

University of Iowa Football Media Conference

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Kirk Ferentz

An Interview With:

COACH KIRK FERENTZ

COACH KIRK FERENTZ: Welcome, everybody. Again, going back to Saturday, it was certainly a tough, hard-fought victory for our football team, and I think as everybody knows, Wisconsin is a very challenging place to go and compete. So just really pleased with our football team from that regard. And the other part of that is if we want to be competing in games that are really meaningful in November, one thing for sure, you're going to have to win in tough environments in conference play. So from that standpoint, that was a real positive.

Very happy for our players, you know, to get the victory, certainly, and then right along with that, happy for Desmond King to be recognized by the Big Ten. It's our third Big Ten recognition for a player this season. And I think what it's representative of, you know, if you look at it it's an offensive player, defensive player and a special teams player, and really that's kind of how we're winning right now. We're playing good team football, and you know, one segment's feeding off the other. So I think that really kind of is very fitting.

The other thing I'm pleased with at this point is our special teams improvement. I think we're doing a much better job in the special teams regard. That was something that really needed to be addressed. You know, we just were okay a year ago, and five games into it I think we've made marked improvement. A lot of that goes to our specialist. I think Marshall Koehn has done a good job, obviously. Dillon Kidd has done very well and came up with two early big punts, critical punts on Saturday. Kluver has done a really nice job quietly, and that's the way we want to keep it, and then Desmond King has given us a little bit of octane as our return guy. So those things are all positives as we move forward.

Our captains, same four captains. We've got Jordan Lomax and Drew Ott defensively, Austin Blake and C.J. Beathard on the offensive side. And then medically, I don't expect Tevaun back. He'll probably miss this



weekend, next. We'll see how that goes. And then the other two guys that didn't travel to Wisconsin, Boone Myers and Derrick Mitchell are both kind of day by day. We'll see how that progresses as the week goes on, but I wouldn't want to speculate at this given point. So that's kind of where it's at right now.

And then going back to this ball game, if we're going to be a successful football team, again, if we want to be playing in November in games that are really significant, one thing that we're going to have to do is have the ability to turn our attention quickly to our next opponent and another big challenge, and that's really what conference play is all about. You know, if you look at the scores from last week in the Big Ten, I don't read point spreads, but I'm just guessing after seeing the scores Saturday night, the experts probably failed in a couple of areas on that one. So to me that's indicative of conference play, and what you have to do is play your game. You can enjoy it for a little bit, but you have got to turn your attention to your next opponent real quickly. And it's gotta be your full attention and full efforts if you're going to have success. So that's really the challenge that faces us right now. We play an excellent Illinois football team this Saturday. They come in obviously with a very good record. I think everybody's aware of that. They're 4-1, 1-0 in the conference right now, and I think the thing that impresses me right now they've got a new coach that's a matter of fact, and Bill's a very capable, veteran coach. He knows what he's doing. He's an excellent football coach. But when you look at the film, you see a team that's playing with great effort right now, statistically. They're not dramatically different offensively, but they are dramatically different on the defensive side. They've really done a lot of good things defensively, and they're playing really well right now. And I think most importantly, what you saw Saturday was they're a team that believes in themselves; came back and did a great job in the fourth quarter to get a fourth-quarter victory in their first conference game. So they did a great job. That just tells you about their football team. If you look at them offensively, they've got a good quarterback that can throw. That's no secret. He's very good. They've got very good skill players. I think their biggest change offensively in my opinion is their offensive line looks much improved from a year ago. Defensively, as I just said a minute ago, I think they're a totally different football team. They're

playing the same scheme for the most part. But they're just playing very well, front to back, from the front end to the back end, doing a great job there statistically. I think they're up around 500 yards a game right now. They're about 300 in terms of kind of improvement they've made there. And then special teams, it starts with our punting game, they've blocked two punts for touchdowns and also had two big returns, and their returner is an excellent returner. He's good, not only in punts, but kick return as well. That's just kind of a thumbnail of their football team. We've got a lot of respect for them, and what that means is we have got a lot of work to do this week. We're going to have to be at our best to be ready to go on Saturday.

Q. Coach, Jim Reid has been on your staff for a couple of years now. All the linebackers say he's one of the most energetic coaches they've ever been around. How did you guys hook up?

COACH KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I wish I had Jim's energy, quite frankly. Half of it. He's just an amazing person. It's funny, there's a guy here from Detroit, Dave Uyrus, a veteran scout, coached at Syracuse for a long time. Dave was just talking about the first time he met Jim. I think I met him a year later. I think it was 1978, Kendall Keith and I went over to UMass to watch those guys practice a little bit. I played at UConn obviously. So competing against UMass they always had good coaches there, Dick McPherson and then Bob Pickett took over and Jim was a young linebacker coach at that time, and I remember being at -- you know, going to spring ball, watching those guys. You know, Fred Schirmer speaking at a clinic there. You know, I'm going back to late 70s again. And then you fast forward when I went to Maine, he was the head coach at UMass and did an outstanding job. Left that job on principle. It's a pretty good story and tells you a lot about the integrity of him as a head football coach. Ended up taking an assistants job and ended up becoming the head coach at Richmond, did a great job and worked down at Miami with a couple of mutual friends of mine. So when I was doing some checking on Jim, the latter-day version of Jim, it was all positive from the people I talked with, and we're really excited to have him on our staff. He's just a tremendous person.

Q. Coach, does Nate Meier show why recruiting is an exact science. You look at the size and you never probably dreamed he'd be a defensive end.

COACH KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah. He was certainly the small guy out there Saturday and that was the land of giants that we were playing against. So if you compared the size of the guy he had to block or compete against for the most part Saturday and his size, you know, it's a tale of two cities. But the good news is he's got a big heart, and that's kind of been

traditionally our mode of operation. We just try to recruit good football players and find the best spot for them. I'm not saying he's Matt Roth, but it's that kind of story, I guess. Nate was a running back. He looked like John Riggins out there playing eight-man football, just running everybody over. We weren't sure what he was going to be, but we thought he was a football player, and he was a big part of the game Saturday, certainly. Not only the play down on the goal line, but certainly the last play as well, did a good job getting pressure on the quarterback on that fourth and two. So he's playing his best football, and again, for us to have a good football team, our seniors need to be humming, and he's doing that.

Q. With all the attention that's placed C.J. through the non conference campaign, is it good almost that this was a defensive type game, defensive win? Takes a little pressure off him, but it also makes the team a spotlight rather than just one player.

COACH KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah. That's a down side to it and that's football. I mean during the course of a year and that's something we try to explain to our players, and I was alluding to that earlier about the awards. You know, the Pittsburgh game is a different game. The offense finished the game on the field. They had to drive it and then Marshall comes up with a big play, but the offense was really the last group out there to make it be a winnable game for us. This week it was the defense, even though the offense had the best play in football, taking a knee, but it was a defensive ending to the ball game, and that's true teamwork, you know, when you have those things feeding off each other, no game is going to be the same. And that's C.J.'s sixth start, so to be involved in different kinds of games, that's college football. We're going to have more of those down the road. And that was a tough outing, tough environment. A really tough defense. They were harassing us, and I thought the one thing that's consistent with him is his poise and his toughness out there. So yeah, it was all positive. It wasn't his best game, but he'll bounce back from that, that's for sure.

Q. Are you impressed by Illinois, especially the fact that they fired their coach a week before the season got started?

COACH KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, all the reasons for that, that's way out of my interest level or knowledge level, but the bottom line is, yeah, it is -- you never know what's going to happen when there's transition like that. You just never know. And I think from an outsider looking in, they're very fortunate. I've got a lot of respect for Bill Cubit and have had for a long time as a football coach, and certainly he brought a team in here and they beat our butts pretty good in '07. So my

respect for him grew even more after that. He's an excellent coach, so to have a guy like that on staff who at least from the outside looks like he seamlessly has just taken this thing and really made it a positive for them. You know, that looks a lot easier than it is. So it's a real credit to him. It's a credit to everybody there, their players, the rest of the coaching staff, obviously is right on board on them and they're playing well. Who knows what would have happened, nobody knows that, but I just know this. They're a better football team than they were last November.

Q. You look at Ike Boettger, he's a young guy who hasn't really played. Is his progress really easy to see for you?

COACH KIRK FERENTZ: You know really for me it was last week when we were going back through your the Wisconsin clips from last year. That was a game we inserted him as a tight end. It was a less than spectacular initiation to college football. Just put it that way. But that's representative of football. You know, he missed the snap count a fair portion of the time during that game. Really his first step was less than adequate. And you know, so just all the little basic things that until you play, it's one thing to do it in practice, but until you get out in a game circumstance. So he's a work in progress right now, but he's off to a really good start. We're really happy for him that way, but it's not a huge surprise, just because again, he works hard. He's a tremendous young guy and he's got a good skill set, too. So he's going to be a really good football player for us.

Q. Your quarterback took a few shots Saturday, took I think seven pressures, four or five sacks. He didn't seem to break character, though. Seems like he still gets up, he's still the same guy. Almost like a pitcher giving up a homerun.

COACH KIRK FERENTZ: That's what I was alluding to, too. His poise, he's unflappable thus far. And if you were going to be flappable, that was the time to be right there. It was a tough -- you know, it's like playing the Steelers, you know, in their heyday, those guys come at you, they show you a lot of different things and they come hard. They've earned, what they have statistically, defensively, they've earned that. And yeah, to go through a game like that, if you can go through those and win, that's a really good thing. So yeah, we have total confidence in C.J.

Q. You talked about turning the page quickly. Is moving an off day to Thursday does that kind of help front load your week in that regard?

COACH KIRK FERENTZ: There's no question about it. And I gotta be honest. Okay. That was not one of the by-products that we thought about, but it really has proven to be, because you're right back to work, we're

on the field Monday morning. So good, bad or indifferent, you gotta move on. You gotta flip the page and get moving on that next opponent, and I think of it as a positive. There's no question about that. But I'd like to tell you I knew that back when we made the decision. You learn all kinds of things. I'm still waiting for the other shoe to drop. We'll see what happens.

Q. You kind of joked a couple of weeks ago about the new me, the new Kirk Ferentz. The players, we asked them about that today, and they kind of said maybe you're out and about in the complex a little more. Is that part of the complex itself helping you guys get closer, and are you making a concerted effort in that area? Is that something you tried to do?

COACH KIRK FERENTZ: Well, I think I tried to touch on that back in January, that you know, maybe one down side of being somewhere, you have a lot of things that start getting on your plate a little bit, and certainly making this building become a reality took some time from everybody. Not just me. Everybody chipped in on that, and you know, those kinds of things take you away from some of the things that you really like. The best part about coaching is being with your players and the staff, pure and simple. I mean I don't care if we're in June, which we're allowed to do that now. We weren't allowed to in the old days, in the rules of insanity, but anyway, whatever it is that people do. And it's kind of the same way in football. It's kind of the same discussion. You get tugged in a lot of different directions, and I think you just kind of learn. And you know, this new me stuff is really taking legs. I got asked on the teleconference. It's interesting stuff. But the bottom line is I think when you've been somewhere for a long time, you see the peaks. You go through the peaks, you go through the valleys and you have a chance to really evaluate things, evolve hopefully and make changes that are going to be productive. It's not like -- you know, we're not home yet, obviously. We've played five ball games, but I think we're doing well right now and the challenge is right now to get a sixth good win.

Q. Does having this new building pump some juice into everybody, coaches and players?

COACH KIRK FERENTZ: I said that in January, Mike. And I would double that now because we got the graphics up. In fact they're in there right now just about finishing up everything up. Another three or four days, I think. If you'd walk in the indoor facility, it looks very different. Our hallways look very different. So there's no doubt about that. And I learned that -- I went through Russ Gerdin's building five or six years ago. Russ took me through their building, and he just talked about the impact it had on the employees there, just how everybody -- it's up lifting. It's up lifting. I think it's

symbolic also. We've been here working hard, and if we're going to do the things we want to do in recruiting, this is really important. Just like I said, it was important in 1981. I know Coach Fry made that a point of emphasis when he came here, and Bump did a great job, and Gary and everybody really worked hard to help this become a reality, too. So the bottom line is if we're going to compete at the level we would like to compete at, it's never going to be easy, but we're not going to be able to do it without great facilities, without great fan support and all the things that we're able to enjoy here in Iowa. And that's why it's great to be here.

Q. Can you take us back to January and talk about the necessary changes?

COACH KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I don't know that the changes have been radical or all that extreme, but it's really trying to bring back into focus what is it that really makes you good or makes you bad. And that's not to make light of the new part of things, but you know, really the new thing is the old thing. It's like everything you do in about anything that's important in life, you get back to the basics. You know, how did we build this thing back in the late 90s, early 2000s; what was that all about. What were we doing well, what did we learn from that and how do we apply it to our situation right now. It wasn't like it was a train wreck last year, but there were just things last year that, you know, you can't leave things out there on a continual basis and we did too much of that. So that really kind of pushed things forward. And it's not like we -- we haven't split atoms or anything like that. It's just trying to do everything a little bit better. I know that sounds real simplistic, but that's what it gets down to and it's a lot easier to talk about than really enact every day, and that's -- you know, right now that's -- but we have good buy in right now. That's the key thing on any football team. We have good buy in.

Q. That's what your players said because they said you haven't changed at all as far as your daily --

COACH KIRK FERENTZ: Same bad jokes, all that stuff. You know, when I think of one. But yeah, we're just trying to do things a little bit better. The credit goes to our players. These guys are working their tails off right now, and they're all, you know, contributing in their way. And when you get that going, you have a chance, like I said, we're hardly out of the woods. We got seven tough games in front of us. But really happy about the things they're doing, and when you see their efforts get rewarded, that's a real positive. That's what coaches enjoy.

Q. When you look at leadership and chemistry, those are things that have to be organic and not manufactured. And yet you know when you see, and you kind of see this team has kind of got that

cohesiveness. Is that something you saw develop in January or is that something you kind of noticed as the season --

COACH KIRK FERENTZ: It's been on going, and I think you can develop it. Not to the point that you could say, like you could make me a National Football League player. That would be impossible. Okay. Couldn't happen. Mrs. Nahberg couldn't straighten out my chemistry experiments in the eleventh grade. She tried. She'd stand right there and watch everything I did. And I just baffled her. I was the one student that really frustrated her. So you can't control everything. But you try to do what you can to enhance things and see if you can't get some growth and what have you. To your point, I mean really, I think it's been on going. I'm not so sure and I think I said this back at the end of April. I wasn't sure of the personality of our football team coming out of spring football. I think we saw it evolve over the course of the summer a little bit, and then certainly since August on, I think we're starting to see some -- but you know, we have more situations now where guys can take a little bit more ownership and can really be more active and assertive as leaders. So we've had a handful of guys and we had guys last year, too, that really did a good job. But can you get everybody kind of going in the same direction, and right now we have more guys doing that than not, and that's a healthy thing.

Q. How much has it helped to have Brian not so far removed from being a player? Has it helped connect with players?

COACH KIRK FERENTZ: I don't know about opened up. He and LeVar both have that role. They're both former players. They know the culture of the program and understand it thoroughly. And I think that's a good thing. You know, I joked about Brian a little bit, but you know, I was half tempted really -- he's always been opinionated, in case you haven't noticed. He gets that from his mother. And I was half tempted to call his boss in New England and just find out, like you know, does this guy do any work, like is he doing anything other than watching our films because he had a lot of opinions about what we were doing. I thought maybe it would be good if he just kind of paid attention to what was going on up there. But to that point, he's had opinions. But this has really been a staff effort, and as I said on the teleconference, I think to me the story is really about the growth of our program and our staff and the cohesion of our staff. And we went through that back in '99, 2000, 2001 while we were trying to get our feet on the ground a little bit. And it's the contrast I made when Randy Walker went from Miami of Ohio to Northwestern, his whole staff went with him. So they were a team already, whereas we all came from different directions back in '99. And when everybody settled in, I think we really grew into a great staff. And I got to enjoy that as a head coach for quite some time.

Now we're kind of going through that process again the last couple of years, but I really feel like things are meshing. They're gelling, just like a team has to. That's a big thing, but there's really no way to microwave that or speed it up. It's just part of life.

Q. I know rankings don't mean much at all to you, but did it bring a smile to your face to see Iowa finally there?

COACH KIRK FERENTZ: I gotta be honest with you, it didn't really move me too much. But I will say this, I'm happy for our players. I think it's probably meaningful for them. It dawned on me for a lot of guys this is kind of new territory, so that's a good thing. What's more exciting to me is that we're playing well enough to be recognized, because those rankings, I think we all saw that, I think it was four or five of the Top 10 last week got blown out of the water this past Saturday. So not everybody kind of knows where everybody's at right now, and I don't think any of us will know how good any of us are really until a couple weeks down the road. But I guess better to be there than not, but it really doesn't mean a lot right now.

Q. When you look at a guy like Cole Fisher, who was on special teams and is now a contributing starter --

COACH KIRK FERENTZ: It's going back to that theme of our seniors playing their best football. We need that, and Cole has been a guy who shows up every day. He has for five years, shows up every day, great attitude, works hard. That's to me is the beauty of college football. If this was the NFL, he'd probably never gotten that chance. He'd probably been cut three years ago. But we don't cut guys here. If they got a good attitude and work hard, we don't cut them. So that's not what this is about. He's got his degree or will have his degree here in energy, going to graduate school. All that stuff is a positive. But the bottom line is, the fun part about it from a coaching standpoint, the football part of it, the connection that way is you see guys emerge at different times and comes into camp No. 2 just like Angerer did as a junior, Stanzi did as a junior, and then after 20 some practices he's been the most consistent of the group, and it's a good group of guys. They're all quality guys, but one thing about having good team morale, you have to play the guys that have done the best in practice, and that's what we do. So he's earned that job. He's playing really good out there right now. Playing well. Excuse me. My mom would be mad at me on that one. He's playing really well out there as a football player. He's given us leadership, and I think he's a really confident player right now, too, which I couldn't have said about him two years ago. But the interesting dynamic he's been playing good on special teams, like a starter on special teams for a couple of years. Now the defensive part of

it caught up for him. And that's fun to see. Some guys hit it like that, just walk in here and it all comes together, but that's a rare -- we get a lot more guys like Cole, and that's kind of the history of our program.

Q. Illinois has won four of its last six Big Ten games. Before that, lost 24 out of 25. Is it simply the talent level has risen over there considerably?

COACH KIRK FERENTZ: I don't know that. I can't judge it because we haven't played those guys for so long. It was weird, last year we hadn't played them since '08. So it was kind of out of sight, out of mind. But the thing I notice, and I don't know what to attribute it to other than why are we playing a little bit better right now, too. Maybe the same thing. But when you watch them on film, they're just a better football team, in every regard. They're playing tighter, cleaner. The statistics reflect that. Talk about 500 yards a game defensively. It's hard to beat anybody when you're doing that. But now they're right at 300. And the other statistic that I think is significant is the turnovers. Last year we played them, they were minus eight, which is not a good number. And right now they're plus four, and that's a winning number. So I don't know what to attribute it to. All I just know is what we see on film from last November and what we see on film right now from last week and it's a whole different ball game now.

Q. Seemed like you guys really liked Cole Croston in camp, and how close was he to Boone and was that a pretty heated competition?

COACH KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, it was. It's kind of like our quarterback competition the last couple of years. It was awfully close. It's a fine line. And like we talk about a lot of guys, until the guys get out there on the field and are really playing the game where it counts and things are flying around, it's a little different deal. And I thought he did a really nice job the other day. He gave up one play at the end, I believe. And I heard about that when I got home, some TV scout. That's a dangerous thing to a TV scout to base things off of a couple of plays and I he played really well, and he's a good football player. So we're growing in that area. We're not home yet, but we're growing.

Q. In pregame, you had James Daniels at right tackle. Is reading too much into that?

COACH KIRK FERENTZ: No. I mean, we have to get somebody ready. We're running low on tackles, for sure. So we'll just keep practicing different combinations and hope we don't have to see them. Hope we don't have to see any of them. That would be great. Unless we choose to see them.

Q. I think you guys ran almost 30 inside zones or something like that, or just inside running plays.

COACH KIRK FERENTZ: That wasn't so much our

guys. It was more what we thought we'd have success with. I think we had a good plan that way. I think our plan overall was really good, quite frankly. It's tough to execute against a really good team. Those guys play hard and they're good, and they certainly know what they're doing. So me it was a great back and forth. It was a really good game.

Q. When you look at Illinois' passing game, Wes Lunt was not really healthy when he played against you last year. This year, the confidence that he seems to have shown, he's got a great arm, seems to be very dangerous?

COACH KIRK FERENTZ: I think it's really true with him. I think he played the week before, if I remember correctly. Standing out on the field, I didn't feel like he was all there, whatever. You know what I mean. He's a much better player than that. So I'm guessing he's probably still hurting a little bit. I can't even remember what the injury was, but that was not a fair representation of the kind of player he is. What we're seeing right now is. So they've got really good skill guys. They've got good size as well. Not just good receivers, but they're big receivers. So it's going to be a real challenge for us, and they know what they're doing. They know where to go. And Bill Cubit is an excellent offensive mind. He picked us apart in that '07 game. That was surgery. We haven't had a lot of people do that to us, but that game and the Arizona State game stand out in my mind from '04 where it's just like they had an answer for anything we even thought about, let alone did. And that wasn't much fun either way.

Q. It looked like on a few runs maybe he gave up too early. Is that just an experience thing?

COACH KIRK FERENTZ: It is. He's going to be a really good player. He and J. Kelly are two guys out there, and they'll do well. We're a better team. I'm not going to sit here and tell you no because he's one of our better players. We knew that in August that we're not going to go through unscathed. We came close in '02, not having anybody out. I don't know if we had anybody out offensively that year. That never happens. I guess once every 18 years you might get that. This isn't the year.

Q. Is Tevaun's injury in practice or was it after the North Texas game?

COACH KIRK FERENTZ: It really got triggered on that really nice catch he made on their bench. That's where it all happened. He's going to be fine, but it's just going to take a little time.

Q. A little off topic, but a couple of Texas players were sniping each other on Twitter and you have a no-tweeting policy. I'm just curious if stuff like that

kind of validates why you have those social media bans.

COACH KIRK FERENTZ: The biggest thought in my mind, there's two arguments, and I gotta tell you, I'm not doing it right now, but in the off season I'll think about that again one more time. It's like your own kids at home. At some point they're going to be out after midnight. At some point they're going to drive cars. At some point they're going to do all those things that you worry about. And so how have you prepared them. And my biggest concern personally, my commentary, and I guess I'm the only one that votes on this one in this house, but I've just read so many of those things where a guy tweets something or puts it out there in public and then four hours later issues this nice, long, elaborate apology that somebody else wrote for them, and it's usually pretty disingenuous. I hate to see one of our guys be in that situation, because usually the things that they blurt out are not becoming, and then usually the followups are even less flattering, so it's just like why do that. I'm just not sure it's going to be when they're playing for us. That's all. When they graduate, they can have at it. Go be a social media star. It's a great life out there. So I've been told.

Q. Do you ever even hear "in Heaven there is no beer," the polka thing? Do you ever hear that or when did you start even noticing it?

COACH KIRK FERENTZ: Is that after the game you mean? I hear it at our basketball games. I hear it and I know it's a good thing. I guess what I'm in tune to is our players going over to the crowd. I think that's great. And it's getting the trophy. All that stuff, the locker room stuff afterwards... that's the good stuff in coaching. That game Saturday was really tough on both sides, and to come out on top and be able to enjoy it, those are the good things in coaching. To see kids feel like they're fulfilled a little bit, that's pretty good.

Q. As far as Derek Mitchell, was that in practice last week, too?

COACH KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah. It was Wednesday last week, I believe. It's just an upper body deal. Not a concussion. But you know, so it's a strength issue, up in the upper extremities. He's practicing right now. I don't know how durable or dependable he is. So it's one of those things. That happened Wednesday. You gotta practice. So it's kind of hard to keep them totally safe.