

University of Iowa Football

Media Conference

Saturday, September 7, 2019

Kirk Ferentz



KIRK FERENTZ: Really pleased with the win today. Thought it was a really decisive performance by our football team and really a great way to start Big Ten play. So very, very pleased about that.

Thought all three segments played well. Did well on special teams for the most part. Offense, I thought really did a good job, and then certainly, defense silly to think they didn't play a great game. So it was a great start that way.

Offensively, I thought Nate looked in control out there, throwing three touchdown passes but equally as important, looks like he's in control and we are feeling good about the way he's playing.

I thought Ivory Kelly-Martin made a real spark play for us on the long drive that we had. I guess that was in the second quarter, and good to see some young guys out there. Goodson did a really good job. And Tyrone Tracy making a touchdown there, made a good finish on that play. That was great.

Defensively, thought the guys did a good job you up front. AJ gave us some good pressure and worked hard, certainly getting two picks like that was great, and we got a turnover at the end of the game, but the two picks really influenced and impacted the football game.

And you know, overcoming bad field position. It was a tough game field-position-wise, needless to say, and on that front, just a lot of credit to Michael Sleep-Dalton, he had a great game. I don't know if I've ever been involved in a college game where two punters played as well as both those guys, or probably any game, ever. Both of them performed extremely well. It was interesting on that front for sure, and great to see Michael play like he did.

Then moving on, we're going to really celebrate this win. It was hard-earned out there. The guys did a really good job I thought, preparing all week long. They showed up and competed hard today against a team that I think has improved, so we're happy about that.

And then tomorrow we have an opportunity to come in and see some things that we didn't do so well, see if we can't make some improvements, get those things cleaned up and then we'll turn around our eyes towards

next week's game, which obviously is a big game as well.

That's kind of where we're at. Last two things, just you know, really pleased to have the '69 team here. Those guys were in the building yesterday, I think upwards of 40 guys were here and it is great to have them here with us this week; and a lot of good people, Tom Hayes was honorary captain, one of the players on that team and that was outstanding.

Just want to thank Pat Green publicly for being here two years in a row. I think we've got him converted. He's a Texas Tech graduate, but I think we've got him converted into being a Hawkeye and being part of such of a great tradition of the wave. I know he's excited about it, and so are we, so appreciate him making the effort to be with us today.

Q. AJ show you a lot of maturity, you probably already knew he had, frustrating week last week?

KIRK FERENTZ: It's hard to shake him up. He's pretty even-keeled that way, and you know, he played well last week, too. Got a little bit of attention. He's going to get that all season long. I thought he just came, had a good week of practice, and certainly worked hard out there today. We didn't get a lot of sacks, but I thought we did a good job of disrupting the quarterback and making him uncomfortable. Not as good as a sack but certainly is what you want and good coverage, as well. I think those two things really paired well together.

Q. He said he broke a cardinal rule and on a sack, he went airborne. Not supposed to go airborne.

KIRK FERENTZ: I guess if you make the sack, it's okay. Like anything else, like taking a shot you shouldn't take in basketball.

Q. Nate only had one touchdown through the first two games last year and already has six this year, what's the difference?

KIRK FERENTZ: I think the thing I would say is what I alluded to a moment ago. He really looks like he's comfortable and in control. Those two things. That's something you can't hand a player. It's a really tough position to play. It's tough in our offense, what we ask our quarterbacks to do so you know, he's worked hard and been through highs and lows and a lot more highs than lows, fortunately.

I think right now we're seeing a guy who really feels good, and the guys around him are doing a good job, too. Certainly nobody does things on their own out there, so it's good to see a good, collective effort.

Q. Talk about the patience of the offense in the first and third quarters.

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I've never been involved in a game, I don't think like that, where it was five-times, 11-yard line or in, and three, two or in. So that makes it really tough and kind of restricts what you can do, obviously.

But we fought our way through it, and everybody did stay patient to that point and ended up, paid off for us. It was really a challenging game that way.

Q. The offensive line, does it seem like it was a gradual thing with the running game, first part, wasn't much happening and then they started pushing more and more down the field, getting more and more push on the offensive line, opening up the running game. What do you attribute to the progression, getting more further and further downfield and blocking the running game?

KIRK FERENTZ: Part of it is the nature of the running game, and in fact of Tom Hayes referenced that yesterday, he talked to our team. He talked about talking to John Robinson years ago when he was on the West Coast and Robinson talked about the running game really starts gaining traction typically in the second half. That's where it really pays dividends if you're working hard. I think that's part of it.

And the other part was it a different front. They moved around and did a good job that way, and from where I was standing it looked like they got too much penetration on us too often and that's something we're going to have to get cleaned up and try to get our backs on track a little bit, but the backs ran hard and did the best they could with even some bad situations.

Q. Smith-Marsette came up big last year on special teams, and this year he seems to be progressing at the wide receiver?

KIRK FERENTZ: Obviously last year as a kickoff returner, did a great job and he'll continue to do that but yeah, he's just growing as player, and both he and Brandon were really young players. Even last year, a perfect world, you could red-shirt them, but that wasn't the way it was.

So they did well last year, but they are clearly different guys now, more confident and decisive in everything they are going. Ihmir has put weight on since we've come out of spring ball, he's just been everything you'd

hope. He's done a good job and focused and works extremely hard.

So we are thrilled with the way he's playing right now.

Q. Is that attention to detail and maturity?

KIRK FERENTZ: I think both, yeah. Maturity tends to make people a little more detailed. That's my experience.

He's really turned the corner. He's enjoying being a guy out there that gives us good energy, a good lead in the group and setting a great example. He got banged up a little bit and came back and did a great job this week. It's a real credit to him, where he couldn't have done that two years ago.

Q. Through two games, what would you say are at the top of your list of concerns?

KIRK FERENTZ: I thought our tempo out there today, offensively, especially, we've got to get in and out. Not that we want to be a hurry-up offense necessarily, but we have to be cleaner on that and cleaner on our communication, getting in and out of the huddle, that type of thing.

There were a lot of good things, but there's always things to work on. Today there were two instances we didn't tackle on a punt return one time, which brought the ball to midfield from 35 out to midfield and we had that penalty. So two times we had a chance at least to flip the field now and they are sitting on that field again. Things like that, they are going to get us.

And Ted Marchibroda used to say, don't get too smart and we got a little too smart with the clock there at the end of the half. Trying not to give them an opportunity to get the ball back, and cost us potentially four points. So just some little things we're going to have to do a better job of.

Q. Third Big Ten shutout in seven games going back to last season, that's got to go impressive. Talk about the way the defense played.

KIRK FERENTZ: That's good news. We'll gladly take it.

I thought our guys really played well defensively today and it was a collective effort. I think the passing part, we disrupted their quarterback. Part of it is because we were covering really well, so he didn't have a place to go with the ball and then threw it away or whatever he did.

Real team effort that, was good to see, and I thought Djimon did some nice things, too, out there, obviously getting a pick.

Q. What's going to be next week? You're not going to be in the comfort of this place, and you're going to be in a place you're not well received.

KIRK FERENTZ: Happens every other year. We've got to go over there and play and it's always tough, but might as well get used to that, too, because that is like our conference. We play a lot of tough road games.

You know, that's what it is, and just based on recent history, probably longer than that, it's probably going to be a really close game.

Q. How is Geno Stone?

KIRK FERENTZ: I think okay. We'll know more tomorrow but he was walking around. Seemed fine in the locker room.

Q. A couple of the defensive guys talked about how a game like today helped them see what kind of defense they wanted to be this season. In your mind, what kind of defense do they want to be?

KIRK FERENTZ: Well, I think we grew today and that's good. And you know, we've got some moving parts. We lost some really good players off last year's ballclub, so every team is different, certainly and every unit is different. You don't just replace a guy like Parker Hesse. What a leader and he gave us a lot of grit out there.

But the good news is I think the guys, I'll go back to a point I made last week, our older guys to me seem like they are playing better. They have improved their play and their intensity and that's how you replace a guy like Parker Hesse, or go down any of the seniors that played. It's a real collective effort. Every week is going to be a different challenge.

I know next week, we'll have another big challenge, and we'll face a lot of them down the road here. It's all about growth. I think we grew here this week and it's all about us keeping our foot on the gas and really trying to work hard and see if we can't get better.

Q. I know everyone expects AJ to pick up the offensive tackle and throw him out of the stadium and grab the carpet, shake it and let the quarterback fall down. Are you impressed with his -- kind of hanging with it?

KIRK FERENTZ: I did sense some unrealistic expectations last week after the game.

Yeah, he's not going to make every play and he shouldn't. He's a defensive end. But if he just does his job, when he does it well, it impacts things. A lot of times those are subtle things that don't necessarily show up.

But just making a quarterback move around, making him uncomfortable, making him aware that you might be over there, that's a good thing. There are a lot of little subtle things that go if a guy plays well. He's practicing hard and doing his absolute best out there. We need them all to grow. That's really what we need, but he's doing his part for sure.

Q. Looking ahead to next week, preparing for a conference game before a big rivalry game like Iowa State, does that help the players understand the preparation?

KIRK FERENTZ: Not necessarily. Tom (Hayes) said this yesterday, too. First games are the hardest games and I've always felt that way because there's so much unknown out there.

To me, week two is similar the same way, no matter who you're playing, because you see their players once on film but you really don't know total what you're going to get.

They are all tough. There's nothing easy about playing college football, just ask any player. But every preparation is important and they are all going to be challenges. That's how I look at it. I don't see any easy outs on our schedule. We'll enjoy this win, learn from it and hopefully get ready for next one.

Q. Merriweather coming back soon?

KIRK FERENTZ: We'll find out. He sprained his foot yesterday morning. Obviously that wasn't planned. So we found out Jack Koerner -- mention him, talk about the defense, what a great job, him stepping in and playing free safety for us. He was ready to go and we've had confidence. He's really improved this August. Did a good job last spring.

If Kaevon can't be back, it will be Jack and we'll get other guys ready to back him up. It's just next man in.

Q. When you look at the way Tristan has played, almost every other series, he's moving from left-to-right and just different physical disciplines and still he's out there protecting, and then also in the run game, almost dominant. What do you think of his performance?

KIRK FERENTZ: It's a real progression for him, too. Two years ago he's playing because we had no one else, all of a sudden he's playing as a true freshman. He was playing well, but wasn't ready for it that way whereas right now I think he is ready for any challenge that's going to show itself.

He's gone from a guy just out of high school, kind of looking around a little bit, to a guy who has earned the right to play well, and played with some decisiveness

out there.

It's been fun to watch his growth, certainly and I don't want to speak for him, but I think he's enjoying the game more than he ever has, and that's part of developing confidence. You have to get knocked down to gain confidence. That's part of learning and part of growing.

Q. You mentioned Koerner. How much has he grown, and given how late in the week that situation unfolded?

KIRK FERENTZ: Probably a good thing. Didn't have any time to think about it basically, last night at the hotel. We liked him out of high school. We were really impressed with him and it's another Reese Morgan recruit, if you will, but he just seemed to possess some of the things that you're hoping to find in a football player.

Did a nice job last year but he's really grown. Did a good job in the spring but this August we really saw good growth, more confidence. It's tough playing back there. I talked about Stanley playing quarterback. Being a signal caller is a tough responsibility. So great.

I was actually thinking about it coming over here this morning, flashback to 2007 when Greenwood had to come in against Illinois. It was against Illinois and we beat them. So I was kind of hoping it would be one of those déjà vu performances, because he jumped in there and did a great job and Jack did a great job, too, today.

Q. A lot of competition at wide receiver. What has allowed Tyrone Tracy to be in the mix and score a touchdown in the game?

KIRK FERENTZ: Kind of same thing we talked about Tristan.

Last year he's a guy who really flashed and showed some really good things but didn't quite know what was going on and didn't quite know the tempo.

So I'm pleased that we could redshirt him, and the four games real helped us on that. Same as Jack. Ever since August, even going back to the spring, he's just a different guy than he was a year ago. So that's the fun part about coaching is watching guys grow and develop a little bit and I think he's having a little bit more fun now than he did a year ago, certainly.

Q. 48-yard average, unrealistic on a weekly basis, but what is the difference between having something that level, as opposed to left?

KIRK FERENTZ: We'd love to have that. We can't count on that. I said earlier, I don't know if I've ever

been involved in a game where two punters punted as well as both of them did. They were players of the game on both sides.

Michael made it really better for us today, obviously changed field position. Helped us out. We were in some tough positions. You know, if we can have him continue to perform like that, that will be a real asset for our football team.

Q. What is Stanley's advantage when you're inside the five several times, but he's had drives where he's been able to affect -- how does his demeanor help you?

KIRK FERENTZ: As you guys all know, he's a really steady person and doesn't really get too high or low on anything. The big thing I would go back to right now, I think he's more comfortable and leading us better than he ever has on the field. It's just a tribute to his hard work, his perseverance, his dedication, all the things that tend to make players really good players.

It's a nice luxury to have, to have him out there. Again, he's get going help from his teammates, as well.

Q. What does it mean for Nate's performance overall --

KIRK FERENTZ: It's really a credit to him because Ricky was a tremendous football player for us, too, and we've had a lot of really good quarterbacks here. Nate is carving out his niche and any recognition he gets I think is well deserved. Nobody has worked harder, and I think I can say the same thing about Ricky or any of those guys, did such a great job.