

University of Iowa Football Media Conference

Saturday, September 5, 2015

Kirk Ferentz

Postgame

KIRK FERENTZ: Welcome to everybody. Obviously very pleased with the team today. We talked in January about it's a new season, a new year, and talked to them last night, this is the first chapter in that story.

So just very, very pleased with the team. I felt we had a really good camp, productive camp, preseason camp. I felt our first week of game preparation went really well. The focus was there every day at practice, and to me, my guess is that time away from the building, the guys did a good job, as well, and most importantly they were ready to play today. When we showed up on the field the guys were ready, so happy about that, and I think we saw a lot of improvement in a lot of different areas out there on the field. The guys played hard. I thought we were more aggressive in areas than we've been, some other areas, and particularly on the perimeter offensively and defensively.

So those are things we're pleased about. And then on top of that, it was a great opportunity for a lot of young guys to play in two phases, really. We had a lot of new players out there playing in our starting lineups, like every college football team, but it was a little scary to me last night, Paul Federici at the hotel mentioned to me we had over 20 guys, it was the first time they had been at the hotel the night before a game, and I didn't realize the number was that high, so it was a little bit alarming there for me -- not alarming, but to get the guys in the game, a lot of them in prominent roles, and then get guys in the game in that fourth quarter in front of fans, that's a good thing, and when it really counts. It's going to be a great learning experience.

All in all, a lot we can learn from and a lot of good teaching moments out there, and we'll go back to work tomorrow, but we're really pleased to get the win.

Q. That 99-yard and 81-yard drive, those were textbook.

KIRK FERENTZ: It was a great way to start, and then we overcame terrible field position, to their credit. They did a great job of pinning us in on the 1, and then also overcame a false start in there. I think we were 1st and



15, so we were able to get past that, as well.

There was a lot of things there that were pleasing. Any time you can sustain the ball like that and put a drive together, that's a positive thing.

Q. When you see a guy like Drew Ott establish the tempo of your defense, it must be pretty pleasing.

KIRK FERENTZ: It was. He's been going hard all camp, and he's really been going hard ever since he got here, but he just has grown as a football player, and for us to have a good football team, it's just imperative our best players play better than they ever have, and I think Drew certainly is an example of that, but we have a lot of guys doing that, and I'm certainly pleased with, I think, the way our older guys, our experienced guys have moved forward.

Q. His bloody nose kept him out a while?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, it did, it took a while to get him out there, but fortunately he was able to return.

Q. How do you think the offensive line played? A lot of questions about those guys coming into this game.

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, just joked with Gary (Dolphin) and Ed (Podalak) on the radio that for two tackles that have never played, I've never read so much about two tackles in my career. That's a couple years now. I thought both those guys, they've been practicing well. They've really done a good job, and as I said before, it's over a couple years, not just the last couple months. You have to have faith and confidence, and you never know how things are going to go. They had veteran ends today and guys that were dangerous and hard to block.

It's really good for those guys, and not only them but the other guys that are first-time starters, guys like Jaleel Johnson, Nate Bazata, Miles Taylor, go right down the list. We had guys that hadn't played football significantly, good to see them get out there and perform and not show up in a negative way.

And then the big thing is I was talking to our whole football team, we've got to turn the page tomorrow and get back to work and see what we can do to get better fast.

Q. The fourth-and-2 at I believe their 14, the thinking there?

KIRK FERENTZ: You know, we kind of shifted our thinking a little bit last year about four-down situations. We talk weekly, and then certainly before the game just about what our parameters are going to be and what our thought process would be but based on down and distance. Also the score of the game.

You know, it's just something that we've kind of developed a comfort level with, and just pleased with the way our guys responded.

Q. A play that didn't work was extremely popular with the crowd when you went for the (fake field goal).

KIRK FERENTZ: I've heard that. Probably won't be as popular next time it doesn't work. I'm just going to go out on a ledge and take a shot at that one.

But just as part of our thinking, back in January and then -- January was more personnel related, but after recruiting finished, we tried to go through everything as thoroughly as we possibly could, and I think that's probably the creation out of that think tank a little bit.

Q. What did you think of Beathard's play?

KIRK FERENTZ: Well, he did a really nice job. I just mentioned, I've never heard so much about tackles that haven't played. I think it seems like things I've read, there's been an assumption that CJ is a veteran player. He's got one start underneath his belt. This is his second career start. But it's a little bit like the tackles. The things that we've seen him do over the last couple years, the growth that we've seen, and I said this a while back, just what he's done since January, especially this summer, really embracing being a leader.

And I think that showed through today's start, the leadership group voting him to be a game captain and then certainly his play today I thought was really impressive for a guy who hadn't played a lot.

Q. When a guy like Ott gets off to a start like that, do you sense sometimes that can carry your whole defense?

KIRK FERENTZ: You know, it's a good thing, and when you're facing somebody that can do that and be disruptive like that, it's uncomfortable, and probably the wild card here is Roberson is so adept at taking the ball, pulling it down and running, and he got a couple of those today. So that's a double-edged sword a little bit.

But somebody has got to give you energy out there on the field, and it can come from any position, but typically it's your veteran guys. I thought Drew

certainly gave us that kind of juice out there.

Q. When you guys practice 99-yard drives, how often do they work against your defense?

KIRK FERENTZ: They work if I dictate they work. I kind of control the switch on that whole thing. We actually work them where they don't work and we've got to punt it out of the end zone and then we'll do it the other way around where they have to take the ball the length of the field.

Q. When you start that drive with the quarterback sneak, that gave you some room.

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, the big thing there is just get it where you can operate a little bit, get the ball right off that end line, and if you're successful there, it's basically back -- not the entire offense, but you want to try to get into the flow of things. Your number one goal is move it out a couple 1st downs so you're not in terrible field position; you don't put the defense out there on your side of the field. But we've obviously got nothing against taking it for a score. That's a good thing.

Q. LeShun Daniels had 130 plus yards.

KIRK FERENTZ: I didn't see what his yardage was, but I was pleased with both our backs, and again, I think we've all felt pretty good. I've read about our shortcoming in the running game for obvious reasons if anybody watched us practice in Des Moines or the open scrimmage. It's hard to run against our guys, first and foremost, and we're not doing everything, but just really been pleased with both LeShun and Jordan Canzeri, what we've seen them do, the way they've practiced in spring practice, this camp. So I'm very hopeful. I think they complement each other well and hopeful that we can just keep building on that.

Q. Did you want to get Jordan in space today, screen passes and swing passes?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, that's something he does very well. He does a good job there, but he's a good runner, too. I don't think any of us are concerned about him running the ball inside.

Q. There was close to 37 seconds where you could just go to the locker room at half, great call on that screen pass. Was that a situation where we see what we get on 1st down?

KIRK FERENTZ: Absolutely. If you get hit in the face, then you're going to get out of there without any damage, but if he can get something going early, that gives you a chance to maybe get some points, and Jordan made a great play on that.

Q. Is that part of the new thinking?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, not as much. Yeah, that not as

much, but the field goal is probably a little bit different.

Q. The defensive tackles, Bazata and Johnson, seemed to hold their own and Coprich really had no room to run?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, that was a good thing. Certainly I'm not saying we weren't worried about our offensive tackles, but any of the new players out there, Miles, we had a lot of guys that hadn't played a significant amount of snaps, especially as offensive or defensive starters, so that was good to see. It doesn't seem like we missed much in there with those two guys playing, and the good thing is that they all got an opportunity to grow, not only this coming week but the weeks after that if we're practicing and paying attention to the right things. I think that's probably the thing I'm most pleased about this team; they've been a great team to work with. I think our whole staff would echo my comments there. Their attitude has been good, their work ethic has been good, and they're paying attention to details. We're hardly perfect right now, but I like the direction we're moving.

Q. Ott got a bloody nose?

KIRK FERENTZ: He did. I'm sure it's happened before, but I didn't see how it happened, but he told me his helmet came down and slowed him down for a little while, but he's doing okay.

Q. Your defense did a really good job of containing that spread option look. Not so much last year against Tennessee. Whenever you see such a dramatic change between the two games, how does that -- how does it feel to see that product kind of change?

KIRK FERENTZ: First of all, we came in with great respect for Illinois State and feel the same way right now. Brock and his staff are excellent coaches. They've got good players and they're tough players and they're very well-coached, so we were worried about that, and then with the running back and quarterback combination that they have. I don't mind telling you, I had some negative thoughts during the week. As the week went on, you start wondering about things. But to that point, I thought we were better on the perimeter both offensively and defensively today.

And to stop a perimeter game, it's a team effort. Somebody has got to go set an edge out there, somebody has got to be able to contain it, and then you've got to be coming like crazy from the inside, so I thought we did a better job of that today, making them bounce a little bit, making it difficult for them.

And then flipping it around, I thought our offensive guys did a good job blocking downfield, particularly our receivers. Those are things you might imagine we've

worked hard at, and we're not there yet, but at least I think we're on the right path moving in the right direction.

Q. On the defensive side, how much of that is tackling? I thought that perimeter tackling was --

KIRK FERENTZ: You know, for the first game especially, until we had a little problem there in the last couple minutes, but for the first game, the guys that have played some, it seemed like we tackled pretty well, and that's something you worry about in the first game. You worry about penalties, turnovers and ticking game snafus. We had a substitution. But for the most part, I thought a lot of good things there, certainly things we'll be able to clean up, though, and improve on.

Q. You even had Boone and Ike room together?

KIRK FERENTZ: You get personal with those questions. I didn't know you were probing -- I think it's just they probably developed a comfort level, and again, we were -- what's the word I'm looking for -- maybe concerned. You're always concerned when guys haven't played, but it wasn't like we were worried. We've seen so much from both those guys and a lot of our other guys, too. It's just you watch the work that they do on a daily basis and you remember -- you remind yourself that players don't fall out of the sky. They've got to get out there and experience things on the field, and we've hardly arrived. We're just getting started here.

But you know, the quality of those guys, the way they think, their integrity levels, their work ethic, and watching them play against good players in practice, you know that in time they're going to become good. They're going to have some ups and downs, there's no doubt about that; every player does, every coach does. But they'll stay the course, and I'm really confident they're both going to do a good job here.

Q. People are probably asking today why Beathard didn't start last year. What is the story on that?

KIRK FERENTZ: We do this with every position, every player. All we can do is base things on what we see, what we witness as coaches, and we put the players out there on the field in every situation, offense, defense, special teams that we think give us the best chance to win at that time, and that's about as -- that's the way it's always been, that's the way it'll always be, I imagine.

Q. A few weeks ago, Boone was struggling mentally, or with confidence, I guess. Was there a switch that came on in the last three weeks kind of like the Eric Steinbach example?

KIRK FERENTZ: Well, I don't think we've had one of

those Kodak moments, but you've got a good memory. It's just a process, but the big thing again is he works. He's thinking right. He's still got a couple little hitches in his delivery that could be corrected or addressed, but one thing you can't give a player is game experience. You just can't do it. You can't simulate that. You practice hard, you practice your best guys against the best guys, but to actually go out in a game, have to prepare for the game, the mental game as Mark was alluding to, the what-ifs. The players all ask the same questions of themselves, so to go through that the first time, it's really an interesting phenomenon, but again, I think quality shows it rises. We're not out of the woods; I'm not suggesting that, but it was a good first step certainly for those guys.

Q. Your preparation for Iowa State starts when?

KIRK FERENTZ: Tomorrow. We're going to enjoy this victory. It's like any other game. If we lose we're going to feel bad, and if we win we're going to feel really good about it. We'll turn the page and we'll study this game intently tomorrow as a staff in the morning and then we'll share it with our players, and we'll close the door on it and get moving on the next game. They're all important, I know that, but we're going to enjoy this one here for a little bit.

Q. On offense you have a one-two punch at running back --

KIRK FERENTZ: Well, you know, we're fine if Shonn Greene wants to hog the show; that's okay. If he wants to come back, I think we'd probably get investigated. But it doesn't matter to us how we do it, but I think if you look at our football team right now, and this was our sense coming into the game, we've got one game of evidence right now, it's really going to be a team effort. I think we've got a good combination at the running back position. Hopefully we can get Derrick Mitchell integrated in there a little bit, and then I think the receiver position right now we have four guys we have really a lot of confidence as a staff in, plus some younger guys that are coming up the way.

We played seven linemen when it counted today offensively. And then the defensive, same thing; we rotated some guys in there. I thought Parker Hesse did a very nice job when he was in there. He was playing quarterback a year and a half ago.

You know, the more guys we have contribute, and I'll go back to '08 and Norm Parker said, you know, it's a team with really good players and we don't have a star. We ended up having a star emerge, but a team with a good attitude that's got a lot of good players and hopefully a lot of good stories coming down the road. That's a team that has potential.

Q. How did James Daniels play?

KIRK FERENTZ: We think he did well. From what I could tell, it didn't look like he whiffed on anything, first and foremost, number one concern. But I thought he looked like he played well, and he's an interesting young man. He just doesn't seem to get real rattled about anything. If he is or if he's nervous, he doesn't show it. He played kind of like he practiced, which obviously has impressed us. That's why we had him in there today.

Q. Do you have Cyclones TV in your cable package, and if so, are you going to watch --

KIRK FERENTZ: We probably don't because my wife is really tight when it comes to the cable package (laughter). I swear. Hard Knocks and stuff like that, I have to go to somebody else's house and watch that.

Q. Jay Scheel wasn't dressed today. Was he injured?

KIRK FERENTZ: He fought a little bit of an injury situation, so that set him back, but he's healthy now, and he's a young guy. I was reminded of that the other day. Disappointing he missed some time, which obviously slowed his progress, but he's a really young player, great attitude, great young man, so he'll start working forward here.

Q. You threw one pass to the tight end at the end. Was that just because of the way the game went, or do you plan to throw to --

KIRK FERENTZ: No, we're fine throwing it to the tight ends. I mentioned balance, and you know, the receivers, certainly include our tight ends in that whole discussion. But that's just the way it was, and they chose to blitz us right there. I thought he did a nice job going to the right place. He made a check and threw the ball well.

Q. Derrick Mitchell, is he okay?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, he was kind of like Jay, he's been hobbled a little bit. He could have played today, but he hasn't practiced enough where I think the coaching staff would have been comfortable. You like to see a little bit more evidence, but we expect him to be full speed. He has been full speed the last couple days, so hopefully we can get him built up there where we have confidence that he can play the way he needs to play. Okay, thanks very much.