

University of Iowa Football

Media Conference

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Kirk Ferentz



KIRK FERENTZ: First of all, it was nice to put the spring in spring practice. Felt great to be out there tonight, and that was good, and good to be in Kinnick, and really appreciate the fans that turned out. They were enthusiastic. I think our players enjoyed that for sure.

I think going back to January, the team really has demonstrated a pretty good work ethic and a positive attitude, really since we began the out-of-season workouts. I think the last 15 practices, it's safe to say that's continued. Guys have been pretty consistent. They've done a nice job with their training meetings, all those kinds of things, so happy about that.

Secondly, I think we've made good physical strides. We're seeing skill improvement, fundamental improvement, and that's a positive. And then focus really isn't on teamwork out there, precision teamwork necessarily, but I think we see the guys, especially this past week, come together a little bit better, and look a little bit more like a team, and then right along with it, see leadership, see some leadership starting to develop on the football team in a lot of different areas, which is encouraging.

We've got a lot way in front of us, too, a lot of ground to cover, but those are all really positives. We were in game uniforms tonight but were hardly game ready. That was obvious, as well. But overall, I am happy about the work that we've gotten done over 15 workouts. We've made good progress. I think the key is right now is keeping a good attitude, being realistic that we've got a lot of things we need to get accomplished between now and September. This was a good step for us, and we'll just kind of build from there.

Q. What is it about Jake Gervase in spring games?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, he's showing off out there. Certainly last year he kind of burst on the scene. Jake has really done a nice job. I mentioned leadership. He's been a guy that's taken a very active role, and probably did start a year ago -- I don't know if it was this night or whatever, a year ago today was really kind of the first step for him. Spring games aren't critical certainly, but they're good indicators sometimes of what guys are doing, tandeming him up with Hooker. Hooker made a really nice play on the interception, and

just from where I was standing, it was kind of funny, you could see him sizing it up that they haven't covered that route all spring. Not that we've thrown it a lot, but he spotted it right off the bat and was just kind of laying in the weeds on that one. I think that shows that he's moving forward a little bit, too, and it's what you hope from experienced players.

Q. Can you elaborate on Aaron Mends?

KIRK FERENTZ: He got injured, I guess, it was Wednesday morning. I feel fairly good about the overall progress of our football team this spring, but that puts a damper on it. We had too many injuries that are serious, both he and Wes Dvorak, and that kind of tempered things a little bit unfortunately. Aaron is a great young guy and can't seem to catch a break right now, so that's tough, really tough.

Q. What kind of upside does Anthony Nelson have now that you've seen him a couple years?

KIRK FERENTZ: The first time we saw him he was probably 200 pounds, 205 pounds, something like that. He's grown physically, but more importantly, he's grown as a player. A while back we started seeing things in practice we thought would translate to game action, and he did that certainly, and it's really been good for our guys, our tackles, our young tackles to work against Anthony, to work against Parker, and the other guys have been pretty good, too. They're doing some good things. But Anthony and Parker in particular, they play like veteran guys. Anthony does a really nice job. He puts pressure on those tackles pretty good.

It's a really healthy thing, but he continues to grow. He's got a great attitude. I mentioned leadership. He's certainly one of the guys that's assuming a role there, also, and that's good to see.

Q. Aside from Aaron, how would you assess things at linebacker?

KIRK FERENTZ: I think we're making progress. I know Phil mentioned Amani the other day, and I would start there. He's done some really good things. Nick has done a good job outside, Neimann has done a good job, and I think after that, you've got Jack Hockaday, you've got Welch, those guys are competing, and Barrington, I know Phil mentioned this, I'm repeating what he said, but it is true, Barrington is one of those guys that just kind of really had a silent year. Nothing

bad, but really nothing to make you say, maybe we can use this guy here or there, special teams, et cetera. I think this spring he's certainly in the two deep and deserves to be in the two deep, and hopefully he's got a chance, A, to start for a competing job, and B, to help us on special teams. If we're going to have a good football team, we need guys like him to step in there and do some things dynamic on special teams.

Q. You talked about Bob Sanders, being like your big brother in a street fight. Do you get the same kind of vibe from Amani Jones?

KIRK FERENTZ: He's got a natural vibe to him or juice. That's the art of scouting. I went to a clinic in Chicago, probably would have been his junior year maybe, and a coach I knew from the '80s who is retired now was helping out at his high school. He grabbed me at this clinic and said, you guys are nuts if you don't look at this guy. It was Mike Barry. Mike is a guy who's coached a lot of football. His son is a coach now. So that got my attention, and the way he talked about him got my attention. The first time you meet Amani there's something about the guy, and he loves the game, and he's appreciative of the opportunities that are in front of him right now. I'm talking about the whole package, being here in school. He really understands this is a good opportunity for him to get a degree and hopefully play Big Ten football, and he's done some good things for us already on special teams. Now the trick is can he convert it into every down-playing out there. But he's made a lot of progress this spring.

Q. Sounds like your comments about Smith-Marsette had a desired effect?

KIRK FERENTZ: You know, that's just having fun with him. Everybody likes him here. You've got to. But we've got to keep him in line, too. We've got to keep him in check. He's a really spirited guy. He's not like Amani. They have different personalities, but they're both guys that really love football, and they love competing. He really adds a good vibe to the team. He's a positive energy guy, and you can just tell when he's out there, he likes being on the football field. I think back to Bill Polian talking about Dallas Clark. He said, I think Dallas enjoys getting his ankles taped, just enjoys every part about the game, and I think that's fair about ILMIR, too.

Q. Everything okay with Easley?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, it's soft tissue. We had a couple guys with soft tissue issues, so he was doing well, basically missing this week, and that's the way it goes, but he'll be fine.

Q. And Max Cooper ends up being the spring receiving sensation?

KIRK FERENTZ: Well, the good news is it wasn't just

today, but it wasn't much more than today. That's the bad news. He was one of those guys that just kind of -- just talked about Barrington, nothing bad, but nothing of note. The last couple days he's come alive. It's like, okay, there is a guy wearing No. 19 out there, so hopefully that's a start of a trend, not just a blip on the radar screen, we'll see.

Q. Are you able to come out of screen with a decent sense of what you're off the line capable of?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, we don't do a lot of live work, that is accurate, but I think that's one position we can evaluate pretty well in practice. I've liked the way they've competed, both sides of the ball, interiorly and all the linemen, the ends, tackles on defense and all five guys offensively. We don't have enough depth right now, but I think we have a chance to have a good line.

It's kind of like our football team. We have a chance, but we're not very deep and we've got a lot of work to do. But I think we've made progress. I think both the tackles -- we have a handful of guys that you think about like Wirfs was still throwing shot-puts and discs all that stuff last year at this time. AJ was coming off a redshirt year. You think about Stanley, you think about Easley was trying to figure out where to go to class, all that stuff last year, a couple of the receivers were in high school. So a lot of those guys are a lot further along. I think we feel better that way, so I think we've got a lot of guys on our offensive team in particular that are further along the road. How good we can be, and then how much can we develop some depth. We've got a lot of questions that way. We still haven't completed a pass this year in a game. We haven't made a 1st down. We have a lot of work to do that way.

Q. What do you see from the backup quarterbacks this spring? Was today a good representation?

KIRK FERENTZ: You know, he really was struggling in August when we got going. I mean, like really struggling. And then what happened, and when he started struggling, it was really interesting and sometimes entertaining, except -- it was entertaining because he was like fourth team at that point. It wouldn't be right now. But he's progressed, too, so he's a lot closer to being able to go in a game than he was. And Petras has kind of surprised us a little bit. He's caught on things a little quicker than you might imagine, so we'll see what happens there. But those guys have both done some good things.

Q. You mentioned the linebackers. It sounds like Mends is doubtful probably for the season --

KIRK FERENTZ: It's going to be tough, yeah.

Q. At weak side then is probably Welch and Hockaday working for that, and then this also brings up other opportunities like Barrington Wade impressed you --

KIRK FERENTZ: Possibly, yeah. We'll keep an open mind, certainly for everybody. You've got Colbert. Nate is out right now, Wieland, but he'll be back in a couple weeks, so we'll see.

Q. You've got some big shoes to fill at the center position. What are some steps you'll take over the summer to make up for the loss?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, that's a really good point. You know, because we felt like Keegan could do it pretty well, but he's really done a good job, so he's probably -- I'd say he's exceeded our expectations because I'm not sure what our expectations were exactly, but he's done a pretty good job. There's some nuances that he needs more work on. There are a couple things that are unique to playing center that you just have to practice on the field and you've got to be exposed to them, but he'll get that in August. I'm really confident of that. He's done a really nice job with taking command, communicating, and that's important at that position. I mentioned the leadership thing earlier, and he's one of the guys that's really taken ownership there and welcomed it.

He's played pretty solid in there, just technique-wise, but a lot of that -- most centers aren't -- they don't just fall out of trees or born or hatched. Most of them learn how to play the position. But he's doing it pretty adeptly. Again, a couple little things he's still got to get done, but Banwart did a pretty good job, and Duwa is a guy we're trying to make into one, trying to get him ready to go, too, and Levi has got a good, competitive spirit. He just needs a lot more work and repetition, but he's barely played football. He's been injured a lot, even in his high school career and then last year. I think he's got a chance, too, so hopefully we're going to get that in good shape by September.

Q. Last year you guys had the Tigerhawk at the 50, now you're going to have the Tigerhawk on the water tower --

KIRK FERENTZ: How about that?

Q. Does this end all the small little things that people would ask you about, and what do you think of this?

KIRK FERENTZ: So I think it was 1979, right, the birth of the Tigerhawk? I'm pretty sure. I was telling a couple people coming in here that it's funny, I was driving in this morning, I was behind a Cambus, and they had the capitol symbol, the emblem there, and I don't know why I was thinking about the water tower because I really haven't thought much about it in my 28

years here, but this morning I was just thinking about Tigerhawk and the capitol. The capitol is a great emblem, also. But I think the Tigerhawk is a little bit more universally recognized. I didn't know it was going on. I swear I didn't know it was going on the water tower. I think it's great. And the capitol would have been great, too. Did they vote for this online? Was this one of those polls? But I think it's fantastic. I think it's great because if you have a Tigerhawk anywhere, people give you the go hawks. I think it's outstanding. Coach Fry will be glad to hear about that, too.

Q. You had an official visitor today. Is the plan going forward to have more officials this spring?

KIRK FERENTZ: That's probably one more than we intended a month ago or two months ago, but I think we've talked a lot about that and other topics in recruiting. Just the major -- the biggest thing that's changed in our profession, and especially the last five years, is recruiting. So I think we're going to keep a very open mind. We still want to do it in a controlled way. We would not -- we'd prefer, at least I would prefer that we do it in a way that maximizes manpower, if you will, like a focus on one weekend, maybe two, but not one guy here, here and here and just like wear everybody out because that can happen real fast, plus we get nothing else done when that happens. But we'll keep an open mind. But here's another interesting thing if I understand this correctly because I've been told about eight times because I still don't believe it. So we moved up official visits to the spring, right? Everybody is following that one. The count, whatever it is, 56? You guys know it better than I do. So you're allowed 56. We've never come close. In fact, we've got 20 or 18 in the bank right now. That pitch count you would think would start when they start the visits, so that's what they do, they're going to move the visits up, they move that 56 thing up and you get to carry them over. No, that still is in August or September or whenever it is. So if you have some from last year, then you can use them this spring. Is that how you guys understood it? Do you guys follow it? Anyway, that's how they explained it to me. Only the NCAA could come up with that one. I mean, that makes no sense at all, right? Makes no sense. Anyway, there we go. It's kind of like the six years that they've been throwing around. I'm still mad about Drew Ott, just for the record. I'm still mad about that. I'm for young people, and I'm all for the guys that have gotten six years. Drew Ott totally got the short end of the stick. One of these days I'll quit talking about that, one of these days.