

University of Iowa Football

Media Conference

Sunday, December 6, 2015

Kirk Ferentz



COACH FERENTZ: Thanks, Gary. We're just absolutely thrilled to get the news today about being invited to the Rose Bowl and to play PAC-12 champion, Stanford. They're an excellent football team.

The Rose Bowl is a Granddaddy of them all. You think about the Rose Bowl, you think about tradition, you always play a tremendous opponent. That certainly will be the case this year.

I think equally as important right now is our fans are really excited about this opportunity. I've gotten feedback already on that.

Speaking of our fans, they were just phenomenal last night. Their turnout in Indianapolis, the noise that they made, what they added to the environment was really special. And then their acknowledgment of our players coming off the field meant a lot to us as well.

Most of all, I'm really excited for our players. They have worked so hard to make this a great season, a special season, a historic season. And for them to be rewarded in this way, it's really fulfilling.

Certainly, last night was a tough night for us and this news is good medicine, I think, for all of us, just to ease the tough outcome.

As I said last night, I couldn't be more proud of our football team, the way they competed, the way they fought, played with great, great effort out there, and as good as I can recall. So, just really proud of their tenacity, proud of the way they act together, the close knit group. For us to be together for another month is really meaningful also. So excited about that.

As tough as the game was last night, again, this gives us something to refocus on when we get back together on Tuesday. We'll start looking forward and start thinking about our preparation for a tough contest on New Year's.

So, this team has been resilient, they have been tough-minded all season, they have been close knit, and I think that's what it's going to take to propel us forward to get ready for our next big challenge. So, we're really looking forward to that.

Q. You've been an assistant in the Rose Bowl, you've been close sometimes, you're supposed to go, it didn't happen, you're a field goal away from going another time. What does this mean for you to finally be able to look up and see the San Gabriel mountains from the sidelines as the head coach?

COACH FERENTZ: It really hasn't sunk in, quite honestly. I said it last night, somebody asked about all the bowls and I really didn't give it much thought. Because number one, it was out of our control. The thing we were trying to do was win last night.

But, just having a little time to think about it here, it's been 30 years on the button since last time I was there. We lost to UCLA. I remember coming back to the hotel, I was kind of down in the dumps and my wife kind of put me back and in shape, she has a way of doing that. Reminding me what a great year it was, even though it was a tough loss.

My first year here as assistant, we were fortunate to go out there and play. And then the year after I left 25 years ago, they were there, too. So to your point, we thought we were going for sure in 2002. Everyone thought we were going, it didn't work out. So, to finally get that invitation, it's really special. We're really excited, but most of all I'm excited for our players.

Q. Your first year here, you went to the Rose Bowl, you saw Coach Fry do this three times, and you know how bad he wanted to win a Rose Bowl. Didn't quite do it. What would it mean to win a Rose Bowl as part of his coaching tree?

COACH FERENTZ: We still have some unfinished business. And guys in this tree have won it. Certainly, Barry's done a good job out there.

But to play in any bowl, a New Year's Day bowl, is great, to play in the Rose Bowl is really special if you coach in the Big Ten. Every game's important to win, this one would be great, great accomplishment. But we also know it's going to be a great, great challenge. I don't know a lot about details as far as Stanford goes, but I do know they're an excellent team, excellent program, traditionally been that way. And ever since David Shaw has taken over, they have been really a quality football team. They have continued a great legacy there as well.

Q. What do you feel like the committee ranking you fifth, Ohio State, defending national champion, seventh, one, says about the respect they had for you guys and what you did this week?

COACH FERENTZ: I had a little bit of an opportunity to watch some of the TV this afternoon when I got back. And got some feedback from some other people that follow that stuff on social media. And this sounds like anybody that watched the game last night, you saw two teams really just fighting it out tooth and nail. It was a great, great battle, great defensive game, both teams really competed hard. And I think if you're a football fan and a football follower, you can't help but appreciate the effort of both teams. We tip our hat to them, they did a great job, they came out on top, but to me, we ran out of time. And I'm just so proud of our guys.

So, I think that had a lot to do with it, and we played them straight up. They had their best players on the field, we had our best players on field, it was just a great football game.

Q. In 1981, that was a season where it was a totally unexpected journey. This year is kind of an unexpected journey in a lot of ways. Any similarities at all between those two?

COACH FERENTZ: I think it's just to your point. Number one, no one, certainly, saw 1981 coming. For a lot of reasons. And I was so young and so naive back then, I thought it was supposed to work out that way. What the heck, I thought we were going to win every game.

And so, it was just kind of a storybook year for all of us. I'll never forget getting the bid when we bet Michigan State out there in Kinnick. What a memorable day that was. Almost surreal.

Then just the whole experience. And probably my most vivid memory of that first Rose Bowl is Reggie Roby punting the ball about 75 yards and our coverage team being about 30 when they caught it. It came back fast the other way. He was too good of a punter.

But it was just a great experience for all of us. Certainly, a magical time in Iowa football history. And for this team to do what they have accomplished this year, it's really impressive because, again, I doubt anybody saw this one coming.

But it really speaks to, like that '81 team, a group that really believed in themselves, that was -- I was new to Iowa at that point, but it really made impression on me right away when I got here. Just how committed everybody here was towards winning and having a special season.

That work had begun well before I got here, and I kind of feel the same way about this football team. I think this has been three years in the making, if you will. I think it really kind of started gaining ground in 2013. But for our guys to finish off the way they did this year is really commendable and this is a really, I think, a really nice reward for them.

Q. You've developed a bowl philosophy. I don't know if it's a philosophy, but the way you do things. Once you get to this site, will you basically have the same formula this year?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I'll think about it. I have kind of been tweaking it around in my mind a little bit or banging it around, but not full-time, the last couple weeks.

Probably the major difference, right now, we have never played this deep into the season. This is 14 weeks since camp broke. Thirteen games in that time span.

So the work that we do prior to the last five, seven days is going to be a little bit different I think. Just want to make sure we're smart. I know first and foremost on our list right now is getting our players rested. They won't do a lot this week.

We'll meet with them on Tuesday. They will get a couple lifts in, but there won't be anything football between now and this coming weekend.

I'll give them a chance to get their personal lives back in order a little bit, spend a little bit more time there, get their academics in line before finals, and take care of those kind of things and just get a break from football. I think they need that right now.

That was really a drained football team last night when we came off the field. I imagine they feel the same way today. So we need a little time to get them back and get them back up on their feet.

Q. With what you asked Nate to do last night, playing that many snaps on that neck, shoulder, groin, whatever else is broken on him. Is embodying this team right now?

COACH FERENTZ: He really does. I think our medical staff, "all" is probably a strong word, but it's close to. I saw Brian Wolf this morning, and he was shaking his head. But that is Nate Meier. And Nate is just a tough-minded guy.

So during the week, we weren't overly optimistic that he would play. Yet at the same time, you understand how he's wired. There was a lot of guys limping today getting on the bus. A lot of guys who were banged and bruised, and I'm sure they got the same thing on their

side.

But our team has been like that all season long. You think about Drew Ott playing with the elbow that he had right on through. It's just, this has been a trademark of this team. It's almost -- I don't know if it's contagious, if that's the right word, but there's a real -- again, it gets back to I don't think anybody on this team wants to let their teammates down. If they can do something to help the team win, they're going to try to give it to us out there on field. And Nate certainly did that. A bunch of guys did that last night. So, that's a good trait, certainly, and we really appreciate that.

Q. On Reese's comment in the locker room. The team has showed the coaches more about teamwork than the coaches could have taught. How did you team show that?

COACH FERENTZ: I think every turn. Just every turn. This team's been about team all the way through it, the way they conduct themselves. Just like Nate, Nate wasn't out there playing for honors, he was out there playing for his football team. He knew it was going to be his only chance to play in a Big Ten Championship game. But he wanted to help the team. I think that's been the motivating factor for every guy on our team and it just shows on every turn. I thought Reese's comments were really appropriate and anybody that's been a parent, anybody that's taught school, I think that those words really resonate. Coaching is kind of the same way. The longer you do it, the more you do learn from your players. It's amazing. They're great teachers, if you'll pay attention.

Q. What is it that makes the Rose Bowl so special? Is it just the Big Ten tie-in, the history of it, or what is it that makes it the crown jewel?

COACH FERENTZ: I think it's everything about it. You just described it. The pageantry, it's just, it is one of those games. I remember Jimmy Stewart being the Grand Marshal, I'm going way back now, but everything about it is just really significant and special for a lot of different reasons. A lot of different parties, not just football fans as well, but to be there and be involved in it and I'm -- I can share this with you, a really neat memory I have is we went out there after the Holiday Bowl, I think it was '87 when Michigan State played USC. We went up the next day and got to watch as fans and it's a whole different perspective when you go in there, not having any skin in the game. And that was really a neat experience. You don't get to go to many games, the coaches don't get to go to many as fans. And to take it all in, the stadium, the scenery outside the stadium, all the stuff that goes on, it's just really fantastic. So, I'm really excited about going back and I don't want to make it about me, but I think I speak for everybody in our program, it's just going to be a great

experience. Again, I'm so pleased that everybody in our program's going to get that exposure that I've been fortunate to have myself.

Q. When the playoffs came out, when the BCS came out a lot of people worried that the Rose Bowl might lose that pageantry that they had for so long. I know the college playoffs were the goal for this team and a lot of players were disappointed last night, but you can't ask for a better consolation prize today, right?

COACH FERENTZ: It is. It's just great medicine for us. As you might imagine, it was a quiet, it was amazing getting off bus last night, just going into the hotel, the guys were really, this game affected everybody, certainly. And I got that sense this morning getting on the buses and coming over, coming back to Iowa City. But I'm guessing when everybody got the news today they were, you know, it picked their spirits up a little bit and that will help us move forward and that's something we're going to have to do here this week at some point.

Q. It's been a whirlwind of a whole year, frankly, off season and emotions of the year, Tyler's death, Brett Greenwood is an honorary captain, the way the season has just matriculated through the year, the wins, last night. Have you allowed yourself to process what you've had to go through to get to this point?

COACH FERENTZ: Not totally. This might be a week for that. I think it's important to our players to get to step back a little bit too and appreciate things and move past this game and then really to your point step back and look at the whole picture and I'll probably do the same at some point.

But it has been, it's just been great. But that's what makes being part of this so special, too, is that you get so wrapped up in the day-to-day and the minute-to-minute and when you're around great people that's a good thing. It's kind of like you get a break from reality for however many weeks it's been, 14 weeks, plus four weeks of camp. There are some of the crazy things that go on in this world and all those kind of things. And that's probably the beauty of sports in general, it gives everybody a three-hour window to just kind of get away from some of the things that are out there in life. Anybody watching the game last night I think got a sense of how close both those teams were. That was a good football team we played, too, a championship team. So that's what the sport's all about. That's a lot of fun. Probably my only other regret, other than not winning the game last night, was missing out on the former players in town. I didn't really get a chance to see them. But we'll have time for that later on too.

Q. You referenced the sendoff your team got last night after the game. You're the first guy in the locker room, so when did you become aware of kind of the scene that happened behind you?

COACH FERENTZ: They shared that with me pretty quickly there after. I've seen that before. Our fans were like that after the Wisconsin game a year ago, going back in the locker room. And that's, I think, one of the great things about Iowa and coaching at Iowa and being part of the program here is that our fans, number one, they're as good as you're going to find, they're as loyal as you'll find. And I've always believed that they just appreciate good football and good competition. We want to win, they want to win, I mean, we all want to win. But I think they also appreciate it when a team lays it out there and just does everything it can to win. And that's what the game's all about. That's what sports are all about. That's what we're trying to teach our players all the time. That's really the objective is to put it all out there. Sacrifice and give what you got and then you live with the results. But usually, if you do that consistently enough, you get good results.

Q. You've had great teams, you've had gritty teams, you've had tough teams, championship teams, this team seems to have a persona that it fights adversity and is the most together team that you've had. What does this team mean to you?

COACH FERENTZ: Well, we'll give them another three or four weeks to pass judgment on the thing, but to this point, you're hitting it right on the head. They're so close, they're together, they really care about each other, and that's position to position, age to age, it doesn't matter. They just kind of cross all bounds and normally after we lose a game I would give the "there's no laughter in losing talk," I sure didn't need that last night, I didn't need it this morning. I may share it with some of our younger guys on Tuesday when we get together, but these guys are so invested and not only invested in the cause, but invested in each other. And that's, when you get that, when a team develops that, then you got a chance maybe to do some things you're not supposed to do, and that's certainly been the story of this group.

Q. Are you optimistic that Jordan Canzeri will be able to play in the bowl game?

COACH FERENTZ: We'll find out more as the week goes on. He was in a boot today for precautionary reasons. And it's a sprain, so they're tricky. We have seen him come back in two weeks and sometimes it takes longer. So we'll keep our fingers crossed, especially for his sake. It's his last chance to play a college football game. So I sure would hope that he can be back full speed for this game. I hope both sides, their team and our team has all their players out

there.

Q. The Selection Committee chair suggested this morning that you guys proved as much last night as you had all season. Do you agree or did you feel like what you saw last night the team had already proven to you?

COACH FERENTZ: No, I think this team's proven it week in and week out, going back to our first ball game. Going into the game last night I certainly didn't feel compelled to defend our team for anything. I don't know why we would have to. They have played well. I was talking to somebody last night, I'm not sure I've been around a team that is not only prepared each week, but then shown up and competed about as hard as you can compete 12 times. These guys have done it and then last night was the 13th time.

So, to me, last night I think it's fitting that the two teams played. To me I would argue that they're the two best teams in our conference and it came down to a matter of inches or a matter of minutes, however you want to look at it. Credit goes to them, they finished the game. It was a really a tremendous battle by two very good football teams.

Q. Have you ever had a team this close?

COACH FERENTZ: We have had really been lucky here. We have had a lot of really good football teams and I'm flashing back right now to the North Texas game you got Pat Dean, Jim Pecore and Mark Bortz here. Look a little different than they did 30, 35 years ago, but the bond that those three guys still have and that's the neat thing about this, but this team in total, right now, they're certainly up there in the top group.

Q. Did you get a chance to see the fans? Did you get a chance to look up and admire them striping a neutral field and do you think that can happen has been maybe at the Kinnick West at the Rose Bowl?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't know about that, but I scanned the stadium a couple times last night and it was just really impressive. The environment, we felt like we were at home and I got a sense of that Friday night just people that were out in town coming back to the hotel saying everywhere you went there were Iowa people there. They showed up at the Gameday set and really made a good showing there, too.

I think that's a tradition of Iowa. Our fans are just fantastic, they're fantastic in Kinnick and they travel with a lot of enthusiasm. I imagine it's going to be quite a few people out in California. I guarantee that it will be a great site.

Q. Does this, do you think this bid feels any different as a head coach versus being an assistant

coach and the staff that goes?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I guess. It's just a little different perspective when you're in the front of the class. But, again, I'm just thrilled for everybody. I've been there twice, but 30 years ago, I can barely remember things, I got to be honest with you. It will be good to see it again. But I do know this, it's a very special bowl. I remember that from being there twice as a participant. And for everybody that hasn't been there, in our organization or team, to have a chance to be out there and partake in it, it's really a special thing. So, it just, it's one of those opportunities you hope are going to come your way but it's really tough to earn it.

Q. You talked about Coach Fry went to three, I guess you call them elite bowls, as a head coach at Iowa. This is your third as a head coach at Iowa.**Do you take any satisfaction from that?**

COACH FERENTZ: Well, they have all been great trips. The trip to the Alamo Bowl in 2001 was awfully special. And again it's like your kids, they have all been great, but this one's pretty good. Especially since we thought we were going for sure in 2002. I mean, that looked like a done deal. And then boom. But the rules of the game, it's kind of a new set of rules. But we didn't dwell on that and just kind of pushed forward. But this is really good. It's really special.

Q. Any temptation to think about where you guys were last year to where you are this year?

COACH FERENTZ: I guess I would go back. I would acknowledge, 2012 was a disappointing year. 4-2 at one point and then lost six straight. Not the same as, but kind of like 2006, where we were going along at 5-1 and then five out of six in the second half. So those are down turns that you just, they don't sit well.

I guess I would suggest, I think that was kind of the beginning of the next shift, if you will, and we got our staff hired at that point, the group that we have now was in place for 2013. I thought we had an excellent football team in 2013. We came up short against some good opponents. We came up short last night in kind of a similar parallel. I thought that team really played at a high level. Did really well. We took a step back, where there's no denying that, and we didn't finish well, be it the season, be it games. But we weren't that far off. That opened the door for us to look at things a little bit closer, make some more tweaks possible and just talk about some things, we made some adjustments. And to me this is a continuation of it. And we sit here right now, I think we won 27 games in the last three years, so to me it's another step forward and every step's hard, every step's a challenge and this next one in front of us will be a tough one too. But we're just really pleased to be in this position.

Q. Do you expect to have any of your staff members sort of moved?

COACH FERENTZ: I'm not aware of any right now. But you never know. That's part of the life we live. So, if somebody decides there's something better out there for them, I've always operated under the philosophy that I don't want to try to make judgments for other people, what's best for their lives. So if something would come along that's exciting for them or attractive, I'll support them on that.

The good thing about coaching here is I think we can always get great people to come here and work. And the last couple guys that we have had have been great additions, so I really feel great about our staff right now. When you have good people you're always at risk, too.

Q. The fact that you trailed in the fourth quarter for 38 seconds all season, how an amazing is that to you?

COACH FERENTZ: It is amazing. Unfortunately, it was 38 seconds. I wish it was less than that. But again it's just a real tribute to the way our guys have played. And I mentioned earlier, these guys have showed up and competed all 13 opportunities. And that's easier said than done.

It gives you insight in terms of the leadership, our internal leadership with our players. That was the biggest change during the course of the season, watching that grow and develop. Starting in the summertime, but it just kept growing during the season and I'm really proud of our guys for doing that.

Q. Did you have any interactions with Coach Shaw at all.

COACH FERENTZ: We bumped into each other one time at a high school in Dallas, probably a year ago January, I'm guessing. But I've had great respect and admiration for him for him, following what he's done. He's a tremendous coach. His work is showing up certainly at Stanford since he's been back or been named head coach. He did a great job there, too. He's been part of a long-lasting run of success there. They have done a great job underneath him. So, it's going to be great challenge for us, I know that.