

University of Iowa Football

Media Conference

Saturday, November 4, 2017

Kirk Ferentz



Iowa - 55, Ohio State - 24

KIRK FERENTZ: First of all, just really proud of our football team. I thought it was an outstanding effort by all of our guys. We came into this game heavy underdogs, and for good reason. Ohio State is a tremendous football team. But the big thing is our guys really believed in themselves all week long. They had a good week of preparation, and then most importantly came out and really played with great energy, great effort, a lot of grit, and played opportunistic football, and that's important in a game like this.

I am really proud of their effort there. I thought we grew up a little bit today, and that's kind of ironic. Nate Kaeding was our honorary captain. Just thinking about that out there, one of the things I told the team yesterday about Nate, it was up at the Penn State game, which was a big game of growth for our entire program in 2000. Nate had three field goals in that game, over 45 yards, and then nailed a 26-yarder, I think, in overtime, double overtime for the victory.

Up until then he was wobbling around a little bit, but that was really a turnaround game for him. I think that's what we saw from our team tonight.

We did a good job in the basic areas that you have to win, turnover takeaway margin was good obviously. I thought we blocked for the first time like you need to if you're going to be on the varsity, and then defensively it was a rocky beginning for us against a really explosive team, but we settled down and finished that off.

Those things were all really positive, and I think the biggest factors in the game and the biggest thing is our guys finished the fight. Just really proud of them and just want to thank our fans again. What another great environment in Kinnick. We're really fortunate and they were there start to finish. Very much appreciate that, and I'll throw it out for questions.

Q. What impressed you the most about Nate Stanley?

KIRK FERENTZ: I talked about our team growing, and that's part of it. He's done a lot of good things this year and had some tough plays, which anybody that plays quarterback is going to. But the way he just keeps coming back, and he did a lot of really good things

today against really good competition, so that was impressive. I think probably my favorite play is the one where he's got the guy bringing him down and he finds a way to get the ball in the end zone there for a touchdown. A lot of big throws by him, and he had five touchdown passes, so that's pretty good, too.

Just the way he's playing right now, really proud of the way he's grown and developed.

Q. Pretty apparent that you guys were wanting to keep your foot on the gas against these guys. Was that something you discussed during the week?

KIRK FERENTZ: I don't know what they average a game; 900 yards of offense, it's ridiculous, and 55 points and whatever. You'd better be playing with your foot on the gas because these guys can close the gap pretty quickly. And I think our players understood that. It's one of those things that if you're not going full speed, this thing could change quick. The way they took the ball down after the pick six, the way they took the ball down the field both those possessions, that's enough right there to keep you on the edge of your seat.

Q. How long were you holding out with the pole cat?

KIRK FERENTZ: Pole cat? You guys got our vocabulary down. We're not very good at confidential stuff.

I just told Gary and Ed on the radio, needless to say, this goes without saying, if it's an original thought play, then it didn't come out of my brain, that's for sure. LeVar has done a great job with special teams. Kevin Spencer has been great, I think, addition, but LeVar has really embraced it. We copied it from somebody. I'm not sure who, but we copied it and thought it might have a chance to go. Figured that was a pretty good situation for it.

Q. You had a pretty good idea Kluver could catch the ball?

KIRK FERENTZ: Quite frankly I was more worried about the throw than the catch. I felt pretty good about Kluver. He's a senior, and everybody wanted to kill Kluver his first year when he was on campus, now everybody loves him, so he's really grown over five years' time. That's true, too. They did want to kill him.

He was hard to like for a while.

Q. This was a tough week for Brian, but the way he came back today with this game plan, they never seemed to find your tight ends; they just seemed like they were on their heels. Talk about his contribution today, just his game plan.

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I think if you're an offensive coordinator you're going to have a lot of tough weeks. That's just the nature of that position. I think he did a great job. I think our whole staff did a good job putting a plan together. The real secret is the execution, and you talk about guys growing, our two tight ends are both young guys right now, they're young players, but you can see that growth there. They're doing some things maybe you wouldn't have counted on back in August.

Overall it was a good plan certainly. I think the way the game was called was really admirable, and we're doing it against a defense that looked like an NFL defense to us.

But I'll go back to, again, those guys up front at least enabled us to get it going. They grew up a little bit today.

Q. James Daniels is always saying he takes it one game at a time. He did say today this game was a little different. Seems like he kind of spearheaded that effort.

KIRK FERENTZ: He did. He made the point that he was actually in the stands in '13 the last time we played these guys. He was over in the stands, and he was impressed by the way we played that day, so I think he shared that with the guys. Talking about our line growing up, I thought the guys I need to give credit to are James and Sean Welsh, our two elder statesmen. Both happen to be Ohio natives, but those two guys are our veteran guys, and I think they're starting to show the other guys how to act a little bit.

Q. Given that, where you were the last three or four weeks offensively and where you were on your offensive line, what's the biggest difference? What changed from then to now?

KIRK FERENTZ: We've talked about every game, right, and there's no magic answers, no magic formulas or pixie dust or that stuff. You've just got to keep practicing. I think the biggest thing, we've got a belief in our people and we've got a belief in our system. You just stay the course, you just keep pressing, keep working, and you hope at some point, not in a this is a breakout moment but you hope at some point you see you're gaining some traction. We haven't had a lot of those yet. We've just kind of been hit-and-missing in a lot of different areas, just haven't had the kind of

consistency in any one area that you need. So hopefully this is a start to something. We're hardly ready to ordain anything, but hopefully this will be the start to some growth.

Q. What was your favorite Josh Jackson interception?

KIRK FERENTZ: That's a good question. That last one was kind of a B.J. Lowery moment, right, very, very similar. But the one in the middle where he fought for that ball and took it out. You know, probably represented the kind of effort we're going to need to win this game tonight. We knew we had to compete, and it was a great effort by him. But all three of those, you come up with four turnovers like that, four picks, that's pretty good.

Q. It seemed like you guys were confusing J.T. Barrett a little bit, rolling some coverages and just keeping him off balance.

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, we kind of do what we do, and feeling those guys, they all get together just like the offense and put a good plan together, but that cushion is so important. I thought our guys up front fought. Talk about maturation, I think they're gaining ground every week. Some opportunistic plays, and then you come up with a couple picks like that, and the first one, I mean, boy, that got the crowd even more into it.

Those are all really important things if you're going to beat a team like Ohio State.

Q. What was the shift at halftime?

KIRK FERENTZ: Well, I don't know. I mean, we just started playing a little bit better. It's not like you draw up too many things different. You're always trying to talk and shades and this kind of stuff, what they're doing. But that's why playing these guys is so hard. It's like they've got 12 guys out there, and then on top of it, he's a veteran, so he knows how to play. I mean, he's a good player, but he really knows how to play.

Q. You mentioned earlier the Kaeding game or whatever; how important is it to kind of get these landmark wins?

KIRK FERENTZ: I mean, this is the schedule this week, and we've got another tough one next week and two more tough ones after that. My point there, I guess you don't have any way of choosing who you're playing on a given week. But we're at a point, eight weeks into it, where we just needed to gain more traction as a football team. Again, we're hardly out of the woods right now, but tonight we looked more like we want to look like, an Iowa football team. Hopefully that's a good step, and hopefully -- with young players what they need is to gain some confidence, and you can't hand it to them. You try to get it to them in practice and

all that, but at some point you've got to go out and do something, and I think at least we did something tonight.

Q. So much happened after, but what about the first play of the game and just maybe the emotion?

KIRK FERENTZ: I think it certainly helped, yeah, it certainly helped and got our fans even more juiced up. They were ready to go. But as much as that was good, then those next two possessions, I don't know about our players, but I know I was feeling, oh, man, this is going to be -- somehow, some way. But to that point, I think our team -- it wasn't like we laid down on offense. We responded there, so we were moving the ball and doing some things, and a little bit more consistent. I know we had one three-and-out in there somewhere, but anyway, I thought the team was responding to the situations a little bit better overall today.

Q. Who called the fake punt?

KIRK FERENTZ: There were two fakes, right? I almost put my foot in my mouth there. So I'll just say two things. It ain't in our playbook, okay? If the play is not in our playbook, then I didn't call it, so I'll let you connect the dots. I normally don't throw players under the bus, right? I did call the fake-out in the Orange Bowl where it was wild kingdom, but that was a little different situation. I guess this is the same one. But if I call it, it's okay. If somebody else calls it, not so good.

Q. You talked about the growth of the tight ends. What are some of the keys that made them so effective today?

KIRK FERENTZ: I thought T.J. last week did some really good things. It's unfortunate that one penalty that was called against him. That was a big play we like. He made a good catch and then physical with his run on it and that type of thing.

It's like our team, it's week by week, and you just never know if they're going to have a breakthrough moment or when they're going to start. Both those guys, they've got things they can get better at certainly, but I think they're certainly helping us out a lot, and Nate seems to find them, too, when they get that chance. There's no magic, nothing magic I can tell you. It's just hopefully a part of the process.

Q. When you think about the enthusiasm you had for the uniforms and then for the way they played and then tonight, this has to be a cherry on the top.

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, we probably can't wear those on the road, right? But it's funny, I asked the former players, Jaleel is back here, Desmond, all those guys. I said, what do you guys think. They all loved them. Our players loved them, our former players love them. We'll do it again at some point, but I know we won't

next week. But like I told the guys on Tuesday, I'm glad you guys like them, I just hope people say we looked good playing in them. I hope that's what they said, and that certainly happened tonight, so I'm more pleased about that.

We'll do uniforms again next year, I guess. Keep the pressure on them. Those guys thought they were the best ones we've worn, the former player committee, so talking to those guys, including my son James. He's a critic, also. We've got a lot of them around.

Q. Why is this such a difficult place to play for top-five teams?

KIRK FERENTZ: You know, the stadium has always been great and our fans have always been great, and they rise to the occasion. But ultimately you've got to play. You've got to play. You know, so I think it gets down to the team doing a good job of filtering through everything, what's important, and then really staying focused on that. And then also realizing if it's going to happen, it's got to be start to finish. It's got to be start to finish. You can't leave the door open. We suffered that fate six, seven weeks ago, whenever it was. Today was a little different story, and another challenge next week, but just really pleased for our guys.