

University of Iowa Football

Media Conference

Tuesday, October 18, 2016

Kirk Ferentz



KIRK FERENTZ: Good afternoon. I want to start out by congratulating Dallas Clark on his recognition. So well-deserved. I was just back there negotiating to see if we can get a couple snaps out of him this weekend. I think that might go detected.

The ANF, the whole concept has been such a great partnership with the University, so we're certainly thrilled about that, and you think about the Wall of Honor and the kind of people that are up on there already, going back to Casey Wiegmann, Jared DeVries, guys like Bruce Nelson, Robert Gallery, that is really elite company, and certainly Dallas is one of the most exceptional, not only players that we've ever had through this program, but I think one of the most exceptional people.

I'm happy for him. He's had a busy year in Kinnick already with the concert, and now this, so congratulations, Dallas. Really happy for you there.

Looking backward for just one second, certainly pleased with the win. It was great to get our third road win, third Big Ten win, so happy about that. Going into the game, we were hoping to do some things better in the running game offensively and then certainly our run defense. Those were two things that were really on our mind. And then third down production, as well, so I think we did a good job there.

Left some things out there. Special-teams wise, we're going to have to do a better job punting the ball, especially from midfield. Penalty situation, not real good, and then beyond that, our backups got a little bit of an education about tempo and that type of thing.

All that being said, happy to get the win, but we always have things to work on coming out of it, and that's especially true this week.

Captains for this game are the same as the last couple weeks here. We've got CJ Beathard and LeShun Daniels offensively, Desmond King and then Josey Jewell defensively.

We came out of the game with some guys injured, and a lot of it is going to be day-by-day. We'll see how it goes during the course of the week. Really nobody ruled out yet, but we'll have to wait and see how the

guys look that way.

Turning our attention to Wisconsin, they're an outstanding opponent, top-10 team and certainly worthy of that. They're just a really good football team. No big surprise there. We've got a big challenge on our hands that way.

Said it a year ago and now just add another year on, you look back the last six years, the level they've played at in the conference, it's awfully impressive, and really quite frankly it's been that way since 1999. They've had a good program, a strong program, and have done an excellent job, and the common denominator seems to be that their players are good. They play extremely hard, and they're very, very well-coached, and that's kind of been consistent for quite some time now.

The thing about them, they're tough to play in Madison, they're tough to play in Kinnick. No matter where they go they play well, and that's a sign of a good team.

Bottom line is we're going to have to really improve. We're going to have to work hard and go into the game knowing that anything that we do get that's good we're going to have to earn, and that's how it should be.

Q. One of the guys in here we haven't talked about a lot this season is Desmond King. From your vantage point what kind of senior year is he having?

KIRK FERENTZ: I think really good. One thing I think that's noteworthy, again, and I mention it every time we talk about him, if he's missed something since January, any kind of practice workout, I can't remember what it would be. You know, he's a durable player. Most of the really great players -- there's a guy standing over there, great players that have been played here, that's one trait, you have to be durable. I think that's a real key to greatness.

He's playing well on defense. He's really doing a good job, and then he's doing an extraordinary job on special teams.

It was great for him to get his hands on the ball the other day, and that return that he made fit right in with the returns that he's been doing in the special teams

phase, as well. So awfully impressed.

I think the defense, they did a nice job, and they've done that traditionally, converting it into an offensive play, but his effort I think was extraordinary on that play. He's just doing a good job. He's playing really well.

Q. The similarities between these programs are well-known around here, the past 23, 24 years. Just curious when Barry (Alvarez) got the job I think you were either at Maine or just going to Cleveland at that point. Did you ever call and congratulate him and did he do the same for you when you took this job?

KIRK FERENTZ: Barry is the first guy I met when I came here to interview in 1981. He picked me up at the airport, and we grew up fairly close to each other in western Pennsylvania, so he's the first guy I really got to know when I got here. He always treated me great. We worked together as assistants. He left two years before I did, and coincidentally went over to Notre Dame where my high school coach was coaching, so the ties continued there. When I left to go to Maine, he went to Wisconsin, same time, and Dan and Bernie went up with him. It was kind of a -- we were all on the same page at that point.

But yeah, we've stayed in touch, and then small world, a department later on, when I was in Cleveland, I'd go back to Notre Dame and visit Coach Moore and we'd sit and watch a lot of Wisconsin film. Bill Callahan was the line coach up at Wisconsin, and what they were doing offensively, it was fun to watch them.

Those ties have remained through the years, and I've always admired the job that he did, and quite frankly the six years I was in the NFL, really the only three college teams I paid attention to were Iowa for obvious reasons, and the other two were Kansas State and Wisconsin because I had worked with Bill (Snyder) and Barry. It was just fun to see those guys having success and doing great jobs at their mutual schools.

Q. One of your former assistants, Bret (Bielema), who took the job in '06, what was that like, and was that awkward at all because he worked with you?

KIRK FERENTZ: No, not really, other than the fact -- I've never enjoyed coaching against or being on the opposite sideline as someone that I've worked with. That was true with Barry, that was true with Bill Snyder in 2000. We played Bobby in the bowl game and then Bret the same way over there, so that's not fun because when you work with guys, typically you end up being pretty good friends, and it's not fun to compete. But when the game is on, the game is on.

Q. A little offbeat here, but I don't think I've asked

you about this yet. You guys have deferred when you've won the toss I think four times this year maybe.

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah.

Q. Where did that philosophy change come from?

KIRK FERENTZ: It took a long time to get there, but yeah, that's exactly right. It's just one of those things that we talked about out of season, and it was one of the things on our list. Some younger, smarter guys on the staff and some guys maybe my age, too, that were smarter, also. Just having conversation, we thought it might be something that was worth giving it a try, too, and we were painfully close to aborting the mission here a couple weeks ago, but we're staying with it, so we'll see what happens this week.

Q. Wisconsin has been starting fast all season long and owning the first quarter essentially, but no philosophy change there this week?

KIRK FERENTZ: We haven't discussed it yet. We'll talk about it Thursday and see what it looks like, but it's up in the air every week, so we'll see.

Q. What was main reason behind it?

KIRK FERENTZ: We just thought there might be some strategical advantages, but it still gets down to how you play. If you start on defense and don't play well, then it's a bad deal.

I remember East Lansing, probably 2001, no, it was 2003, pretty significant win, so we kicked the ball, put it in the end zone and Smoker was their quarterback. They drove the ball I think 80 yards, took about nine minutes, so that was a great decision there, right; we got the ball back with six minutes and it was 7-0. Some of the stuff just gets over -- you've still got to play no matter what decision you make.

Q. The depth charts, is this an antiquated thing? I know Harbaugh is pretty much done with them, and we've seen depth charts and on Saturday it's a completely different story.

KIRK FERENTZ: You know, I think everybody does them. Most everybody does them, out East everybody does them, but that's changed a little bit. You put them out there. Part of it's projection, part of it's just what you've been doing, and that's what it is. I'm not smart enough to know -- none of our guys are ruled out yet, so health-wise you hope we get guys back and what have you, but I don't know.

Yeah, maybe they are antiquated, I don't know. As coaches we're going to look at the film and see who finished up the game and kind of go from there. So yeah. No real strong opinion. Pretty good chance Beathard will be the quarterback, I can give you that

one, LeShun. Those four guys I mentioned will all be starting. We'll try to start our best guys as long as they're healthy and ready to go.

Q. Last summer Akrum was telling us he spent one or two days at cornerback. You're smiling. He said it was a disaster. How did that come about, and how quickly were you guys ready to go back?

KIRK FERENTZ: He actually probably could be pretty good out there if that's what he wanted to do and really bought into it. Probably say the same thing about Ronnie Harmon, not to equate them as the same kind of backs, although they're both pretty talented.

But yeah, that was in camp last year. We were having some marital issues at that point, I guess. We kind of were going through some things.

But he ended up back at running back, and that's when he started this climb.

Q. I don't think people give Akrum and LeShun enough credit for -- they're full-service guys. There's not one thing you ask them to do. Akrum runs between the tackles, LeShun runs on the outside. Is that by design? Is that how you need it, want it?

KIRK FERENTZ: We're fine just keeping this thing low keyed right now, but I think both of them are really having good years and they're both playing well. LeShun is a senior. You really hope for that and expect that from your oldest players. The big thing is he's been healthy. He's staying healthy and really doing a good job, but he's improved, too. He really works at it hard. And I'd say the same thing about Akrum. He's really grown a lot in this past 15, 14 months, and I think he's really made some nice strides.

You know, it's still out there for him. He can still get better. So can LeShun, so that's good. But they both work at it really hard, and they both like football.

Q. A couple of guys have mentioned the leadership meeting the week of the Minnesota game. What do you remember from that? What stood out to you about getting together that week?

KIRK FERENTZ: I don't know if it was anything real dramatic. I wish it was that easy. Basically we just tried to state the facts, here's where we're at big picture, and we don't talk about big picture very much, for very long. We always touch on the big picture, but then really it just gets back to what can we do this week, what steps can we take in a week's time to get better, and that's really how the season goes.

But there's no question, we're disappointed -- you're disappointed any time you lose. We lost to a good

football team that day. We knew that. We sensed that at least, and I think history has proven that to be true.

But nonetheless, the season is going to move on and you've got to move on, too, and the biggest thing was what's our response going to be; we either need to get back up on our feet and go to work or just accept a bad outcome.

I think they've done a good job. We've really practiced a lot better the last two weeks, and we practiced okay prior to that. That's what this whole thing is about, it's about development, and it's about education, if you will, just learning from good and bad, and then trying to move the needle a little bit forward.

Q. Wisconsin stayed No. 10 after two tough losses. Does that seem kind of obvious to you that they would still get that team respect?

KIRK FERENTZ: I do. Makes sense to me, and the polls don't always make sense. I don't follow them very closely, but they don't always make sense. What makes sense to me is when you look at film and then you look at a team's ranking, and if they match then you can say, yeah, that makes sense. That's not always the case.

But these guys are playing really good football. A lot was said about their schedule preseason, heading into the season, and they've just taken each game one step at a time. It always hasn't been as pretty as they probably wanted, but they've got a good record, and they more importantly have got a football team that really plays well, and again, it doesn't seem to matter if they're on the road or at home. They play good football.

Q. The respect you have for Wisconsin, how much of it is history and knowing that program and how good they are right now?

KIRK FERENTZ: I alluded to it back in the '90s when I wasn't in college football but watching their tape. I scouted players from their teams, so you watch tape of people, and you know, some things flip your switch, some don't, and they have always kind of -- when I watched them -- I'll go back to the '80s, we played them out there in '83. It was two pretty good teams that year -- that was '82. '83 they were pretty good, too, right? I think they had three No. 1 draft picks that year.

Anyway, they've had good players, and they've played well, and they're typically pretty well-coached. They had that little dip there for a while, but when Barry got there, he's just pushed that thing to the top.

I think an interesting part, they've had several coaches since Barry retired, yet the product still looks pretty

darned good. A little different in personality, but for the most part they really play good defense, they play good offense, good special teams, and that's what this team looks like right now. They're strong in all three areas.

Q. What's your level of optimism on Croston and Myers? Is one ahead of the other?

KIRK FERENTZ: I think we've got a chance with Cole, and Boone, we'll have to see how the week goes. I think they've both got a shot. We'll see where it is.

Q. On the offensive line the other day it was Levi at right guard. Is that still kind of your thinking? Levi is listed at both right guard and tackle.

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, and probably if we were playing games, which we are Saturday, it would probably look like it looked Saturday, this past Saturday, to start with.

But hopefully we've got three guys that have played tackle, so far -- it's kind of like last year; hopefully we can have two of the three. I'm not going to be greedy. If we can just get two of the three that would be a great starting point, not including Sean Welsh.

Q. Road teams won five straight in this series; is there a difference with a rivalry playing at home versus playing on the road?

KIRK FERENTZ: I don't think so. Most of these games have been pretty close and pretty hotly contested. I'm thinking we weren't all that good in '07, yet it was a three-point game if I remember correctly, and we had a chance on a nine route we missed by about that much, and they were pretty good. But we weren't as good, and it was still right there we had a chance to win the ballgame.

In games like this typically, little things are really going to matter, and they're good at little things, so if we're going to want to be in this ballgame, we're going to have to do that a little bit better, too, and really be detailed because it's going to be tough.

Q. When you're on the road, it's you guys and nobody else. Is there anything else you have to remind a team about playing on the road?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I think every situation is a little bit different, but probably safe to predict it's going to be a good environment Saturday. Sometimes you know you're going to go into a situation where it's underwhelming, the environment, and you talk to your guys about that, and then conversely sometimes you go in places on the road or in Kinnick where it's pretty wild. You feel those things good or bad, but ultimately it still gets down to what happens when the ball is snapped.

For the players, they really have to be wired in on what

is their job, whether it's snowing, 90 degrees, we're playing in Butte, Montana, or we're playing in Kinnick with a packed house. You've still got to be ready to go.

Q. Dropping the last two games at home, maybe a season where the home record isn't what you wanted, do you go back and look at things to see what went wrong, or do you try to remind the players of specific things?

KIRK FERENTZ: This sounds really simple, but if you want to have a really good team, you've got to win on the road. We talk about that all the time. You've got to win at home, too, because the more you win, the better off it is.

I don't think there's any great difference. I think most of us would volunteer we'd rather be at home, but it still gets down to what you do at kickoff, how you play, how you perform, and that's the bottom line.

Q. You said earlier it would be kind of unrealistic maybe to expect George to play.

KIRK FERENTZ: I'll tone that down a little bit. I don't want to be Dr. Doom here. I think he's got a chance. There was concern on Saturday there might be a fracture. That was word given to me during the game. They did, whatever they call it, a fluoro or something like that, kind of a half-baked X-ray. I mean, it's an X-ray but it's not like going over to the hospital.

That was good, and since that time he's had MRI X-rays and the specialists have looked at it and said everything is good, so it depends on what he can do, how he can progress in the next couple days' time, and we're not going to rule him out. But it's probably a longshot. Right now we've got to prepare -- anytime a guy gets hurt, you've got to prepare like he's not going to be there, but if he can play, we'll play him. We've done that before. That's not unheard of, if he can play. He's got to be able to play effectively.

Q. How much of Wisconsin is staying the course because CJ was out here earlier and he said three-and-outs are going to pile up and LeShun was out here and he said, yeah, there's going to be a few one- and two-yard runs. How much is it just staying the course and keeping that level of intensity?

KIRK FERENTZ: That's what this game will be all about in my opinion, unless something just -- the ceiling comes in. But we've been historically in a lot of games like this where you just never know what that play is going to be, what's going to happen. Outsiders might describe it as ugly football, but it's kind of like -- the visual I've got right now is like the last couple years when Pittsburgh and Baltimore play; it's usually a pretty tough, physical game and comes down to a

possession.

You just never know. In big games you never know what it is that's going to -- what's the play, and it might be on special teams, offense, defense, it might be something really subtle. I think back to Mitch King drawing a holding penalty out there in the Penn State game in '08, made it 3rd and forever for them, they threw a ball, got tipped -- just one thing led to another.

You just never know what that play is going to be, so yeah, you just play somebody that's really good, these guys are really good, not every play is just going to be going on the scout team. It just doesn't work that way. And players need to understand that, and you just keep pushing, just keep banging away and see if something good will happen. Last year's game, that was pretty much the story of that game.

Q. With how aggressive Wisconsin's defense is, is there more emphasis with CJ at the line of scrimmage? Does he have to recognize more do you think?

KIRK FERENTZ: Not necessarily. It gets down to -- based on what I know thus far, I don't think so. It's Tuesday, but he's got to be sharp every game, every play. That doesn't change. But I wouldn't call it necessarily that kind of -- but I think our whole team is really going to have to be alert and really sound. All that being said, they're going to make some plays. They're good, and they're really disruptive defensively, so we have to weather that and fight through that.

Q. The depth chart thing, Aaron Mendis fell off this week and I don't think he played last week --

KIRK FERENTZ: That's how we ended up Saturday. But it's clearly cloudy right now. Maybe we'll get some things cleared up next week during the bye week. Hopefully we can get a little clarity there because it is what it is.

Q. He was No. 1 in camp, that's why I ask.

KIRK FERENTZ: After Bo right now, it would be Hockaday quite frankly, who I think I have on there.

Q. Falconer played I think for the first time Saturday. Did you ever consider redshirting him?

KIRK FERENTZ: No.

Q. With Dallas being here, how much do you let him in the locker room to talk to the guys because obviously he's busy but what can you draw from him to teach to the guys or show to the guys?

KIRK FERENTZ: Right now is probably not the best time to do it because our guys have already come and gone, but Dallas -- and I'm not letting the cat out of the bag. He lives in Iowa now, so he's down here. I don't

want to say frequently, but he's around, and he was around during camp because he was here the entire week of the concert. He's on vacation, and he's in there 7 a.m. We're out practicing, he's out there. Summertime he's working out in the weight room at 6:30 a.m. on his day off. That's kind of how he's wired. So he's been around our players, they know him, and he's talked to them at camp. When guys come through, not just Dallas but former players come through, we invite them to talk to our players any time.

It's kind of the concept of the honorary captain. The more our players can learn about the tradition, the fabric, the people that have played here and come through these halls, it's so valuable. It means a lot to everybody.

Q. With recruiting today, how difficult is it to -- I don't know if enforce is the right word, the no visit after you commit rule that you guys have?

KIRK FERENTZ: I don't think you can enforce it. You can have policies. It's kind of like some of the things in our building, I tease our coaches sometimes, there's policies and then there's rules. Policies are policies. You can break policies. There's no penalty. But rules are rules. The rules don't forbid that, so there's no -- but we can have policies.

Q. With an internal policy, how hard is that to kind of stick to?

KIRK FERENTZ: I think we just have to decide. It's like anything else, you just decide every individual case and kind of go from there. I think it's good to have policies and beliefs, and hopefully everybody that's on board is on board and goes with us.