

University of Iowa Football Media Conference

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Kirk Ferentz



KIRK FERENTZ: Good afternoon. Certainly just taking a minute to look back at Saturday's win, a lot of good things took place out there. I think after watching the tape, really it just gets down to the staff did a good job of preparing the football team. They had a good plan, and the team certainly went out, and that's as good as we've executed all season long. Those things were really pleasing. I've talked about execution pretty much just about every week, and it was obviously the best we've played in terms of cleaning things up, eliminating mistakes, and I thought the guys played with confidence, and it was not only our seniors but also even our true freshmen, redshirt freshmen. It was a positive step for sure.

For us to play good football and be a good team, we're going to have to play cohesively like that. We'll certainly need that to meet the challenge we face at Camp Randall this week. As we transition into the game with Wisconsin, it seems like every time you play them, you're playing a really good football team. It's certainly the truth this year. They're undefeated, well-deserved, and they've got an outstanding football team.

Playing for our second trophy in three weeks, and I guess that's interesting, but really before the trophy came into being in 2004, this has always been a good border state rivalry, and this one hopefully promises to be the same kind of deal.

Wisconsin, just watching them on tape, they're what you expect. They're very well-coached. Paul Chryst and his staff do a great, great job up there. They're a big, physical football team.

Offensively they run the ball very well. They're able to control the ball and kind of set the tempo they want to. The quarterback has played very well for them, and clearly is the leader of their football team.

And then defensively, you know, they've got a bunch of guys that grew up in their system. They play to their system very well. It's a unique system, and just like they run the football very well on offense, they stop the run defensively and make it really tough for you to gain yards, but more importantly it's tough to score against them, and that's been a challenge for us. It's been a challenge for pretty much anybody that plays them.

It's going to be a big, big challenge for them, and the only thing I'd throw in there is special teams, they play well in every phase. They really get after it and play hard.

Should be a big challenge for us. I think for us, obviously, we're going to have to play our best football. We're going to need another week of improvement, great preparation, and most importantly, we're going to have to be ready to go when kickoff comes around on Saturday. This is a really big challenge for us, but we're looking forward to getting there.

Let me just hit on the captain front, too. Josey Jewell will be one of our captains, Kevin Ward, and then on the offensive side, you've got Matt VandeBerg and Sean Welsh will be the two captains.

Injury-wise, got a couple guys nicked up from the game, like about every game, but I think they all have a chance to be back Saturday. And then the other piece of news, Brandon Snyder will be getting surgery this week. He's going to be off the field, obviously. We'll look forward to getting him rehabbed and get him back for next season, but it's an unfortunate twist, and Brandon will not be coming back.

I'll throw it out for questions.

Q. You guys have increased your recruiting in Wisconsin the last several -- last couple cycles. What kind of led to that, and why have you been successful doing it?

KIRK FERENTZ: We've always gone up there and seen what we could find. But for whatever reason, we've been able to get a couple players that have fit well with us, and just the match was good. They were guys we thought were good players, and they liked what they found here, so it's worked out well, and a couple of those guys have made it to the field now.

Q. Can you describe the development of Noah and T.J. at the tight end position, and what kind of a mismatch that they provided against Ohio State?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, really two different kind of stories. Noah came in, as you know, we played him last year, not excessively but he played and got his feet wet a little bit. We thought he'd be playing a pretty prominent role this year, at least have an opportunity

to, and made a really -- a couple good plays but a real big 3rd down conversion in our last game out there in Kinnick last year. So we saw him grow during the course of the year physically and just in terms of comfort, what have you, and I think that's carried over into the season. So his work on the field last year, even though it was pretty -- wasn't extensive, but I think it helped move him forward.

Then T.J., on the other hand, was a guy who was a little bit more raw when he got here. We really liked what we saw of him recruiting, not only on the football field, the basketball court. But last year he was on the scout team and caught our eye a bunch over there, too; saw him making a lot of plays against our defense, frustrating them at times.

He was progressing in a different realm, and then just did a really nice job in spring, did a good job in bowl prep last year, and throughout camp we just saw him keep moving up. It's a little bit different story with both guys, but they both have impacted our team in a positive way and certainly made a big impact the other night.

The one question we had on T.J. really, first time we saw him, was we didn't know if he was a physical guy or not. He was playing more out-of-the-box, if you would, as a receiver and playing pretty deep on defense. And a good basketball player. But we didn't know if he had a feel for the physical part of it, and he certainly brings that aspect out there. I think both those guys are really doing a nice job.

Q. Can Brandon take a redshirt?

KIRK FERENTZ: I don't know that we can. He played in that game and the Illinois game. He already took a redshirt already on top. We'll try it, but I'm not optimistic there.

Q. Wisconsin is so good on the offensive line; why are they like that?

KIRK FERENTZ: I think they've got four guys back, so these guys are veteran guys now. They've played a lot. But I'll go back to a year ago, they played really well with a lot of new faces in there, and they're well-coached. Seems like it's the same story every year. They're just really well-coached. Obviously they're huge. I don't know, I haven't researched it, but I'm guessing they're probably bigger than most NFL lines. They're a really big group. They're physical. They know what they do. They've got a system that's in place and been in place there, and they know what they do, they know what they are, and they do it very, very well.

You know, and they play with an attitude on top of it. They're an aggressive group. They're very physical.

As big as they are, they move really well. They execute their assignments pretty well, and every now and then catch a touchdown pass on top of it. I think linemen across the country are jealous that way. But it seems like every year they just come up with a group that really works hard, and they're very cohesive. They play cohesively.

Q. Why have things not seemed to change with that program since Barry Alvarez became a coach?

KIRK FERENTZ: I think it's really interesting, quite frankly. Because Barry passed it off to Bret, then Gary Anderson came in. Taking it even a step further, when Gary Anderson came in, they changed their defensive philosophy dramatically, and that was seamless, which I was a little skeptical of that watching from afar. But boy, right from game 1, they played it well. They really grabbed on to that system, and then with Paul Chryst coming back, which is kind of a return to the way he worked under -- had been there previously, so he kind of was in the family, if you will. But they've stayed with the defensive system that they ran, and again, it was a seamless transition.

It's really been impressive. It just seems like whoever is coach there or whoever is playing there, they play a brand that's very similar to what Barry brought there back in the early '90s, and it's been very, very impressive.

Q. Did you recruit some of their offensive linemen?

KIRK FERENTZ: Not really. If you look at it, most of their guys, most of them are from Wisconsin, the majority of them are at least. Every now and then we'll go head-to-head on guys. That's not totally unusual. But most of their guys are home-grown, and I think -- not to pretend to be an authority, but it seems like most of the guys in Wisconsin that if they get an offer to go to the University of Wisconsin, they jump on it, and rightfully so. They've got a great program there, and have had since really the early '90s.

Q. How does Jonathan Taylor get recruited? They've had a string of them like that.

KIRK FERENTZ: They have had a string of them, it's amazing. Seems like, again, same story as the linemen in some ways. Whoever is back there seems to be good, and they've had different types of guys, Clay a big, physical guy. I mean, you go right down the list. I don't know that he was a five-star guy. I don't follow that stuff real closely. But I know we were a little late to the scene on that one. He committed to them. It wasn't like -- I don't think it was an early deal. But boy, I'll tell you, what a remarkable thing he's done already. If he stopped right now, which would be okay with me, I mean, he's already had a great season for anybody, let alone a true freshman. Just really, really impressive. The guys behind him run the ball very

well, too. They've got some other guys that are very talented.

Q. Can you remember a story you've had like a Josh Jackson at that position especially who sort of came out of nowhere and hit the national scene like he has?

KIRK FERENTZ: Well, I was as surprised as anybody last week. Wednesday night is my paper night -- I read about that that he was on the draft board or whatever. I've got to tell you, with all respect to those draft board guys, it's always interesting you check the draft boards from October to draft time, you know, it's good to throw stuff out there. Luckily you don't have to get paid for accuracy.

But anyway, yeah, I mentioned back in August, I thought he was a guy that really had a chance to have a good season. He had had an unbelievable out of season this summer and played well in the spring, played well last year, the last couple years. You've just seen him grow with his role, but you never know where it's going to go and how well a guy will play. And certainly he made three beautiful plays, but he made other good plays in the game, too, so it's a real credit to him. That's kind of -- he's more the nature of our -- I can't remember who we beat in recruiting to get him, but he's come in and just flourished. But it hasn't been all easy. He's really had to work hard, and he has worked hard, and that's really the key. He's had good ability, but now he's really learned how to play a little bit, and that's a good combination.

Hopefully he'll continue to improve.

Q. How impressed have you been with the development of Nate Stanley?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I mean, not much I can say. The biggest thing I've said all along is I've been most impressed with how he's handled the bumps. When things go wrong, it doesn't seem to rock his world. I'm sure it does internally, but he doesn't show that. And then most importantly, he comes back and plays on the next play. That's a tough position for anybody that fragile. Any position is, but that one especially because everyone has got an opinion about what he does and how he plays. He's really got an ability just to stay focused on what's important, and he's made some really big plays for us already, so it's impressive, and I think he's shown his mettle and his toughness, too, physical toughness and mental toughness. To play that position and be respected by your teammates, you'd better have those attributes working for you.

Q. His recruiting seemed really uncluttered. He's not a social media guy. Did he just drop out of the heavens into your lap?

KIRK FERENTZ: I remember him coming to camp, and we really liked him. I sat down with he and his dad. I guess sometimes I'm too subtle; so they said, does he know that you offered him. I said, well, I think he does. So then I ran out to the car and said, oh, by the way, that was an offer, okay, just to -- I said, we want you, which to me that's what that means. If I say we want you, I mean we want you.

Anyway, I made sure we were clear on that point.

But yeah, it's unique, and it's not the Josey Jewell story because it happened a lot sooner, but it is a Josey Jewell story -- how many guys of Josey's stature, talking about a guy who's developed, and to me he's on the national scene and has been for a while. Josey was playing baseball in July when everybody else was down here training, right. In this day and age if I've got to go to school next January, one of those shots. Josey stayed up there, played baseball. He's part of the program there and part of the community. And then he came down here and did his deal.

And Nate is a little bit like that. I think he was more interested in playing basketball and baseball than he was getting on recruiting sites, going to all the camps, and for quarterbacks like that it's so unusual because they've got to go to all those camps and see what kind of nice things they can get people to say about them.

You doesn't have it in him. He could care less. Not that he's indifferent to it, but he's not driven by it. He's just a guy that likes to play, and I think he takes a lot of pride in what he does.

Q. Does it make you wonder where this kid came from?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, you know, I don't know if Dallas Clark had a guru or Bob Sanders. I don't think they had anybody training them. Those guys were just good quarterbacks, and I'll tell you, if any quarterback dads want to call me and get some advice on how to save some money, I can probably help them on that. It's just -- to me, my personal feeling is you let kids be kids. You want to make sure they know the fundamentals, but I'm telling you, what we do ain't that hard. It's pretty basic. The basics are the basics. But there's a lot of people making a nice living off that. So God bless them, and good for them. We're a capitalist system, so I'm all for that.

To me, kids ought to just play. They ought to play sports. That's what he did. He played all three sports and competed, and you can't find a substitute for that, going out and competing.

Q. How big has Ken O'Keefe been in this? I know he works behind the scenes, but I would assume

he's had a daily every day with Nate.

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I think Ken is a master teacher. He's an excellent teacher, and he can teach anything or any position. So yeah, I think a guy with his expertise, his wisdom, his demeanor to coach, he's very demanding, I know that, and I imagine Nate would tell you that and all the quarterbacks would tell you that. But you have to be; for a guy to grow and develop, you've got to be. But he's got a really good feel for it. I'm not pretending he's the only guy in the country that would be like that or could do that, but I'm really glad Ken is back here. I think that's been really good for him. And Greg was a great teacher, too, so I'm not comparing people, but we've been really lucky we've had a lot of good teachers here.

Q. Greg also didn't have a quarterback coach --

KIRK FERENTZ: Right, yeah, this is the first time we've had this where it's all Ken's focused on pretty much. He's adding a lot in the room, whether it's the whole staff or offensive staff. But when he gets a position -- it's kind of the first time we've ever done that or first time since the first year, I guess.

Q. What was everybody's reaction when Drake hit that touchdown after the leg injury?

KIRK FERENTZ: Anytime a fullback gets to touch the ball, forget about a touchdown, if they get to touch the ball, it's a big moment, so that's good. But yeah, then you factor in Drake's story, and it wasn't that long ago when he was out there in a lot of pain. You think about the rehab and all, and he's been in pain -- I think he's doing pretty good right now, but early in the season it was hard for him. And again, I think that's part of the story a lot of people miss sometimes. I don't want to talk about injuries, but most of our players have to endure an injury at some point in their career. It's a lonely feeling. It's a hard feeling. You know, I can't say enough about the job our medical staff does, not only in terms of their expertise but working with the kids and keeping their spirits up.

And now Brandon fights that again; he's going to face that one more time. But he's been unbelievable. I've never -- it's rare when you see guys so involved and so active, and he's been tremendous that way, and he'll get through this thing, and he'll play -- he'll have a great year next year. But yeah, that was really nice. It's nice any time fullbacks get a little reward.

Q. Brandon, I think he knew the risks of coming back and really wanted to get back even sooner than he did. I guess what is your perspective on --

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, there's risk in everything we do. I think I mentioned this a while ago, I had questions months ago about it, what would the layout be, and I learned a lot, I got educated. We have an excellent

medical staff here, but those guys don't live in a closet. They talk with people that have a lot of expertise in that area, and people come to us for advice, too. I think everybody was very comfortable, the family, Brandon, us as coaches with what the facts were, what the odds are -- I think we all felt he made the right move coming back. We were very conservative with his return, based on what he had tested and how he had passed through all the protocol.

So it's one of those things that happened, and we'll go on to the next step, and I have total confidence when June comes around he'll be full speed and we'll have one hungry player and one very smart player and one very talented player on our hands, so that's a good thing.

Q. Punter, have you gone back to Rastetter?

KIRK FERENTZ: We'll just going back and forth, try to find a winning combination.

Q. You talked a lot about execution. I think everyone is still just kind of remembering how Saturday happened and how everything came together. Is execution as simple as it is, or was there something else that you noticed?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I kind of talked about this the other night. It really gets down to your people and what you're doing, so the people involved and then what it is you're asking them to do. You know, maybe I'm an optimist, but I've always believed in our people and the people we have on the field right now, the people coaching them and what we're asking them to do. I believe in that. There's no guarantee it ever is going to push through or you're going to get up over the hill, and then once you do, there might be a bigger hill. It's kind of like, won a game Saturday, but we've got a bigger hill to climb this week.

You just keep going out and you keep working and trying to get better in practice every day. Hopefully there's a cumulative effect, but there's no guarantee when it's going to happen or if it's going to happen, so at least we showed some progress the other night.

Hopefully that will excite the guys a little bit, and hey, we can do this if we really zero in and concentrate. Just a lot of little subtle things. We do a good job with the snap count, and we got them to jump and we didn't jump tell, which I wish I could tell you we did that in practice every day. We don't, we don't always do that so well. We had some ugly plays on Friday morning in practice.

You know, again, it's not like we walked off the field Friday and said, okay, we've got it now. That wasn't the case at all. But just it came together there. But it's a

whole new challenge now. It's a new week and a new challenge, and we'll see how we do.

Q. What was different for your offensive line on Saturday? What came together for them?

KIRK FERENTZ: Same thing. I mean, it's the same discussion. You just keep banging away. We're not doing any new drills or anything like that, and at some point things got to start coming together if you're going to be successful, and they did Saturday. But there's no assurance it's going to happen again this week. We've got another tough challenge here. But hopefully that gives some of those younger guys especially some confidence that they can do this, they belong here, and they shouldn't be overwhelmed.

Q. With rain in the forecast for Saturday, is that something you've looked at and considered in your game plan?

KIRK FERENTZ: I haven't looked at it closely. I've heard maybe later in the day, evening. It's really not that big a deal, and I guess maybe some snow, too, later on at night. We were talking about that earlier. Some quarterbacks like throwing in the snow. At least our guys from the north, not from the south. But whatever it is, it is. That will be classic Big Ten weather.

Q. How did it feel Saturday night when you're trying to probably conduct an on-field interview with somebody that you just met and then there's this stuff going on behind you?

KIRK FERENTZ: Gosh, I hope I get a rain check on that interview. I really look forward to those things. It was okay with me. I mean, what was impressive was the guys that got me off the field, like those guys, I wish they played for us; we'd have a couple more wins in the bank. They were going hard.

But no, I mean, that's pretty neat. As long as you get out of there safely, and if that was one of my kids out there in that group, I'd be worried to death. Hopefully no parents are paying too close attention. In fact, there were some parents down there, I heard that, some of our parents were down there, I think, so good for them. That's good.

Q. It seems like the whole defensive line is batting down more passes than in the past. Is that a product of the height you have in there?

KIRK FERENTZ: You know, part of it is Bazata, who's not our tallest guy. We have the law firm of Nelson & Nelson. Those guys could probably play for Fran. But even Bazata. So A lot of times it's just timing. If you're rushing a guy and you see the quarterback getting ready to throw and his eyes are your way, get a hand up and you can bat it, and that's not as good as a sack,

but it's a pass defended, so it's a good deal. I was kind of flashed back to Penn State early 2000s, seemed like they used to bat down like 10 a game. They had some tall guys there, too. Yeah, it's not a bad deal if a guy can time it and get his hands up.

Q. Is it almost surreal that you just played a game against Ohio State and your coordinators upstairs get a chance to actually get down to the sideline before the game is even over; you don't expect that kind of thing against Ohio State?

KIRK FERENTZ: No, you don't expect it in any game really in conference play, but it was just one of those things where everything just kind of clicked. You wish you could bottle it. It doesn't work that way. So when you have it, you enjoy it, and we all enjoyed it Saturday I can assure you. And then the reality of what we have to do this week kind of set in and gets you right back to focusing on what you have to do.