

# University of Iowa Football

## Media Conference

Tuesday, November 22, 2016

### Kirk Ferentz



KIRK FERENTZ: Good afternoon. This week our singular focus is the Nebraska game. We've got a short week and certainly a tough opponent to get ready for, so that's really what we've been doing since Sunday.

You know, very important game for a couple of reasons. First, and maybe foremost, it's the last opportunity for 14 of our seniors to play in Kinnick Stadium, and that's always a really special thing. Then secondly, we're playing an outstanding team that gives us an opportunity to hopefully improve our record, but it will be a big challenge again.

Said over the year about our seniors, it really doesn't change. I think I speak for myself, and I speak for everybody on our staff, we all have tremendous respect for everybody in the class, each player involved, and think a commonality, all of them have had great experiences, great moments in the program, but right along with that, they've all experienced heartbreak, disappointment, and that's what comes with playing college football. They've put in long hours, had to live up to high expectations, and many if not all, have gone through some form of injury, dealt with injury.

So it's a really challenging tour of duty and as coaches, we're very, very proud of the entire class. On top of that, very appreciative and thankful for all their efforts, contributions, and the leadership they've provided. So that's number one on the agenda, certainly.

Anytime you put on the Hawkeye uniform, we consider that to be an honor. It's a privilege, and there's no question this group has done a great job representing the program, the university now through their four years, five years in some cases, one year for a guy like Ron Coluzzi. So just very appreciative of those guys.

Captains this week are the same four guys. You have C.J. Beathard and LeShun Daniels, Desmond King, and Josey Jewell. Medically, both George Kittle and Ike Boettger did some work today. How effective they can be Friday, we'll have to wait and see. They're certainly not 100% at this point, but they've got some work in, so we'll see where that goes.

Nebraska has had a strong season. Certainly they're a very good football team in all areas, defensively,

offensively, and special teams, and there's no question they've earned their ranking of 15 in the country right now. They've earned every one of those wins. They've had a tremendous year. So it's going to be a big challenge for us. One we're looking forward to.

The last two things, just want to express my appreciation to the folks at Hy-Vee for sponsoring this Heroes Game. The concept behind it is absolutely fantastic. Certainly happy to see the efforts of Ken Blazek and Brock Staley being recognized, and I know Nebraska's got several people being recognized as well. I just think it's a great thing for both states to be participating in, and again, very appreciative of Hy-Vee's support of that whole initiative.

The last thing, as all of us know, Sam Foltz' passing this past summer was very, very tragic. To our understanding his parents will be at the game on Friday. Our plan is to give a private tribute to Sam in the locker room prior to the ballgame. So with that, I'll throw it out for questions.

**Q. You've been on that field for senior day ceremonies as a parent now three times and as a coach every year. How powerful is that experience?**

KIRK FERENTZ: It's really powerful and it's very bittersweet, as you might imagine, whether one of our kids is involved, and this will be the third one, or not, because just as I said, when you look at the seniors each and every year, it's one thing the fans get to see the guys play and they get to see snapshots of them throughout the year, but we're around our players so much as coaches, so I think we're the ones who really can appreciate and fully understand the investment they've made in the program.

It's wonderful for everybody who gets a chance. Think of a guy like Desmond King who got thrown into his first ballgame on campus and basically has started every game and played just about every snap since that time. Or guys that really never see the field when the score's in doubt. But I think the reason they stay with it, they go through all the tough things that are involved is, you know, they get something out of it. It's a reciprocating deal.

So, you know, when you look at the body of work,

whether it's four years, five years, and you see that when a guy comes out and you see and meet his parents, especially the guys that have been here four, five years, you know the changes they've gone through, the growth and development, all the life experiences they've been able to have. That's really special.

You know, Ron Coluzzi, I mentioned him, he's only been here a year, less than a year, actually, but same thing. He's just jumped right in, been part of our team, part of our culture. To see what he's added to our group and what he's contributed, but also the things that I think he's enjoyed, those are just really special things. So, yeah, it's a great thing, but it's always kind of an emotional thing.

**Q. When you have a guy like Greg Mabin, an experienced senior who is injured on senior day, what are the thoughts and feelings of that?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Unfortunately, it's kind of been the case the last month or so here. We've had three of our really good seniors not playing, George, Greg, and Cole Croston, but that's what I'm talking about. You talk about the fun moments, victories, and guys being involved in the victories, but when guys are watching from the sidelines, and anybody that's ever competed in any sport that's been injured, especially if they're in a team sport, they understand it. You just feel like you're way on the outside when you're not able to practice. You are part of the group, but you just don't feel like you're part of the group. The psychology is really hard to describe.

So, again, as a coach, you get to see how much guys invest, and especially in our sport where we only get 12 games. So for the limited amount of competition they have compared to the amount of preparation and work and training and all that stuff that they do, it's way out of balance. Then, to see an opportunity get taken away -- and it's nobody's fault. That's the one thing about injuries, it's nobody's fault. They happen, they're part of the game. But all that being said, Greg's been part of the team, Cole, George the same way, they've been doing their part, but it's just not the same. So you feel bad for them on a personal note.

**Q. Your first two sons played a lot here, but your third son Steven hasn't, but he stuck it out. What's that mean to you the fact that he's been able to stick it out like he has?**

KIRK FERENTZ: It's kind of representative of a lot of the guys that have come through that haven't played. Again, I would argue or suggest it's a lot easier to be motivated, it's a lot easier to train, it's a lot easier to do all the things that we ask of our players when they know they're going to be playing. They obviously have

a different stake, if you will. So, when guys do it in their fourth years, fifth-years, I think that says a lot about them.

I think about a guy standing here, Brett Chinander his brother, Erik, I mean, those two guys have gone on and done very well in their professional lives. One's an engineer, one's a defensive coordinator at Central Florida. Neither one of those guys have played when the game was on the line. But knowing those guys ten, 15 years later, what it meant for them to be part of a program and part of something.

A guy like Will Lack, I'll never forget asking him why he did this. The guy's going to med school. Ends up going to Harvard Medical School, working in the hospital while he's playing football, sleeping four to six hours a night. I said, why do you do this? I was really curious. He said for him just being part of the team meant that much to him. It was that significant. I'm not sure I understood that. I had to, but still trying to make sense of it logically, you couldn't. But to this day, Will stay's in touch with us.

But nothing better, a couple weeks ago you've got Derreck Robinson, Colin Cole, Fred Russell, those guys walking around. That's great. But still, you know, hearing from Will Lack and he always comes back for a game and getting an email or note from him to share with the team, those kind of things make football and things so unique. The fabric of the whole thing is just really unique and just really special.

**Q. You have met two of your sons at the 50-yard line at Kinnick Stadium, got to walk your daughter down the aisle.**

KIRK FERENTZ: Best walk there is. Not even close. I mean, there is no close second on that one.

**Q. So walking your daughter down the aisle, is that something special?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, that is. I learned that one a couple years ago, it's pretty good.

**Q. Your youngest child is completing his journey in football; what are the emotions going into this and how did you approach it before, and how do you approach it now?**

KIRK FERENTZ: I try not to think about it probably, and I haven't thought about this one too much. Probably the biggest story I have on all that stuff would be my wife with Bryan -- two stories, I guess. But for her, she's been to a lot of games in Kinnick, obviously, being married to a coach. But it's the first time she'd been on the game field when there were people in the stands and that blew her away.

I learned something that day. She'd been around Iowa football for quite a period at that time, but it's a whole different perspective being on the field. So for the parents just from that standpoint it's very different, then you factor in here comes your son last time at home, it's a really special thing. Again, it's bittersweet.

My second story is you try to hold it together, but then James Ferentz got the gene, and I got it from my dad, and he was in tears like 80 yards away, so forget that one. But that's what's special in life when you have those good feelings, good times, it's a pretty good deal. But one thing you have to caution your seniors about is we've still got a game to play, a really big game, a really important game, so you have to try to balance it. Not the same as but kind of like when you're playing a game during the day when you're kicking it off at 7:30 or whatever time they tell us to jump.

**Q. Obviously with Josey Jewell being nominated for the Butkus Award, I have to imagine that when he first came in as a 109th top pick that he must be the last guy you'd think would be there. Did you see something in him, a personality trait?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, as I've said many times, we were so close to not offering him a scholarship. We really went back and forth. Really the deciding factor was the person that knew him the best on our staff was Reese Morgan. When Reese has a feeling about a player, it's typically not wrong. Not that it's going to always turn out like that, but normally he's pretty right about players that way. So that was kind of the tipping point.

At the end of the day, it's kind of like Bob Sanders, my mentor Joe Moore said, he'll make your team tougher. I don't know if you'll ever teach him to back-pedal, but he'll make your team tougher. He'll probably be a good special teams guy, if nothing else. So that was the deciding factor there. I felt with Josey at least we're going to get a guy that's a winner. He did everything. He was certainly a leader, he was certainly a tough-minded guy. But I'd be lying if I told you that I knew he'd be -- I guess he's second in the league in tackles right now and he missed a game too in there. If I told you that I knew he'd be that kind of player or the kind of player we saw in the second half of the TaxSlayer Bowl a couple years ago where he was just playing at a speed different than everybody else, that's, you know, I'd love to say I was that smart. I wish I could have told you that Mike Haight was going to be a number one draft pick too. I didn't know that was coming, but it unfolded.

**Q. Of all the things that have maybe gone wrong for the offense this year, what was the most difficult for you guys?**

KIRK FERENTZ: I think that's a nice way to say it. It's better than saying you guys stink.

**Q. What was the most difficult thing to get your finger on and figure out why isn't this working?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Well, you know, I think we have a beat on why things are challenging right now. I like my word better, challenging. So, you know, the bottom line is what the game's about is trying to find a way to win. You know, 2002 was pretty easy. We had an offense that was rolling. We had momentum and they had it going pretty good, other than a couple games. But, you know, 2004, whole different thing. In 2004 was just find a way to win. That's where we are right now, whether it's defense, special teams, offense.

I would argue the offense has really done a good job in the last two weeks of helping the cause. You know, the objective is having at least one more point than your opponent. We've been able to do that two weeks in a row, so that's been a real team effort. Lot of good complementary team football. For us to win, that's what it takes typically. We normally don't have the dooms' day defense or the name of a famous offense. But anyway, that's not us.

We're just going to try to find a way with what we've got to be successful, and that will be the case this week. This is going to be tough. They're a really good football team in all three areas. We're going to have our work cut out for us again.

**Q. Kittle says he's playing. Is that too strong of a statement?**

KIRK FERENTZ: No, I think he's going to play, I just don't know how effective he'll be. That's the real issue right now. Can he drive off? Can he be effective? In the run game, you've got to drive off and strain a little bit with resistance and passing game, can you make a decisive break or cut and that type of thing. He's out there practicing, he's been climbing the ladder with the trainers. But it's a little different when you have a nationally ranked team playing against you. That's a little different challenge.

**Q. Coach, what's it like for Noah Fant to be involved at such an early point in his career?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Not to be smart-alecky, but part of it is necessity. We've got a little void right now with our job. Noah created a window there. But the other part is he's done a nice job. He's really handled things pretty well. He's come a million miles. He's got a million miles to go yet, but that's how it should be for a first-year player.

But where he was in August compared to where he is right now, he's really grown. He works hard. He's got

a very good attitude. He's easy to coach. He's going to make mistakes, because first year players make mistakes. But he's done a good job so far and he's not overwhelmed, not overwhelmed at all. So the exciting part for us is just the growth potential for him is really there for him. I feel like that about that whole group of tight ends. They're doing a lot of good things. But we're not really experienced there.

**Q. You've faced Nebraska 10 times personally.**

KIRK FERENTZ: Some of them better than others.

**Q. Is the rivalry still growing? Does it feel anything like your other ones yet?**

KIRK FERENTZ: The first year I got here they had a close game in '78, '79, '80, not so close, '81, okay. '82, not so good. We got a standing-O when we got our first first down, I think, in the fourth quarter, you'll have to look that one up. But it was a slaughter. Then you fast forward, we got here, they're ranked second or third in '99. I think we were 133rd, and it looked like it on both sides.

So I've liked the last couple years better, because at least we've been there in the fourth quarter. We've been there with them. But we've got our work cut out, and we'll see what we can do this week. It's going to be a big challenge for us.

**Q. Is history the most important factor in the intensity of a rivalry?**

KIRK FERENTZ: I don't think so. I mean, first of all, this isn't a rivalry. We haven't played that much. Historically we haven't played all that often. We're border rivals, but we are in two different conferences for so many years. So is Iowa State, I get that, but we played them not forever, but forever for me, because I got here in '81 after the thing started. So, I think that's a little different deal, plus we're in the same state.

But I think it has the makings of and the potential to be. I got to tell you, I'm a little confused and I said that on a conference call earlier. I got here in '81, and Minnesota was the biggest rival at that point, then Iowa State, and Wisconsin, and you had Illinois. Seemed like everybody hated us because we were the guys that stunk and then started getting good, so it seemed like everybody hates you then. Then we don't play Illinois for five years.

So there have been some interesting things through the years, but at the end of the day it's what happens at game time. Doesn't matter if you've been playing for the last hundred years or haven't played. It's about what happens at game time and how that thing goes.

**Q. How does the tandem of Daniels and Wadley**

**compare with say Owen Gill and Harmon? Have you seen a specific style of play?**

KIRK FERENTZ: That's a flashback too since we're talking history. That was a pretty good tandem right there. It was like kind of like Phillips and Blatcher in '81 when I got here. But both those guys are really playing well. We talked about the offense a second ago.

In '04 we had no running backs, just Sam (Brownlee) did a great job. But we had to make yards through the passing game, and right now it's kind of the flip here. But we've got a senior player in LeShun Daniels. Talk about a four-year senior that's done a wonderful job from day one, playing his best football as a senior, and that's what you hope for every senior, certainly. He's playing really well. Then you've got Akrum, who is really, for this past year now really established himself a little bit too. So we've got two guys that we have confidence in.

The best thing is they compliment each other. They're different, yet they can kind of play off each other a little bit, and there is certainly room for both.

**Q. How do you plan for a quarterback situation where you don't know if it's one style of play or another. It could be one of five guys?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, you have to plan for both. But I think we'd be fools if we didn't assume their starter's going to be in there and playing full throttle. Because that would be a bad surprise if we thought he wasn't going to be and then showed up. The guy holds every record that's meaningful over at Nebraska. He's had an unbelievable career and he's a tremendous player. But if he's not there, I mean, like they showed last week, they're a really good football team, and they'll find a way to balance that out.

We're not 100% sure, but we'd be fools if we didn't prepare to face the toughest challenge.

**Q. With that said, you've kept Tommy in check for whatever reason the last two years. What is it then that you can tell?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Last year maybe we got the best of him, but the year before he was the guy that had the last laugh on that last play. He ended the game for us. It's been a good series here recently. It's gone back and forth, and my guess is this one will go right down to the wire too like the last couple games have.

**Q. How is anything different defending him when he's healthy versus when he is injured?**

KIRK FERENTZ: We have to assume he's going to be ready to go. I'm not a doctor, and certainly those things are hard to predict. But we have to prepare like he's going to be full throttle. The real question is how

do we prepare for him full throttle, because nobody's really done too good a job with that one.

**Q. How do you plan to use your strong safeties?**

KIRK FERENTZ: We'll see how it goes in practice. But we suddenly have more depth than we knew we had; I guess that's a good thing. Sometimes that can work out that way. Like Paulsen and Render, they've done a good job too. But Anthony's certainly done a nice job in two games and Rugamba the same way. So you're never sure about your depth until they're out there, and like a teaching moment.

When they go in, at least for a school like Iowa when our whole second group goes in, it can be kind of ugly as we saw a couple weeks back. Yet when guys piece in, it looks a little different sometimes. You hope it does. There are no guarantees. But sometimes that whole thing doesn't click if it's an operation with 11 guys going in there together.

The good news is Anthony has really played well, Miles seems to be healthy. So hopefully we're deeper than we were a few weeks ago.

**Q. This year, putting C.J. and Desmond on the schedule posters, what drove that decision?**

KIRK FERENTZ: I'm not sure who made the decision, actually. Both of them had recognition. We've never had a trophy winner come back. I guess, Shonn could have and Dallas could have. So that was a little different. C.J., the quarterback went undefeated. So we went that way.

It's not necessarily a trend. It seemed like it was popular too, not that that drove the decision, but I don't know what we'll do next year. That's not my department. I'm not good at that stuff, quite frankly.

**Q. When you get King back and found out he's not going to the NFL, was there anything you told him, hey, let's work on this with you this year or anything you wanted to see him improve from last year?**

KIRK FERENTZ: A couple of things. For me or positionally? Every player, as they get older, you want them to give more to the team. You want them to take a more active role in leadership. I think he's done that. Then every player, no matter what position, you have their skills they're honing and working on. Every player has weaknesses, and I've coached guys in their 30s that are really good players. But there's always something you're working on in sports and life for that matter. It's funny you bring that up, because I was sitting out there watching them in practice today. And in some ways he's like a kid, and I mean that in a complimentary way. A kid out in the backyard playing.

When it feels that way, that's really good.

But when the ball's in the air, and he still goes and finds a way to get it. When he takes it, he gets it and runs with it. He has a habit of doing that. Same thing when he gets kicks and that type of thing. The guy truly enjoys what he does. As a coach, what I respect about him and appreciate, you talk about appreciation of seniors, is the way he practices. Maybe he's missed a snap, I'm trying to remember when it would have been, spring ball or camp or now in season. When he's out there, he's working.

His number's on that GPS are pretty high. So this guy is out there going. That's the best form of leadership is practicing well and also showing that you enjoy the game. It's really nice when you enjoy the game. Little tougher when you're the right guard. Okay, go block that guy. It's not exactly like catching a ball and running forward and being famous. But I appreciate the way he operates and works out there in the field.

**Q. How would you describe your post-commitment visit policy for recruits?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Hasn't changed much since last time we talked about it, it's about the same.

**Q. I know you can't talk about anything specifically. But there was another recruit that decided to leave, and also mentioned specifically that you were targeting other recruits that were already committed, and he felt it was maybe a hypocritical policy do you have any additional thoughts on this policy and it changing?**

KIRK FERENTZ: No, nothing new. We'll talk about it and review it when the season gets over. But I think we're set in what we're doing and how we're doing it.

You know, there is a young guy, Carter Hill who committed to Texas, December 1st, whatever year, it was like 1983. He was a guy I had my sights set on, my heart set on and all that stuff. I remember walking around the school that day blown away. And Carl Jackson said better to find out now than February. And I didn't know what the heck he was talking about, and it took me a couple weeks and I figured it out.

So back then I learned about recruiting and the way it works. There's no guarantees until signing day. I think that's something we all realize. So we play every case individually, and from my standpoint, looking at the big picture, we're going to have ups and downs, we'll have guys commit, decommit, we'll have guys commit, and typically we have a pretty good feel of who is in what category. Every now and then you get a surprise. It's just the way it goes.

You've got to have good recruits to be successful, I get that. What's really important is identifying and finding players that are going to fit here in our program and thrive in our environment. And it's not for everybody.

Ultimately, that's what we have to do. I encourage all recruits to do the same thing. If you're not sure, look around. Because we try to be straight up front about who we are and what we are, and how we do things. One thing, you can't promise too much, other than opportunity.

It's my 18th year here, so I promise you, I'm not searching for my identity anymore. I've been through that. I know who we are and who we want to be. We'll tweak things here and adjust to the times. We have a good feel about what we're trying to do. We'll try to keep identifying guys that are going to come in here and thrive. Whether it's a Josey Jewell or whomever it may be, find the right guys that are going to be here.

I'm confident at the end of the day, by Signing Day, we'll have the right 20-22 guys here, and hopefully the guys that are out looking find the places -- most importantly, they find the places that are best for them. Because that's what it's all about for every individual, find the best place for you to be. What is the best school, the best program to be in where you can thrive and be happy.

**Q. You guys have had the no visit policy for as long as I can remember, have you ever experienced this much back lash before?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Recruiting has gotten so heightened, you know? At the end of the day, those recruiting rankings, really don't mean crap. I mean, with all due respect. The only rankings that count are the ones in January. It's kind of like winning games. 500 yards offense or 150, if you win, it's a great game, you know? As a head coach, I can say that. Offense, defense, I don't care, as long as we win, we're all happy, and we'll find a way to fix or address whatever we have to.

So, yeah, recruiting is an industry now. There's always been interest in it. Now it's an industry just like the draft. The ridiculous grades they give on drafts, things like that. People that really don't know the systems these players are going through and all that stuff. I'm not knocking it. It's entertaining, but you want to be successful, you have to have an idea of what it is you want to do and who you're going to be. Hopefully you get enough guys that join the program and fit that thing and move forward.

**Q. The perception is you don't make any exceptions. Is that fair?**

KIRK FERENTZ: I think it's like discipline, every case, in your kids at home, same way, every case is unique

and different. There are a lot of things you can consider. I've got 100-plus players I'm responsible for. So if one walks into my office with an issue, and two hours later another guy, you know, one guy may have a lot of credit in the bank, the other guy may not have much credit. Those kind of things. Those all weigh in. It's all human stuff.

No, it's not like Russia from 1960 or something like that. It's a benevolent dictatorship. The best line I ever heard was Marcus Simmons' dad said we teach democracy but don't exercise it here. He was a principal at a school. I thought that was a pretty good line. But anyway, every case is unique.

**Q. Got any plans for Thanksgiving, favorite Dish?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah. We're going to get on the bus and go to the hotel, our normal pregame.

Thanksgiving will be on Saturday. Looking forward to that. With that, I'll wish everybody a Happy Thanksgiving. I think we have a lot to be thankful for.