

Big Ten Conference Football Media Days

Tuesday July 26, 2016

Kirk Ferentz

Iowa

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Iowa head coach, Kirk Coach Ferentz.

COACH FERENTZ: Certainly, like every coach up here, we're awfully eager to start next week and anxious to get back on the field with our players. Looking back to last year we had a lot of positives, very rewarding moments. And like every year, when January comes you turn the page and move on to the next season. That's what we did again this past January.

We lost 21 outstanding seniors off our football team from a year ago. They did a great job of modeling the right type of behavior, the types of things you have to do when you want to have a winning team. And so that being said, as we look forward right now, this is a very new team. We're minus those players. We have new opportunities and certainly new challenges that are ahead of us.

Anytime you have a good team you lose good players. That's certainly the case here. But that being said we've got a lot of quality players back that we're very excited about. And the three players I brought to Chicago -- Desmond King, C.J. Beathard and Josey Jewell -- certainly are reflective of that.

If you look at our football team right now, certain areas we have to try to develop where we had senior attrition. We had two defensive ends graduate, two wide receivers, couple of offensive linemen, both fullbacks, and then tight end, free safety, weakside linebacker, on down. Like every team we've got work to do on that front. And maybe as significant as anything is our punting and kicking situation. We had two seniors at those positions last year, and they both did a great job. So that's a big thing.

Then again overall just the fact that we had 21 guys graduate. That leaves a huge void on your football team. Certainly guys have to ascend and somebody has to fill in those areas afterwards.

All that being said, we're anxious to start camp next week. Expect a lot of healthy competition. The guys have had a good summer. They've put in a good summer thus far, hopefully finish that up well this week and we're eager to get started. We know we have a lot of work ahead. We're looking forward to that. With that I'll throw it out for questions.

Q. What have you learned from the 2005 and 2010 seasons in terms of high expectations and undesired results?

COACH FERENTZ: I think if you look back, there are years where we've handled that well.

Like '09 and maybe 2003 and 2004. And then in those two seasons you alluded to, that really gets down to just winning close games, doing little things right, those types of things.

And I think it's that way in college football in general. Certainly it's been that way at the University of Iowa for a long time. Little things do matter. They are big things. And our ability to handle little details and do little things well on a consistent basis typically is a measure of our success.

And last year is a really good illustration of that. I think if you look at it all but one game, there weren't many games where we were in the last four minutes where anybody on our sideline felt very comfortable. All those games went down to the wire. They're extremely competitive and again that's just I think the nature of college football. It certainly is for us at Iowa. And for us to be successful we've got to be able to come out on the right side of those things and again it usually gets down to little detail things.

Q. Are the pieces in place to duplicate what you did again. How tough is that going to be for you to repeat the magical season you had last year?

COACH FERENTZ: First time I've been involved with an undefeated season during my time in college football. And we've had good college football teams historically. But just right there, just look nationally, it's very tough to go undefeated. A lot of things have to go your way. You have to have a good football team to start with and then you have to be fortunate injury-wise. Although really we didn't fit that category last year. You have to handle situations really well. It's tough to do.

But the big thing for us each and every year we want to win every game just like every team does. That's our goal at the onset. And it gets back to just taking care of what you can take care of on a given day, given portion of your calendar and take it a step at a time. It's really not much more complex than that. Our team again did a really nice job of that last year. That's a heck of a challenge for this year's team to, A, have the kind of leadership we had last year at the top end of the team, and then also handle the daily challenges the way last year's team did it. So those two things really went hand in hand and that's a lot easier to talk about that than to really have it come out and in terms of functionality.

Q. Last year, C.J. was kind of stepping in as your starter, and now he's pretty established obviously. What's the ceiling for him as he heads into this year?

COACH FERENTZ: We'll find out. It's interesting, at least locally last year we made the decision to go with C.J., and going into this season a lot of people assumed he was a veteran player. He'd had one start in his career, I believe, and came in in relief in another game, played a prominent role.

So last year is really his first year playing. I thought he did a tremendous job, especially of given the injury situation that he was confronted with. He was healthy, really wasn't healthy other than the first two and a half games probably. So I thought he did a wonderful job. Showed a lot of poise, a lot of mental toughness out there. A lot of great leadership.

I think he's representative of our good players, the guys I mentioned and others on our football team. If we're going to have a good football team this year, realistically every one of those guys have to play better than they did a year ago.

And Desmond had a very celebrated season but he certainly played better than he had the first two years. Took the experience he gained and really used it to his advantage and we expect that of all of our players. Certainly quarterback's a very tough position to play. It's a very critical position, and C.J. is a very intelligent young man, very prideful young man. All of us expect them to continue to push forward and not only be healthier but an improving player on top of that.

Q. Did Desmond have one of the tougher decisions in terms of NFL or coming back, you've seen in your tenure here?

COACH FERENTZ: I personally don't think it's tough at all. And I told Desmond basically the same thing I told Brandon Scherff. From my vantage point there are few times in life where you get to do what you want to do. Not that you have to do or feel like you have to do. I think Brandon went through the same thing a year prior to that.

When you're sitting in a position where you have a chance, you know your future's good no matter what you choose to do -- you have an option to go to the NFL. And what I told both players was I was pretty confident when they're 26, 27, they were going to be really good players in the National Football League and contributing to whatever teams they were on. So that was out there. I think it's a given, pretty much a given for both those guys.

It's one of those rare opportunities when you can do what you truly want to do, and every one of our NFL guys that comes back and always tells our team the most fun they'll ever have is in college. I think both those guys took it to heart. I know Desmond, it's really important to finish the degree work not only to him but entire family. I think in both cases with Desmond and Brandon the messages they heard from their families was very positive towards staying in college.

And the bottom line is you only get to be a senior twice in your life as an athlete and those are really enjoyable, fulfilling years. And I think Desmond really appreciated that. I think he's excited about being back and also embracing the challenge of being a leader and being a better player than he was last year. It may not show up statistically, but being a better football player for us, that's something that we're all counting on.

Q. I think people still think of the Big Ten as black and blue linebackers, linemen. How good is the cornerback play in the league right now between Desmond and Jourdan Lewis at Maryland and Will Likely at Maryland? I could keep going. How good is the cornerback play in a league that people think about running?

COACH FERENTZ: I'm old enough to be around when there were a lot of perceptions about our league, going back to the early '80s, you know, where it was three yards and a cloud of turf, whatever it might have been back then. I think perceptions a lot of times are overrated. If you look historically in our league, at least '80s on, there's been a lot of diversity in terms of the way people attack offensively, defensively, things they do on special teams. And right along with that I think we've had tremendous players at all positions here historically.

That's one of the neat things about being in this conference and watching the players that have come through and certainly those players that you just mentioned are all outstanding players. But I think if you studied all the positions in our conference we've got a lot of tremendous young players.

And it tends to be that way every year. So that's part of the challenge, part of the fun of this whole thing is seeing great players and being able to compete against great players each and every week.

Q. I don't know if you've ever brought a junior to Big Ten media days before but you did this year with Josey Jewell. What does that say about him and what you feel about him as a leader?

COACH FERENTZ: It's interesting, to that point we've never brought anybody other than seniors here. It's something we've tried to do traditionally. Going back 18 years I've already surveyed the staff on who they thought would be the three best players to bring here. And our staff was basically unanimous with Josey. Took it into a staff meeting. What I concluded was it was pretty obvious. Josey is the first sophomore captain we've had. It's an award selected by the teammates, and Josey was an overwhelming choice last December to be a team captain. It just made common sense I think to bring him here.

He's achieved something that no player's done in the last 17 years at our place. He's a tremendous representative. He's done a great job on the field, a great leader. We're thrilled to have him here. There's several other guys that would have done a great job, too, but I think it was the right thing to do.

That movie was Spotlight, by the way. Two months later I remembered it. Sorry about that. The one movie I've seen since the season started. I knew I saw a good one.

Q. When you look at George Kittle's development, he came in as tweener in size and really developed both as a blocker and pass catcher. Is this -- did you anticipate him making these strides or did he just exceed your expectations?

COACH FERENTZ: We were certainly hopeful. George's cousin did a great job for us last year, Henry Krieger Coble, just had an unbelievable senior year, and I think he has a nice opportunity with the Denver Broncos. We're wishing him the best. He's a real key loss for us.

With Henry, each step of the way was important to him, and I think George, we kind of view him the same way. Different type of player, but very much the same in terms of development. I think George came to our place at 200, 205 pounds. He's built himself up where he's able to do the things we ask our tight ends to do. He's got a tremendous attitude. Just worked extremely hard and we've seen him, I think, take really positive steps with every segment of the calendar.

So if he continues to do that throughout the summer and really hopeful that he'll have a real memorable senior year that would really help our football team a great deal, and more importantly that's what you want for every player on your roster. You want to see them develop and continue to improve. That's where his thoughts are, where his efforts have been, and just really excited to see him play this season. We're very hopeful for him.

Q. Again this year you're going to play Nebraska on the Friday after Thanksgiving rather than Saturday. Is that good or bad? How does your staff like it?

COACH FERENTZ: Personally it's great. We really enjoy it. But for a couple of reasons. I think it adds to the game a little bit. Makes it a little bit unique from a television perspective and players seem to enjoy that. And I think it works out just fine. If it was earlier in the season I'd be a little uncomfortable with that -- a short week, but when you get to week 12 I don't

think it's really that big a deal. In fact it may be beneficial. Sometimes it's better to get to games faster than it is to sit around looking at each other for another day. I think it's all positive.

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