with that whole group was the way they settled down that fourth quarter. That drive was really pretty, and it came at a great time.

Q. Is Brian Ward the next, next man in?

COACH FERENTZ: He's one of them. We have several candidates right now. I don't mean it disrespectfully to those guys but I hope we don't have to see them on Saturday. Hope we don't have to go five.

Q. I think Jerry Kill said this week that -- more years than any years he's coached -- he's not alone. Is this any different than it's ever been?

COACH FERENTZ: The only way I would reference it, and I don't like talking a lot about the whole thing. The only reference I would make there, and I shared this with our team. I think in 2002, we had one starter get knocked out. My memory's not perfect, but what I do remember was a pretty clean year.

Then you go to 2004, not so clean. Go to 2009, not so clean. So that's more of the norm or standard than it is the other way. If you have a year like 2002, then you're living right. It's just one of those lucky years, you're fortunate to have them.

To me you always have to expect turbulence. You have

to expect adversity. That's part of this game. It's kind of like if we go to Chicago and think it's not going to be windy or it might not rain or something like that, then shame on us. Something's probably going to happen.

Q. Have you settled on a third QB and do you see any more freshmen jumping into the offensive line?

COACH FERENTZ: No, and third quarterback is kind of a toss-up. We are hoping we don't have to go down that street.

Q. C.J. says he expects to play this week, is there any doubt C.J. could play Saturday?

COACH FERENTZ: Count on it, yeah. I'm counting on it, absolutely.

Q. With Drew, his injury, kind of a weird time line with NFL prep. What do you see there?

COACH FERENTZ: There were a couple scouts at practice today that are veteran guys. The one thing I've told them about Drew, all year long, is he's better than you think he is. There are some players I can describe that way.

I'll go back to Aaron Kampman, for whatever reason, didn't get invited to the combine. I've never called the combine, I've coached for awhile, but I did that year and told the guy they were making a mistake. I've been to the combine five or six times. Every now and then you get a player like that. You've got to watch a lot of tape to appreciate a really good player like him. He's not flashy, but he's just a really good player.

So where I'm going on that whole thing is he will get that opportunity. They recognize what kind of football player he is and what he's already done in his career. This doesn't help the case at all, but if there's anything good about these things, the outcomes are fairly predictable. He'll be full strength, if not more so.

Speaking of Kampman, Kampman has gone through that injury, as has Chad Greenway.

It's a big pothole. It's unfortunate. The thing that's unfortunate is it's the senior year, that's what amplifies it from my vantage point. It's not going to derail him. He'll get an opportunity and he'll do very well. I'll be shocked if he's not on somebody's roster a year from now.

Q. Jordan Canzeri, did he turn down your his initial scholarship offer?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't remember that. I don't remember getting jilted like that.

Q. Realized he turned down a Big Ten offer when

his dad told him he had made a mistake, do you remember that?

COACH FERENTZ: He didn't just jump in our laps, I can tell you that. Probably was like I was in 1981: Iowa? Ironically, I had been here, but as a little kid.

It wasn't necessarily a slam dunk. And I said on the teleconference earlier, Andy Talley, who I used to coach against, I couldn't beat him as a coach, but I've beaten him on two recruits, Jordan Canzeri and Mike Daniels. We hit two pretty good ones there. I think Jordan was overwhelmed with us initially. He was happy when Villanova and UCONN jumped in, too, at the end.

Q. Northwestern's Justin Jackson has more carries than any other back in the country. Are they playing differently because of his durability? They seem to be a little bit more downhill.

COACH FERENTZ: They are doing a good job in the running game and he's a big part of it. Two things, they have a new quarterback, and then he's a really good player and the guys up front are doing a good job. It doesn't take much room for him. I was watching him last night and I'm thinking, how did he get through there, but he did and came out running.

He was a good back in high school, as was the quarterback. We liked both of those guys a lot and we couldn't even get a date. That's the way it goes sometimes.

Q. Northwestern seems always have your number in certain years. What is it about Northwestern?

COACH FERENTZ: Not to be disrespectful, but I think sometimes we have a perception problem here. Like some people are living in the 80s.

I was here in the 80s and I talked about Wisconsin being this way. When I left here in '89, we would have played Wisconsin three games in one day, forget about a doubleheader. Tripleheader, we would have signed up for it in a heartbeat. Things have changed there.

I think a lot of people maybe fall victim to remembering Chuck Long throwing for 17 touchdowns in that one game, whatever year that was, '84 or '85. They weren't very good. And Kidd's dad played there then. I made a joke last night about that it was a good place for him to go as a punter because he got to play a lot. But that was the 80s. I mean, this is a whole different era. And they are honoring the '95 team and that's so historical, just like '81 was a historical moment in the Big Ten, and certainly for Iowa football.

You go back to '95, it started before that, but that was kind of the -- okay, they did and they have been really

good since that time. They have had a few exceptions, but I have a ton of respect for Gary Barnett. I knew Gary when he was an assistant. We used to recruit against each other. What he did there is phenomenal. To me it's very similar to what Barry did at Wisconsin.

Since that time, Randy Walker was an outstanding coach. Pat is a really good coach. And they have really good players and they really play hard, and they have got good coaches. They have great stability. I look at them as a very tough out, and hopefully they look at us the same way.

But I think some people fall victim, like back in the 80s. Those days are long gone. That stuff is ancient history. I think there's a little of that stigma sometimes. Some of those games they beat us, they were pretty good. Wasn't like we were terrible, but they were really good. They have had a lot of players – think about some of those guys that have played well at left tackle.

Q. Seems like you have a good program set up where guys learn a couple years and get in and make some havoc.

COACH FERENTZ: Colin (Cole), going way back, he was the exception, we were thin. He played as a freshman. But then Jonathan Babineaux, guy who moved around a little bit and settled in, did a great job. So we've really been fortunate, had a lot of good players in there.

Last Friday saw Mitch (King), just told the story about as good as we were in 2004, we were trouble in the spring of '05 and moved Mitch from linebacker. Had no idea what he was doing but got to the ball three out of every four plays. Obviously learned how to play that position.

Different ways to get there. But to your point, Jaleel is really growing. Again, it's one of those where we have seen him practicing better and better. But you're waiting to see what he does on the field. He had a really good game on Saturday, and he has been playing really well for us. Both he and Nathan have made a good combination, and for us, the way we play defense, that's really important.

That's one of the underlying stories. Our linebackers are playing well, but they can't play well if those guys up front aren't doing their job. So really proud of him and really happy for him.

Q. How important is pass protection for your running backs to see the field?

COACH FERENTZ: That's usually the last thing a back learns typically. It's a hard thing to do. Most backs don't have to block in high school. That's just kind of the way it is, so when they have to learn it and do it, it

takes some work and skill. Jordan's done a great job, and those guys have both improved behind the scenes. They are getting there. We have confidence they will play well.

Q. Coach when Northwestern got blown out last weekend did you think maybe this doesn't look good for us?

COACH FERENTZ: No, I don't think at all. To me, Michigan is a really good football team, starts there. And then sometimes, we have all been in games where you have a good football team and sometimes it just doesn't work, one of those things.

All you have to do is look at their body of work and every other game they have played, they have looked really good. They have looked good in their Big Ten games and they have looked good against Duke and Stanford, two really good teams. That one, almost throw the film out. Michigan is playing really well right now and they were clicking on all cylinders the other day.

Other thing to be mindful of, there was not a lot of points against the defense there. They scored on special teams, the pick return, those types of things. So their defense is still -- they are salty and really playing well, high level right now.

Q. Last year when they came here, pretty much a toss-up coming in, kind of like what happened at Minnesota. Is there much or anything you can take away from that game for this one?

COACH FERENTZ: To me, no -- for our game? No, it just is one of these things where everything clicked and it didn't for them so it was a perfect storm. So you can take it and toss it out.

It will be more like the year before. To me that's more representative where two teams battled, went into overtime and we were fortunate to come out ahead. That to me is more indicative. We caught them last year and they nailed us in 2012. The truth is somewhere in between. Like that 2013 game, to me that's what we are looking at here.

Q. How has their defense evolved in past years?

COACH FERENTZ: Theirs or ours? I think they are very veteran, very veteran. If you look up on -- their guys charted on the wall there, returning starters in red. You think it was Wisconsin or Nebraska. A lot of red up there on that wall. More importantly they are good players and those guys are really playing at a high level.

As I alluded to earlier, the guys that have stepped in are doing a nice job also, and that's something you

never minimize. But clearly, clearly their older guys are giving them good leadership. They are playing hard, setting tempo.

I mean this -- hopefully it's a compliment, hopefully they are not mad at us. But they look like one of our good defenses. When our defenses are good, they are not overly fancy, but they just keep coming at you and they make it tough for you and you have got to earn everything. That's what they look like. That's what we faced two years ago, too, whatever the score was, like 10-9 or 13-10. Just yards were hard to come by. You've got to almost methodically be perfect, and that's hard to do offensively because they don't give you anything easy.