

University of Iowa Football

Media Conference

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Kirk Ferentz



Iowa - 45, Illinois - 16

KIRK FERENTZ: So we're thrilled to get the victory. It was really a welcomed win for us and a decisive win for our football team. It was all of these, so it didn't come easy, and we didn't expect it to. Illinois came in prepared to play a really good football game, and I thought they really fought hard.

Just very proud of our guys. I thought it was a real team effort, and right along those lines, we played a lot of good complementary football out there, and end of the first half certainly getting the spark and then in the second half when we needed a spark, Brandon Snyder gave us a big one. Taking advantage of those big plays gave us a big boost today.

And then talking about Brandon Snyder, I know you've already interviewed him, but quite a story there. Just not only the time that it took him to return, but the way he handled it. Needless to say, he really rehabbed hard to push the needle a little bit that way, and then beyond that, I think the mental work that he was doing when he was out. A player that has experience and a player who's been through some ups and downs like he was a year ago has a real opportunity to take that time when he can't practice and improve, and I think that's certainly what Brandon has been doing. So I can't say enough about the work that he's done when he's been away from the field and not able to be out there in the huddle.

For him to get a pick-six today and give us a spark like he did, that's just really poetic justice, if you will. So just thrilled about the win. It's a great way to go into the bye week. We'll utilize this bye week coming up, and we'll get ready for our next Big Ten contest.

Q. Talk about the fake punt and the timing there and what you guys were thinking and obviously it worked.

KIRK FERENTZ: It's a play we've had in our playbook, and we practice it weekly, but it's got to present itself where we feel like we might have a shot, and we thought there might be an opportunity today, and we felt like we needed a little something there to get us going. Amani did a great job on that. The blocking up front was good, and then most importantly we finished after that.

Q. What was your sense of the energy level before Brandon's pick when they were driving to potentially go ahead?

KIRK FERENTZ: You know, football is full of ebb and flow. That's just part of the game, especially in conference football. But I would say any game you just have to expect that. We had stalled out. We were three-and-out two times in a row, and it just seemed like that was the play we needed to pick us up a little bit. They were driving the ball, and they did a good job today offensively. Their offense did. To come up with that play to get the interception was big, and then to turn it into points was even bigger. Just seemed like that got us moving.

Q. You're always talking about good stories; would Brandon Snyder be a good story as you move ahead?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah I think it's a great example, and I've always used Bryan Bulaga. I remember Bryan missed about a month, not a couple months, but a month back when he was a true freshman, and it was clear when he came back on the field that he was really paying attention. For a guy that young, that's unusual. But in Brandon's case, there were some moments last year out here that weren't so good for him early in the season especially, and that's experience. That's how you learn.

But as the season went on, he just kept getting better and I think the big thing is the way he handled it. I don't want to skip over the physical part of rehab because the hours that guys put in, it's not painless; it's hard to rehab any injury after surgery. The work that our training staff, medical staff does to help players back, that's such a big story. And then for him to get back on the field in this short amount of time like that, that's remarkable, and then to give us the spark he did today, that's really just a great -- that'll be a great teaching moment for anybody that has an injury.

Q. This is the first time you've had a freshman start at tackle --

KIRK FERENTZ: There you go.

Q. I know you haven't seen the film yet, but how would you assess his performance?

KIRK FERENTZ: Two things. He actually got beat on

that last touchdown that we threw, late enough where we got the ball out. There was one play in the first half where the guy came up underneath on him. But outside of that, nothing that was glaringly -- we'll have plenty of coach off tomorrow. But again, that's another good story there. And he was doing a nice job in camp, and then had an injury that really set him back because he doesn't have that knowledge base. Brandon has a great knowledge base, so when he got back here, he was able to play and play fast, whereas Tristan, that set him back way past go, actually. But every week he's been building and gaining, and it's a twofold benefit for us. If he can play well out there, that's good for us, obviously, and then the other thing, it allows Sean to get back to where he's a little bit more comfortable. We're kind of just fudging things a little bit with Sean out there. We're taking a guy who's a really good football player and maybe minimizing some of his effectiveness.

We just felt like coming out of last weekend this was the best thing for us. It gives us the best chance, and fortunately those guys practiced well together this week.

Q. Maybe it's not a long-term thing necessarily, but that's the plan?

KIRK FERENTZ: Those were kind of our thoughts, yeah. We recruited Tristan as a tackle-type guy. We think that's his best place. Same thing with AJ on the other side. If those guys can do what they can do and do it well and AJ just keeps improving every week, I think it just makes us a little bit stronger inside, a little bit more cohesive. I thought in the second half we started looking a little bit more like we want to look as an offense, so a big part of that is what's going on up front.

Q. Halfway through Nate's first year starting, is he where you were expecting him to be? Is he kind of beyond?

KIRK FERENTZ: It's always tough to answer those kind of questions, because our expectations are we're going to watch and see what happens. You're really not quite sure until guys get on the game field. But he's doing an awful lot of good things, and I've felt like that for six weeks now. There's some things that we have to get ironed out, but he's really worked hard. He's unbelievably conscientious, but I could say the same thing about Tyler. Both those guys are first-class guys, but with every experience he's doing some good things, he's making good throws. He had one he'd like to have back today and the ball just got away from him, but he had the right idea on it. It wasn't like it was a bad idea or trying to force it or anything like that. The ball just took off. We're really enthused about him, and we've got a lot of guys like him, talking about Wirfs and talking about Nate, that are younger as players and

experience they go through is so valuable, so hopefully we can keep building.

Q. What did you like about your receivers?

KIRK FERENTZ: Same thing. Speaking of Brandon, it's a good Kodak moment, but to get VandeBerg a touchdown, boy, that's great. It's great for anybody, but it was good for him to get back in that realm. He's done a great job being a leader with those guys, and then I think we're seeing improvement with all the younger guys. Nick Easley is not necessarily a younger guy but young in our program, and just keeps on making plays, just works hard, makes plays. That group is coming along, too, and we still have a lot in front of us right now that we can get better at, but hopefully we use this week in front of us wisely and just keep getting a little bit better with every week.

Q. The first half of the season has been inconsistent. A lot of that is because of personnel in and out on the offensive line. How would you grade yourselves for the first six games and what's the potential going forward? Can this team be a good team that kind of gets better?

KIRK FERENTZ: Probably the last time I gave grades out was when I was at Worcester Academy, unfortunately. I might be the only line coach in the history of line coaches -- I never gave grades to our players because all they want to do is argue about them, and I want them to watch the film and learn from the film, and let's talk instead of looking at the sheet and picky and all that stuff.

There's always room for improvement, but I felt like we grew today. It was tough in the first half, and credit goes to Illinois, they came in here to win a football game, and they did a lot of really good things. But I thought as things, as we pressed on and pushed on we kept playing. That's one thing this team has done pretty well for six games. They keep playing. They keep fighting out there.

But I thought we started doing some good things in the second half.

But we'll start all over again here two weeks from today, next time we tee it up. It's going to be a new adventure. Every game is a little different story. The biggest thing we have to do is just keep working forward, and every guy can improve, and that's been the mantra all the way through. At least this week I think we took a positive step.

Q. What about Amani Hooker? You brought him in a few weeks ago and he replaced Jake, now came in in the second quarter and had a heck of a game. Is he too good now to sit?

KIRK FERENTZ: We'll see. We'll look at the film and we'll let guys play. Miles has played a lot of good football for us, Brandon obviously has, I think Jake did some good things for us. It's like some of the discussions about the tackles and some of the other young guys. We'll just keep watching them in practice and let everybody compete probably room for everybody quite frankly.

Q. You were frustrated at how they came out mentally last week. Do you feel like you saw the team turn the page a little bit this week?

KIRK FERENTZ: I think we had a good week. Yeah, I think we had a good week overall. We showed up today, and so did they. It was two teams really competing out there, and that's to me representative of conference play. We'd better expect that every week and understand that's going to come.

But the biggest thing is we've got to make strides in practice. If we can do that, then we'll have a chance to hopefully have a good football team.

Q. Some of your players sounded a little frustrated the last few weeks and then the start today. Is that something you can work with, that frustration, that emotion?

KIRK FERENTZ: When you're not doing what you want to do, I think it's normal to get frustrated and what have you. What's important is how you respond to frustration and where you put your focus, where you put your energy, and then also what you do during the week, what can you do to be a better prepared team and learn from whatever has caused frustration in previous weeks, that type of thing, and that's an ongoing process. That's really the race that we're all running right now. We've got six plus weeks left of it.

Q. Does that put a little seasoning in the pot, the fake punt --

KIRK FERENTZ: Those are recommendations from the staff, and boy, I'm all for them. But I feel even better when we do them well in practice. Miguel was kicking that onside kick. He really did a nice job all week. It's a little easier for me to give it the okay when you see it a couple times during the week. That gives you confidence. And the fake punt is something that is in our playbook, but we thought it was just maybe there, and in that situation right there, we just felt like we needed a little juice, something maybe to get us going, and the guys did a great job with the execution.

Q. It looked like you took a little hit in the second quarter and popped right back up on the sidelines.

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I ended up on a bench actually, so that's good; I guess it wasn't my head.

Q. You got back up.

KIRK FERENTZ: I've been actually knocked over about three or four times. The worst one was when I was coaching in Cleveland. We were in Denver, and I was facing talking to my guys, our guys, the linemen, and it sounded like a herd of horses coming. I looked up, and I saw those guys, their eyes were like that, and I got blown up totally, and afterwards I said, you know, not one of you guys said one thing, so thanks a lot. I think that I was a beloved coach, as you can see.

Q. (Indiscernible.)

KIRK FERENTZ: He wasn't going to come back today, but I have no reason to think that he won't be -- if we were playing next week, as far as I know he'd be ready to go. But this week off will help him a little bit, get him and the older guys, try to get them healed up a little bit.

Q. The special teams plays you guys made, did you feel like the team got energy off those?

KIRK FERENTZ: Absolutely, yeah, and there's risk and reward any time you do things like that, but -- and it hurt us -- not to drudge up old news, but last week we couldn't capitalize off one. When you can convert those things and execute them and then do something with it, then that's a really good thing, and that's what I mean about complementary team football. If you do something well there, the execution is good, but then what are we going to do as a result of that, and I think it certainly helped us today on that fake punt.