

University of Iowa Football Media Conference

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Kirk Ferentz



COACH FERENTZ: Welcome to everybody, and Happy New Year. Just start out by expressing our condolences; everybody in the department certainly was saddened to hear about Barb Elliott's passing two nights ago. Coach Elliott is one of the all-time great people in the history of this university, not just the athletic department. He was here when I got here in 1981 and he and Barb have remained very active in the Iowa City and university community. It's a real sad occurrence. Our condolences certainly go to Coach Elliott and his entire family.

Next on my list, it was announced that Jim Reid is taking the coordinator position at Boston College; it's a bittersweet thing. I've known Jim for a long time, basically going back to the late 70s. Jim has done a wonderful job with our football program over the past three years, tremendous coach, tremendous person, and did nothing but give his absolute best to our football program in every phase: Supervision of his players, academic supervision, recruiting, certainly the coaching aspect.

Just very appreciative of everything that Jim did for our program over the last three years and wish him nothing but the best moving forward. It's always hard to lose a good person, but this move made total sense for him. He's going back home. It's an opportunity to be a coordinator and I think he'll certainly have a positive impact on their football team there. Just want to thank Jim for his contributions.

We released a depth chart and I'll be happy to talk about that as we go along. Depth charts in January is basically just a starting point. You can take it for whatever it's worth and there will be a lot of changes to that, most likely, and developments as we move along but it's a starting point.

Two things to note on the roster. Needless to say, we are all really pleased to learn that Desmond wanted to come back for his senior season. Personally I think it's the best thing for him on all levels, not just as a football player but as a person. I think it's just a great thing. I know he's going to be a great teammate and hopefully develop into one of our strong team leaders. I think he certainly has that opportunity and that expectation. Thrilled to get him back.

Drew Ott, we're still working on that. That's still in process and really no decision, final decision has been made on that. Needless to say, we'd love to get him back, too and we'll do all we can to advocate for him. It's already being done but we'll wait and see how that pans out.

The only other real news item, Terrence Harris, back before the Bowl trip, we decided mutually he's going to move on to another opportunity. So I think he's considering a community college right now, and that's kind of where we're at on the roster.

Medically, we've had two players that are coming back have surgery this past week, both James Daniels and Josh Jackson had successful surgery, earlier in the week. I think it's fair to say they will both be limited or out of spring practice, and in Josh's case, probably limited. But we expect a real good outcome for both players. That's the hard part about the game, but it is a reality.

And outside of that, right now we are not anticipating anybody having surgery. A couple ones that are still up in the air, we want to give it a bit more time and see how we go but nothing major to discuss at this point on that. Those are just some clean-up items to cover and I'll be happy to talk about them in a second.

Just go back to last January, I talked about when you are in coaching and if you're doing anything that's competitive, you're going to experience highs and you're going to experience lows and we've certainly done that over the last 17 years right now.

I think if you look back at the last three years, we felt really good coming out of 2013, thought that team played at a high level, really maximized opportunities that were in front of them and really did a good job. Last year we came up short too often in too many circumstances and we talked about that last January. And really I think what came out of that was the fact that it was an open book for us as a staff.

Went back and re-examined just about everything we did and everything that we were doing, the things that we talked about last January. As a result of that, I think we made a lot of small tweaks and made little changes. It's like anything in life, little things can add up to big

things if they are done properly. So I'm pleased with the way that process went but the most important thing is our players really did a great job of buying in and being committed. They did a wonderful job there.

As a result of that, the 2014 season, was not only historic but it was really enjoyable to be part of that. Anybody that was involved with this football team I think really enjoyed the experience. We had a lot of great people involved and a lot of great people working together. Certainly to win 12 ballgames was significant. That was historic. To compete in the Big Ten Championship game and to compete in the Rose Bowl, those are things that really were very special.

So certainly very tough to come up short in the last two ballgames. The Championship Game we've already talked about, basically 30 seconds away from winning that game. But bottom line is we didn't get it done.

And then the Rose Bowl, just in a nutshell, we played an outstanding football team and we had a lot of respect for Stanford going into the game. It's like anything: until you get on the field, you don't get a full appreciation I think for how good or where a team is, and that was an excellent football team, there's no question about that. My guess is the final rankings will reflect that.

I'd say the same thing about Christian McCaffrey, since that time, after the ballgame, I was thinking about it, and I'm not sure we've played against a more impactful, dynamic football player in 17 years than him. He's just a tremendous football player and is a threat every way possible; is a guy that can touch the ball, and can't say enough about him. As good as he was on film, he's certainly more impressive in person. Their whole football team is impressive.

Stepping back from that, thinking about it a little bit, if you look at both those programs that we lost to at the end of the season, they both have earned great success over the last five years. Both of them had years that people might consider down, if you look at the other four collectively; that is the nature of football, and overall, over five years, they have just had tremendous programs.

For us, the good thing is it gives us a chance to really learn, to grow from this experience. When you see it firsthand, experience something firsthand, it's significant. Going back to 1999, we didn't have much fun up in Madison, Wisconsin. But the only good thing that came out of that in my mind was we came out of that in our first year. If you wanted to know what it took to be a Big Ten Championship football team, that was it. We saw it firsthand there and we saw Dayne set the record.

So we got to experience it and we learned from that and we grew from it and good things came out of that, and really, I'm hopeful that that's the same case here with these two ballgames. Both those teams have played in championship games and they have played in Rose Bowls, and for us it was a first-time experience. Our goal is to learn from it and be a better team as a result of that.

Along with that, I want to say how proud I am of our football team. Specifically our players; they are the ones that do the hard work and sacrifice and work so hard. But I think our staff, our support staff, all did a great job over the last 12 months and they certainly deserve credit.

It gets back to where we were last January. I said our goal is to perform at a championship level, be it on the field, be it academically, citizenship-wise, and I think this team certainly did a great job. If you look at it and the traits that this team displayed on a consistent basis, their hard work ethic, their resilience, their dedication, and most importantly their dedication to each other and then the spirit of community that was present on this football team. To me, those are things that are important in sports and are important I think in our state and our values in Iowa, really are in harmony with those things.

Again, I'm just really proud of this football team. They did a tremendous job and accomplished a lot of great things and they can all walk away feeling really good about what they have done. That said, we'll be back together on the 19th for the first time and we'll turn the page at that point, and the reality is, this is a new team coming together here on the 19th. It's a new year and we'll have new challenges in front of us.

The biggest thing, it's always been a fine line in sports and athletics between winning and losing, and really that's where winning starts in my mind. You have to understand that and certainly at our place, we need to understand that. There really are no givens. To that point, it's conceivable, we could have a better football team and not win 12 games next year. That's realistic. Just like Desmond King could play better next year and not win the Thorpe award. There's no givens on that, either. That's just how it goes.

But the real big thing I think as we move forward right now is that we learn and grow from the things that have happened, the 12 regular-season games, the two post-season games. And basically, again, this team has really modeled good behavior for next year's football team. We'll really expect this team to do that.

And then the next thing is to evolve and improve, and

that's what sports are about. That's what life is certainly about. And to me, it's all based on the fundamentals, it always has been; whether it's the skills that go into being a good football player, the fundamentals of good team work, and certainly the fundamentals of being a good citizen, being a good student. All those things are going to serve our guys well down the road. That's our ultimate job is to make sure when they leave the program that they are prepared to do some good things as young adults and then adults.

And then the last thing is a personal thanks to our fans. The turnout in Indianapolis was unbelievable. What a great environment. Just so good to be part of that.

And I would say the same thing about the showing in Pasadena. Again, the turnout of our fans, it's phenomenal. It's legendary, and again on behalf of our program, our team, I want to let our fans know how much they appreciate all they do and the support of our program.

Q. Were you surprised that Desmond came back? Winning the Thorpe award and all that stuff, seemed like he would have a real big chance in the draft.

COACH FERENTZ: I wouldn't use the word "surprised," but I was pleased. Yeah, my sense was in December that he was giving it serious thought. I don't want to say he was leaning towards coming back but I think he had an open mind it and we encourage that.

The big thing we encouraged him to do was get good, valuable, accurate information from knowledgeable people and I think that entered into his decision.

But I think it's a little bit like Brandon last year. I think he enjoys the college experience. I think he values being a team leader. I think he values the opportunity to be part of something special. And it is more fun. It's more enjoyable than pro football, and every one of our players says that; and I've coached in the NFL, I'd say the same thing.

And the bottom line is, pro football is going to be there for him. But now he has a chance to get in the NFL hopefully a year from now with a college degree in hand. It's important to him; it's important to his family.

Q. With Jim Reid's departure, he has a stellar career and seemed to be instrumental in elevating your linebackers year over year, because he coached all three, and they grew and got better. What are you looking at next? Is this going to be a national search? Do you have an idea of where you want to go?

COACH FERENTZ: I've got a couple ideas in my mind. There's no pressure to make a decision right now. Probably the only thing I would say that's really pertinent to it is we were not the same program we were three years ago.

So the profile Jim brought to our program at that time I thought was really important and very valuable. Norm Parker had retired, and I'm not saying that Jim filled that role but Jim was a coach who had a really broad resumé, a resumé that had a lot of depth to it at all levels.

What he brought to our program at that time I thought was really important. We are in a different state right now. I'm going to try to take my time and just think it over and do what's best for our football team and our program long term. But yeah, it's a little different scenario or climate right now than maybe it was three years ago.

Q. Is it because of Phil Parker being solidified as defensive coordinator?

COACH FERENTZ: Absolutely. Phil was young into his coordinatorship at that point. There's a reason you go back when Marv Levy was coaching, they had some pretty good teams. I did see a 30-for-30 somewhere in the last month. They had a lot of guys in their 60s and 70s coaching on that team, but there's a lot to be said for wisdom. There's a lot of value in that and certainly, Jim brought energy, brought wisdom to our program at that time, and to me it was a perfect fit at that stage.

Q. Do you anticipate making any changes to your staff?

COACH FERENTZ: You know, we'll see. It's like every year, right now, I'm just kind of at the infant stages of going through things and thinking things out. It's amazing, we played six days ago and it's just been a blur.

So I just want to think things out. Ultimately, we are going to do what's best for our team and make sure that we give our guys the best chance they can to get coached and make sure our coach is in the right spot so that they can do the best things that suit their talents and abilities.

Q. With C.J., what do you anticipate -- I don't know what you need to see out of him but what do you anticipate getting out of him?

COACH FERENTZ: My hopes would be the best players we've had in our program, and I think C.J. has an opportunity to be one of those players, the best guys we've had in our program have had their foot to the floor board every day here. Just start to finish.

You know, just look at that wall right there, at least the guys that I know personally, that's how they thought. They are all about improvement and pushing forward and there's not a player or coach that can't get better. And that's how C.J. is wired, fortunately. That's why he's got a chance to be a great player in our history. He's already done some unbelievable things.

And the other thing I'm looking forward to is seeing a healthy C.J. Beathard. I think he's probably looking forward to it more than any of us. That would be a really good thing. He's got a lot of things he can do to improve right now and he's well aware of that.

Q. Do you think he'll be ready to go?

COACH FERENTZ: I'm optimistic, yeah. I'm optimistic on that, sure.

Q. The national profile is definitely going to change; 12-0, played in the Rose Bowl and returned the most amount of players of anybody in the Big Ten so you're probably going to be Top-10. That has its own set of challenges to go along with it.

COACH FERENTZ: History just keeps repeating itself, doesn't it. It's so funny how it goes. Things are predictable. Sorry to interrupt you.

Q. What have you taken away from some of these teams like 2009 to 2010 where it was close but didn't happen; how can you apply that to now?

COACH FERENTZ: Sure, it's a great question. It's kind of what I said, there's such a fine line between winning and losing, and we are in a little bit of a unique position.

When a Drew Ott gets hurt, we can't just run another guy out that looks pretty much like Drew and Drew didn't look like Drew three years ago or four years ago. So for us, it's such a fine line. That's what our players need to understand -- our players and staff really need to keep understanding for us to win 12 games, I mean, just about everything has to go right; and we couldn't keep our quarterback healthy and ironically we had more injuries this year than I can remember. I'm sure we've had other years that would rival it, but things really have to be right for us to get there.

So to that point, you just look at the guys that we've lost off this football team after Friday, last Friday. We've got a lot of work to do. And you look at our depth right now and all the vacancies that have been created and the voids that have been created, the void in leadership. And not that -- I've said it many times, we didn't have much leadership. Wasn't bad leadership but we just didn't have much personality back in the spring. All those things get developed.

And I'll say this right now: For us to be a Top-10 in September, I can't think of a time since I have been here that we have been, legitimate. We may have been in the papers, but legitimate, no. We've been it in November, and even October at times we've been there. But for us, it's an uphill climb and it's how we take those steps.

So that's going to be the message to the team no matter where -- and you just wrote my August speech, because whenever it comes out, I guess it's June, it's always at the Trans American golf outing. That's about when somebody comes up and says, hey, you guys are ranked whatever.

It really doesn't mean anything. Kind of like the recruiting rankings. They don't mean much in February. Three years later they might be relevant but not when a guy signs a paper.

Q. How did Desmond let you know about his decision?

COACH FERENTZ: He actually let Phil know first. Phil got the good news first. They have got a great relationship, very close relationship. Spoke to both he and his mom and they were both really pleased. I know he spoke with C.J. that day. I've read that -- I took that as a really positive sign. I think it just gives you a reflection of the way our guys are thinking and that kind of closeness, it's how good things happen.

And I think there's a respect between those guys and just I think everybody on the football team had a really strong respect for each other. So when I heard that, that was really a positive thing, as well. I'm guessing C.J. might have been recruiting them. Swear I didn't put them on it. I don't operate that way but I think all the guys are thinking the same way.

Q. Got to feel good to have one guy on offense and one guy on defense that can kind of be the pin man, the leader?

COACH FERENTZ: What makes me feel better is that we have got more than one on both sides. We have some really good young people coming up that have already embraced that leadership role. We saw that during the course of the season. I kept talking about our seniors, but there are a lot of guys in the junior, sophomore class that are doing the same thing. We have got a big void because we just graduated 21 pretty good guys and now we have to try to fill that void, so we have plenty of room for guys to jump on the boat, that's for sure.

Q. How different will this off-season be compared to a year ago?

COACH FERENTZ: We had guys last year but it was just, it's always that process. Really to your point, it's not going to be a lot different other than the outside, how people perceive us. That will probably be a little different and that comes with winning. It comes with losing. All those things, you can write that script out of your head. It's how we handle it and how we deal it and what we do.

Goes back to my point about the fine line. The most important thing is the people in this building have to understand just what a fine line it is and we are starting all over again. We haven't won a game this year. Our first opponent is Miami of Ohio. I know they could care less what they say about us or what's being said about us, good, bad or indifferent. They are going to come here trying to beat us. We need to get ready for that but we have a lot of steps between now and then.

Q. Which position is the hardest to develop? Looks like defensive end is a position where you guys are in total developmental mode?

COACH FERENTZ: It's a little bit like our offensive tackle position a year ago. We knew this was coming. And so with Parker and Matt Nelson, they were kind of the Boone Myers, Ike Boettger of a year ago. All the time has been really important for them knowing that change was -- Parker got thrown in there, fast, a lot faster than we scripted it out. But that's what happens. And he did a really nice job. He's going to be an outstanding player for us, I have no doubt in my mind about that; I'll go on record there.

And I feel the same way about Matt. The things that we've seen, particularly the latter part of the season, really encouraging. We have three years with both those players and they have got all the right stuff like Ike and Boone. It's good. We have some guys coming up behind them, too, that I think have a chance. But we just have to keep pushing that.

Q. Does it seem like James Daniels is going to be out for the spring and how does that impact him?

COACH FERENTZ: My guess is he will be. I guess we're lucky he was here last spring so we picked up a bonus spring there. He's done a lot of good things in practice. Naturally would love to have him out there for those 15 days, but if he's not out there, he'll be able to overcome it. That's how it's going to work.

Q. Is Boone at left guard a best-five situation?

COACH FERENTZ: All three of those guys, the good news is we have three guys that can play tackle right now and seen them do and seen them do it pretty well. All of them have a tremendous amount of room for improvement and they will improve because they are guys. It's a flip of last year, for sure, total flip.

Q. Obviously your focus is on the beginning of next season, but another Bowl loss, this past senior class never won a Bowl game. Have you thought about evaluating how you prepare for Bowl games going forward?

COACH FERENTZ: That will be at the top of the list for sure when we get to it in February. I just talked to a coach, not about that today, but came up in conversation. We finished up our conversation.

Yeah, we'll start looking at that, and not unlike what we did after 2002. We looked at it real hard and tried to re-assess, re-evaluate what we're doing. I don't think we're that far off quite frankly. In this case, we faced a really good football team and they were playing hard and they were playing motivated. You know, they got a good result.

Again, I don't think we're that far off but we're going to look at everything, certainly. I will say this: This is the first time we've played in December in the regular season, if you will, and then had a Bowl game. I was a little, I won't say concerned about that, but very cognizant of that and maybe there were some things there that we'll have to factor in. We'll have to look at that closely.

Q. Your players said they were slipping all over the place. Did you notice that was an issue?

COACH FERENTZ: It was an issue. I think probably McCaffrey had more to do with that than anything else than the field or the shoes. That's just my feeling.

Q. With LeShun and Akrum, you have two very different backs. In the way you guys can use them, how do you get away from tipping your hand?

COACH FERENTZ: Hopefully we can get Akrum to 185; hopefully we can get him above 185. That's goal No. 1 for him. But you know, it's who do you want, Shonn Greene or Fred Russell, it's one of those deals. I'll take them both if we can get them. If we can get both those guys playing anywhere close to those two, that would be a good thing.

The big thing now would be to get these guys healthy where they can play the way they are capable of playing.

Q. LeShun banged up, too?

COACH FERENTZ: LeShun has had a lot of issues during the course of the season, as all three guys did, basically. Akrum, not quite as much. The issue with him is durability with being able to take the punishment that's out there. I mean, you saw their guy and you saw him. And I'm not saying they are the same guys. But McCaffrey, he's put together, strong, tough to

tackle. I mean, you try to tackle him and he's tough to tackle.

I'm trying to think of a negative on the guy other than he was too productive. That's probably the only one I'd give.

Q. What did you learn about Akrum this year?

COACH FERENTZ: I thought he took a huge step in Chicago. To me, I'm hoping that's a career-changer for him. All players go through, you know, learning stages and what-have-you, and the biggest issue with Akrum was just ball security, which is more than ball security. It's responsibility of the football team and if you're -- it could be a left tackle. If you let a guy run by that you're supposed to block and you don't block him -- I saw one of those Sunday where a quarterback got whacked and the ball came out. That's a left tackle; that's not just a quarterback.

If you do touch the ball, you've got to really treat it as it's important. It's hard to win if you don't, so I think he really -- and I can't quantify this but my belief is he felt the responsibility of the football team and he really took it to a different level and I'm hoping that will move him forward. I hope he'll do the same thing with his training. I'm not saying he's been loafing, but to have a college football physique and compete at this level, like the guy we just saw, it really takes dedication.

You've got to be -- and I'm thinking a guy like Danny Olszta who weighed 190, whatever he was, 180, who ate methodically; or Eric Steinbach, go right down the list, we've had guys do it. But that's what it takes if you want to play and you want to play high level football.

Q. Macon and Adam provided you with so much consistency at the fullback spot. What do you see developing there? Drake has a little experience.

COACH FERENTZ: Drake is a tremendous young guy. I thought, I've said it before, I can go through our whole roster from last year. One reason we won, everybody kept improving, and some were dramatic than others and I would say the same thing about Drake. Drake really improved this year. I think all of us feel a lot better about him in the December mode than we did back in August.

And then Brady Ross, we moved over during -- we toyed around with him a little bit. He was kind of the Grant Steen of our scout team this year. Grant was a total pain in the neck, '99. I didn't know what he's going to play, but I have a feeling this guy is going to play and he starts three years for us. Boy, what a great job he did.

Brady was that guy this year, he was just a pain in the neck all the time. Everything he did was full speed. He

knew our offense better than we did and boom, he was always breaking stuff up. He really took to it naturally. He did that in high school and I think he's got a great future, as well. Not saying we are going to replace them, those two guys are great guys, special guys and great leaders.

Q. Schedules expanding, you played 14 games, some teams played 15. What are your thoughts on playing more games at the college level and how will you handle the next month or two?

COACH FERENTZ: To me really the most important thing is how our players feel about it. I hate to speak for other people, but I think if you asked our guys, they would sign up for those 14 again and gladly, you know, gladly go down that road.

It was a little tough after the Championship Game. It was a very physical, competitive game. If we had to turn around and play next week, it would have been a challenge. But I think we had ample time to recover. That's not why we lost the Rose Bowl. I'm not making any excuses. It has nothing to do with that.

To me, my personal commentary is I think we are at the right number as a program and if we had the opportunity to play in the Championship Game next week, I think it's not that big a deal. The biggest challenge from my vantage point is schools -- some schools have already opened up and started school, I'm guessing. That's a challenge there.

But for our guys, it would mean, infringing on their winter break. I think most guys would trade that. Most football players would say, I'll give up a winter break to play in a Championship Game.

I would still need somebody really smart to explain to me how we could do an eight-team playoff. I don't see it in college... if you thinking about the players. That's just one person's commentary. I think we are right where we need to be. If they wanted to cut it back one, I think that would be fine, too, but I think we are at a healthy number right now.

Q. Kicker will be a brand new guy. What can you tell us about him?

COACH FERENTZ: Right now, not a lot. A lot to be learned. That will really start in the spring. I can say this: The guys listed have improved and they have been working behind the scenes like the defensive ends or the tackles last year. But no matter what, they are going to be new. We had two seniors this year, and Marshall, the most experienced guy. But both those guys have done a lot of punting and kicking over the last two years.

So we are going to be new and we have to know that going in. We have got to be willing as a team and prepared to experience probably some inconsistencies, not unlike you do any time new specialists or new position players take over.

Q. One player that seemed to go from good, young player to Big Ten calibre player was Josey Jewell and his short distance explosiveness and power seems to be where he's able to -- within a couple of feet of somebody -- what kind of strides did you see from him and where could he end up?

COACH FERENTZ: We were talking about young leaders and he's one of those people. He's a really strong-minded guy, very committed to his beliefs and his beliefs are perfect alignment with our football team. He really embodies everything you're looking for in a linebacker, a football player and a young man. He's a tremendous guy.

It's like C.J. He played a really high level this year, kind of remarkably, considering how much he played a year ago. But it starts with his attitude and his -- he's just a really committed, hard-working young player. He'll just keep getting better. He'll be stronger and more mature next year and there's no question in my mind he'll embrace the leadership role and bring other guys with him. He's got that ability and I don't know that you teach that. But he came here with it and we're just going to encourage it to continue to grow.

Q. Assistant coaches' salaries seem to be increasing, Dave Aranda went from Wisconsin to LSU, but as far as keeping your own in this day and age, how challenging is that for you knowing that I'm sure the market is pretty high for your success and you lost your linebackers coach.

COACH FERENTZ: Jim went home. I think that was the biggest thing for him. Again, I don't want to speak for other people, but he was really torn. I think he felt a great sense of loyalty to our program. I know he's enjoyed it here. But he went home; that makes perfect sense.

The guys that have left have left for logical reasons. If salary is going to be the most important thing, then that might be -- you're always going to be at risk there, because I don't think we're prepared to compete with some of the SEC schools and I'm not sure we want to, quite frankly.

Q. What did the NFL advisory board tell you about Desmond? Was there a projection there? Did that factor into his decision?

COACH FERENTZ: He may have gotten an answer. I've never asked him. Normally we get a call like, swear to God, it's usually Christmas Eve, get a call

from somebody in New York and they tell us what it is. They never called. Maybe gave them the wrong number, I don't know.

I'm not sure what they said. I've got information; we surveyed more than a handful of teams in the NFL, and it was all fairly consistent. But it's still a crap shoot. The draft is a crap shoot and I think he understood that.

Q. Speaking of the NFL, former players in the post-season, including your son who played in 14 games this year. Are you going to get a chance to watch it? Are you going to go to Denver?

COACH FERENTZ: We actually snuck out there Sunday, so it was great. It was neat to be a fan. It's kind of weird. Yeah, got a couple good stories on that one I'll share with you later. It was neat, really neat to do it. I'm glad I'm not the jinx; they turned it over five times and won the game. I don't know what the odds of that are, but they are not very good, but they won it.

It will be fun, yeah, to that point, this weekend. I'm not as much a fan of teams as I am people. People like our guys are involved, it's fun to watch and fun to have a chance to catch up.

Q. Neat watching James --

COACH FERENTZ: It's hard for me to talk because I'm his dad. He's a good story. He's a really good story. And if I wasn't his dad, he would be one of our great stories. Guy is working for Randy's Carpet. Basically he was moving carpet around. I don't think they actually let him put it down. He's not that refined. You know, that's what he was doing, and training here. It's a good story of sticking with your dream and chasing it. I encourage all of our guys in your 20s, that's what your 20s are for in my mind, chase your dreams a little bit and see where they take you. You've got your whole life to work a real job. It's great. I'm really happy for him.

Q. Do you have a better sense now of what C.J. was able to do and not able to do because of injury?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, that's why we're excited to see him healthy. He still threw the ball fine but mobility is such a big thing in football. When I was in the NFL, I was around some guys that ran out of gas, really good players that ran out of gas.

And when you're limited, like any sport, when your lower body starts to go, it's not a good thing and experience and expertise can only make up for so much of that. He was a little bit limited that way.

I think all of us are excited to see what he can do when

he's fully healthy. Hopefully he'll get there and stay there. I know we'll get there but the key is staying there. The biggest thing about him is the neck-up part. The guy, he thinks right. He's calm under fire. He's got all those attributes. And that game was a learning experience for him, too. It was a learning experience for all of us. None of us liked it, I can promise you that. It wasn't much fun. It still I think stings all of us.

But that's how you get better, too. That's how you grow. If you learn from it -- I can't tell you how many times I've heard about Dan Gable talk about learning more from one loss, which is all he ever had, than all his victories. As long as you learn from it and grow from it, then it's okay. It's not okay, but you get something out of it. There's some benefit to it.

Q. You don't anticipate surgery for C.J.?

COACH FERENTZ: Hoping not. Medicine is not black and white but we're hoping that that's not the case.

Q. I'm sure at wide receiver, you've got one guy who played a lot, a couple guys who played a little. Is it a mix right now of really being interested with what you got and being nervous --

COACH FERENTZ: Anywhere we're losing seniors, we lose two good seniors at the receiver position. So the development of -- and that's -- I'll dovetail back to the preseason rankings.

Guys that make those rankings have no clue. They look at how many guys we have back, they don't take into consideration what we lose, not only in terms of production but leadership, all those kinds of things. For us, we don't have, throw out the developmental term. If we have got 40 guys that are ready to get into a game, we are doing really well; where some teams might have 60 or 70 that can walk out there and be pretty good.

We don't operate that way. It's just not our -- so we have really got to be hitting things right. The guys that the -- beyond your first 15 players, how they develop, how they grow, what they do, that's really paramount to be successful.

And then going back to the question of what can C.J. do. If our first 15 players, whether it's C.J., Desmond, Josey Jewell, if those guys are not improving, what kind of example are they setting, first of all. And then we are not going to win with them playing at the same rate they played at last year. Doesn't work that way. Our best guys have to play their best.

Again I go to those guys on the wall over there. All of them played best as seniors. That's what they do and that's what you've got to have.

Q. Last year you made a quarterback change and stood up here and said you were not happy with where the program was out. A new Kirk was kind of born. How much more enjoyable is coming up here today than it was 360 days ago?

COACH FERENTZ: I'm not going to say I'm "Happy Kirk," but last year was enjoyable, the experience was enjoyable, because of the people. That's what makes coaching special, and if you're a teacher, it's the same thing. When you see growth and see things -- try to think of how to put it.

When you see people do things that they were not sure they could do and attain, that's the joy in coaching or teaching. So if you're in a classroom or coaching, that's the most gratifying thing that you get to enjoy.

Needless to say, there are a lot of experiences last year that I think were really gratifying I think for everybody here and to see players really understand what it takes and what it means to be a good teammate and really be on a good team, you don't have to go 12-0 to do that, but that's the fun of this whole thing.

Yeah, it was really special, it was really special, the reality is, it's January and now we've got, you know, we'll enjoy it here for a couple more days and it's tough to enjoy it because we lost a Bowl game. That always kind of taints things a little bit.

But big picture-wise it was a fun, enjoyable, gratifying year. Now the challenge is not so much can we surpass it, but what can we do with this opportunity. This is a different team. What's the best this team can do and how successful can we be at getting there. That's a race we'll be running here in a couple weeks, and it's going to be a lot of fun.

Q. Talking about having 60 guys ready to play -- what's it going to take for Iowa get there and can Iowa get there?

COACH FERENTZ: If we move to Columbus that would probably be a good start geographically. I say it in jest.

Recruiting has always been a challenge here in most sports, not all. Wrestling is probably a little different climate. But even there, you look at the way wrestling programs operate through the years, they don't always take the obvious guy I guess.

That's always been our challenge. Our goal every year is to recruit better and hit a higher percentage. Not only guys that end up being productive and playing but get them there faster and all that type of thing. But all that being said, it isn't an exact science and we probably have to project a little more than a couple schools do. That's kind of where we're at.

The good news is, you can still be there and I mentioned, Michigan State, there have been times when they have not been as good, the five years, they have done a great job the last five years. Stanford has had their times when they are down.

That's the great thing about college football, everybody has an opportunity but you have to understand who you are, what you are and then try to maximize it and it takes special people. You're not going to get there without special people, that's the goal there.

Q. Given the circumstances changed off the field, does your message to recruits change?

COACH FERENTZ: The crazy thing, most of our stuff is already done in our recruiting. So it's kind of like the next round here. Although, we are not taking anything for granted with this class. Guys can move any time they choose to. Yeah, we still have our recruiting -- but the message is, this is a great place, there's great people here and it's a great opportunity I think for young people to come in here and grow and develop. We certainly have a nicer place for them to come every day and work and do the things, eat and be together. Those are important things.

But to me the most important thing about anything you do in sports are the people involved and I think we have got great people here working would you are players. Not just as a coaching staff but the entire -- everybody they inter face here and there's a support and a commitment to giving them a first-class experience educationally, citizenship-wise and football-wise. That doesn't change. But just like a new building is more attractive to prospects, so is winning. There's no debating that. Sometimes opportunity, if you have a bad team, hey, maybe I can come in and play. But most guys think they can play regardless.

Q. Jay Scheel was a highly-touted local guy, who has been injured off and on. Got him second on the depth chart. Is he a guy you think can make that step?

COACH FERENTZ: Kind of like talking about Nelson or Parker. Jay's biggest thing, two things, he was a quarterback in high school, and then that injury is really sticky. He has had a long, windy road. Late this fall and then during December, we think we really saw him playing kind of the way he can play, you know, moving faster and doing the things he did in high school.

It's been a long journey for him and he's a tremendous young man. Again, a little bit of adjustment playing outside and doing some things that he didn't block much in high school, but most guys have to learn that anyway. We are really, like Parker, like Matt, he's a

really quality young guy who has good potential and good -- I can't guarantee he's going really going to be a good player, but we have a strong feeling that he's really going to continue to develop and be a good player for us. He has all of the characteristics and attributes that you look for.

Q. Heading into season 18, 60 years old, how are you feeling?

COACH FERENTZ: Good. Today, good. I'm a little behind in my workouts right now. I'm a little concerned about that. Went to Denver for two days. But I feel great. I feel great and hope it stays that way but it's, you know, it's one of those deals. Life is good. We have a little downtime right now from recruiting, quote, unquote, downtime, but we'll be back. What do we call those things hamsters get on, those little wheels. We'll be back on that thing next Thursday. Get it going again.

Q. You did win a couple national awards for Coach of the Year. What goes through your mind when you win something like that?

COACH FERENTZ: It's really a great honor. Just a quick aside on both of them. The Eddie Robinson thing, I remember as a kid watching highlights on Sunday morning. I had the pleasure of meeting Coach Robinson back in the mid-80s, Bill Brashier, doing a clinic in St. Louis and got to meet him. Asked him about the wing-T. Curious why Grambling would be running the wing-T. That's when I found out he studied here and got a master's at Iowa. He told me the story and I found out about his visits with Coach Evashevski. Then we drafted one of his players and I got to have a long phone conversation with him prior to the draft in 1993. Just a special man. I had two personal interactions with him so that's pretty neat.

And then I learned after the Bobby Dodd folks came up here and visited, I didn't realize Coach Dodd had not graduated college. So it was a really strong initiative for him was making sure his players graduated and that award stands for more than just, you know, winning however many games.

Those two things are kind of special on that level but again it's a team award. It's like any of our guys, getting awards, the Thorpe award, any of our guys will tell you it's a team effort. You don't do anything on your own and especially if you're a head football coach. There's a million people in this organization. I'm the guy that says what time we practice, basically.