

# University of Iowa Football Media Conference

Thursday, December 15, 2016

## Kirk Ferentz

KIRK FERENTZ: This week got off to a really good start with our awards banquet on Sunday. It was a really nice afternoon and certainly a lot of very well-deserved honors were recognized and more could have been probably. Just a really nice day for the players, their families, and certainly friends and also the fans that showed up. So we're very, very appreciative of that.

I think it's got a real nice touch to the Brett Greenwood Award, which means an awful lot historically in our program to have former players back. It was great to have Sean Considine, Tyler Luebke, and Pete McMahon back to get the retroactive awards and make comments. To me it was the highlight of the whole program. So it was really a nice day.

Then we transitioned into an important week for all of our players and students on campus here, going through finals week it's always a little stressful and taxing for all of them. But certainly an important week. As important as they've had during the course of the semester. I think bottom line is this: We've tried to keep our hands off the players at that point. We practiced Saturday, they've been off til tomorrow night, and that will be our first time back in a football activity. So we'll get that started again.

But we wanted to make sure they've had the chance to do what they had to do and finish up their work in quality fashion. Want to take this opportunity. We have seven guys that will be walking on Saturday for graduation, so certainly happy about that. Couple guys have already completed their work, and then we'll have a couple more graduate this spring, so all 14 of our seniors will be graduates by May. That's something that's certainly good. I think certainly it's a reminder to our players of the value of setting goals and prioritizing their academics and also the value of the support that all of them have been fortunate to receive, whether it's on campus or from home. Usually it takes that combination for people to have success. So happy



team, but to get his degree. We start that conversation in the recruiting process.

Really the most lasting accomplishment any player will have when they come to college is getting their degree. Whether they win the Doak Award or whatever it may be, the Thorpe Award, at the end of the day getting their degree is something that's going to be with them their entire lives. So really pleased for our guys and hopefully they finish up strong on that front.

We will shift back into football tomorrow night. Basically we are having three phases. The period between now and game time. We'll go through a phase where it's a little like preseason practice or spring practice where we're just trying to hone our skills a little bit, get back into a groove and get a rhythm and tempo, and get our fundamentals where they need to be. Then we'll go through a game week simulation and then do the same thing once we get down there. We'll travel after that first game week simulation.

So kind of broken down into three phases. Hopefully the guys will have a little window to get home. It will be a small window, and it will just be the guys locally. But hopefully we can work that out where nobody's left here on campus, and if they are, we'll absorb those guys as a coaching staff.

Then certainly we're looking forward to getting down to Tampa. As I said before, it's just a great place to go, a great place to compete, and it's always a tough opponent. So those things are all still in place. Medically, nothing new since last time I talked. Obviously, Drake Kulick will not be able to play, and Greg Maybin is in the same situation. Both those guys have fractures and no chance to get them back. Manny Rugamba is a week-by-week thing. He's making good progress, we'll just have to see where it is here another week from now and go from there. But we certainly can't count on him.

on that.

Last thing really quickly, it sounds like ticket sales have gone pretty well. I'm not exactly following that on a minute-to-minute basis, but it sounds like it's been a positive response through our department. I also know people will get them from other places as well. People who live down in Florida. So just very appreciative of our fans and their support. It's been great all season long. On the road, certainly they have traditionally been great at bowl games, and mentioned a couple times the last two games in Kinnick are as good as I can remember. We're certainly looking forward to having our fans in Tampa with us when we get there.

**Q. You didn't mentioned the Joe Moore Award. I imagine that would be a great personal thing for you?**

KIRK FERENTZ: It really is very, very special on two levels. Coach Moore was my high school coach my senior year, and then I worked with him in 1981. He is probably the reason I'm here right now, on a lot of levels, let me put it that way. But maybe as important as anything, he basically talked Coach Fry into hiring me on the phone. Unless I fell asleep in the interview, I had a really good chance of getting the job.

He's an excellent football coach, excellent coach in general, and a great salesman on top of it. So from that front, it was really neat to have a chance to come back here in '99. One of the first pieces of advice he gave me, I'll share this with you, don't win too soon, too fast too soon, or too much too soon. Then he came out and watched spring practice and said, don't worry about it. You're going to be okay on that front. But just he was a really special person in my life.

And it's funny what a small world it is. I didn't meet Aaron Taylor until last spring. Aaron played for Coach Moore at Notre Dame, and I was speaking to him on the phone last year and commending him on the work he had done to make this award a reality, and Aaron has been the driving force behind it. It was interesting. Aaron didn't grow up with a dad, and he said the two most influential people in his life were Bob Latis (sp), his high school coach, and Coach Moore, and that's really what was motivating him to make sure this thing went through. So that really resonated with me for obvious reasons.

out of the lineups. We had different lineups weekly, that type of thing. Then for me, it was representative of our entire football team. What Aaron said about our line kind of covered the whole team in many ways.

So it's really special. I'm really pleased not only for our line, but the tight ends, the fullbacks, they're a big part of that. The running backs still have to run in the right place and read things right and they've done a great job of that. You've written about C.J. and I would emphasize the role C.J. has, getting us in the right plays, getting us out of bad plays. He's done a great job in his career doing that, and that's a big part of having success as well.

**Q. With that said, it's also a cyclical thing. I know you've looked at the fact that Joe Moore was your high school coach. Your son now coaches a Joe Moore Award winning offensive line. What's that mean to you?**

KIRK FERENTZ: I haven't thought about it that deeply. That's my January stuff usually when everything's done. But it's really neat. It's just really neat. Brian's name is Brian Joseph, so he was always Joseph when Coach Moore talked to him. Brian didn't exist. It was always Joseph. I got Coach Moore hired, actually, as a consultant in Baltimore after he retired from Notre Dame. He finished his career there and he was coaching up in Erie a little bit.

So, anyway, he came down to camp, and he would take Brian back to Erie and drive him around and show him the neighborhoods and all that and show them this is real America. He gave Brian a lot of lectures and life lessons. So I think he'd be really proud of a good moment for him.

**Q. When you look at the progress that unit made over the course of the year, the North Dakota State game, some of the others, even the Penn State game, then the last three, like Nebraska, you guys went heavy almost half the game, you know, 22 or 23, and you still were able to have an 8-minute drive in the fourth quarter, churn out the yards. What kind of pride do you have in just that growth and specifically what they did in the end?**

KIRK FERENTZ: There is really no way to predict any of that stuff. Things just happen or they don't happen. So from the start of the season, I try to articulate this every year. You never know the way things are going

disappointments and setbacks along the way.

But the thing I'm happiest about and proudest of this football team thus far is just the way they've stayed with things. They've stayed determined, they've stayed positive, and stayed together. They've pushed forward. So whether it's the offensive line or entire football team, I think that's what we've witnessed with this group.

Our work's not done. We still have another big hill to climb here in the next couple weeks. But thus far, that's really, I think, been the story of it, and the line is representative of that journey, in some ways just the way they've -- I mean, it did get ugly the first week of November. I think about Arizona State (2004) and it was a hundred yards I think or right at a hundred, so it could get uglier. But we were close to that. It felt like a hundred. So it was a really good rebound for everybody.

**Q. How much does the Iowa football program owe its success to the loyalty of your assistants?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Well, I think, again, that's traditional. I can only go back as far as '81 when I got started here. But that was the thing I valued so much. Again, just kind of living in the moment, and I was living in the moment for about nine years. I wasn't a real deep thinker around the '80s. That's for sure. But after I got out of here and was gone for nine years, during that nine-year period, I thought a lot about what was it that made this such a special place to be? And what made that such a special time in history in this program?

And I still think, and I've said this many times, I think '81 was an historic year, not only for Iowa football but for the Big Ten. You think about the 13 years of it was a tennis game between two teams, two people, two schools to get to the Rose Bowl. So, you know, Iowa broke the ice in '81. It's really changed the complexion of this conference, I and would argue it's still alive today.

If you look at the Big Ten Championship games we've had. Thus far tally up who has been how many times. I think that's the great thing about our conference, it's open competition. But a big part of it, and I'm take a long way around the block here, but the big part is just the staff that we had here, the continuity and the fellowship that we enjoyed. We're all still good friends to this point. We all stay in contact.

the world we're living in. It's more short-term parking than it is long-term.

It's something I really value, and we've been fortunate. In my 27 years here I've worked with a lot of great people, and that's something that's really important to all of us, I think.

**Q. How do you maintain what you want in changing times and as you said short term? How do you deal with that and still get what you want?**

KIRK FERENTZ: I think I'm really lucky that I work in a place that's really unique and special. It's funny I was talking to somebody involved in the NFL a couple days ago, and we were talking in generalities. And I threw out there are a couple organizations that really if you look at it are model organizations. And Pittsburgh always comes to mind, New England comes to mind and Baltimore. I think you can start there with those three teams. The stability that they've demonstrated a decade and beyond.

You wonder why they're successful, and fortunately I've been really lucky. In the 27 years I've been here, we've had leadership on campus that understood that. So whether it's Coach Elliot, Bump Elliott, or Gary Barta or Bob Bowlsby, even the presidents that we've had, they've understood what it takes. They understand it's competitive. They understand there are going to be highs and there are going to be lows, and I think if you demonstrate that you're working hard for the right reasons and with the right priorities, then they let you try to do your job as best as you can.

So it's not like that everywhere. It's something I'm acutely aware of. I read the news every day, almost every day, and I've got that iPad now since we didn't go to a bowl in 2012. I got little new toys and learned how to read all that stuff. It's a crazy world out there.

**Q. You always hear how much continuity helps you on the field with your play. But as coaches, how much does it help you with your lives? All your kids went to the same high school? Chris Doyle talked about that. How important is that?**

KIRK FERENTZ: That's something I've been long appreciative of. I don't know how many coaches in the history -- well, Eddie Robinson, same job, same wife for over 60 years, I think it is. That will never be broken. That record will never be broken. I've got the

community. Having kids in school allows you to be part of the community. My wife is a lot more visible than I am and a lot more involved in things outside this building. But nonetheless, it's allowed us to have a quote/unquote normal life, and most coaches miss out on that part because you're one city to the next and one job to the next. So it's really hard.

You extend yourself, and you're almost afraid to develop relationships because you know at some point they're probably going to get broken. You're going to be moving. It's a little easier with kids when they're not in middle school and high school. But it's not good for adults and it's certainly not good for kids in high school. So that's something I'm really appreciative of. A chance to have them in this building, that's the cherry on top, certainly.

But those things, they all factor into a really nice existence, and a really -- just an opportunity to maybe have a little fuller life than maybe if you were just coaching here and then coaching there.

**Q. Coach Doyle talked about the players you guys bring in. It almost sounds like it's joining the military. You guys look for a certain profile, and it has to fit. And Brian said you can only see it. You can't really describe it.**

KIRK FERENTZ: I'm only laughing because Stanley the carpenter when I worked for Shields Construction he said, yeah, I was in the Salvation Army. That's the only service he was in. I was never in the service, as you might imagine. There are a lot of things I haven't done.

But there are probably some parallels between the two. You know, Steve Banach was up here, who had a good career in wrestling, a really good career in wrestling. Not as famous as his brothers in that way, but the things he's done in the military just are mind-blowing and the success he's had. Some of the messages he's shared with our team. And we're not unique in that regard. A lot of teams get people from separate branches that come in and speak. But I think anytime you're in an activity that's intense and competitive and hard to do, there is probably a lot of commonality. And certainly college football isn't the only one that's out there. And what we do is not life-changing. It can be entertaining hopefully. Sometimes it's not real entertaining, but that's our value, more so, than

**Q. Apart from the strength and conditioning and nutrition and all the job description things, what does Chris Doyle give you guys?**

KIRK FERENTZ: That was a lightning rod whenever that article came out. It had a little life. Again, I have the iPad, and it had a little life with talk radio and all that stuff nationally. But hopefully there is some thought-out process when we do things. And from the time I've come in here, and part of my job and background is as a line coach. But strength and conditioning is such a critical aspect of the program. The way we do things is different. If you had guys that were 28, 30 years old, it would be a different program. But, nonetheless, the value, I could argue, would be every bit as important, because guys, when they're losing their edge physically, you could argue it's just as important. And we're getting guys on the way up.

The thing about Chris in my mind, he was a position coach. He understands the football coaching as aspect. I've never met anybody more professionally inquisitive than him. He does his homework in all aspects of strength conditioning. He's right on the cutting edge and has been. So that part, that expertise is something that certainly we all value. Then beyond it, as I came into this thing, the roles had changed, the world had changed since I left. The bottom line, what I surmised is he's going to have more face time with our players than anybody in our program. They're going to hear his voice way more than sometimes mine, maybe 20 times more than mine on a week-to-week, month-to-month basis.

So his opportunity to be with our players and be with them in critical times is far going to exceed mine or any of our position coaches. So as a result of that, he's probably the most important coach, including me, in my mind. So if you've got a guy in that position who is not relaying the right messages, first of all, he isn't on board -- and Chris is more than on board. He helps draw up the plan, actually. So it's just a really -- I think a real asset for us. And in our circumstance it's really critical. You don't always get the players that look like Jonathan Ogden when they walk in, but our goal is to try to get him there in year three, year four, year five.

So for Chris, that compound effect of what he does is so valuable and so important. I go back, I'm not a wrestling expert. I'm hardly that. I watched a lot of it,

those rods go back to Chris and the role that he plays with our players on a daily basis.

**Q. Have any of your players expressed interest since we last talked to exploring the NFL? Have you had any conversation with anybody?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Josey, I think, put a line in the water and got a response back, predictable. But I think he was just gauging it. He wasn't really looking or dislike us that much. I think he's on board for one more year. I think he was curious like a kid would be curious.

**Q. Is that the only one?**

KIRK FERENTZ: That's the only one I'm aware of at least, yeah. I think they'd have to talk to me about it at some point.

**Q. With Akrum, potentially being NFL ready, what would your advice to him be?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Put more weight on. Start right there. I'm kind of fixated on that. We had that discussion again yesterday morning during finals week. You know, he's done a great job and fantastic job. People that make comments, I don't mean this in a disrespectful way, but a lot of times people throw stuff out, they have no idea how tough and competitive it is to play in the NFL. And if players will listen, I'll be happy to tell them. I was there six years, witnessed it. It's an extremely competitive business. It's not a real sensitivity, go find yourself, you know, hey, we're with you while you're developing and all that kind of stuff. They're really not into that. It's like most jobs where you've got to produce or they move you out, and maybe more so than most jobs.

So I think that's one thing all of us can share. Plus we have guys come back in the building all the time that can share just how tough it is, how hard it is, and how ready you've got to be if you really want to get there and stay.

Akrum's a really talented guy. And I'll tell you, he's improved with every step along the way. I think a year from now he'll have a really good chance. But he's going to have to get bigger and stronger, because there aren't any 185-pound backs I'm aware of that are playing a lot.

**Q. Is that even beyond NFL?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah. it's stuff I work on with him after

on recruiting, but I'll get on my soapbox a little bit. I don't know if he had two stars or one, I don't know how many he had. But he was a guy, we looked at his film. We got a tip from Coach Verducci out there, Andre Tippett's coach, and he looked like he had to get bigger. He looked skinny on film, and he still is. But he looked like a really good football player. I think Temple might have been talking to him, but they didn't propose. They might have been holding hands, but they never proposed.

You know, that's -- so to that point, I'll dovetail that or pivot right into recruiting. I feel really good about our recruiting. We've had a couple weeks on the road. We've got whatever we've got, 13, 14 commitments. We feel really good about the guys that are committed. I think they're with us for the right reasons. Then I think we have an opportunity right now to fill out this class the way we want to. We're going to have to have some luck and things will have to move our way and all that type of thing, but based on what I know right now, feel really good about it.

Kind of goes back to the original point, getting the right guys, guys that we think are going to fit in here and play the kind of football we're looking for. So I don't know what the buzz is right now. I do go on the internet a little bit, but I don't go on the gossip column stuff. With all due respect. I know that's people's jobs.

But I think it's going really well. I don't know if we're getting good reviews or bad reviews. But I'm feeling pretty good about it right now. Got to close it out, obviously.

**Q. Jake Newborg moved over to the other side of the ball and Brady Reiff has moved inside. Are there any other positions, either changes or alterations?**

KIRK FERENTZ: The only thing I would add is Shaun Beyer. We slid him inside. He's been playing receiver for us and did a nice job all year. We did that last weekend. I think eventually that's where he's going to play. A year ago we thought outside linebacker, we weren't quite sure, but really works hard. Good guy.

**Q. Chris was talking about legacy and sustaining success and the culture here. He said he had an intolerance to his equation about when things are working outside of the culture. Do you think**

things, probably the more you learn, quite frankly. It's an ongoing battle. We talked about the changing world out there. There's always been distractions for people, young people, and for coaches, for everybody. The world is full of distractions. So that's not a new phenomenon. But there are different ways they come at players. Ultimately, somehow, some way, you've got to convince players it's really a good thing to focus on what's important. Whether it's academics, football, the kind of citizen they are, those types of things. A lot of different ways to get it across, and we're always trying to reshape the message.

The reality is the message hasn't changed an awful lot. I guess they call it old school or whatever. But I think it's good luck to play good defense in football. It's good luck to block guys well, and it's good luck to protect the ball, those kinds of things. So the truisms never really change. But the way you try to present them, sell them, however you want to package it, those do change, and the challenges change all the time. And I would argue, I'm an old parent, but for parents in their 30s, 20s, this is the toughest time as there has ever been to be a high school coach, to be a parent. That just moves right up the ladder. When kids come to college, it's really not a lot different. It's a challenge.

I mentioned to Desmond a while ago. That's what his decision said a year ago, just like Brandon's the year before. College football is a pretty good deal. As good as the NFL is. It will be there when you get that time. Brandon's going to have a nice career, Desmond is going to have a nice career too. Everything has its time and place. Patience is a good thing. But that's a sell to everybody, right?

**Q. I know you've mentioned the recruiting trail and obviously the players have been in finals. So what's been the biggest thing on the agenda this week?**

KIRK FERENTZ: I'm only laughing because early this week I tried to remember what did I do last week? I was trying to remember because it went by so fast. I'm not sure what I did. I can probably go in there and figure it out. So there are so many things. We're still recruiting. Whether it's notes, correspondence, talking to coaches, that type of thing, and prospects. But that's been cut down this week because of the rules. But you can fill the hours pretty quickly. Our wives would attest to that. And just making sure we get

**Q. Two guys were hurt early in August, Jake Hulett, and Jon Wisnieski. When did they get back to practice and where do they stand right now?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Jon is back practicing. He's trying to work back into a stack of guys. That's really kind of encouraging. Seeing good things from young guys. They've certainly grown. And this is an important period for Jon. Like a lot of guys that haven't played much this period, it gives them a chance to advance.

Jake, on the other hand, is finally starting to run. I saw him run out there yesterday or two days ago. I was down there in the video room and saw him out there with the trainers running on dry land. So we've got him. He's out of the boot and all that stuff. So I don't know that he'll practice before the bowl, but at least he'll be healthy in January when he gets back, so that's good news.

**Q. Where is Michael Slater in there?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Pretty much the same thing. He's dealt with some injuries and all that kind of stuff. Right now he's been on the scout team all year doing a good job.

