

University of Iowa Football Media Conference

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Brian Ferentz



Q. Your four games, your yards per attempt would be the third highest in your father's tenure here. Are you getting that kind of depth you're looking for in the passing game, especially the last two games?

BRIAN FERENTZ: I think it's still really early in the year, so you look at it through four games, and I haven't even looked at that statistic, but I guess that's good. Certainly it is. What we're really trying to do, if you think about the course of a game, what's really important to us is what are we doing on first down? So whether we're running the ball or throwing the ball, are we getting ourselves into a second down that we determined to be manageable?

So our number is four yards on first down. If we're at four yards, we're winning. So if we're at 2nd & 6, we feel pretty good about that. Really, statistically, anymore the way the game has changed a little bit, 2nd & 5 should probably be the number, but we feel like for the way we play, 2nd & 6 is good. We've been able to achieve that goal if you look at it on the whole. But we haven't done that consistently game in and game out.

So the next step for us, whether we're throwing the ball or running it, just staying on schedule and doing that on a more consistent basis.

Q. Another stat for you: First two games you averaged four and a half yards a play roughly. Last two games have been seven. So what has been the big difference in the offense?

BRIAN FERENTZ: I think going back to the other question, we've thrown the ball a little more efficiently in the last two ballgames. The more we control the ball on first and second down and do those things, certainly it's easier to create more yardage throwing the ball than running it.

So if you can get a good blend going on first and second down, little run, little pass, and you're being efficient throwing the ball and completing those balls and completing them a little further down the field, then that's a positive. That's where you see those yards per play jump a little bit.

If we can keep that going, well, that would be helpful. It helps you move the ball.

Q. Does your effectiveness with your tight ends enable you to do more things than you normally would because of the way Hockenson and Stanley have both played?

BRIAN FERENTZ: Yeah, I think whoever your personnel is, whoever your best personnel is, making sure you get your best guys on the field. For us sometimes that's a fullback, and we like to play with the fullback too.

Brady Ross' impact is not easily measured the same way maybe the tight ends are from a production standpoint. But I think he's caught the ball three times. He's carried it for us a little bit, and certainly really his most valuable contribution doesn't get measured statistically in the blocking game.

Whether it's the tight ends or fullbacks, some games it's receivers, depending on how we're being played. How do we get our best guys on the field? How do we make sure we're utilizing them and giving them opportunities to affect the game in a positive way? The tight ends have been able to do that through three games. Hopefully we can get other groups included as well.

Q. Have you been pleased with the running game so far?

BRIAN FERENTZ: Yeah, at times it's been good. But a major key for us moving forward is continuing to establish that running game early in the game, and our offense, whether it's the throw or anything else that we're doing, is going to be determined by how well we can run the ball when everybody in the stadium knows we're going to run the ball.

I think at times we've done a nice job with that. Other times we haven't established it with maybe as much authority as you'd like. So if we can keep that going and we can continue to build on that, I think it's a really positive thing, and it will certainly help our football team.

Q. It appears your offensive line seems to have grown continuity-wise that there is more consistency in their blocking. Am I seeing that right?

BRIAN FERENTZ: Yeah, we've shuffled some guys in now, so even in the last two ballgames, we've had to

play some different combinations, and we've rolled guys through, ask so we've had guys playing different spots and getting different amount of reps. But I think it's a matter of playing multiple spots, we haven't been able to keep one constant lineup as much as we'd like.

But we also know in this day and age, with the way we play, we're going to play with seven, maybe eight guys in the course of the year. We've already done that this year. The more we can get those guys reps and experience, some of those inexperienced guys. Shoot, I remember going into the first game, Cole Banwart has never started in a game, never played in a game, you don't really know what you have there. And two weeks later it's like how are we going to replace Cole Banwart.

Well, two weeks ago we weren't sure Cole Banwart could do it, now we're worried about who we're going to play with. So the fact that we've been able to get a bunch of guys in there, and get them reps at different spots. A guy like Dalton Ferguson who has had to jumble around for us a little bit and pull some double duty and has been working as a center in practice.

Because that's the other thing, when Banwart was down, you really lost your second center at that point too. So we had to make sure we had somebody ready to go, we felt like at that point, Dalton was the best option for us.

So all those guys getting experience, getting reps, I think it's a real positive. Really, this is about the time of year, week four, week five when you start to see some of that game experience pay off for some guys, and I think that's probably what you're seeing.

Q. Along the same lines, the wide receivers, through one-third of the season, where are they?

BRIAN FERENTZ: I think they've done a nice job. You look at some of the games that we've played, the biggest plays in the games have come out of the receiving corps. So I look back at the Iowa State game where we were really having trouble getting anything going. The two biggest plays in the game were to receivers. It was Ihmir on the post ball, which was a really good play by the quarterback as well.

Then coming back to Brandon on the fade there at the end of the game when we were able to punch it in on the next play. So those are certainly two big plays in a tight, closely contested football game where we weren't really moving the ball effectively offensively for the majority of that game, or whether it's that, you look at the Northern Iowa game, certainly those guys made a couple plays in that game.

Nick had a big day, caught ten balls and made a couple

plays for us. That was with Ihmir not playing. Brandon was able to get a couple catches, contribute a little bit. Then you look at last week, and maybe they didn't make some of the biggest plays in the game from a passing game standpoint, but there were no bigger plays in the game than the in cut that Brandon caught on a play-action pass when he went down and scored, where basically we were blanketed everywhere else on the field.

They did a nice job on coverage, came back to the in-cut. Brandon did a nice job of using his body and winning.

Ihmir on some of the plays that we didn't come up with in the game, but he had the run. I've seen growth there, I've seen production, but we're going to need more. It's kind of like our whole offense. We need to keep improving, keep getting better because the goal is never to beat Northern Illinois, beat Iowa State, beat Wisconsin, that's not the goal. The goal is to win a Big Ten championship.

To do that, we know we need to improve and get better every week. We've seen that with all groups, especially with the receiver group. The trick is it's only been four weeks. We might want to continue that process.

Q. When you look at Nate's growth, especially the last two weeks, it seemed like maybe in the Iowa State game, whether it was a confidence issue, was it always set with his feet, he's kind of almost seemed to be aiming a few passes. Did he kind of just go back to square one on some of his fundamentals to go into the UNI game? Did that help? Is that what happened?

BRIAN FERENTZ: Well, I think if you look at the Iowa State game I would start with giving a lot of credit to Iowa State and the way they played us and the way their defense came in. They had a good plan and they did a nice job disrupting us and taking away some of the things we wanted to do. Got us out of rhythm a little bit.

Certainly we probably didn't play as well as we wanted to at any spot. But the bottom line was when we needed a play, we came up with a play. It was a good route. It was a heck of a football that got thrown up there.

I think like anybody on our football team whether it's the quarterback or the right guard, when things aren't going the way you want them to go and those things aren't coming through as you might have visualized them or imagined they would, you certainly have to go back to basics, take a look at your fundamentals and

make sure you're doing things in a sound manner.

I think Nate's done a nice job over the three years I've known him of working hard every day to improve, and taking a look at what he's doing, what he's not doing while figuring out how he can do it a little better. But I think what you're seeing over the last four weeks is really the fruits of more like three years of labor than just a couple weeks of looking at this or looking at that.

Sometimes football is a cruel mistress. I heard Rory McIlroy talking about one time about golf and whether you're a play caller or a right guard, this analogy is pretty, you know, pretty fair. I think he said when you're playing well, it's hard to imagine a time when you weren't. And when you're not playing well, it's hard to imagine a time that you were ever playing well.

And at the time I think he was the number one golfer in the world saying that. So football's the same way. Sometimes things aren't going to go your way. Sometimes they are. No matter what, keep the emphasis on fundamentals and doing things in a sound manner and you at least have a chance to be consistent over the long haul.

Q. Curious how you guys handle replay and whether to challenge a call? How quick is that process?

BRIAN FERENTZ: There's not much of a process for us. I don't know if there's numbers... how many challenges have been won in college football? Can anybody think of one off the top of their head? I mean, I'm serious. Does anybody remember a challenge being won? You're wasting your time out.

The officials tell us in the locker room every single play in college football is reviewed upstairs. So if you challenge it, you're simply trying to make yourself feel better, I guess. You're not going to change the outcome.

The only way that something could be changed on the field is if it gets buzzed down. They take a look at every single play, and I know the NFL is a little bit different. When I was in the National Football League, nothing was reviewed. So the way a play got reviewed was if a red flag came out. Didn't matter if it was a scoring play.

Now they review every scoring play, I believe. I think every turnover gets reviewed now. They pretty much review everything in the NFL now too. So if you challenge a play, you're simply wasting a time out. I know that's not what people want to hear, it's not popular, but that's the reality of it.

We have officials come in our locker room before every

game and say, hey, listen, we're going to tell you right now if it's getting buzzed down or not. If you want it buzzed down and you call a timeout, if they buzz us afterwards, we'll give it back to you. But if they don't, you're not getting your timeout.

So the whole challenge thing I think is a little bit of a misnomer. I don't even know why it's available, because it's just kind of a waste of time. But everything gets reviewed upstairs, and those guys are pretty confident. They do a good job. If it doesn't come down, it doesn't come down. That means they didn't think it warranted any further review.

Q. There is a constant evaluation of your personnel, but once you get into season mode, that kind of narrows, I assume, except for injuries. Are there any players that are on the fringe? Tyrone Tracy, for instance, got in and made a nice catch against Northern Iowa. He's also a true freshman so you have that careful balance there. Is he the type of player or are there any other players that you're looking at going you want to get a little more of a look to see if they can help you out as the season goes on?

BRIAN FERENTZ: The new rule helps you a little bit. Tyrone has played in one game. Henry Geil has carried the ball in two games. Nico Ragaini has played in one game. So there are a couple guys that we've been taking a really hard look at. Whether it just be from a depth perspective or a perspective of, hey, maybe this is the guy that can help us as the year goes on. So the good news is with players like that we have two or three more games moving forward to get them involved, take a look at what they can do, and decide if burning that red-shirt is worth it or not.

Certainly Tyrone's one of those guys. I would put Nico in that category as well. Henry had to carry the ball a little bit just because we were down backs. Certainly we'd like to maintain his red-shirt if we could. But if we're in a situation where we only have so many healthy backs, then you have to do what you have to do.

But Tyrone's another guy that could carry the ball a little bit. We've worked him at running back and receiver at practice. He's done a lot of really good things in practice and started to grow a little bit. So he's a guy that could certainly get in the mix as time goes on here. But we have some other good players at that position too.

Really, when you play the way we play, you're probably only going to have two or three of them on the field at most at a time. So when you want to be is judicious about how you use a young guy's eligibility, thinking

about the future of the football team.

Certainly the goal is to win right now, but you always have to, you know, kind of juxtapose that with what's best for the future of the program.

Q. How has Shaun Beyer responded to a tough play on Saturday night?

BRIAN FERENTZ: Shaun Beyer's a good football player. Shaun Beyer's played a lot of football for us. He's been out there in a lot of special team situations. There was a miscommunication. Shaun Beyer was hustling, doing the best he could to help his football team. Something unfortunate happened. He's responded the way you'd expect anybody to respond. He came back to work and he's working to improve and get better and help the football team.

Q. You guys have struggled out of the bye the last couple years offensively specifically. Anything you've identified, tweaked or changed to be more prolific early in those games?

BRIAN FERENTZ: Sure, we always look at the schedule, whether it's the off-season, whether it's camp, whether it's the bye week, whether it's bowl prep. We're constantly evaluating and tweaking those things. We've looked at the bye week schedule. We've gone back to a schedule that we used probably three or four years ago. We just felt like that was the best thing for our football team right now.

But certainly, it's like anything else, whether it's game three, you know, go back to the UNI game, we had put an emphasis on starting a little faster. Didn't feel like we had started very fast in either of the first two ballgames. So we tried to tweak some things, change some things up, take a little different approach just with how we were doing everything from the hotel to pregame to how we were emphasizing what we were working on in that first drive. So we felt that helped us a little bit, got us on track.

But same thing last week, we wanted to try to get a fast start, and we did that. It will be the same thing coming out of the bye. We've certainly tweaked the schedule this week, but the emphasis will remain next week. What are we doing to help the players get going a little bit faster?

Q. Going back to the offensive line, as you mentioned, Cole Banwart had his first start, first real action. You still have two sophomore tackles, they're still sophomores. Ross Reynolds is just kind of the rotational guy last year, yet the way that they're gelling, whether it's Keegan Render's leadership or just collectively as a group, seems to be almost on a fast track despite their age. Is there

anything?

BRIAN FERENTZ: No, I think you've got a veteran guy in the middle like Keegan. I think that's a big help. Really, both tackles are fairly veteran. Both guys started, I think Wifs had seven games last year or eight. They've played a lot of football relative to everything else. But the bottom line is whether it's those guys, whether it's Ross, whether it's Cole Banwart stepping in, Dalton Ferguson who has been in the program five years stepping in there, both Paulsens have played a little for us. It really comes down to your work habits and how you do things every day on a daily basis for a year, or in the case of Dalton five years. In the case of the Paulsens, three-and-a-half years.

So I think what you're seeing is the cumulative effect of that work as those guys go out there. It's really hard to simulate a game environment until you get in it.

But if you've done the right things and taken the proper steps in your preparation over a long period of time, then I think you have a reasonable chance to expect to be successful, and you've seen that with those guys. So that's certainly encouraging. I think the main thing, it's like the rest of the team, can we continue to grow and build on that.

The bottom line is we're four weeks into the season. The season is very young. There is a lot of room to grow right here. But the flip side of growing, there is a lot of room to be stagnant and decline, so we're going to try to avoid those two things.

Q. Being an offensive line coach with Dalton, you've mentioned he's taking snaps at center. Did you see that versatility when he came in as a walk on? What is it like to see another story like that where a guy comes in, living his dream?

BRIAN FERENTZ: Dalton is a great story. He's a guy that, in recruiting, we really liked him. We knew he was very athletic. We felt pretty strongly about him. He was a guy that fell into the category that a lot of our guys fall into where not quite at the level we determined was scholarship level, but we're wrong quite often.

You've seen a lot of guys we determined that level to be did not go on to play for us. And there were a lot of guys we said weren't quite good enough that have gone on and played for us. He's one of those guys.

But athletically we saw a guy that could do multiple things and handled a lot, and he's certainly done that throughout his career. But unfortunately for the last two years he's had to deal with some injuries and overcome some of those things. He's done a nice job with that, and couldn't be more pleased with how he's responded from the spring on and just grown.

He's a lot of fun to watch. He's one of those guys that you're awfully happy for.

Q. Are teams taking away Noah Fant a little more than we can see, how would you evaluate how he's done?

BRIAN FERENTZ: I don't know what his stat line is. I don't know how well people are taking him away. He's been pretty productive for us. He's scored a few touchdowns and had a few receptions. Then it's like we talked about in the off-season. Certainly if you put good players on the field, people are going to come for them. And if they're accounting for them, can we get the ball to other guys? And I think we've been able to do that. I think it's opened up some of the rest of the offense, and that's all been positive.

I'm pleased with the production Noah has done. He's a guy we've tried to create match-ups at times, and we've been successful at times. Not as successful at others. But in the Wake of those match-ups, other match-ups have developed on the field for us and I think we've done a pretty good job of taking advantage of those.

Q. How often do you second-guess your play calls? You're inherently in a position where people second-guess you.

BRIAN FERENTZ: Never. We spend a lot of time on this we spend a lot of time being ready to prepare for these things and ready to execute them when the moment comes. If you're going to spend time second-guessing things, this is not a good profession for you. If you're going to spend time evaluating things and being very honest with yourself, and being hyper critical of your decision-making, and wondering if it was the right decision, and then being very analytic in how you look at that, then it's probably the right profession for you.

I don't think I've ever second-guessed anything I've done. There are certainly things I wish in retrospect I would have done differently or called a different play. If one play works, it's probably a good call. If it doesn't work, you probably should have called something else.

But I don't want to spend a lot of time second-guessing those things. You prepare for the moment when the moment comes. The decisions have already been made. You put them in the game, and if you've done your job properly, then things work. If you haven't, then they don't, and you need to go back and evaluate why it went wrong.

Q. Do you like being on the field better?

BRIAN FERENTZ: I prefer being on the field. I just like being on the field. You get a better feel for the game.

You're around the players. You can communicate with players. You can coach players. You can get information from players directly face-to-face. Just for me, it's a better place. It's a much better place for me. I'm not as good in a sterile environment. I kind of like the chaos down there, and I just like being down there. It's a personal preference, I suppose.

Q. In the heat of the moment, like a 4th & 1 or whatever, if you have just a few seconds to decide, how many plays are you usually -- does it come down to maybe two or three plays?

BRIAN FERENTZ: I think that's the misconception sometimes. There is not just a few seconds to decide. I don't know how many hours are in a week. How many hours are in a week from Sunday at 2 p.m. to Saturday at 7:40 p.m. when the ball is kicked off? A lot of hours. That's when all those decisions are made. That's when you take a look at what you think you're going to see, what you have available.

You practice it, you prepare it, you execute it, you rep it. You do it again. You rehearse it. You rehearse it in your mind. Then when the situation arises, the decision is already made.

Q. So no spur-of-the-moment decisions?

BRIAN FERENTZ: There's never a spur of the moment decision. When you're going for a fourth down in the spur of the moment, you're making a mistake, because you're not prepared. So when we go for it on fourth down, we know we're going for it on fourth down on Friday afternoon when we sit down and meet and make our strategy for the game. We know exactly what it is.

You look at the most recent fourth down attempt that we had, and we've had quite a few this season, but the most recent one we had were 3rd & 9 on the 14-yard line. We've gone backwards on second down, unfortunately. We're 3rd and 9 on the 14-yard line, and we put a certain personnel group in the game, we run a 3rd & 9 call that we felt good about. We knew that if we got to 4th & less than 1, it was an automatic go. There was no decision. When we caught that ball, we tried to go with a tempo play. We knew we were short.

At least we thought on the sideline we were short. Apparently we needed to review that, we did. But we tried to go with the tempo play, it got shut down. Then when we came out of it, we still knew either we were going with the first down play or fourth down play. The decision was already made.

The only decision was instead of -- obviously, we lost the element of tempo. So we changed personnel, and we changed the call, but we still knew we were going. We were either going to get a first down call or fourth down call right there.

Q. It seemed like when Reese Morgan makes an appearance, social media stories, a lot of former players can't say enough good things about Reese. Just what impact did he have on you as a player and now as a coach?

BRIAN FERENTZ: My first interaction with Reese Morgan was on the wrong sideline. He was the head coach at West Side my junior year at City High and they beat the bricks off us twice, once in the regular season and once in the playoffs. Then fortunately for us at City High, Reese came to Iowa.

So I always tease people and say my dad hired Reese here so we could win the boot, and it worked, we did my senior year.

Then Reese took over my recruitment, and what Reese means to me on a personal level is I was an undersized guy. I was not heavily recruited, and Reese believed in me, and I think a lot of kids from Iowa would tell you the same thing, and that means a lot because I wasn't highly recruited.

Northern Illinois was my only other offer. Coach Roushar, and Coach Novak were recruiting me, and I probably would have gone there. I always wanted to play at Iowa. I grew up dreaming of playing at Iowa. I wanted to play for Coach Fry. That obviously wasn't going to happen.

But they didn't want me. And your own dad didn't think you could play here, that's kind of tough. But I wasn't a scholarship player here. Reese kept banging the table and pounding the table for me. Then two, three days before signing day or whatever it was, now I've got an opportunity to play here, and I ended up getting a chance to play for Coach Morgan for three years, and I learned more about just being a human being and how to do things, even more than football. And there is plenty of football intermixed there.

So what Reese Morgan means to me is really simple: Reese believed in me when no one else did. And he's got a lot of stories like that, and a lot of guys that proved a lot of people wrong. Reese knows how to find the underdog. Reese knows how to measure a person's heart instead of maybe perhaps their measurables, and if you're a program like us, we live on those guys. So a guy like Reese is pretty darn important.