

University of Iowa Football Media Conference

Friday, November 23, 2018

Kirk Ferentz



KIRK FERENTZ: So first of all, our players saw the movie Creed II, I think it was, Wednesday night after our Thanksgiving dinner. I promise you, I was not in the movie. We're trying to duplicate. Looked like I guess somebody bumped into Stanley out there on the field. I'll gladly take a little luck, no big deal.

The other thing, too, I'm not a big shopper. Today is Black Friday. I'm smart enough to know that, it was in the paper this morning. For us this is a Black and Gold Friday. We've really enjoyed playing these Friday games at the end of the season, I think it's a great tradition. Really pleased with the way our guys performed today.

It was a hard-fought win out there, a physical game, tough game. We knew it was going to be a tough game. We're playing a team that's got a lot of good players, very well-coached. They've had a lot of momentum these past six weeks. We knew there was going to be nothing easy about this thing.

The bottom line is, games get decided on the field. It's all about performance, what guys do out on the field. I thought our guys did a good job starting Sunday, getting ready, they prepared very well all week. Really focused. Not being in school can be a good thing, it can be a bad thing. I thought our guys really matured and prepared well.

They showed up on kickoff really for the 12th time this season, they've showed up and played, competed. Today we had to compete right to the very end. It was really a tremendous outcome.

Really happy for our seniors. Can't say enough about them. I've been talking about them all season long. Feel even stronger now. Maybe as much as anything, for a moment like at the end there with Miguel, to me it kind of represents what's great about sports. It's fitting that he was a senior. Just had one of his more disappointing moments of his career minutes before that. Then he came out and nailed that field goal at the end. Just really pleased for him. I think that's representative of the whole senior class.

Q. When did you make the decision to try to go for it on fourth and eight?

KIRK FERENTZ: We had a play we felt good about,

which is what we ran. We decided we're going to do that. If we hadn't got the look we were hoping for, we would have called a timeout and punted the ball. It matched up. Like everything else, it's down to execution. Our players did a great job blocking the blitz. T.J. got open, Nate gave him a great ball.

Q. What is it like when you get that look you want?

KIRK FERENTZ: And it works? It's awesome. That's what you work hard for. There's so much precision, so much detail that goes into a play like that. The guys have done a good job. Then sometimes you get it, sometimes you don't. We got it, pulled the trigger. Those guys did a great job. That's the difference between winning and losing.

Q. Your first three scoring drives, 11, 13, 15 plays. What does that do for confidence for the offense?

KIRK FERENTZ: You draw them up, that's the way you draw them up. Really impressive. It started up front. Our guys up front did a really nice job giving everybody else a chance to do what they're supposed to.

Both our backs ran really well. I thought Toren ran really hard. He always does. A lot of energy. It's been fun and enjoyable to watch Mekhi continue to grow. You look at him, he doesn't look anything special, doesn't look that big, this or that, but the guy is a good player. I think he is deceptively good, deceptively strong when he runs the ball. On top of that, as good of a young guy we have on our football field.

Q. Do you leave the kicker alone at a moment like that?

KIRK FERENTZ: I said something quickly to him as he went on the field. We knew they were going to try to ice him. At that point, yeah, let him do what he does. I don't know anything about kicking. Keep your eyes down. I know that. Wasn't much I could tell him that was going to help him.

Q. Of all your seniors, Sam and Parker Hesse have been roommates, put on the defensive line together, both made a lot of progress. Is that kind of Iowa football right there?

KIRK FERENTZ: It really is. Sam has a good attitude, shows up every day on time, works hard.

Last year he played pretty good football for us. It was

during the spring where we saw this guy being a little better than we think he is. He ended up earning a starting job. He's done a good job as a football player, but unbelievable person, great leader, draws other people in, that type of deal.

Everything I just said about Sam, amplified about Parker, same thing. Got thrown in before he was ready four years ago. Went out and competed as hard as he could in that championship game, played against a first-round draft pick. He fought hard, gave us a chance to win. Tremendous young guy, what a leader he is, too, in his own quiet way.

Q. Jake walked on to the team from a small school, what has his work ethic been like?

KIRK FERENTZ: If I was a safety prospect, we offered a safety prospect a scholarship, I would never take it. We never play them. It's always a walk-on guy like Jake. Pretty much the same story.

Reese Morgan identified him. Certain guys just kind of display some things. Pagel. That's been Jake's story. He showed up, worked hard, just one day at a time. Ends up making his mark on special teams. Next thing you know, he's in there a year ago, maybe before his time. Got burned a little bit, which is typical, too, of guys when they first play safety. He kept on learning. Again, tremendous leader on top of it. He's been a big part of our football team.

Q. Did you have to be talked into the fake field goal?

KIRK FERENTZ: No. We came in thinking aggressive. Just like that fourth down call, if you see it on film, you think it's there, you see it in practice, it looks good, then you go with it. If it doesn't look good, you don't go with it.

Maybe we got greedy, but we were playing to win. First half, too, maybe didn't have the opportunity to make that type of decision.

They did a good job of defending it. Credit goes to them on that one.

Q. Second-guessing?

KIRK FERENTZ: Fourth quarter, I thought about that a little bit. Second guess, that really happens (laughter)?

Q. Even if you get the look.

KIRK FERENTZ: We were going for the kick. It's as simple as that. It was an opportunity right there where we felt we might be able to really push this thing through. They made the stop, to their credit. Came right back, we got a three-and-up, then they hit their gutsy call more than any today. Paid off for them.

They drove the ball. That's when the momentum swung.

Q. Do you think you go for the fourth down play five, six years ago? When did that aggressive mindset take shape?

KIRK FERENTZ: Along the theme of the '14 season, that kind of really caused us as a staff to really go back and talk about a lot of things. We do every year. We really dug deep on that one.

You look at the world a little differently. We still are who we are, the way we drove the ball, if I could play that way every series, I'd love it. You also want to give your team every chance to be successful. We try to be smart about that.

But there's no guarantees in this game ever about anything. You got to realize that. What do they say, no biscuit for riskit, or no riskit no biscuit.

Q. (Question about the running game.)

KIRK FERENTZ: Our line continues to mature. They've really grown and gotten better. The veteran guys inside, Reynolds and Keegan, those guys have really done a good job. From where I stand, looked like those guys played pretty well. Our tackles just keep climbing the ladder. The backs ran hard. One of those days where it happened. Like to do it every week.

Q. Talk about your senior class going out undefeated against Nebraska.

KIRK FERENTZ: I think they're pleased about it. Trophy games, we got three out of four this year. Obviously like to win four. But they take a lot of pride in all those things. I think every game is important. These guys have just really worked hard. The trophy obviously symbolizes the fact that you won the game. Bigger picture, I can't say enough about what that these guys have done, what we ask them to do. They've delivered and then some since January.

It's evolved. They've improved as we've gone along. They're a really good group of guys. It's been a lot of fun to work with them. Glad we got one more month with them.

Q. (Question about the bowl game with warmer weather)

KIRK FERENTZ: I have no idea. I know it will be warmer than last year. Make a prediction, go out on a limb. We had a great experience last year. I'm not minimizing that at all. It was a great experience. We're looking forward to wherever they want to send us.

Q. Theme for the defensive line this year, togetherness. How have you seen that develop?

KIRK FERENTZ: Those guys, they're literally together all the time. I joked with them last night, I left snack, I kind of leave near the end, they out-waited me, asked if they're going to start a card game, all sitting at the table there eating ice cream, whatever they were eating. They're like that. But it's genuine, too. It's genuine. They care about each other. They look after each other. They have fun together, but they also work hard together. Reese and KB have done a good job of continuing to hold these guys together.

Kind of learned to enjoy it. It was new to us in '11 I guess when we started this. But it's like anything else, it all gets down to the players. They have to take it in, go out and play. Just happy about our guys doing that.

Q. (Question about Reese Morgan)

KIRK FERENTZ: My mind, Reese, he's a master coach. Everything he's done has been good. Probably one of my biggest mistakes in 20 years, not hiring him on the first staff. He did a tremendous job at West. Did a tremendous job at Benton. Just been consistent, everything we've asked him to do, tight ends, offensive line, taking Joe's job, which is no easy task. Joe was an excellent coach.

Went to him about going to the defensive line a couple years back. Felt like we needed some work there. Everywhere he goes, it's top quality. If he was here, he'd deflect it to KB right away. Both those guys have worked really well with the players. Reese to me, I've always felt like the essence of coaching starts in high school, like the best coaches I've ever been around continue to be high school coaches or they had roots there. That is education. That's what coaching is all about.

To me, Reese embodies all those things. He's been great. Does a lot of things well, too. Boy, he's an excellent coach.

Q. When you take a shot like that, do you buy some credibility with your players?

KIRK FERENTZ: You hope so. That's what you're trying to tell them, we think you're going to do it. I was confident we'd get a stop.

Q. When you talk about this Black Friday tradition, tell me your thoughts on how it's been, what you look forward to down the road?

KIRK FERENTZ: At this time of year I like it. If it was our opening game, I'd be fine with it, too. You'd have a chance to have an extra day for the next one.

Like in the NFL, kind of funny, I heard Brett Favre talking maybe a week ago Thursday, on the radio, talking about short games. I think from a coaching standpoint, it forces us to be a little bit more concise, not have too many good ideas. Then the players really have to wire in on it. If you have a mature team, you have a chance. If your team is not so mature, maybe it isn't a great deal.