

# University of Iowa Football Media Conference

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## Kirk Ferentz



COACH FERENTZ: Looking back, very, very pleased to get a good win, good home win, and close out the month of October last Saturday.

Thought we saw a lot of positives in all three areas, all phases of play. That was good. Now we turn to November. This is always a really important time, certainly for our team to continue to build on what we started back in January 10 months ago. That's our focus right now.

Season-wise we're two-thirds of the way done, but only half of the way through the Big Ten portion of the schedule.

With that being said, we have a lot of work ahead of us right now and certainly another big challenge right now.

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

Injury-wise right now, both Jordan Canzeri and Ike Boettger are making progress. They may go and travel. We'll see how the rest of this week goes. They are making progress. I don't see either of them playing, but at least they're getting closer. We're starting to see them gaining ground here.

Moving forward, we have a road contest obviously against Indiana. It's going to be a real challenge for us. They're very, very productive offensively. They're very balanced. Do a nice job running and throwing. High tempo with really good players. I think one of the better offensive lines in the Big Ten from my vantage point.

Pose a lot of problems, very productive, scoring a lot of points. Defensively they're a very aggressive unit with a lot of different looks and different pressures, certainly not bashful about playing aggressively. So we've got to really be sharp and alert on that side of the football.

On special teams they play extremely hard and do a really good job there. The specialists do a really good job. Again, they're very aggressive in their approach. Ran a fake punt at Ohio State off their own 16, as you saw last year on-side kicked a couple times against us, surprise on-side kicks. You have to be on your toes in

all regards. They do a really good job in that sense.

All you have to do is look at them in the Big Ten right now. They played Ohio State in their opening game, finished with first and goal on the six yard line, chance to score and tie the game. Came up a little bit short there. That was one heck of a football game.

Most recently before their bye, 28-26 with Michigan State up in East Lansing. So they played a really good game against an outstanding football team there, too.

They're a very good football team. They're coming off a bye week. We expect them to be rested, well-prepared. Again, going back to November, it's always been really an important month I think for every football team certainly. It's all about how you finish. That's really important in any season.

As we move forward, we're going to have to be at our best. Certainly we realize that. Have a big challenge on our hands. Need to have a great week of preparation. I think we're off to a healthy start so far. But a couple big days ahead still.

We've got work to do. We're trying to get ready for another tough road contest and conference play.

### **Q. Jordan's status in doubt, must be comforting to know you have three guys that have proven they can run the ball well?**

COACH FERENTZ: We caught a break getting LeShun back. LeShun looked the way we hoped last Saturday. That was one of the positives of the game certainly. The other good news is, kind of true of all our injuries situations, we've had guys step up and do a nice job. Whether it's Sean Welsh sliding out to tackle and playing well. Akrum Wadley coming in, doing a good job. Derrick Mitchell has done a good job the last two games.

One thing about injuries, they force you to develop depth. The credit goes to our players who have stepped in and done a good job when they're called upon.

### **Q. How do you replicate their speed and tempo?**

COACH FERENTZ: It's really difficult when you play a tempo team. Hard to get a good quality look from

scout teams in general, no matter what the opposition may do. You think about a team like Georgia Tech, for instance. It's a similar challenge to duplicate that tempo, the way they do it with their proficiency, you can't do it, it's not realistic. The onus falls on our players to really do a great job of concentrating.

On Saturday they're going to have to do a wonderful job with communication, getting the calls, communicating with each other, doing it at a really quick rate because it happens fast.

**Q. They have the trigger man, too. Hit about any spot on the field.**

COACH FERENTZ: He knows how to operate that offense really well. He can make all the throws you have to make. Does a really good job with that. Then they've got a good running team. Sometimes you play teams that are one-dimensional. They're hardly that. They're doing a nice job.

I go back to their offensive line. I think they are well-coached. They do a good job. That gives them a chance to operate proficiently, run and pass.

**Q. What do you think Norm Parker would say about this defense? Do you think he would love coaching this team?**

COACH FERENTZ: I think he would. Thus far at least the guys have played really hard. I go back to 2008. It's a quote he had back in August of 2008. He looked at our team and said we have a lot of good players, not like we have a major superstar. Shonn Greene emerged out of that group, but back in pre-season nobody saw that coming necessarily.

I think if you talk about our defense, our whole football team, but our defense, that's what we are, we have a bunch of guys that play really well together. The collection of the parts is probably more impressive than any one individual. That's the beauty of football.

**Q. How important have your two veteran fullbacks been?**

COACH FERENTZ: To me, that's not one of the major stories, but a story last year. We really missed both those players. Adam Cox was out the whole season with an ACL injury, which was tough. Macon was never quite right, a little bit like Jordan Canzeri, had a hard time staying healthy or being healthy for a prolonged period of time.

For the way we play, it's really a bonus when you have an outstanding fullback, and we're fortunate we have two, they're both seniors. Beyond what they do as football players, which is really significant, but beyond that they're great team leaders, too. So widely

respected. Part of it's because their stories are walk-on guys that are tough, hard-nosed guys, played defense, slipped over a couple of springs ago, spring of '13, ever since then they've done a lot of good things to help our football team.

**Q. Has the defense progressed maybe faster than you had even hoped when you were in spring ball?**

COACH FERENTZ: You know, yes and no. I think we had a gauge on the athleticism of the group. But Desmond King is a good example of what I'm alluding to here. It's one thing to be fast or athletic, it's another thing to play fast or athletic. I don't know how fast Desmond is. We don't time our guys actually. You watch him practice. You watch him train. You get a feel for it.

But then the real thing is how do they play, how fast do they play. A lot of that's just knowing what to do and really reacting quickly. Even the pictures that you haven't seen, because it's impossible to prepare for everything that's going to happen in the course of a game.

Player's knowledge base, how he can connect dots, that type of thing, do it quickly, makes him play faster. That's why I think Desmond is playing faster than he did a year ago. Probably you can say that about our whole group right now. They seem to be clicking, taking care of their responsibilities. When they do that, it gives everybody a chance to kind of get in the flow of things.

**Q. Back to the fullbacks. It kind of goes with wide receiver blocking, a lot of dirty work type things they're getting done for this team.**

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, those are little things that make four-yard plays become six-yard plays or seven, which doesn't sound dramatic necessarily. But that's what the slight edge is all about, how that compounds. That's something we've really tried to sell our players, educate them and sell them on since January in all phases, areas of their lives. Certainly when it gets to football, little things. Same thing I'm talking about on defense. When the defensive linemen do a great job of playing their responsibilities, it allows our linebackers to play fast to the football instead of having to maybe stop and check something they shouldn't have to check on, that type of deal.

That's every phase of football. We didn't do a great job of that on the kickoff coverage team the other day. So we've got to get that shored up. That's really the beauty of team football. If guys can do that, really pay attention to details.

**Q. You referenced a lot of reading a lot of stories**

**about the offensive tackles. Where would this team be without Sean Welsh coming back?**

COACH FERENTZ: I don't want to think about it quite frankly, especially at Northwestern. That was the fireman relief pitcher award of the day right there for him coming in there, doing that.

So he's a guy that's really played well ever since he's shown up here. He just has a little bit of a knack for playing. Came with a real good skill set, fundamental set. He's a tough, competitive guy. So for him to jump in there the way he did after missing time, I thought it would take him a little longer to look sharp. He looked pretty sharp during preseason.

While the tacklers were trying to get their feet on the ground, all three of them, the way we played inside, our guys really played pretty solid inside. When Sean did slide outside a couple weeks ago, James Daniels did a good job, too.

At that time we were a little bit more solid outside. So it's whoever's new, feeling their way, at least they're getting good support from the guys that have played. To your point, all three of the inside guys, be it Austin, Jordan or Sean, they're doing a really good job so far.

**Q. Austin put it this way. They are changing the line of scrimmage, getting some push.**

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, it's hard to play, at least the way we do, on either side of the football if our line is not doing a pretty good job.

So this is going to be another challenge for us coming up. These guys, they move a lot, they've got a lot of different looks, things they'll throw at you. We have to be really on top of our game. They're big and physical inside, their front seven, especially their inside five guys are big, physical guys. It is the same way flipping it around, our defensive line has their work cut out because it's a well-coached and physical group, too, big-sized guys.

**Q. Seems like you called a lot of plays, maybe more in the past, with Austin.**

COACH FERENTZ: Austin does it very naturally, does a really good job. Historically it's a really important position, at least for the way we look at the world, to play center, the tackle positions. They're all important. But to have a center that can do some things, reach blocks, also have the ability to pull, it gives you a little bit more flexibility with what you want to do schematically. If you don't have that, you don't include that in your scheme package.

Austin is a guy from the day he walked in here, he had a good feel, he's pretty adept at just about every block. It's a matter for him of developing consistency,

continuing to develop his strength, which has happened. Boy, he's playing really at a high level right now. Really pleased for him and pleased about what he's doing.

**Q. I know the days of thinking globally probably ended about two weeks ago halfway through your bye week. Tonight the first release of the College Football Playoff Selection Committee. Have you given it any thought? Where do you think you might end up?**

COACH FERENTZ: Funny you should bring that up. I have given it thought. Everybody's been talking about it for a while. I didn't do this, but somebody helped me out a little bit. I went back and researched, someone did for me. If my numbers are correct, of the top four teams last year at this time, three of them didn't make it to the dance. Then the team that won the national championship was 16th.

I throw it kind of in the category of August polls. Doesn't mean a lot right now. But it's been great for the game. It's been really good for a lot of people to talk about. College football is at an all-time high. That's all positive.

My only two observations are that, A, they don't mean a lot right now. Then B, people spend a lot of time, people that get sucked into conversation that I've witnessed not only with these polls, but the BCS stuff, they tend to get nailed pretty quick soon thereafter. We're going to try to avoid both of those plights.

**Q. What are your thoughts on the committee bringing in a personal element compared to 2009 when you were looking at computers?**

COACH FERENTZ: That discussion probably started two years ago, or at least it started to come together a couple years ago.

I think it's a great idea, me personally. Probably no different than what they do at the NCAA basketball deal. Bottom line is you're never going to have a perfect system. It's impossible. Just like the basketball, there's an argument about wherever that cutoff line is, 60, whatever it is. You are always going to argue.

I think we made improvement. Instead of arguing who is 2-3, now it's 4-5. That's the nature of all this stuff.

But I think to give people that are knowledgeable, that have experience in college football, I think that's a good thing. I think it's a positive thing.

**Q. As the wins continue to pile up, now this poll is being revealed, is it harder to block out the noise**

**than in years past?**

COACH FERENTZ: No. There's noise wherever you are, whether it's medium, heavy or low, good, positive, indifferent.

The big thing for us right now, we got a game this Saturday. Anybody who was at the game last Saturday knows that was a tough, hard-fought game. That's really the nature of college football. If you watch TV on Saturdays, you're going to see a lot of those types of games. The best thing we can do right now is try to get our football team ready to play this week. We've encouraged our players to do the same thing. The best thing they can do to help our football team is do what they do best, and that's prepare, then you have to go out and compete.

Said it weeks ago. My suspicion was we could probably beat anybody on our schedule, lose to anybody. I haven't seen much of our opponents coming down the road quite frankly. Seen a lot of Indiana, a lot of Maryland, all the teams we've played. That's really about the extent of my knowledge base right now.

**Q. When you look at team defense, last year against Indiana in the running game, Tevin Coleman, he was a terrific runningback, but he was able to break through on a lot of runs.**

COACH FERENTZ: No question.

**Q. Have you watched any film at all of last year?**

COACH FERENTZ: Oh, yeah.

**Q. How has that come together?**

COACH FERENTZ: Kind of ties in with what was on our list back in January. It's hard to be a good defensive football team when you give up a lot of big plays. This game is the poster child for that. This game we gave up seven or eight of them. If you do the yardage on that, it's significant.

If you give up 300 yards rushing, which we did, and we own it, they earned it, we own it. So when you give up that many yards on the ground, it's going to be tough to win ballgames.

We made it hard on ourselves, credit to them, their line, they've got a good scheme. That back was excellent. The guy they have now is a really good back, too. He may be laying in the weeds because he had a bad ankle, like our guy had a bad ankle. But their guy is healthy I would imagine now. Looked like he was in the last game. We're going to have our work cut out again.

**Q. How much of the off-season is setting the edge and then swarming to the football, was it preached**

**more in this off-season than the past?**

COACH FERENTZ: We try to sell it every year. It's how it's received, how well we can execute it. The credit again goes to the players. They're doing a really good job, not perfect, but we're doing a much better job than a year ago.

It's a team effort, whether it's out on the perimeter, inside. You lose a guy like (Drew Ott) who is a really good football player, a really good leader, for a guy like Parker to step in and do what he's done has been impressive. He's not as good as Drew right now for obvious reasons. He's stepped in and allowed us to keep playing good team defense.

A lot of guys are putting effort into it. Somebody does have to contain a player, set an edge, other guys better be coming to the ball.

That one play, just like that Miami-Duke play, was the longest play I've ever seen. That touchdown in front of our bench last week might have been the quickest play I've ever seen. That guy got to that end zone fast. Kind of like Rod Woodson in '85, '87. Those are two of the fastest touchdowns I've ever seen scored in Kinnick. We better do a better job or we're going to see that again Saturday.

**Q. Speaking of Miami-Duke, is that something that you practice? It's such a bizarre play?**

COACH FERENTZ: You do. I think they'd probably admit, too, there's a lot of luck involved in that play. It's one of those deals, everything has to fall right. To their credit, they got it done. That's a tough play to execute.

**Q. What have you seen from Tyler in the last couple weeks?**

COACH FERENTZ: If there's any good news, we rested C.J. during the bye week and gave Tyler a lot of work with our first group. He's improving every day, which is great to see. I'm planning on C.J. being in there. That's my plan, and I think that's his plan, too. That's not only this week but the rest of the season.

But Tyler is doing a good job. He is moving along. When he gets in there, he'll do fine.

**Q. I hate to draw this parallel of 2009, James (Vandenberg), very few reps, do you feel you're in much better position now?**

COACH FERENTZ: We've had more time to prepare, certainly. We didn't rest Ricky at all. We just kept him going, like you always do.

With C.J.'s deal, we've rested him, I don't want to say quite a bit, because that's not accurate, but during the bye week we did certainly. Judicious with his reps right

now, just like with anybody that's got some injury issues.

So it's given Tyler more of an opportunity to work with the first group. That's always a healthy thing. Things look a lot different when you get into another huddle. He's doing a good job. That's a benefit of somebody being out, just kind of like Parker got a lot better when Drew had his elbow issue, too. Hopefully he'll be a better player when he does get his opportunity.

**Q. How improbable is it to get eight games into the season and only give up one rushing touchdown?**

COACH FERENTZ: I really haven't thought much about it. I knew it happened the last game or the game before that. Was it last game? Doesn't matter. A touchdown is a touchdown.

The broader picture for me is we're playing better run defense. For us that's important. It's not important for everybody maybe. Everybody has different statistical categories they look at and view as important. But for us we think that's really important. That's kind of how we're built.

If we're not doing a good job of slowing the run down, and last year's game is perfect evidence, we got worn out. That's just not a good feeling.

Again, it's really a team effort. I think the guys are doing a great job of feeding off each other. They're taking care of their responsibilities. When that happens, some good things can be a result of that.

It wasn't our goal. I guess it was our goal to have no rushing touchdowns. But you hate to give up anything. But so far so good, the guys are doing a good job. But touchdowns are touchdowns. I'm more focused on points per game. That's more important to us.

**Q. You won at Wisconsin without scoring in the second half. Do you change your offensive approach, get more conservative to run that clock, maybe not take some risk plays?**

COACH FERENTZ: A little bit. But really Saturday was more about our field position in the third quarter was bad, flat out bad both times we got it. Then the fourth quarter, at that point, yeah, our mindset changed an awful lot.

You've heard me say it a lot. Style points, this may be stupid on my part, but style points really don't count with us. We're trying to win. That's our goal every time we go out there.

But we kind of felt like the only way we could lose the game at that point was really do something stupid.

That's what we were trying to avoid in that fourth quarter. Our whole deal is to get out of there with a victory. We came close, made one stupid play, outside of that we did pretty well, I think.

**Q. Last time we saw Nate Meier his arm was in a sling. Do you expect him to be limited?**

COACH FERENTZ: Hopefully not. Hopefully not. It's irritation. That's what it came down to. Some inflammation in there. MRI, everything is good. He's a tough guy. I expect him to play.

**Q. Ryan Boyle wasn't on the field Saturday. Is there a reason for it?**

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah. Wasn't dressed, you mean?

**Q. Right.**

COACH FERENTZ: Dressing is a privilege. Our guys earn the right to dress. Simple as that. We have criteria you have to meet every week to get there. If guys don't meet that criteria, they don't dress out.

**Q. The Slight Edge, a book, self-help thing. How did you stumble on that?**

COACH FERENTZ: Like most good ideas, somebody else comes up with them. Chris (Doyle) got it from somebody. I don't know where it came from. He read it sometime after the bowl game, maybe before for all I know. But brought it to me. Read it, looked at it, we talked about it.

You ought to read it. It's one of those books you read it. It's like the seat belt, why didn't they think of that 20 years ago. It really kind of articulates what it takes to be successful. It really kind of fits the way we've tried to operate for a long time.

So now the trick is, is it going to resonate with the people we present it to? Turned out to be a really powerful thing for us. Our players have done a great job of embracing it. The older guys are the ones that presented it to the team, gave some illustrations.

It's like anything, it's one of those things you can go back and reference it a little bit. Everybody grabs it, understands what we're talking about when we reference it. I think it's been really productive.

Hasn't made a tackle yet or thrown a block, but it's been a good thing for us.

**Q. Did it resonate with your leaders, kind of trickle down?**

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, that's how it kind of works. Chris and I are both in agreement that it really had value, at least we thought it would for our program, for our team. The next thing is to let the leadership group

get involved with it.

We've done this with other stuff in the past, too. It's not like a novel concept at all. But they really thought it was outstanding. Most importantly, they did a good job of presenting the concepts. Chris kind of helps organize that. We gave every guy a concept or two to present. The rest is history.

But, again, the beauty of it I think is while they did that during the spring, it's something that we're able to continue year-round, kind of always reference. Guys go, Okay, I know what that means. That rings a bell.

**Q. With the league being split now with east and west, do you think the identities of the two divisions are changing a little bit?**

COACH FERENTZ: Sounds like the SEC. Everybody is always complaining about it. Doesn't matter what the system is, whatever. In the old days, hey, you don't play these two teams or whatever.

Maybe I'm an exception. I just look at our schedule. Right now we got a tough game against Indiana. It's about as simple as that. I look at every game and say, Geez, you know, what are we going to have to do to beat these guys?

Again, you look around college football. Pretty much anybody can beat anybody. It's not 100% true, but it's pretty much true. I'll let other people argue about all that stuff and worry about all those comparisons.

To me, I don't have that much time to waste right now. Not too interested in it.

**Q. As much as you may not be playing into the rankings, does it still feel good to get the national recognition?**

COACH FERENTZ: I'm not against it. Don't get me wrong. That comes with winning. You learn that in third grade. The better you do, the more people are interested typically. In sports, that's for sure the deal. For us it's about how we're pursuing it. It gets back to that Slight Edge. What are we doing? How much are we investing, how much consistency can we show in our performance? We haven't been perfect this year. Our record is, but we haven't been perfect.

The good news is we're playing like a football team. If one area is dropping a little bit, somebody else compensates and picks it up. We gave up a kick return the other day which was not good. But there are other areas we did really well. It kind of all balances out.

When you can get that going, that's a good thing. At least historically about all I know is coaching here, for

us to have a good season and have a really good team, that's how we have to operate. Yeah, that's where our focus is. If you do well enough, enough people are going to say, Hey, these guys are okay. We'll let you guys tell us how good we are or how okay we are. The more you win, the better it is. I've learned that real fast.

**Q. You look at that sequence at the end of the first half. It was all three units working together in unison. Good punt, three yards, three downs, a blocked punt, overcoming a penalty to score. Is that something you show the whole team?**

COACH FERENTZ: That day Saturday, then certainly came back Sunday and visited it again. Yeah, this is what we're trying to do. You just brought up a good point again. I think this team's responded pretty well. We did get a penalty. Oh, geez. But we don't let things bog us down. We just keep playing. That's a good attribute for a football team, too. We highlight those things.

But, yeah, it all goes together. For us to be good, we're not just going to go out there and wow them with our coaching, our combine type talent. For us we have to be playing like a team. That's our strength. That's what we do best. Anytime you can reinforce it, that's a really positive thing, something we try to do.