

# University of Iowa Football Media Conference

Tuesday, September 29, 2015

## Kirk Ferentz

KIRK FERENTZ: Welcome, everybody. Just to start out, we've been really pleased with getting the win Saturday and overall with our team's performance during the September block of the schedule. I think a couple things about the team thus far into the season, they've worked hard. I think they've been focused on the right things. Been ready to go to compete at kickoff, and we've had four different kickoff times now, so we've had good training in that regard.

And I think maybe as important as anything, we've played through a lot of tough circumstances, a lot of different situations, and for the most part the team has really responded well.

Happy about all that. Been saying this team has really worked hard. They've had a good attitude going back to January when we got started. They've had good work habits. I think we're seeing growth right now, and probably the most impressive thing is just the leadership that's been emerging during the course of the last eight weeks or so.

That's been good, and certainly credit goes there to our senior class. They're really working hard. They're together. I think they're doing a lot to pull the team forward.

You know, good start that way. Now we shift into October certainly and get into conference play, which I think anybody that plays in the conference, that's certainly significant, so something the teams are all looking forward to, something fans are looking forward to, and it's just another part of the schedule that we're excited about.

Our captains are the same this week. We've got Drew Ott, Jordan Lomax on the defensive side; Austin Blythe, C.J. Beathard offensively. We're kind of locked in there it looks like. Medically, we had a few guys have different issues during the course of the game. My guess is it's going to be like that all season long. We haven't had anybody eliminated yet, so we'll just keep moving forward. A couple guys are limited, and hopefully they'll gain ground as the week goes along and be ready at game time.



Moving into Big Ten play, we start certainly with a great challenge this Saturday traveling up to Wisconsin. The last five years Wisconsin has played as well as anybody in our conference, and certainly on the west side. And really that kind of dates back to 1999. They've had good football teams historically up there, and I think the common denominator is they've had good players each and every year. They've been very, very well-coached. They play hard, and then when you play up in Madison, that's an extra challenge on top of it.

We've got our hands full as we start to prepare. Again, I think we've got a good football team right now. We'll certainly learn more about our football team over the next eight contests, next nine weeks just like every team in the conference will.

We've got our work cut out for us right now. We're rolling through our preparation, and need to really have a good week here to give ourselves a chance to compete the way we want to on Saturday.

I'll throw it out for questions.

### **Q. Do they look kind of like a combination of Wisconsin from last year and Pitt together with what they're doing?**

KIRK FERENTZ: You know, yes and no. It's kind of interesting thinking about that, I think this is the fourth coaching staff we've faced now since I've been back in '99. Typically they've looked pretty similar, and obviously Paul was a big, big part of what they were before he left there, and now he's back and he's done a great job, and the way they looked at Pittsburgh offensively last year is very similar to what we're seeing now and what Wisconsin did look like.

Defensively they made a shift when Coach Andersen came in a couple years ago and they've remained constant there. It's kind of an interesting back and forth, if you will, the Pittsburgh dynamic and all that stuff when we played them a couple weeks ago. So it's an interesting preparation.

But what we're seeing defensively is an excellent defense. It is a departure from what they used to be, but they're playing at a really high level again, and

offensively they come at you. They're a really physical football team that likes to run the football.

**Q. Talk about Jordan Canzeri; he scored touchdowns last year, he's got eight this year, but it seems like you're as happy with his pass blocking and blitzes as you are with anything?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, that's the first thing that came to my mind the other day. It's interesting, I don't know if you can say somebody has a quiet four touchdowns, but it just seems like it was the other day. But it's a real tribute to him and the work that he's put in. He's been a good football player ever since he's been here. He's had some injury issues on and off, that type of thing, but the good thing is this year, including last spring, he's been able to really practice the way he wants to, and it's been really fun to watch him.

I talked about our seniors giving us leadership. You can start right there. He's done a great job that way, as well. Talked about a couple weeks ago LeShun had to come out of the ballgame. He assumed that carrying the whole load for us, and he's just done a really nice job. But that pass protection part to me, it's a dividing thing for a player, from being a good player to a really good player.

**Q. You have a chance to pass the guy who picked you up for your job interview in victories. Is that just a number or does that mean anything to you?**

KIRK FERENTZ: I haven't paid that close attention. To be in a group with him, that would be an honor, that's for sure. That's just a good thing that way.

**Q. LeShun Daniels doesn't seem quite to have his pop. Is that something that's going to linger do you think?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Hopefully we're getting there. I thought he looked better today in practice, and hopefully we're climbing the ladder and that's really why he didn't play much the other day. He's healthy, he's cleared, but didn't look as efficient as he had early in the season. We're trying to get him back where he can really play the way he wants to play and the way that he's deserving of.

**Q. Wisconsin's offense doesn't look too complex. But how much more difficult does that make it because they do it so well?**

KIRK FERENTZ: It's not a calculus equation necessarily and it never has been, but they play well. I talked a little bit about Pittsburgh's defense a couple weeks ago. It's not like they've got 43 blitzes that you have to pick up, but they know what to do and when to do it. And to me that's the definition of really good football. It's probably the definition of good anything is not being overly complex but knowing when to do

things.

I can assure you what they do creates a lot of stress on you. Defensively they just -- if you try to load up in one area they're going to find it real quick because they know their system and they know where to go when you're hurting them. That's the challenge that's at hand right now.

Just look back the last couple games with them, you're playing them well, you're playing them well, you're playing them well, and then boom, they hit you with that one play, and I think that's kind of a characteristic of a good football team, and certainly they've been successful at that for quite a while.

**Q. How do you get the guys ready for Madison, just a fantastic atmosphere?**

KIRK FERENTZ: The good news is we got good training two weeks ago or three weeks ago when we traveled on the road. There are a lot of tough environments in our league, and certainly playing across our state, that's a tough place to go for us, too. It's a high-voltage experience for sure.

You know, that training is a starting point. I'm glad that we have a tough road game under our belts, but it really gets down to concentration, really being focused on what's going on out on the field. Believe it or not, it's not loud every snap when you're out there typically, but they have good fans. They know when to get rowdy and when to get loud, and that's where our communication has to be right on spot, and that's why preparation, the right preparation is so important, because as a player you're not always going to get the call. You're not always going to hear it, but hopefully you know what to do just by looks and those types of things.

**Q. You saw a lot of pressure against Pitt, and this defense applies a lot of pressure, completely different, but with Schobert and Biegel, you saw them last year, they seemed to be -- their level of play seems to be rising this year.**

KIRK FERENTZ: They're really an outstanding duo, and to play that kind of defense, the kind of defense they do, it really helps if you have two outside linebackers that are disruptive, and they both are very disruptive.

I don't want to call them nondescript. It's not that they're not descript. They're good-looking athletes. They're good linebackers and what have you, but they're not Andre Tippett, 6'5", 250- or 260-pound type guys, but they're just really good football players. They know how to play. They're very tough to block, and if you do block them they don't stay blocked. They just

have a real good knack, and it's not something that comes natural. I'm sure they've worked very hard at it. They have a really good understanding of what the scheme is, and they're disruptive, really tough guys.

So it starts with those guys. Blocking those guys is a big, big part of things.

**Q. Both teams have two fullbacks that they play. Wisconsin plays both at the same time. What does that say about this game?**

KIRK FERENTZ: It's kind of been the way it's been there for quite a while, and I think we've been fairly consistent, too. It's one of those no-fear-dodging games. It's going to be a tough, hard-nosed physical football game. They've prided themselves on that for quite some time and done very, very well at it, and our better teams have done the same thing. From that standpoint, it ought to be a great contest.

**Q. You mentioned in January, again, that the Big Ten Championship is paramount for this program. First game really could dictate who wins the Big Ten West. I know you don't emphasize one game --**

KIRK FERENTZ: I mean, yes and no. We didn't lose our first game in '02 and ran it right through, and then in '04 we lost our first game and then ran the table afterwards. In '09 we started out really well and lost two of our last three Big Ten contests. They're all really important, just like last week was an important game, too, and that's going to be our mindset. We know we have a big challenge on our hands right now, and to that point, if you look at the Big Ten West, again, just to emphasize that, Wisconsin has done as well as anybody the last five years.

If you are going to be a contender, you're going to have to do well against them. We're not going to let one game define the entire season, but it's an important game. They're all important. This is conference play now.

**Q. What about Mabin and Taylor and their availability? How have they looked in practice this week?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, they're both making ground. They're both limited right now. They're not full speed. We're going to be careful with them, and hopefully we'll have them both at game time.

**Q. How did Jake Duzey respond to Saturday and where do you feel like he's at?**

KIRK FERENTZ: He's moving in the right direction. He's hardly full speed yet, but he made a beautiful grab today, by the way, a wild catch. But that doesn't mean he's fully healthy yet, either. He's cleared, he's moving forward, making progress, but I think this is going to

take a little bit of time. But it's great for him to get out on the game field. That's a big part of it and a big step. The week before he dressed, not actually get on the game field, and hopefully get out there a little bit more this week, but we'll just take it a week at a time, a day at a time.

**Q. And Drew seemed to make some progress last week. Is he taking another step?**

KIRK FERENTZ: It's kind of like LeShun. I think both those injuries, they're not 100 percent yet but they're a lot closer than they were, so the question is can they play effectively. I think we're moving in the right direction.

**Q. What do you think CJ has done so far that maybe you thought -- didn't know he could quite get to that level?**

KIRK FERENTZ: I've said this before and I would stick with the same answer. The thing I've been most impressed with outside of his toughness is his poise. Those are hard things to measure. In practices, again, we try to put all of our players in stressful situations and positions but it's not quite the same. It's kind of like Koehn kicking that field goal. It's one thing to do it in practice. It's a little bit different when you're in the emotions of a game and playing the game. For a quarterback to be on the road and first-and-99 or whatever it was, second-and-99, those kind of situations are different when you're going through them in real life. I think that's really what I've been most impressed with so far.

**Q. What does Cole Croston do that reminds you of his father? Is there anything?**

KIRK FERENTZ: I was underwhelmed with Dave in the recruiting process. It was my first year recruiting. Shows you how much I knew. And what a gray area recruiting can be. Walt Fiegel is the guy talked me into -- he said, you've got to give Dave Croston a scholarship, and by the time I left the school I was convinced. Thank goodness for Walt Fiegel because when Dave came in here, he was just an outstanding player right from the start. He started three years and really played well.

Cole had some of those attributes. In other words, he really had a good feel for how to play, extremely coachable; be careful what you tell him because he tries to do it right to the T. But he wasn't as far along as his dad was coming here physically, but he's worked extremely hard, and in the last couple years he's really started to catch up a little bit. Certainly based on Saturday, I thought he did a really nice job.

It's a real credit to him and his hard work, and it's a neat thing to see.

**Q. Is he one of the smaller guys -- he said he weighed 235 when he got here. Is that as small as you've had come here to play offensive line?**

KIRK FERENTZ: No, I mean, we've had a lot of guys that were (undersized). Steinbach was skinny. He was kind of skinny when he played for us. He was skinny with the Bengals, but he got to play. But yeah, it's on the lighter side. But that's some of the work that he had to get accomplished, and I think he earned the name Cricket -- what movie was that, "Bugs"? You know what I'm talking about? I think that was his nickname given to him by one of his teammates actually. Not the Incredible Hulk, but he's moving the right direction right now.

**Q. Your red zone offense right now is outstanding. Basically every time but one you've scored, and I think 14 out of 16 trips you've scored touchdowns. Is there anything you can point to that's specifically different than before other than generally finishing drives?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, and it's like a lot of things, that was obviously on our list, too. We've got a long list of things that were on our list since January, but that was one of the areas we didn't do well enough last year.

We've spent a lot of time on it in terms of scheme, but more importantly in practice. You know, you just never know when that's going to show up or if it's going to show up or if it'll continue to show up, but I think at least our guys are a little bit more comfortable down there and they've done a great job. Ultimately it gets back down to the players. Players with their execution and guys are really doing a great job so far.

**Q. Boone Myers, is he healthy?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Same category as the other guys. He's limited right now and we'll see how the week goes.

**Q. We asked Cole what it's like to go against a fullback head on and all that fun stuff. He said that you guys do 9 on 7 almost right away every day, you guys have contact. Is that intentional?**

KIRK FERENTZ: That's just what we do. That's just part of our DNA, I guess. It's good for both sides of the ball. You know, in a week like this, we probably need to go double just to get ready for these guys.

**Q. What's been your analysis of Ben Neimann? We haven't gotten to talk to him much or anything, but it seems like we haven't noticed him making mistakes.**

KIRK FERENTZ: That's a really good thing. It's kind of a quiet man position if you will, and it's been that way historically. When we don't have good play, we call that

that position the Leo position, the outside linebacker position, and when that position doesn't play well, it tends to show up, and when he does play well, he's like the silent man, which is really good. He's done a really nice job, and that was something that we kind of envisioned happening a year ago. That's why we played him on special teams. He didn't play much from scrimmage, but we thought that was kind of his position; he was built for it and had a good feel for it. He's really done a nice job. We're getting good linebacker play right now. That's certainly an understated part of it, but really an important part of it.

**Q. One of your former players, Chad Greenway, is well-known for what he's given back to communities, and the other day kind of in the twilight of his career he pulls off a 91-yard interception. Did you talk to him about it or did you see it?**

KIRK FERENTZ: I heard about it Sunday, but I don't get to see much pro football unfortunately, but I did hear about it, which is great. It's fantastic. Chad is just a tremendous guy. I mentioned it a couple weeks ago. That's still the best part about what we do, and today I got a call from Mrs. Babineaux, Jonathan's mom. She calls on a pretty frequent basis and just leaves very happy, pleasant voicemails, and those are always welcome, by the way.

So it's great, but I got a chance to talk to her. She's got 12 grandkids right now. Jonathan is married, has got a couple kids down there, and he's really had quite a career just like Chad, a year apart. Both those guys are playing right in the middle of the action, so for them to be playing this long into it is fantastic. They're both great young guys, and that's the neatest part about all of this stuff.

**Q. You've already played in physical games, the Pitt game was. Does that help this week at least giving everyone an idea?**

KIRK FERENTZ: I think so. I'm pretty sure I'm correct in saying we've had four different starting times in four ballgames. That's college football. TV tells you when to play, and that's great, and stylistically it's kind of the same thing. You play teams that are more spread out, that are throwing the ball very frequently, and then shift into a little bit different style of attack. So yeah, this is our second game prep that's going to be like this. Not that they run the exact same plays, but the style of play will be very similar to what we played against Pittsburgh. At least we've been in a game like that, and we have an understanding of what the tempo is going to be, then just increase it another X amount of percent because Wisconsin does it extremely well. They've been so consistent and so good.

**Q. Are you guys kind of over the notion that Jordan at 190 something pounds can't be your 20 pack carry guy? Are you straight ahead with that?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Those were never my words. I don't get pinned down on that stuff.

Fred Russell, I don't know what he weighed, but boy, he had a lot of carries. There's nothing in terms of physics that says a guy can't do it. In a perfect world, if we've got two good backs, we'd love to rotate them both and keep them fresh and what have you. But if one guy carries the load, that's fine.

Like I said, Fred Russell did it. Albert Young wasn't the biggest guy sizewise, but he did a good job. It's possible, entirely possible. It takes a tough-minded guy, and certainly Jordan is doing that.

**Q. CJ was saying today that you guys kind of teach them to deal with criticism the same way you do praise. Is that easy to do, like now everyone is loving them and what have you?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, it's easy for us to say. It's like anything, but what resonates, what actually sticks, that's the key. It's really hard in life to have people say nice things about you, and it's tough around players because they're actually out there they're outside of this building. We're in here all the time as coaches, at least until the latter part of the week, but those guys are on campus six days a week, so they're out there hearing it good or bad, and I think it's really important if you're a competitor. What we do is public, so you just have to develop a mindset and understand that there's going to be praise with victory, and there's going to be criticism with loss. Sometimes there's criticism with victory. But it's part of sports.

It means people are interested, which is great. But you've really got to be focused. I think the team for the most part has been focused on the right things thus far, but each week is a different challenge, a unique challenge, and right now there might be a little of that going on. We've just got to be careful and understand we've improved because we've been focused on the right things. That's what we've got to say. And if the roof should cave in this week, if all hell breaks loose, we're going to line up and play next week, too, so we've just got to get back to it and stay centered on the things that are really important.

**Q. Do you think CJ's background in NFL heritage, I guess, family, music industry, that the stage and the criticism and the fan stuff doesn't really seem to get to him?**

KIRK FERENTZ: I buy into that a little bit. Again, the credit goes to CJ, though, because nothing prepares you for being out there and getting smashed and

having fans yelling and just all the crowd noise and all that stuff totally. But I do think if you've been around the game, there's some advantages to that that can help. If you look historically, I think there's some real pluses, it's not 100 percent, but he seems to just have a knack for it. We'd love to take credit for that, too, but we can't. It's something he does well. It's a credit to him.

**Q. Unity has kind of been the theme of this group, the seniors and everything. How does that maybe help you in road trips?**

KIRK FERENTZ: It's everything, because whether you're home or away, -- once you get out there on the game field, it's the team. Really nothing else matters. It's great when you're in the friendly confines and the fans are really behind you. That's a great thing. That's a great feeling. But at the end of the day, it's about the guys playing the game and the guys on the bench supporting them and everything. It's a different challenge. It's a different challenge than playing at home. But it's fun. You know, if you enjoy competition, if you enjoy college football, then it's part of the equation, and you realize that you have to be able to deal with that just like you do with the home environment. Ultimately it gets down to the competition on the field, and not getting distracted by that other stuff.

**Q. This series had a major disruption five years ago or so when Nebraska was added to the league and you went to Legends and Leaders and then it got kind of brought back with the geographical divisional alignment. What were your thoughts when it got broken up and then when it got put back together a year ago or whatever it was?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, it's kind of like the same thing when we went to Illinois last year, it was the first time since '08, which just seems odd when you have a border state school.

But going back to that whole thing, when you expand, there are no rules. Things aren't going to be the same, so we all knew that when the Big Ten chose to expand. I think everybody was in agreement that was a really positive thing for the conference.

But I would also suggest it's been really positive that we further expanded and redivided the other way. You can make a lot of arguments for doing things differently, but I think for the welfare of the teams and the fan bases, to do it geographically just makes a lot of sense. I think that's really, really neat.

There's been so many great games. I go back to my time here in '81, going up there to Camp Randall, it was my first experience with the guys that were here

last week. Pete Carr, Pat and Borty are all talking about that game, so that's a neat thing, because really we've got a lot of recruits from this part of the Midwest, and I think it's been a real positive for the conference.

**Q. You guys used some three-tight-end sets Saturday. Could that grow with Jake's health?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yes.

**Q. Does this group offer more of a vertical look?**

KIRK FERENTZ: We've used it in the past, the last couple years, and then certainly with Jake being out, backed it off a little bit, although Jameer stepped up and did some good things, so that's the good thing that happens out of injuries sometimes. You find out a little bit more about guys and how capable they might be if you give them an opportunity, and that's part of football.

But yeah, certainly as Jake starts to work back, that'll be on the board every week. How much we package out of it remains to be seen, and then how much of it actually shows up on the game field, a lot of times that just kind of comes as the game goes on; is it going to fit or isn't it going to fit.

**Q. A lot of fullback talk this week. Is there any chance Adam Cox could get a sixth year? Have you thought about that?**

KIRK FERENTZ: I don't think so. If you've got any ideas, I'd love to talk to you about it afterwards. Great young guy. You're talking about our senior class being leaders, Adam is top shelf. He and Macon are really -- it's a shame we can't get them out there all the time because they're top-notch guys. Basically same story, walk-on linebackers, converted to fullbacks, and boy, they both play well. But they're doing their part leading, I can assure you of that.

**Q. Macon mentioned that some coaches asked them to kind of set a pace and wake people up in practice with some physical play. Do they answer that call more readily? They seem like guys who would do that.**

KIRK FERENTZ: To me that's what a good fullback does. He makes your team a little bit stouter. You know, I think that's probably why Wisconsin had two of them on the field a lot last week, and they did it very successfully. That's something that if it fits in with what you do philosophically, it's really a good thing.

**Q. There are certain programs that kind of fit into different tiers, whether it's financial or recruiting bases or whatever, and it seems like Iowa and Wisconsin, probably Michigan State, Nebraska, probably fit in a comparable tier because you don't have the wealth of athletes in Ohio next door. Do you feel it's important in some ways that the**

**program remains in that similar tier with a Wisconsin, with a Michigan State, Nebraska, competing, winning as much as you lose, I guess?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yes, and if you go back, at least since I've gotten here in '99, if you study all those teams you just mentioned, where they've been over the course of that time, look at it over 15 years, 15-year block, it's an interesting study. It's something I'm acutely aware of for sure.

We want to be in the best neighborhood we can all the time. That's our goal. I said that back in January. I said it 16 and a half years ago. Our goal is to be a championship-level football program, and it was that way with Coach Fry, and we certainly don't want to go backwards.

To do that, it's a heck of a challenge. It's a fun challenge. It takes the right people. That's the fun part about it. But yeah, that's where we want to be for sure.

**Q. I know you don't have doghouse, but did Akrum kind of earn some confidence points back with his play on Saturday?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, you're always either putting money in the bank or taking it out, and he was putting it in Saturday, which is good. That's all we want everybody to do is just keep stepping forward a little bit. Part of life is you're going to get knocked off your feet, you're going to move backwards. That's going to happen if you're trying to do something significant and hard, but what do you do once you get knocked down? That's a point I made about our football team. I think when we've gotten knocked off track, thus far we've responded pretty well, and I would say the same thing about Akrum Saturday. He did a good job. It was clear he was thinking about the right things out there and was playing hard.

So that's a good positive step, and he's practicing well right now, too, and that's really important because, again, going back to injuries, we're going to have injuries during the course of the year at all positions, and so we need guys preparing, so when they do get called on, just like Jameer Outsey, when he went in there, he did a nice job. If we're going to have a successful team, everybody needs to understand they've got to be ready to go if they get called on.

**Q. Cole Fisher said you had a great practice today; would you concur?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yes, it was interesting. It was good. It's a start. A lot of rough edges out there, but the effort and the tempo were good today.

We need to carry that into tomorrow. We're going to have to clean some things up because some of the

stuff that we did, you know, left the door open for some things. But Tuesday is our first real hard workday, so you expect that, but it was a good tempo out there.