

University of Iowa Football

Media Conference

Saturday, September 22, 2018

Kirk Ferentz



Wisconsin - 28

Iowa - 17

KIRK FERENTZ: First of all, just want to thank our fans. I thought the stadium was unbelievable tonight. Great atmosphere out there. We knew it would be. That's about as loud as I can ever remember it. So they certainly did their part and we appreciate that. It was a great environment out there. I'm proud of our team's effort tonight. I thought our guys played hard and fought hard, both teams did. But that being said, it's a tough loss, our first conference game, and I think as everybody saw we made some critical errors. If you're going to win a Big Ten game you got to play cleaner football than what we did tonight. So that was the tough part about it. You play Wisconsin, first of all, we anticipated this kind of effort from them. I think what we saw last week was certainly uncharacteristic, when you think about how many football games they have won over the last five years. They came ready to go. Right along with that, when you play Wisconsin, possessions are at a real premium. So we squandered a couple opportunities on that front and ended up paying for that at the end too. Bottom line is I thought our guys played hard, we didn't play well enough to win. Credit Wisconsin for that, they did a good job. And it's our first loss in the conference, first loss this year, comes at a break, so we'll sit back and reassess things a little bit. I think we made progress over the first month and really the two keys right now are how we respond and then how we move forward and that's where our focus will start. Start tomorrow. Throw it out for questions.

Q. Do you feel like that in the fourth quarter you guys had a second and five at the 50. Do you feel like that kind of left the door open, they went on a game-winning drive after you guys punted it back?

KIRK FERENTZ: We had a couple opportunities to sustain drives in the second half, but to their credit too when they had that opportunity they took it and went and it was a beautiful drive on their part. And we gave up a big play on that possession and that was a tough play for us there.

Q. On their go-ahead touchdown it looked like you ended up with a linebacker trying to guard a wide receiver. What was going on there?

KIRK FERENTZ: We do that frequently. That's part of our defense. Yeah, the guy made a good throw and they got, receiver did a good job of getting open and it's just part of what we do.

Q. Is this the type of game where it seems like the smallest details tip the balance one direction or the other and lack of execution or turnovers or what have you just seem to sway to a team that really didn't do anything wrong?

KIRK FERENTZ: Absolutely. They played clean football tonight and they played good football. A couple things, I mean typically they're pretty good about being smart with the ball, securing the ball. They do play good field position football. That's where our turnover really cost us. We had the ball up near mid field there, so you don't get many of those possessions against Wisconsin typically. We had one and then squandered it with the turnover there. Yeah, so if you don't take advantage of those opportunities or make the little mistakes -- and obviously the punt that hit our guy, that's bad play for us. So, but a couple of those and that is the difference in the game, really.

Q. What do you guys teach on when the ball's --

KIRK FERENTZ: Get away. There's a communication involved there, but it seemed like most everybody was getting the message there, so for whatever reason it didn't quite get communicated. And when you're in that area it's dangerous.

Q. How tough is that for whatever 90 plus, a 100 yards, that something like that happens and give away seven points?

KIRK FERENTZ: It's tough. Even there though you hope you can hold them to a field goal. That was the next challenge and we weren't good enough to do that on that possession. So to their credit they not only recovered the ball but then they turned it into a touchdown and that's to their credit.

Q. How did they challenge you guys defensively, because the defense has been stellar the first three weeks, not giving up a whole lot of offense, but they were kind of able to win the battle up front?

KIRK FERENTZ: They did. We haven't played an offensive team like them and I think everybody, pretty much everybody that follows Big-Ten football knew the kind of potential they had offensively. To me again last

week just wasn't very characteristic of who they are, what they are, and we assumed they would be ready to go for conference play and they were. They came out and played well and they ran the ball well. And the back's an excellent player. He's not good, he's excellent. So it's a good combination with that line they got, the tight ends block well, back's outstanding and they throw the ball effectively. So that's a tough, again, minus those couple plays that really hurt us, we had a chance to win this football game. That's the tough part about it.

Q. Seemed like Nate Stanley actually in the loss had one of his better games. How would you assess kind of what his leadership and what maybe the growth he's taken?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I think he has steadily played better. I think the last two weeks more represent the kind of player he is. I believe our line looked like they grew tonight. I thought the backs ran pretty well and ran tough. So we're actually in my mind I think we're improving, but you still want to win games and tonight we squandered an opportunity. But had we played cleaner we would have given ourselves a better chance. And a couple of those plays are correctable plays. Those are the ones that are tough to live with. If they beat you straight up that's one thing, but that back, a back like that's going to make yards with that kind of line, that type of thing, but the stuff, the little mental things are the ones that we have to do better if we want to be competitive in the conference.

Q. You guys did a lot of rotating on the defensive line to stay fresh. Were you surprised they were able to get between the tackles like they were. Seems like they had a lot of luck there.

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, they're a big physical group. That's how they have been built for quite some time. You guys saw them in person, they're the real deal. And then they have got back or actually a couple backs that run tough. But Taylor's a special player. He does things that takes a three-yard gain and it's five- or six-yard gain. So he does that really consistently and just keeps the pressure on you that way. So that, but that's the challenge. We got a good stop there at the end of the half, I think, and felt like maybe we started to gain a little bit of ground there. But to their credit they came back with a big possession there at the end.

Q. Why do you think the Hornibrook was so effective on the game-winning drive?

KIRK FERENTZ: I think he's a really good player. There's not a lot talked about him or written about him, but you think about how many games they have won when he's in charge, I think they know that better than anybody, they know who he is and what he is and when they go to him, he responds pretty favorably. So

he didn't do anything that hurt them tonight and he made some really good throws and some good plays. And they're a good offensive football team and they have been for quite some time.

Q. Did you feel confident that making them go 85 yards with whatever it was, five minutes to play --
KIRK FERENTZ: Obviously, we're hoping to get a stop and get the ball back and have a chance to run the clock. But we weren't able to do that. Then when the ball moves down then your goal is to keep them out of the end zone and he made a good play.

Q. On the drive where they scored the game winning or not game winning, the go ahead touchdown there, they were, it was like a, looked like that there was a rough spot where you might have been able to challenge it or at least call a timeout?

KIRK FERENTZ: I could have and the guy on our sideline said they were reviewing it. So pretty much the way we have been told, you can take a timeout to make yourself feel better and I did that once, I don't know last year or maybe earlier this year, but basically you're wasting a timeout. They're reviewing all those things. And spots are always a little tough. We don't always agree with them, but like to think they're doing it right.

Q. Djimon started the second half at weak side. Was that just a switch of players or was there a --

KIRK FERENTZ: Both those guys have played during this season. Kristian was out the one game, so we're probably going to keep rotating guys around and just -- but I think both of them are doing a good job. That's been one of the pleasant things over four weeks I think we're getting some good play from our linebackers and seeing some positive things there. I think we're seeing a lot of growth all over our football team, but some of it gets hidden tonight because of a couple critical plays that we weren't able to execute cleanly enough.

Q. You talk about growth of your team. Nate talked about the offensive line a lot. Can you talk about them the last four weeks of the season, they really seemed to grow and that might have been one of the best performances of the season tonight.

KIRK FERENTZ: I think so. I think they're quietly moving forward and Keegan Render is kind of the steadying factor and influence in there. He's really done a good job of leading those guys and we got two guys playing tackle that are second year of playing football. And that was part of the issue last year up there, we had those guys a year out of high school or first year playing against some guys that were pretty salty. So I think we're moving in the right direction and the thing that excites me is that I think we got a lot of

potential to get a lot better. So that's pretty much at a lot of positions right now. So that's where we got to be focused and realize we still got an eight-game schedule to play. So we would love to get over this, we'll do that in the next 24 hours and then Monday we get back to being, trying to get back to being a better football player or team.

Q. Did Hankins get dinged up?

KIRK FERENTZ: He did. Yeah. He's fine.

Q. Smith-Marsette has been kind of up-and-down, a little inconsistent. Is he all the way back physically first of all and second of all where do you see him going as a player?

KIRK FERENTZ: You probably noticed he came out of the game tonight. He got nailed a little bit. He's not a hundred percent probably, but who is at this time of year, after the first game. So he's a good football player. He's got a lot of juice, he's got a lot of attitude and he'll keep improving too. He's a young guy too. Second year player, however many games. What is that, about 13, plus four? 17? So yeah, he'll keep getting better.

Q. Was he taken that give away fumble hard? How did he respond?

KIRK FERENTZ: It's tough. It's just a tough thing. If you hold the ball or control the ball and have the ball, possess the ball, it's one of the risks you take. It's not characteristic of him, it won't define him at all. He'll come back and he'll make some plays for us. He's a really good football player. It's one of those things, it's a tough break.