

University of Iowa Football Media Conference

Tuesday, October 15, 2019

Kirk Ferentz



KIRK FERENTZ: Good afternoon. Appreciate everybody being here.

A couple of words again about last week. Like I said the other night, the film has bared it out, two really good football teams playing extremely hard out there. Bottom line is they made some critical plays that we weren't able to make. Credit to our opponent.

After watching the tape on Sunday, I feel the same way. I believe we have a good football team. Certainly room to improve. The bottom line is it's a fine line between winning and losing. There's a handful of plays out there that we weren't good enough in executing to give ourselves a chance.

I think our guys are working hard, our focus moving forward is on the things we can correct and coach a little bit better. That's what we're paying attention to there.

Certainly we were better in the penalty front last Saturday as opposed to the week before. One thing that's hurt us the last two weeks, turnover margin. We haven't done much in the takeaway department, protected the ball. That's going to hurt you in any game. Certainly, our red zone execution is going to have to improve a little bit.

All that being said, it's a 12-week season. Our plan is to keep moving forward. Our focus is strictly on this football game. We're playing a really good football team in Purdue.

Our captains this week are the same four guys: Stanley, Ross, Ojemudia, and Welch. Touched on this the other night. Cole (Banwart) was injured last Wednesday and is going to have surgery. His season unfortunately is over. Nobody is happy about that, obviously.

We have total respect for the Purdue program. Coach Brohm and his staff have done a great job. Third year into the program. Done an excellent job right away. They had a tough loss two weeks ago, bounced back extremely well last Saturday against Maryland.

I'm stating the obvious here, but the quarterback played extremely well, did a great job. They have an

outstanding receiver who is a freshman, player of the week in the Big Ten. Their tight end has been a good player, had another good game, too.

Offensively they pose a lot of challenges. They're going to threaten you in a lot of different ways, good scheme. A challenging scheme to prepare for. I would say the same thing about their defense. They're very multiple. We are going to have to do a good job of recognizing things, communicating, and hopefully executing.

It's a big test for us. There's nothing easy in college football. We've all been around the game long enough to understand and appreciate that. This team outplayed us the last two years. The challenge for us now is to face a tough week of preparation and then get ready for the challenge that is in front of us on Saturday.

We're excited to be back in Kinnick. We know we have a lot of work to do between now and kickoff. We'll keep chipping away at that and be ready to go at 11 a.m. on Saturday.

Q. With Kristian being the captain, is he fine health-wise?

KIRK FERENTZ: Got nicked up a little bit, but we expect him to play. Hopefully, he'll be fine.

Q. How is Kyler Schott doing?

KIRK FERENTZ: It will be after the bye week. Nothing sooner than that. He has a couple more weeks to go.

Q. You mentioned takeaways. Anything you try to change up or keep plugging away?

KIRK FERENTZ: Takeaways are kind of like big plays on offense. You can try to scheme big plays, obviously. For the most part they're just a result of playing well, good execution, aggressive play. I think everybody does certain takeaway drills. The bottom line is it's usually a matter of good preparation, good reaction on the field, playing well. Sometimes being aggressive.

Credit to our opponents on that one. They've done a good job of securing the ball, a better job of that than we have. I alluded to it last week, we had an opportunity against Michigan where the ball came loose in the middle, we couldn't come through with it.

Played better the other end of the column that way.

Q. Mark Kallenberger had his first start. You worked him at guard in the spring every other day it seemed. How did he grade out? What are you looking at now at that position? Elevate Justin?

KIRK FERENTZ: I thought he played well, made a good representation of himself. It was his first start. I thought he handled that well. Then playing inside, which is not something he's done a lot of. He handled that well, too. A little bit different feel in that. Some guys can't handle that. Some do. He seemed to be unaffected by that.

I saw a lot of positives. That's encouraging. A month ago I'm not going to say he was in a slump, but the month of August was okay with him. He didn't seem like he was really moving forward and progressing. The last four weeks I think we've seen good progress. I think he deserved the right to get in there and play and did a good job.

Q. Ince and Britt saw time, are they going to be rotation guys?

KIRK FERENTZ: I think we're keeping an open mind for everybody. We're not playing well enough on the line enough, not cohesively enough. We're working to get our best combination in there, get our best football being played up there.

It's an open door right now. Opportunity for any one of the guys to jump up there, practice well this week. We'll base it off what we see this week in practice.

Q. It has to be disappointing to see the offensive line let you down the last couple of weeks?

KIRK FERENTZ: It's frustrating any time we don't do well enough to win, wherever it may come. That's one thing about football, it tends to rotate. Usually games aren't the same.

Whatever it is we're doing that's not performing well enough to get us in a winning margin, we just got to try to focus on that, improve it. All can you do is try to work out in practice, then be smart in meetings. Hopefully guys take what they see in meetings into practice, work on correcting things, like any sport.

That's a challenge. Really doesn't matter what position it is. If we're not quite getting it done, it's always frustrating. We want to do well. But the good news is, we've seen our guys play better. We'll keep focused on that, see if we can't get back up a little bit better.

Q. Is it deficient to the point in the season that it's too late if you don't protect?

KIRK FERENTZ: If we don't protect, that's going to be a problem any week of the season. It can happen this

week, then be fine for a couple weeks. That's how football is sometimes. Your opponent, whatever it may be, schemes.

Yeah, if we're not protecting the quarterback, it's going to be tough to operate the way we want to operate. That's certainly paramount. Just like running the football better, that's paramount on the list.

Q. How difficult is it to protect a quarterback if you're running the ball?

KIRK FERENTZ: They go hand-in-hand. Everything goes hand-in-hand on offense, in my opinion. At some point in the season, somebody is not going to let you run it, you got to throw it, and vice versa. You got to be able to do both to be a successful team, unless you live off the option or throw it every snap of the game type team.

But we've been in this situation before. The only thing I'd throw out there, we've played two pretty decent defensive football teams. History or time will bear that out. What I saw with my own eyes, I believe it. We have prepare for our opponents. We'll respect the process and try to get better here.

Q. Did you think it was physical issues on Saturday?

KIRK FERENTZ: It's usually everything. The film bears that out. There are things mentally we could be doing better. Those are the things we're really focused on in terms of practice and corrections. Our guys are not going to go from 250 to 260 in a week. That's not going to happen. There are physical limitations on everything.

The things that are correctable, footwork, whatever it may be, those are things we can work on during the week. I told our team this morning, our team good teams, common denominator, when time goes on, we get better. We've been 2-2 before and had a great season.

There's still a lot out there to be playing for, but it's not going to happen if we don't improve. That's really where our focus has to be.

Q. Purdue presents some unique challenges because of the way they attack through the air. Does this present more of an opportunity to really go with a cash that is more of a standard defense?

KIRK FERENTZ: I'm not laughing at the question. I'm laughing no matter what cash, dime, nickel, regular, we better defend the ball deep. These guys throw the ball as deep as anybody we played, in my opinion, over the last two years. They did it Saturday. Threw the ball down the field well. I'm even more focused on our deep zones than I am our underneath zones.

They do a really good job. They run the ball effectively. They've got a good scheme that way. I don't think they overdo it, but they do it enough to be effective running the football. Then they throw the ball really well. Coach Brohm was a quarterback. I'm sure that has a lot to do with it.

They threaten you all over the place. We've had a hard time defending these guys.

Q. Do they attack areas where maybe you don't think they have the best odds to have a completion?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, just in general terms I would say it's not uncommon for a game to end, boy, we didn't throw the ball deep enough today. Whatever. I don't think they say that very often. They'll take their shots down the field.

I can't say I'm an expert on his past. Yeah, I think that's certainly in his DNA. They're going to test you out down there. Then if you have good receivers, that's a good thing, too. This quarterback did a nice job throwing the football.

They'll throw it all over the place.

Q. You guys blitz 15, 20% of the time. Last year Purdue, obviously the rush wasn't there like it needed to be. What can you do when the ball is getting out in two seconds?

KIRK FERENTZ: It comes out quick. It's almost sometimes counterproductive to try to rush because it's going to come out before you can get there, before you can even disrupt it.

You have to make educated guesses and try to be as smart as you can on that. One thing you know, your coverage is going to get tested.

Q. When you look back at Tyler's fumble, how much of that was on him? Didn't look like he secured the ball very well.

KIRK FERENTZ: You talk about correctable things, that's one of them right there. It was not a smooth operation play. So he's got some ownership. But it was not smooth. I'm not putting that on him at all. That was a team effort right there.

Those are the kinds of things if we can't get those things cleaned up, it's going to be a problem as we move forward. Just nobody's good enough to put the ball on the ground.

Our defense did the a good job the other night of putting the fire out. We called on them too much. The

first punt, might as well have been a turnover, too.

If you're playing a good opponent, any opponent, but you start talking about playing a top-10 team, it's not realistic to think you're going to be able to win unless you get those things cleaned up.

Q. Tyler takes everything in stride. How have you seen that after the last couple days after the fumble?

KIRK FERENTZ: He's been fine. Again, he doesn't have 100% ownership in that. I'm not sure the ball was smoothly exchanged. The other part is it's going to happen. We have had two of those at a really bad time a year ago, then we had a heck of a streak after that where we really protected the ball well.

That's one more thing I'm impressed with, all of us are impressed with with Tyler. He handled it well. Had a good two days of practice right now.

Part of competing at this level against really good teams, you're going to have a bad play or a bad day. It's how are you going to respond to that. He's done a good job two days into it.

Q. You coached a ton of offensive lines. I thought Nate one of the positives was he absorbed a lot of hits and didn't show it. Is that easier said than done? Throughout your career, how does that go behind closed doors?

KIRK FERENTZ: I've never been around a good quarterback that wasn't physically tough and mentally tough, no matter what kind of style you are, what your skill set may be. Those two characteristics, to be a good quarterback, you have to have that. He certainly possesses that. He has since he's been here.

I'm just impressed with our whole football team. It's a team-oriented deal. Everybody is accepting responsibility and ownership. Read Chauncey's quotes, if it takes a shutout, we'll get a shutout. That's the right attitude. That's the nature of football. We're going to be in a game chances are sometime this season where nobody can stop anybody. You always have one or two of those during the year. It's on the offense at that point to get the job done.

That's the beauty of teamwork. Everything I've seen and witnessed is our guys care about each other. They understand this is a tough challenge. We're going to push through it together.

Q. How important during times like this is senior leadership?

KIRK FERENTZ: It's really important. The whole team has to be thinking right. You remember the younger

guys, takes a while. Goodson is a good illustration of a guy that kind of gets it. A lot of times younger guys don't quite understand, A, how competitive it is, B, how tough it is to be doing all the things that we're asking them to do football-wise, socially and academically.

But the bottom line is it's no fun. No fun losing two in a row, I can tell you that. I can tell you the older guys hurt more because they've invested more. Been through it longer. They're the guys that show everybody how to do things, how to handle things, how to respond, and most importantly how we move forward.

Q. K.J. Hamler, a couple matchups linebacker against wide receiver. Purdue will present that kind of problem. Are you closer to cash or take more time?

KIRK FERENTZ: If we go cash right now, probably it's a younger player. There's a tradeoff there. It wasn't just one player on that play. It's a little bit of a teamwork deal there.

When you play a guy like Hamler, or Moore last year, really tough out to get. Really got to be smart about how you approach those guys because you have to respect. I said that last week. This guy is a home run hitter. That was a short fence home run, however many yards. That takes a special, unique ability to make a play like he made. You have to respect that and do your best to box a guy like that in a little bit.

Q. Riley Moss in the cash spot right now?

KIRK FERENTZ: Technically he'd be a nickel. Nickel and cash look a lot alike in my mind. If you're confused, so am I (laughter).

Q. Different world with the four game redshirt situation. You have players who have been in the program who could redshirt. Ivory Kelly-Martin, Julius Brents, Merriweather. Are there any discussions about...

KIRK FERENTZ: I think right now we would be smart to try to protect Ivory if we can. But we're also trying to win this year. It's kind of we'll stay flexible on it. Yeah, we'd sure like to not waste a year of his eligibility if we can.

The other guys right now, that's still probably a little further down the road. We'll see how that measures out as we go. We'll try to be mindful of that with everybody.

Q. The last two third quarters against these guys make you self-evaluate how quick you make adjustments?

KIRK FERENTZ: I'm not sure it's anything they did different schematically. They came out and jumped a little faster, quicker to it. Especially going back two

years. That was, boom, a brick in a punchbowl. It was not a good moment.

But that's why you got to be at your best at all times, keep the ball in front of you. It just is critical. That is sudden death right now.

Q. Britt, has he earned an opportunity for an extended look?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, absolutely. We've made the decision he's playing. That's not a discussion any more. Our attitude is we'll just keep watching him in practice. If we can get him in the game, we'll get him in the game.

I will say he's improving every week. Had a good day today. He's pushing that direction. We have an open mind, have had an open mind over a month now with him and everybody. For him in the race because he's a true freshman. Just depends what happens in practice. We'll make decisions as we go along. He's a guy we're straight ahead with him for sure.

Q. How much time as a head coach can you spend with the offensive line?

KIRK FERENTZ: Head coaches don't do anything in practice. We just walk around. That's all we do. That's the first discovery I made.

You try to help out anywhere where you can, kind of scan the field a little bit. Yeah, I'll gravitate in that direction every now and then.

Q. Feel like you need to this week more so?

KIRK FERENTZ: I think every week. It's no different. We're not looking at this like it's anything different. We have to get better as a football team.

Because I show up somewhere doesn't mean things are going to get better, for the record. It's not that easy. In fact, it may work conversely. You can make that argument.

Q. How hard is it to block out the 'sky is falling' mentality that happens with the fans and some of the media?

KIRK FERENTZ: I don't worry about it with me, I worry about it with our players. They have exposure to the real world. All of a sudden the NFL Network and ESPN coming in or going out, there's not a lot of Iowa talk on either one of those. Not a problem. I glanced at a headline, two things in the last five days in the papers that were interesting. Won't go into the one. Nothing special, whatever.

To me '08 was a good season, '04 was a co-Big Ten champ. That was special to me. I understand that

mentality. People that compete can't think like that. It's crazy. I mean, we would have surrendered every war we've been in if we looked at the world that way. You can't do it.

Have to keep pushing, keep fighting. We have a chance to play Saturday, get back in the win column. That's where our focus has to be. That's our concern as coaches, make sure our players understand. Can't worry about yesterday, but what's in front of us today, what the opportunities may be.

The way the season plays out, it's entirely in our hands. We have control of our destiny. We're not going to be undefeated, we've proven that. Everything out there is out there for us. We have to keep playing. Best thing we can worry about is Purdue. We have plenty to worry about when we look at the tape.

Q. What have you experienced with your players in sharing with them about Nile Kinnick, 80 years ago won the Heisman, what he represents to the program, even the speech?

KIRK FERENTZ: This year what we did in camp was we had young guys do reports on guys that have played in the last 20 years for the most part. We had an older captain or two from former years, prior years, that I knew were going to be on the docket for honorary captain. I included those guys to get a brief in there. Now Kinnick is a pretty famous Iowa Hawkeye, so he's on the list every year.

You're always trying to expose guys. Young guys today don't know who Brandon Scherff is probably. Guys in our program don't even know that. That's the world we're living in right now.

We get them to try to have an appreciation for guys that have come before them. That's what the honorary captain program is all about.

Kinnick, what a discussion, he and Fred Becker, who had he played later on in life, would have been a national hero. Those are really special stories. Yeah, we shared both of those with our team, just how unique of people those people were.

The Becker story, not to digress here, but who leaves college, right, to go fight in a war after being an All-American, first All-American, I believe, as a sophomore. He would have been a three time All-American presumably. What an unbelievable story that was. Talking about selflessness, all that kind of stuff. That's pretty good.

Now Kinnick, wow. Talking to his teammates, sounds like he would have been a governor, senator, he would have done something really special. Made the ultimate

sacrifice. We can all be very proud our stadium is named after a great American.

Q. Some players in the past and present have tried to memorize that speech, taken it to heart. How does that make you feel to know it means something?

KIRK FERENTZ: It makes you feel good. As a coach or parent, you feel good when people recognize sacrifice, doing the right thing. Every time I see that speech, how old could he have been at that time, 21, 22, right? This guy has a global view, right? He's not just looking at his cell phone, self-absorbed with whatever.

Those are great things, great examples for our guys to look up to, feel very proud about. It's an honor to walk by that statue every time we come in that stadium. A great reminder, too.

Q. There's probably a specific number, I'm ignorant of it, when you look at the offensive line, recruiting them, bringing them in, is there a diminishing return on guys who are in development that they can't help you now? Do you have enough guys who can help you?

KIRK FERENTZ: What's the best way to frame that? My first exposure to major college football was 1980. I swear to God we coached a national championship team to 11-1. Ended up second in the country that year. You talk about talent and depth. Bill Maas was on the scout team, scout defensive line. Two deep on the defense. It was NFL ready up front. We had guys, really great quarterbacks, et cetera.

Our tight end was okay, I'll say that. We had an NFL offensive line. We had six linemen that could play in a game. We could win. We could keep moving, keep producing, moving forward.

That was a pretty good, like, reference point for me in my entire career. It's the same way in the NFL. If you have five linemen in the NFL, you're doing really good. If you have six, you really feel good about things, that can go in and play, especially tackles. If you have two tackles you're really doing well.

The reality is, yeah, it's hard to develop linemen. It takes time, a lot of work, a lot of effort. Every now and then, I mention Bulaga coming in, Moeaki, James Daniels to some degree was ahead of the curve. For the most part it takes a lot of labor, a lot of work, all that type of thing.

Usually you're doing pretty good unless injuries factor into it. We've been hurt by that. That's the reality.

You also have good stories, to, Kyler Schott a year ago.

Nobody ever saw that one coming. He really has developed into a really good football player. You have good stories like that, too, that you're not counting on.

Q. Sack of Clifford, looked like a fumble.

KIRK FERENTZ: Doesn't matter what your opinion is about anything (laughter).

Tat crew works hard. Every time that crew shows up, I know they're working hard. Not that the other ones aren't. So many things are bang-bang.

The one thing I did learn the other night, which is actually a positive, thinking about this when I was putting my tie on, targets right now, I'm not sure what it is any more, I'm pretty sure it's not what it used to be. I think that's probably healthy.

We're all for player safety, but it seems like we're at a point where we were getting too ticky-tack on that. I think the other night maybe we were leaning the other way a little bit, which is okay.

Q. Do you like the rule where the ejection also carries over?

KIRK FERENTZ: It depends. If it's a ticky-tack, bang-bang, something you can't avoid, that's a hard penalty. We've had a couple of those historically here. That's where I struggle with it. If it's a flagrant play, it ought to be officiated and suspensions. They had one in the NFL this year that was a repeat customer. There's no room for that in the game. That's to me what you want the rules to control those kinds of things. That's not good for anybody. It puts players at risk.

Thank you.