

University of Iowa Football

Media Conference

Saturday, November 23, 2019

Kirk Ferentz

Postgame

Iowa - 19, Illinois - 10

KIRK FERENTZ: Obviously, we're thrilled to get the victory. It was a competitive, tough November Big Ten football game, and that's fully what we expected coming into this thing.

Every conference game is earned, every victory is earned, and every game is important, too, and our guys understand that and did understand that. I told them early in the week, I think it's the first point I made Tuesday, this Illinois team is nothing remotely close to the one we played last year, and last year's chain of events, just the game got away before it was ever a ballgame. I think we realized this was going to be a tough contest, and on top of that, it's the seniors' last game in Kinnick, so that's a special thing, too. A lot of variables coming in. Big plays both sides, a lot of explosive plays both sides, both ways, and then certainly some missed opportunities for both teams.

But maybe it was representative, Keith Duncan setting a record today, which I wasn't aware of, but to set a Big Ten record single season, made four but also missed two, and in a lot of ways kind of representative of our football team. I thought Keith has practiced well and he practiced well again this week. I thought we had a good week of practice, but we missed a couple opportunities. Keith the same way, but the good news is he fought through it and kept fighting, nailed them when we needed them, and I think our team did the same thing.

A couple keys to the ballgame, the turnover/takeaway ratio, we knew that was going to be big coming in. They've done a great job with takeaways, so we ended up with three takeaways today and then the one turnover. We won that battle.

A couple big sequences, Nate stepping out of that sack and the big play down the field, that was certainly a great, great effort, and then just that little flurry at the end of the half where we ended up blitzing and got the sack and then gave the offense field position to get three points before we went in the locker room, I thought that was a really important sequence for us.

Transitioning down to the fourth quarter, I don't mind telling you I was thinking a little bit about the



Wisconsin-Illinois game just standing there, where Wisconsin is up 20-7, 20-13, then it's 23-14 I guess it was or whatever, and then back and forth. A lot of ups and downs in that fourth quarter. Just really proud of the way our guys stayed the course, and probably as slow as we started out defensively in the second half, we finished just the opposite, and that's when it counts is at the end.

All in all, really proud of our guys, and we have a short week in front of us, so we'll wrap this thing up and get working on the next one.

Q. What was it like for you emotionally to be out there to represent Devonte Young?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, not quite the same as when the other three boys were out there, but unfortunately Devonte's folks couldn't get here, so I was thrilled that he asked, scraped the bottom of the barrel on that one. But I'm not going to tell you every one of these guys is like one of our sons, but we spend a lot of time together, and I think Devonte it's fitting because of his story -- every player that comes here, hoping to start every game, have an NFL career, but the best bet is getting your degree and just bringing a good attitude and a good work ethic every day, and that's exactly what he's done. He runs routes every day against our defense, wears them out. He's done a great job, found his niche as a special teams player and he's one of our core guys. So just so proud of him and the way he's handled everything that's happened in his career, and he's on track for graduation. He's contributing to us having a good year. It was a special honor for us to be out there and greet him at the end there.

Q. What's Nate Stanley meant to this program? It seemed to really show in his emotions today.

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah. I think the statistics are certainly -- they say a lot about what he's done as a player. But the thing I appreciate and I think all of us appreciate including his teammates is just the guy he is every day. He works extremely hard. He's a high-integrity guy. Mental toughness, physical toughness, all those things you hope you find in a football player he's got them, and he's all about the team, and he has been right from day one. I think about him getting thrown in the first time against North Dakota State four years ago, the way he responded there, the play I just referenced a minute ago. He's going to do everything

he can to help our team win ballgames, and we may even move him to running back this week, I don't know; he's our leading per-carry back today. But I can't say enough about him. It's been really a pleasure and honor to work with him. Just really, really proud that he's got two more games for us. Really happy about that part.

Q. Keith joked that could hear the crowd booing when he came out on the field. Today that was going to be enough to win, field goals, the way your defense was playing?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, well, most of the time. But yeah, points were big. You're talking about the deliberations there? And for a minute I was thinking emotionally and then I started thinking logically, so we got him out there, and if we took a penalty there, so what, it was pretty close, a chip shot. But it was the smart thing to do. It just took me a while to come to that conclusion, I guess.

Q. How would you describe your defense? I don't know if I'd call it dominant but you look at the scoreboard and there's 10 points on the board.

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I don't get too excited about stuff, but I did think this week, that's pretty good. We're 12, whatever we were average wise. So you don't get excited about statistics, but now we are into November, so they do have a some bearing and credit to those guys. First thing that always jumps out at me about it is it's more of a team effort. We don't just have one dominant guy playing, and then we've had a lot of moving parts with Christian being out. Ojemudia played a really good game today after missing last week.

I think that's a great thing these guys work together, they work hard. They've had some ups and downs, but the production has been great.

And to that point, great to have Kristian back out there today, too, a senior who a couple weeks ago was looking at the clock just wondering what's going to happen, so great to get him back on the field, and OJ, but it's been a great effort and they're getting a good plan every week and they take it to the field and do a good job with it.

Q. What distinguishes them, if there is such a thing, from an ordinary defense of yours?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I don't know. If you think about '04, okay, that's kind of one of the -- that '04 line, all four of those guys were in NFL camps the next year. Travis Meade being a free agent, but nonetheless, those guys, D-Rob was back here last week, Babineaux played however many years, 18 or 16 or whatever it was. So when I think of that '04 defense, I think of that front four right off the bat. We had pretty

good linebackers, too.

But this group it's just more of a team effort. These guys work at it. They're really together. They prepare. And they just -- all kind of know what to do and where to be, and then every now and then we'll come up with some big plays. But it's been spread around a little bit. It's not just A.J. doing it all the time or whatever. I saw Joe having to chase another guy down today. I think that's been for me personally, that's kind of been the interesting part watching them work.

Q. Did you think with Keith staying two years as an understudy kicker, he stays for two years, do you think something good is coming? What does it say about your program, too?

KIRK FERENTZ: That to me is -- the whole story is -- I'm not saying he had a bad attitude, okay, but when somebody beats you out, they win the job in competition, an older guy, a lot of times you just see guys just kind of -- I call it a second-team cocoon, even where it's a pretty safe zone, because I don't really have to play on Saturday so I can kind of like do this, do that. I think sometimes guys don't compete or practice, prepare the way they need to. And he went through a little bit of that, right after it was over.

But then he went back to work, and he and Caleb have just been -- I swear to God, it's a coin toss with those two guys. It's a real credit to both of them. That to me is the story is just the attitude. Nobody knows -- I didn't know he could break the record today. I had no idea. But to me it's more about his attitude, the work ethic he's displayed, and he's a great teammate. Every day you see him, he's got a smile on his face. He's a positive guy.

Q. Kristian Welch kind of mirrors a lot of your stories. In some ways he just went across the state line, but to be up in central -- north central Wisconsin and grab him and bring him back, he's kind of had this up-and-down career injury wise and then all of a sudden the last two weeks he comes back and double-digit tackles, a sack in each game. Just seems like his importance is really instrumental.

KIRK FERENTZ: I don't disagree, and I'm smiling here thinking of the first time I saw him, it was a spring practice, he was a junior or sophomore, I think probably junior out at spring practice out on the far fields there. He and his dad were here, and there was something about the way he looked. He looked like a football player to me.

He ends up coming here, we offer him, all that stuff. He's done a good job, don't get me wrong, but this is the year where it's started to really click for him. We

played him on special teams right off the bat, but this is where it really started to click for him, and then just when it's starting to click, he gets hurt.

So how disappointing is that, but for him to finish up these last two games in Kinnick, these will be great memories for him, and he's still got two to go. You just like to see the story end like it has for him. It's a real credit to him.

Q. Tyrone's catch right before the half, the 4th down conversion on the opening drive. It seemed like they were all at big spots.

KIRK FERENTZ: Absolutely. You get in games like this, and they made it really tough for us to run the football today. You look up at halftime, we have a lot of yards, we just don't have any points. So you start worrying about that. So to make those big plays and then converting for Dunc to come back and nail a couple field goals when we needed them, and our defense playing the way they were, that's what it takes to pull it all together and get a victory. Pretty much everything positive that happened out there was critical to us being successful today. There was nothing easy about it.

Q. Tying Hayden Fry for most Big Ten wins, what does that mean to you?

KIRK FERENTZ: Probably means I've been here a while, whatever it is, 21 years now plus nine, so 30 years. But I was just saying in there, if you had asked me in 1981, I didn't know where Iowa was, why anybody would live there, and I think if you asked Coach Fry the same thing in 1970, he'd probably tell you the same thing. It's interesting how life goes sometimes, but I think -- I don't want to speak for him, but I think what he found here was pretty good, and I know how he feels about this state, this university today, and ditto with me. I just feel very fortunate. I'll share this with you.

I applied for three jobs that spring in 1981: One at Appalachian State; no interview. One at Hawai'i; I got a phone call. The guy said, hey, we need somebody that knows the West Coast. I don't even know why he called me; that was stupid, but he did. But I've never forgotten that, and I've tried to carry that with me and remember it, and I'm a fan of his. And the other one was Coach Fry, and my mentor Jim Moore talked him into interviewing me. But there's never been a master plan. It's just kind of dumb luck, and I'm glad I'm lucky.

Q. They lost four players from this class last year; some guys are playing on Sundays now and obviously you haven't won all the games but it's been a pretty successful season.

KIRK FERENTZ: That was a prominent thought of

mine on January 2 sitting on the plane getting ready to come back from Tampa. Should have been happy and celebrating a great victory and a great team, and you worry about those kinds of things. It's the day and age we live in. But the bottom line is we've got 19 guys in this class that have done a great job their entire careers here, but they really took ownership starting in January, and everything we've tried to encourage them to do, they've done it. Just they've been just so committed. Anything good that's happening on the field right now, it all starts with those guys. They've been great. They carry the water the way you hope they would, they model the way college athletes should conduct themselves, whether it's how they train, prepare, do things out in the community, in the classroom. Just extremely proud of those guys.

As a coach or a parent, the number one thing you're worried about 10 years from now, what's this guy going to be doing because they aren't going to be playing pro football unless Babineaux or one of those lucky guys. What are they going to be doing, how are they going to be doing; no concerns with this group; they've been extraordinary.