

University of Iowa Football Media Conference

Wednesday, September 9, 2015

Kirk Ferentz

KIRK FERENTZ: First of all, I appreciate, all of us appreciate your understanding about yesterday's postponement. Like all of us, I think our thoughts and prayers are certainly with the Sash family. A very difficult ordeal to deal with right now. I want to thank our fans, everybody involved, former players, everybody that's showing support to Tyler's family and the Hawkeye family, and that includes many people from Iowa State, as well, fans and athletes, coaches from there who have reached out through social media, and fully appreciate and understand that they've gone through some very difficult times, as well. Their support is very much appreciated and very, very special.

I want to thank you for your respect, also, just in dealing with this story. It's a tough story, certainly, and I know a lot of great things have been covered and written about Tyler and his career and just memories about him. He certainly was a special young man in our program, had a great career here, was extremely competitive, just a high-energy player and did a lot of great things. You can talk about a lot of things that Tyler did here. Certainly the Indiana play in 2009 was a signature moment for him, and I'm still not sure how that all took place.

But it's kind of interesting, as I think about him, my first exposure to Tyler was actually at a little league basketball game, I think it was in Sigourney, and I can't tell you what grade he was in, but it was a youth league basketball game. His team -- our son James was on the team opposite of him. On that team was Matt Gatens and John Gilmore, two pretty good athletes, and Tyler's team beat them 40-36 that day. I remember coming home and telling our staff, I saw a kid that scored 36 of 40 points and single-handedly beat James's team. That was my first exposure to him.

I remember calling him, he was on his way back from the state track meet his junior year, and that's when we offered him a scholarship. We certainly had a great time with him after that. We're very appreciative of the opportunity we've had to have him in the program, and to lose one of our own, it's a tough thing as you may well imagine.



That being said, we'll transition forward, and just a couple words about last week again. We're pleased with our start. It was a good, positive start. Certainly our fans were fantastic and appreciate them weathering very tough circumstances weather-wise out there on the field.

It was a good start for us, but it was one game, so now we're onto the next chapter and we've got a big challenge as we look forward here. We're working hard to get ready for that right now. Our captains are Drew Ott, Jordan Lomax on defense again, and then offensively the same two guys, Austin Blythe and CJ Beathard.

And like every week, I imagine, moving forward, we've got a couple guys that are nicked up right now. We'll wait and see how they look by Friday, Saturday and make a game-time decision on a couple guys. But overall I think we're in pretty good shape right now.

Yesterday morning it just kind of occurred to me, this is my 26th game involved in this series, and maybe somebody has got that one topped, I'm not sure. But I imagine that's pretty high on the list.

What I can tell you is I just fully understand and appreciate what this series is all about. It's been a great series through the years, certainly has since I've been back, and on top of that I think it's a very exciting football game for all of our players that grew up in the state of Iowa, grew up watching this series through the years, and for them to have an opportunity to play in this game, it's a really special thing.

And then that's not to discount how important it is to everybody on our football team, and I'm sure it's the same way with them, as well. It's going to be an exciting environment for sure.

Last point I'd just make is that this is a really exceptional thing in that you don't see many rivalry games that involve two different conferences, major conferences like this one does, so it's really to me a spotlight game for the state of Iowa, a great thing for the state of Iowa, and we're looking forward to being involved in it.

Q. You seem to have pretty good depth. Are you happy with the second and third teams?

KIRK FERENTZ: Just really happy they got a chance to go out and play, and probably like we might have guessed, some guys did a really good job and some other guys looked like it was their first time out there. But it's invaluable. It's different than practice and that goes for the guys who made their first-time appearance when the score was even. To get out there in front of the fans and be in a real game, a legitimate game, not a competitive scrimmage or practice, that's a big thing, so certainly anytime new players get a chance to play, that's a good thing, and especially guys on the second team.

Q. Being from a small state actually, and you mentioned two major conferences in a very small state, a game like this, does it kind of showcase that there is some talent here? Since 1977 there's been a ton of guys who have started in this game from Iowa high schools?

KIRK FERENTZ: There sure are, and that's something we're very proud of. We've had great success. During my time away from the program, the nine years I was gone, I thought long and hard a lot of times about just why did it all happen the way it did, and one thing I went back to, to me the core of our teams, and I think this has been historic, at least with my 26 years, be it in the '80s or now the last 16-plus years, the heart and soul of our team come from this state. Our great leaders tend to be the guys that played high school football in this state, and that's important in this game. I think overall they just have an appreciation, and they're the guys that really share, I think do a great job of sharing it with other players that come from other places.

I've said it for a long time, it's amazing to me a state of this population, three million people, we've got two really good Division I programs. We've got an outstanding FCS program and a lot of good Division III and II football being played here, as well.

To me it's an amazing story and I think it all starts with the coaching and the playing that goes on in our high schools. It doesn't matter if it's a big town or a little town; you find great football and great coaching corner to corner in this state, which is an outstanding thing.

Q. As you watch tape, your new defensive tackles, Bazata and Jaleel Johnson, how did they play and is there a pretty big upside there?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, it's interesting; those guys have slipped under the radar for whatever reason. All the offensive guys have gotten all the attention.

To that point, it was good to bump into Carl (Davis)

here. He was here Monday morning and it was great to see him.

He made the Ravens and he had a great camp from all reports that we've heard, and then Louis (Trinca-Pasat) has done a great job, made the practice squad in St. Louis.

We lost two really good football players there and guys that have carved a good niche in the next step.

Yeah, to answer your question, really pleased. I thought for the first time those guys played when it counted. Both Nathan (Bazata) and Jaleel (Johnson) did a nice job, and hopefully that'll be a springboard to better things, but it was a good start certainly.

Q. Iowa State has reshaped its defense with a bunch of junior college guys in there. How much scouting can you do of guys, or do you go back and see where they were last year and check that out?

KIRK FERENTZ: It's interesting; this is almost like a tale of two cities. When you look at their offensive team, extremely veteran, starting with the front guys, as good a receiver corps as you're going to find anywhere, quarterback has played a lot and played well.

So they're very veteran offensively, and I think they're settled -- I don't want to say settled on what they're doing, but they are settling into what they're doing, and they do have an identity, no question.

Defensively, again, to your point, a lot of new faces, a lot of injection of good energy, and boy, they played well the other night.

We're really in flux that way, it's almost like preparing for a first game, which this is Week 2, but still to your point, just because those are players that we haven't seen on tape before and we're trying to figure that out. Not only that, but what they're going to do, so it's really an interesting study.

Q. People say teams make the most improvement from Week 1 to Week 2. That really hasn't happened in the last two years here.

KIRK FERENTZ: And that's something certainly to fit in with the theme that we're looking for. We're looking for week-to-week and day-to-day improvement quite frankly. I think that's so critical here when you coach at the University of Iowa. It's just important that we make progress, and it's true everywhere, but there are some teams that played this weekend that I don't know how much more they're going to improve quite frankly. They'll get a little bit better, but historically we've had

an opportunity to really grow as the season goes, and we can't waste a day.

That's certainly something that we're hoping to see on Saturday.

If we want to win the football game, we're going to have to improve. There's no ifs, ands or buts about that one.

Q. Would you agree the last two years maybe it didn't work out that way?

KIRK FERENTZ: That's a fair statement, and even during the season I think our improvement and our growth was inconsistent, and that's what we want to do or who we want to be.

Q. George Kittle sat most of the second half. What's his status going forward?

KIRK FERENTZ: We're hoping he can play. We'll just have to see. He's working his way back right now and we're hoping he can play. He's got a chance.

Q. He had a knee?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, he had a strain there, but we wanted to keep him out for precautionary reasons.

Q. Is there a moment, a play, a game for you that encapsulates this rivalry?

KIRK FERENTZ: Well, I'm a coach, so I'm always thinking negative things, I guess, and the first thing I'm thinking about is Seneca Wallace zipping the ball back from that far hash down there to the other hash for I think a 17-yard conversion, 3rd and 17 if I'm not mistaken in 2002, and that's one of those plays, I don't know how you defend it quite frankly. I could give you probably about 50 of them unfortunately and probably 40 of those are negatives. Sick mind of a coach, I apologize.

Q. Paul Rhoads said he might run some 4-3 against you guys. Does that alter your preparation?

KIRK FERENTZ: We wouldn't be surprised, and I think what we saw Saturday is probably a byproduct of the conference they play in. It's a very different conference than maybe the way we're built. Not that there aren't some teams like us in that conference, but that's part of the uncertainty that we have right now in terms of what they're going to do defensively, and then who's going to be running it. I think we know who those guys are, we just don't know them that well.

Q. When you look at their receivers, pretty veteran group of receivers, and then your secondary has got some good experience, how do you -- do you think that's a very important match-up?

KIRK FERENTZ: Absolutely, and obviously they want to throw the football well, and they should. They've got

great receivers. They've done a great job there. So hopefully we're going to have to match up or be able to match up.

The thing I'd say about that, though, it's a little bit like the quarterback we played last week; it's still got to be a team thing. Our secondary has to do a good job and there are going to be some balls that we're going to have to try to fight for and come out ahead on.

They've got some good size at the receiver position, which is always concerning, but we're going to have to do a good job trying to get pressure and then also trying to reroute and things like that. I know this: If we just let those guys run the routes they want to run uncontested, it's going to be a long night, so we can't do that. Linebackers are involved with that as well as the secondary.

Q. How would you assess the growth in blocking of your receivers?

KIRK FERENTZ: I was very pleased with that Saturday. Again, it's a one-game exposure. We're not there. I'm not ready to ordain anybody. But I thought we were a lot better on the perimeter offensively and defensively.

To your point earlier, that was an area of concern last year. We were not representative of the kind of football team we want to be, and we're not going to win games if we don't play better on the edges in the running game and then against the run.

Q. It looked like Tevaun was kind of leading that. When your senior leader does that, how much does that kind of feed --

KIRK FERENTZ: It's critical. If our team is going to be a good team this year, we have to get our best play from our older guys and the guys that have been out there playing. Tevaun played an awful lot. If he's not helping lead the way, we're going to have some problems, and that's true at every position; our older guys have to do a good job. But really happy and proud of what he did out there. That didn't just happen Saturday, he's been working hard at it.

Q. Your bubble screen really seemed to work the other day, and that's a trickier play than most people give credit for. What do you think make that effective? Is it CJ's arm? Is it the fact that VandeBerg caught a lot of them?

KIRK FERENTZ: It's a lot trickier than it looks. It looks simple. It looks like everybody should be able to do, but I've seen a lot of bad ones, unfortunately firsthand, and it starts with the throw, making a good throw so the guy doesn't -- the guy receiving the ball doesn't have to break stride or what have you. Then the guy with the ball has to do something with it. That's a big part of it

like any play in space.

But going back to the point Pat made, you've got to block. If you don't block out there, it's hard to expect the guy to make everybody miss out there. It's really, again, a combination of a couple things. Quite frankly we haven't been real good at that play, but it looked a lot better Saturday, and that's encouraging.

Q. How much of that success Saturday with that play is CJ's arm, getting the ball out there fast?

KIRK FERENTZ: It's a factor, there's no question it's a factor. I don't want to put a percentage on it, but it sure helps. All those things are really important. All of them are key ingredients.

Q. Iowa State had a good day returning punts.

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah.

Q. You guys, both punts went in for touchbacks so they didn't really get to hit anybody. Obviously I would think that would be an area that you're a little concerned about?

KIRK FERENTZ: Maybe not the last time we saw a punt returned but one of the last times we didn't get great results. It's something we've worked hard on, and credit Iowa State, they've got good returners, two good returners, not one, but beyond that, it's just kind of like the bubble screens. If guys aren't working hard and really doing a great job, that's one of the tougher things to do in football is to block on a punt return or a kick return.

They've got a bunch of guys that really work hard. They're very -- that's kind of representative of their special teams overall. They work hard at it. They take a lot of pride in it, and they've gotten great production and results. That doesn't happen by accident what they did the other night.

Q. Drew Ott said yesterday he didn't think he played a very good game after watching film. Would you agree with that?

KIRK FERENTZ: You can always get better. Every player can get better, and that's one of the reasons he's a good player. He's got that kind of attitude and he understands that. But he did a lot of good things, too, and hopefully he's got a few more in his pocket here.

Q. It seems like LeShun and Jordan have a real strong mutual respect. How important is that? LeShun moved ahead of him and Jordan seemed just cool, everything team first?

KIRK FERENTZ: Well, both of them are just top-shelf guys. They're first-rate, first-class. They've got their priorities I think totally in the right place. They both

have competed hard out there on the field, and really it's kind of interesting, I've said this many times, the thing, Jordan's story last year was he was never right. He just never quite looked right other than a window here and a window there. Knock on wood, he's been able to look like the guy we thought he would and could be as a senior, and I think they both realize we're going to need both of them, and they both really complemented each other well the other day. If we could keep that kind of rhythm, that would be wonderful.

But as you know, there's ebb and flow and there's ups and downs, but I really think if one guy is not going well, the other guy can pick him up.

Q. There are rivalries in every level football and you've coached almost every level. What are some of the great rivalries that you've remembered, Upper St. Clair --

KIRK FERENTZ: I wasn't there. That's easy.

Q. Any good memories from those?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, again, I'm a coach, right, so my junior year we had them like 24 to whatever it was, 7. It's kind of like the 2002 game out here, they ended up beating us, and boy, that was really disappointing. That was a hard one. We were trying to catch them. They were the elite school, if you will, or the power in Western PA and all that stuff. And UConn, I think I set a record as a player for playing in the most Homecoming games in the history of football, college football. Teams loved it when they saw us coming.

Q. How about the Ravens? Or Browns probably have one --

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, it's a better rivalry now than it used to be, the Steelers, and that's really how that -- if you talk to any of our guys that go there, and Carl was just here, when you walk in that building it's about beating the Steelers; you'd better beat the Steelers if you're going to compete in that division. Credit to the Steelers for that, but the Ravens have done a great job of putting a team together that can compete with those guys.

Q. When you have a guy like Bazata, Coach, when you get to this level is there still some uncertainty? Can it translate to the next level?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I really don't think so. I think probably the biggest thing is a place like us, we have to look places where maybe some other folks don't or we have to look a little closer at some things. And Reese does it as well as anybody I've ever been around. He just sees things in players, and if he mentions something twice about a guy, then you really need to pay attention because he's subtly trying to tell you

something. That's been the case certainly about Nathan and a couple other guys that you had mentioned.

It's about identifying the right guys, and then really once they get here, I've never believed that whether you come from a town of 100 or 100,000 or 3 million, it really doesn't matter. It doesn't matter. It's what you are and who you are and how you're going to work towards it. Nathan has got a lot of the traits a lot of our really good players have had. He's really serious, he's focused, he works hard. He's not perfect certainly, but one thing about him, I know when I go to bed every night, he's thinking about getting better, and that's what he's going to try to do during his career.

It was good to see him get off to a good start, and to me his best football is still ahead of him.

Q. What were your words for Akrum after Saturday and when might we see him again?

KIRK FERENTZ: Well, you never know, just back to work, back to work. I'm not a big doghouse guy. I think it was Earl Weaver, I think, said he didn't have a doghouse. And it's not the pros, we don't cut guys, ship them out and bring new guys in. This is college football. We're trying to develop our guys as best we can. He wasn't ready to secure the ball Saturday unfortunately, but hopefully next time out he'll do a better job. Somewhere in there, there's a good player, we've just got to get it out of him and get him really concentrating the way he really needs to to protect the football.

Q. Would you like Derrick Mitchell to play Saturday?

KIRK FERENTZ: Hoping so. Hoping so. He's looking better.

Q. Is he healthy?

KIRK FERENTZ: He's looking better. We're hoping he's there.

Q. Jack Trice Stadium looks a lot different today than it did the last time you guys were in there. How do you think the changes to the building will change the atmosphere?

KIRK FERENTZ: You know, it's been a tough atmosphere. I go back to '81, it was no walk in the park back then. That's one great thing about playing in the Big Ten; you play in a lot of really tough stadiums, competitive stadiums that are loud and noisy. It's going to be great preparation.

We know it's going to be tough walking in there. It was tough two years ago when we walked in there, and they'd probably say the same about coming over here.

It's one more element about the series that's been consistent at least since I got going in '81. It's going to be a lively, vivacious crowd, and they're going to be loud, and it's one more thing as the road team that you have to try to overcome to be successful.

Q. What do you do? How do you talk to guys about that on Friday night to get them prepared for their first road game?

KIRK FERENTZ: We'll do a little crowd noise. We've kind of toned it back. We've been up and down the ladder on that historically through the years. But it's a little bit like ball security; we just talked about. It really gets down to concentration, extra concentration, and above everything else, you have to focus on what's important, and what's going on in the stands has no bearing on this game just like it didn't here last year.

It's focusing on the right things you have to focus on as a player, and we do a lot of signaling and things like that anyway. That's just -- it's probably the hardest on the offensive line quite frankly above everybody else. They've probably got the toughest job.

Q. Any update on Duzey?

KIRK FERENTZ: He's making progress, significantly more work this week, but to put a number on it right now wouldn't be fair, but we're getting closer. He had shoulder pads on and did some things, some football activities this week. Very limited, but that's the first step to getting a guy back, so that's a positive step.

Q. Where do you stand with Darian Cooper?

KIRK FERENTZ: He's a little bit behind that curve right now. We're just going to keep pushing.

Q. Redshirted and get a sixth year?

KIRK FERENTZ: I really don't know if that's realistic. I think the biggest thing is we're just going to try to push as hard as we can within limits and be smart about it and then hope that he gets an opportunity to play this year.

Q. How does it feel to be the father of an NFL player?

KIRK FERENTZ: You know, it's a good thing. Really happy for James, but it's really a little strange how this stuff is, okay. What I'm proud about is that he stuck with it, and then he had a good job here at Randy's Carpet, which I'm not making light of that at all, but that's what he was doing, and then he continued to train here. There are a lot of times where I thought he might just say, hey, enough of that.

But he stuck it out and he chased his dream, which is great. But in reality, he experienced highs and lows

this past week. He got cut on Friday; you can imagine how he felt that day. And then just the way the world works in the NFL, boom, something else happened on Sunday and he's on a different plane.

Unfortunately it's kind of the reality of that profession and life in general, I guess, but that profession especially. I'm just happy he's got the opportunity, and then after that it's whatever he makes of it.

Not many players get to retire, unfortunately, NFL players. Just enjoy every day while you can.

Q. How come you didn't have a speaking part in "Hard Knocks," and is that a choice the players get?

KIRK FERENTZ: I've got three DVDs of that show. It was on my desk, now it's in one of those cabinets. I cleaned out my office last week. It's something I do every year. I haven't seen one minute of it. I think they're probably more focused on a few other players, defensive linemen down there.

Q. Now that you've had some time, the crowd reaction to the fake field goal Saturday, were you surprised by it? And what does that say?

KIRK FERENTZ: Well, I don't know what it says, but I know what it's going to say next time. Like I said Saturday, if it doesn't work, I know what the reaction will be next time. We did it because we saw it on film. That's what it came down to.

You know, I'll just go back to what I said earlier. I said earlier, like earlier a couple days ago, we've looked at everything. We've tried to look at everything. It was a disappointing end to the season, and our focus was on looking at everything that we're doing offensively, defensively, special teams, recruiting, training, et cetera, how we practice.

We try to be as thorough as we can, you can only do so much, but that was one thing that popped up, and if the opportunity presents itself down the road, hopefully we'll be able to execute and make it next time, but we just thought we had a chance on film, so we ran it.

Q. The tight ends, is that dictated by the defense, or do you go into the week saying we're going to block both those guys or pass more? Is it dictated by the --

KIRK FERENTZ: The run-pass percentage is dictated by our game plan, and then a lot of times who we're playing and how we want to attack them, et cetera, and then the next step is in the passing game, you know, what role tight ends play. But right now the way we're doing it, our guys are probably less involved in protection. I think that's fair to say, at least our drop-

back stuff than maybe anyplace I've ever been or any time I've ever coached, for the most part they're getting out not 100 percent, but for the most part they get out, and then where the ball goes is just dictated by the defense, how they play it and what have you.

We want our tight ends to be involved, and I think over the course of the year you'll see that they are involved. But a lot of that is dictated by the people we're playing.

Q. Your players have always been involved in community service, as you are, as well, but your players don't call anybody here and say, hey, I'm going to be at the hospital or whatever. But Jordan Canzeri may be among the very best you've had in that. What has he meant to the program off the field the way he conducts himself?

KIRK FERENTZ: I won't give you the details, but somebody referenced a story either early last year or the year before that, but just something he did coming out of the stadium after he had crossed the street where nobody knew who he was. A friend of mine witnessed it.

To that point, to me that's really doing something, not the stuff for show or when people are watching or when somebody is videoing and all that stuff, which is so prevalent in this day and age. He's the real deal. He's a genuine guy who cares about other people. He's really been raised right. It started at home. He came to us as a great young man.

I'd like to think he's growing certainly, but he's just a guy that thinks right. He cares about others. When you're talking football team, because football teams are probably the biggest team that you can find anywhere, at least in sports, having people like that is so critical. That's how you develop teamwork is having people that really understand what it's all about. Being a good teammate is just putting everybody else ahead of you, and he lives that every day from everything I can tell.

Q. Regarding Tyler, did you ever get a chance to talk to him after his NFL career ended, and what were some of your final conversations with him?

KIRK FERENTZ: Not afterwards, and typically I would -- without getting into great detail, probably his closest relationship, and this is really common with our players is with the position coach Phil Parker, and that's really typical, Phil and Bob talk a lot, and then the other conduit usually is Chris (Doyle). They're the two that are the biggest.

So to that point you can imagine, yesterday was a really tough day for everybody, but for a guy like Phil who sat in the same room with Tyler for four years, there's a real bond that develops and a real closeness,

and as a head coach you miss that frankly. That's the first thing that hit me in 1990 when I became a head coach. You have to work really hard to find that fix, get that fix, I guess, or satisfy that fix. That's the greatest thing about coaching is being in the same room with guys.

It's a hard thing. It's a hard thing. But it pales in comparison to the family, what the family is going through right now, all of his close friends. It's a hard deal.

Q. Do the players feel the impact of this, even though they never played with him? Are they feeling this?

KIRK FERENTZ: I'm going to say fortunately, because that's not the right word to use, but the guys on our team right now, there's distance there, but you think about the guys that played with him, 2009 and 2010 especially, the Praters, the Angerers, go right down the list of guys that were in the huddle on that defensive football team, and that's a hard thing.

It's hard at any time, but Tyler was way too young. That's hard, and you can imagine as a parent just how that feels. It's a tough deal.

Q. Have you talked to his family and friends?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, yeah.

Q. What have you said to them?

KIRK FERENTZ: It's a tough -- what can you say, other than we're all feeling for you. If there's anything we can do, we're going to try to pay tribute to Tyler in a tasteful way, and they were okay with that. That's about it, but it's just a hard thing.

Q. Iowa State, if they were to reach out to the family and to you guys about how to handle Saturday, did you have any --

KIRK FERENTZ: We have not yet, but I would certainly welcome that call, and not surprised. It's a first-class thing to do.

Q. Do you have any plans for either a decal or a --

KIRK FERENTZ: We haven't decided yet, but we're definitely going to find a tasteful way to pay tribute, and his family was very receptive to that, so we'll run it by them first, but they were very receptive to that.

Q. Cole Fisher's first start; seemed like he was really having a good time out there.

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, it's great to see, and I think that's one of the great things about college football. You're talking about a guy now up in his career that came into August camp as a second-team guy and has worked his way into the starting lineup, and he's done it

with steady performance, great attitude. He carries a pretty good grade point in engineering, too, and he's a tremendous young guy.

But he's had his ups and downs here. He has done a nice job on special teams the last two years. I think quite frankly he didn't do enough for us to have full confidence in him being out there in critical situations defensively and after this camp.

So again, it's a real nice story and a tribute to his perseverance, his hard work, and his just staying the course and letting himself get caught up to his abilities. He did a really nice job.