

University of Iowa Football Media Conference

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Kirk Ferentz



HEAD COACH FERENTZ: Welcome everybody. We're eager to finish up this portion of our preparation, the Iowa portion. And Thursday we'll be traveling. So we have that to look forward to here.

I think so far the preparation, our practice, has been productive. It's been a really busy couple of weeks. Finished up on December fourth. We took a couple of weeks to give the guys a chance to relax and recharge, get feeling good again. And then we went through exam period.

And now since that time we've really been trying to sharpen our skills and get back to playing good football. It's kind of been the road that we've been on.

Last night we started to transition a little bit into our game preparation. We'll begin that more in earnest here tomorrow.

That's kind of where we're at right now. As you might imagine our team is very, very excited about this opportunity and about the trip. I think so far they've done a good job handling the preparation. But bowl games are really unique, always have been and still remain that way.

Couple of objectives, first all is to enjoy the events. All bowl games are tremendous. The Rose Bowl, it doesn't get any better than that. I know we'll receive great hospitality, great opportunities to take in some of the things that are unique to California and Southern California, in particular. But just the basics. You end up staying in a beautiful hotel, the meals are great. Just a lot of nice things about it. Players get bowl gifts and all that stuff, too. That's part of the experience.

And the other part, obviously, is trying to get ready for the game and having the focus that it takes to prepare well. One thing about a bowl game, typically, especially in this kind of bowl, you're always going to play an outstanding opponent. We've got to get our preparation down and be prepared to play the kind of football, that is representative of the kind of football team we've had this season.

That's the challenge, you have to have a good plan. And most importantly the players have to have a good grasp and understanding of what it takes to be

successful and be ready to go on game day. That still is ultimately what you remember the most about any bowl trip or bowl experience.

Again, we're thrilled to be in the Rose Bowl, it's a great honor and thrill for our football team, one that the team has worked hard to achieve and earn. Next step is to be able to compete at a level we want to. All that being said, things are going well so far.

Q. With this roster, where you would rate your guys?

HEAD COACH FERENTZ: We had a lot of guys come out of the last game a little bit hobbled and limited. So really fortunate, because we probably would have had some key guys missing that next Saturday.

We're a lot further down the road right now, so that's good. It's part of football, you learn to live with those things and don't make a big deal out of them. If you do that the team learns to adjust, and you roll with the flow a little bit. It's an opportunity to get guys back.

And I think more, every bit as important is the physical part, the mental part. Coming out of camp, we went 14 weeks, 13 of those we had games that weekend. That's a real -- I don't want to call it a strain or pressure mentally -- but it's an exercise, and it takes something out you have.

I thought it was really important for the guys to have two weeks to back away from it, not unlike the first couple of days of the bye week, where you remove yourself, relax, unwind, take care of other things, academics, social life, and start getting back to football.

And again we didn't really mention Stanford until last evening with the team. I think there are other things more important as we move forward. Now we're moving into that phase where they'll be prominent on our minds.

Q. Can you compare this year's Bowl prep to last year's, what are your observations and differences?

HEAD COACH FERENTZ: Totally different objectives, quite frankly. Last year we were just trying to get right again. Because we clearly we were not right coming out of our last game at Kinnick.

I'm not saying the bowl game wasn't important, I'm not suggesting that, but what's more important is that we got our practice habits, our attitude straight again.

And that kind of paralleled maybe to the preparation for the Texas game in 2006. We finished that season in a way that wasn't representative of what we wanted to be. And spent that month really trying to get right more so than worrying about our opponent specifically.

So this is a whole different deal. This team has really operated at a great level all season long. And we're trying to maintain that level of preparation and hopefully carry that into our next game.

Just a little different mindset that way. And these guys have been responsible all season long, going back to January, so hopefully that will be the case in the next 10 days, that will be the most important part.

Q. You said Jordan is back practicing. He's good to go?

HEAD COACH FERENTZ: I'm encouraged, yeah, based on what I've seen I'm encouraged. You just never know. We're 10, 11 days out, so that's encouraging. Time is on our side. And hopefully he'll have the pop and explosion we need to be successful at that position. But we are encouraged now.

Q. The Rose Bowl is a really big deal to the fans, but the players were not alive the last time we were there, do you have to explain any of the history to them?

HEAD COACH FERENTZ: I'll go back and show highlights, showing positive reinforcement.

But my memories are blurred, too. I'm eager to go. And I've been there twice. But I'm eager to go just to kind of rekindle things a little bit.

And Gary (Barta) and I were talking a minute ago, the only two times I've been there we stayed in places that were a little bit different. We were in Pasadena one year. City of Industry the next time. This is going to be a totally different setup.

What I kind of equate this to is maybe our first Orange Bowl experience. It was good. Our last one was outstanding. Everything about that trip was outstanding. I kind of anticipate that with this trip, as well.

We're staying in a pretty populated area, and the trips to the practice facility, which is key in Bowl preparation, may sound funny to you. How long players are on the bus to and from practice is really important. It can

really actually take away from the experience or can add to it. This one we're 20 minutes from practice, which is really a good thing.

Just everything I've learned about the setup, it's going to be first class. Excited about that.

But it still gets down to what we do on the practice field and our meetings. And the other thing is how we handle the good things. You want the players to enjoy that. They've earned that. This is something they've earned. But you also want them to have an awareness of what we're trying to get accomplished at the end of the day.

Q. You've been a part as you mentioned a couple of Rose Bowls, the first one was three weeks early, everyone gained 20 pounds. And the next time it swung the other way, and the result was similar. What have you taken away from those trips the way they were conducted and how different are you going to approach the whole experience versus those two?

HEAD COACH FERENTZ: You know, I probably equate that to the '81 Rose Bowl, a lot of parallels between that one and 2002. We were flying at a whole different altitude than we were used to. And maybe I should have been better prepared in 2002, learning from the '81 deal. But that's past history.

But I think the big thing is we've been to a lot of Bowl games historically. I think we know how to operate, what needs to be done. And I'll look at it again.

The things that are important to me are the logistics, the travel time to the different events, et cetera, what are the events that are required, those types of things and where are they in the week. Going to the Disney Experience right off the bat, which is great. It really times with our preparation. So you don't have a tired team on game day. But I think we've got a good grasp on that and we'll do our best to make sure all the heavy lifting is done here before Saturday. So the guys can really enjoy the California portion of things and also be ready for the game.

You want it to be mixed. I feel good about where we're at and we've got guys on the staff, Greg and Bobby, that have been to the Rose Bowl in recent years, so they have a good feel for it, as well. I think we've got a good plan right now.

Q. Have you seen a player do as much for a team as you've seen from Christian McCaffery?

HEAD COACH FERENTZ: I have to go back to Barry Sanders, and I remember distinctly Larry Coker and another coach came up here in '88, '89, I can't

remember which, and they came up and visited with the offensive staff.

And my request was would you bring some film. I wanted to see Barry Sanders. First time I saw him on film and it was an amazing thing. I'm not saying they're identical. But you don't stumble into that. To win 11, 12, 13 games in a season is hard to do. What he's done, there's a reason nobody has done that, it's just phenomenal. A thousand yards alone in kickoff returns. Start there, think about that.

So it's really an amazing thing. He's a tremendous football player, seems like a tremendous young man on top of that. So our preparation starts right there. You better find a way to contain him a little bit. And that's going to take a really great team effort. Not only defensively, but on special teams, as well, punting and kickoff.

Q. Stanford, big buys that play small guy positions. How do you think that will play out as far as communication goes?

HEAD COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, the big thing is first of all when you play 3-4 teams, and we don't play a lot of them, they're not as prominent in college football, when you play teams that play that front, it's a little bit different communication system than a four down team.

And when teams look like they have two down guys and all of a sudden one of the linebackers becomes a third down guy. It's not as complicated as -- I'm not going to try to make it out to be a calculus equation, but it is a little bit different and from that standpoint we feel lucky we've got more time than three days to get ready for these guys.

They're a good football team. No matter what segment you look at, they play really hard, they play really fundamentally sound. And they've got some players that they mix in, whether it's on the offense side or the quarterback, they have guys that are really difference makers. You better have a good plan or you're going to be in trouble.

Q. How would you assess Kevin Hogan at quarterback?

HEAD COACH FERENTZ: I think he's a really good football player. We just played a really good quarterback in our last game. And now we face another guy that's similar. I'm not going to say they're identical, but similar, veteran players that are really proven. Their resumes are very strong in terms of leading our football team, not only as a team but also to victory.

It's going to be hard to rattle him. They do a great job running the football, as you know. Their third down

conversions, everything just kind of goes together. They convert a lot of third down situations, and it's tough to get them off the field. And he's the center it all, like a quarterback in any system, basically.

Q. What was Northwestern able to do?

HEAD COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I don't mean to minimize it, Northwestern is a really good football team, I don't want to diminish what they accomplished. But that was a 9 o'clock game for Stanford. And it's really good luck for a West Coast team to play a Central Time Zone team at 8:00 or whatever time they play on the West Coast. And the same thing going the other direction. Unless it's a Bowl game you're there for seven or eight days, you get acclimatized. You take teams out of time zones, I think it's a huge factor. I think it's a factor in the NFL. I think stats back that up.

And plus it's the first game of the year, and they had a lot of young guys on the defensive side in that game. Not that it was a high scoring game, but they're such a different team, that's a big thing. We looked at the film, but it's not going to give us much help, unfortunately.

Q. When you look at the résumé of quarterbacks, you've been around a lot of good ones, some have gone to the Rose Bowl, some haven't. But when they go to the Rose Bowl they stick out. C.J.'s stature is elevating day-by-day almost. But how does they compare favorably, with Chuck Long and with Gordy Bohannon?

HEAD COACH FERENTZ: To me, the book is still out there, and Matt Rogers, I wasn't here for that, but I was here when Matt was a sophomore.

I would backtrack to the first thing you said. It's about the team. In our conference we have 14 teams. It's hard to get there. It was hard in 2002. We thought we were going and didn't get that opportunity. But so just by numbers alone it's hard to get there. One commonality is teams that play there are good football teams. That's a starting point.

But typically if you have a really good football team you've got a really good quarterback. And that's been the case with all of the Iowa team. Think about Gordy and Pete Gales, mixed in there back in '81. They both played at a really high rate in '81. We were more of a defensive football team at that point. But those guys did a great job.

And Chuck Long I don't have to say much about him and what he accomplished as a quarterback here, it was phenomenon.

And then you transition to Matt, who struggled in '89, we were 5-6 that year. It was his first year playing, and

he played at a really high level next two years and played in the pros. It's a pretty good indicator.

And C.J. again, going back to the start of the season, we were all talking about him being a veteran player, he had a game and a half under his belt. But he really has really played great all season long and done a great job leading our football team. We expect him to do the same. He's practicing right now.

There will be good quarterbacks in the game. But I'm guessing that's typical of a Rose Bowl.

Q. It looks like some medical hardships claims have gone through, have you guys heard about Drew Ott?

HEAD COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, we're in the process of it and I expect it's going to go a while. I'll be the first to tell you I have no idea what the whole process, if I understand the whole process of the whole deal. But we're going to appeal it right to the end and hopefully we'll get that opportunity. If we don't, we don't. The good news for him, he's got a great future, he'll continue to play football and be great.

Q. What is your philosophy with bowl prep and how much you use young guys in the early practices, what you try to do with guys that haven't been the ones and twos?

HEAD COACH FERENTZ: It's really important to us, and always has been, and probably more important to us than other programs. We're a developmental team, and we're proud of that. It gives us an opportunity to work the guys more than we would in other periods.

And one thing with our new schedule we've had a little less opportunity for developmental periods and practice, that type of thing, because we're on a little bit more tighter time constraints with classes.

So it's given us a chance to look at guys we haven't really looked at exclusively in our system and play them a little bit. And while we're resting the older guys of that have played. And give us a chance to work them and learn a little bit more about them, and see how they're progressing. That's one of the benefits of playing under the bowl game for sure.

Q. What is your philosophy with the young guys who are experiencing bowl prep for the first time?

HEAD COACH FERENTZ: I'm not so sure it's different amongst us, but certainly my sense is, and I'm not an expert on that, by any stretch, but it's really been met with great enthusiasm. We've had the ticket requests for the Orange Bowl weekend. I tell you, both times we pulled up to the Orange Bowl it was unbelievable, the fans that lined up where the buses came in... it was

remarkable. I think that's a trademark of Iowa fans, they show up, especially bowl time they show up when we travel. They travel really well, regardless. That's the nice thing.

I think certainly there is the history of this whole thing, I figured that out in '81, it's a pretty special thing.

Q. Speaking of the fanfare, just noticed a lot of fans walking around the complex today, people in the parking lot asking for autographs. Have you noticed more people hanging around the complex?

HEAD COACH FERENTZ: Well, not so much, although I think I mentioned before, I've got a window for the first time in 26 years. I did notice somebody out there with autograph balls. We had that issue back in 2002. It's the first time since then we've had that. I probably have to probe a little bit and see if we have to do something about it. It's a good problem to deal with.

Q. Stanford's offensive line, is as good as there is in the country, especially the left side, Garnett is the Outland Trophy winner.

Is there anything you can compare? You played some really good offensive teams yourself, but are they more like Wisconsin with the power concepts, how does he compare with guys you've seen in recent years?

HEAD COACH FERENTZ: He's an outstanding football player, and again appears to be a tremendous young guy. I just saw the awards show where he won the Outland. And saw the Heisman program, as well. I've got the insight in the people you're talking about. They've got a program for great young people, from what I can tell.

He's outstanding, and I think our last ballgame is going to be really good. I'm not saying they're identical football teams, but there are a lot of parallels between the two.

You mentioned Wisconsin, they've won a lot of football games over the last eight years. With the same type of style, maybe not identical, but the same type.

Those are good preparation for us. We know there's a heck of a challenge for us, they're really good up front. They play a lot to linemen. It's not like they're trying to keep a secret what their goal is, what they want to do. It's a matter of how well you can hold up and fight the entire fight with them.

Q. How has the time off allowed Duzey to end on a high note, and how would you assess his future in football?

HEAD COACH FERENTZ: It's a tough injury. What

he's got is unpredictable. Could be two months, four months, don't quote me on those months, but there's a lot variance in the recovery.

Some injuries are predictable, ankles aren't, but some injuries are. And to that point this one has been -- there's really no way to predict what's going to happen.

Good news is the last week he has looked better, looked a little bit more like the old Jake Duzey. We hope that will continue the next ten days. Would be great if he was able to get involved in a positive way. We're all hoping for. It's his last game as a Hawkeye.

Moving forward I think he'll have a great opportunity. He's the guy that was on everyone's radar going into the season. Certainly last spring the NFL teams were aware of him. He's a big guy that can run, block and do a lot of good things. And that's a really good premium position in the NFL, it's hard to find good tight ends.

Q. Difficult, too, for somebody like that, who had high aspirations and still does, but to go from where he was, a junior, and he's probably a draft pick now because of this year. Do you have good relationships with NFL staff and GMs? Do you talk to him about this process, the challenges that he's going to face?

HEAD COACH FERENTZ: Injuries are bad, no matter when. The low point of coaching is dealing with injuries. It's just really hard on everybody involved. Especially with guys who are seniors, because they see the clock ticking, it's really hard. But in his case and Drew's case, at least if they're not here, which Jake can't be, Drew remains open.

But at some point you're going to move on. Both of those guys have NFL potential. They'll get the opportunity, I'm really confident in saying that, they'll get an opportunity to get into camp. Once you get into camp, it's better to be a first round draft pick, at least they won't cut you the first year, but for everybody else it is fair game. Free agents in this day and age really have an opportunity to play in the National Football League. It's a matter of what you can do and what you can present.

Going back to the injury, I think in his case when it comes time for timing and all that stuff, he'll be fully healthy. He'll get to hopefully test out well. He's got enough good film that somebody is going to invite him to camp, at least I think so. It's what he does with the opportunity. That's all you can ask for in life is a chance, just an opportunity to show what you can do.

Q. So many good football teams this year, do you

think it would be good for the sport to one day expand to an 8 team college football playoff?

HEAD COACH FERENTZ: I'm not an expert on the topic. It's a fairly strong opinion. I think where we're at is I a good thing for college football. To me it's a plus one, I don't know if we're using that term. I always thought that was a positive idea to expand it.

To go beyond that I think is -- somebody would really have to -- some smart person is distinguishing to have to explain how we do it practically.

As a coach I'm fully aware of what our players are asked to do. We played in a Championship game on December 5th. I'm not sure when that next round of playoffs would begin, we've got these finals on campus early December, they come every year, 17th year in a row. How you deal with those, and they are important, because we want our guys to graduate, that is important here, it's always been a program goal.

I don't know how you do that. And just played a couple of bowl games on Saturday, this past Saturday, we could never play in those games, we're in finals week.

At some point you have to think about the players, too, and what's good for them. To me the only answer is to push it into January. Most colleges go to school in January, too. So I'm not sure how you'd pull it off, I guess.

And this still is college football, it's about the players, it's not pro football where it's their jobs, and you get up every day and go to work. That's a whole different discussion, in my mind.

I don't know why we need more -- we're the 5th team according to rankings, we had our opportunity, we came up 3 points short. And hopefully next year we can push over that wall. We're not looking back. We're where we're at and we're excited about where we're at and make the most of this next opportunity.

Q. What was the most special moment of this year for you? I know it's hard?

HEAD COACH FERENTZ: It is hard. Every step is so important. Going back to the point about the playoffs, that's what's neat about college football. Everything you do really has bearing. And you can lose early and still win it. That happened to Ohio State a year ago. I'm not saying it's life or death. But everything is important. Every little small victory, the little things that people aren't aware of sometimes, those are important things.

But I think as much as anything the Northwestern game was really, going into our bye week, we were really hamstrung a little bit about injuries and those

types of things. And then Jordan goes down right away. And the way the team responded to me was really emblematic of the way this football team has carried themselves this year.

If I had to pick one moment, that's not a specific moment, but kind of a game was really important in our development.

Q. How would you describe Desmond King's season in a few sentences?

HEAD COACH FERENTZ: It's representative of what you hope happens to a player. He got thrown in early, probably before he was ready, but he really responded well.

The next year played solid football a year ago. And year three he's elevated his production, his game, to a whole different level. I think he's still got another step to go, personally. That's been fun to watch. And that's what you hope all your players are doing. It may not be as dramatic as what he did to win a national award like the Thorpe Award. That's exceptional. But you want to see that progress. Anytime that happens that's a great thing.

Q. Have you guys talked about the future with him?

HEAD COACH FERENTZ: It really hasn't been pressing. We gathered information. We told him we would do that. He's going through the advisory board like anybody should. That information will come back right before the holidays, if I remember correctly. Seem like they call about 5:00 on the 24th. If my recollection serves me well. We'll be on a plane this year.

We'll get all the information, so he's got accurate information. And go from there. The big thing I want any player to do is make a well-informed decision, not one based on voodoo, those Magic 8 balls, or the guy down the street, or Uncle Tim, you know, or whatever it may be.

Q. Made any opposition changes?

HEAD COACH FERENTZ: Nothing official yet, no.

Q. Traditional home uniforms, there's no rose in the there?

HEAD COACH FERENTZ: I don't know. I know I have a patch. I've seen those. I've seen pictures of those. But I don't think anything beyond that, at least not that I'm aware of.

Q. What are your plans for Christmas?

HEAD COACH FERENTZ: Christmas? It's actually like a Wednesday of practice for us, ho, ho, ho.

We will celebrate Christmas as a team that evening,

but we do things a little differently, I guess, but explain to our guys, first as a coach it's bad luck to not be coaching on Christmas or the holidays. We tried that a couple of years ago, it's not much fun.

And the other part of it is we kind of get a routine down that works, and sometimes Christmas interferes with that. So we'll do the Christmas deal, too, but we're going to keep pushing towards the game and keep our time line alive. And if the guys are fortunate enough to play in the NFL they'll go through the same way. I'm not equating us that way. But we have a plan.