

University of Iowa Football

Media Conference

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Kirk Ferentz



Iowa - 26, Purdue - 20

KIRK FERENTZ: So I think typically every Big-Ten game you can count on it being a battle and today was certainly a good illustration of that. I am really happy of the level of effort and perseverance that our team showed out there.

First half, nothing easy about that. And I thought in the second half we made some adjustments and did some things better, but the game went right down to the wire as you know. We talked in the past couple weeks about being better, detailed and we're going to have to continue to work on that. So we'll keep our foot on the gas certainly this week.

But there are a lot of positive things that happened today, too. I think if you look at our defensive team one of the goals we had was to really stop the run. They haven't relied on that real heavily, we didn't want to let that get going. I thought our guys did a good job of that. I thought we got good pressure pretty consistently throughout the game. And to come up with a couple takeaways certainly is something that we haven't done a great job of the last two weeks. So that of would be big, obviously.

Then the other part is just putting out the fire, the guys have done a good job of that last couple weeks and I think, we getting the ball well done, or into the right there. So that was good to see.

Offensively, just to finish out the game the way we did and ran the ball when everybody in the stadium knew that was going to happen that was certainly a positive. I thought our protection was a little bit better out there today and came up were some big plays, one that got negated, but came up with some big plays. And then on special teams, Michael came up with a couple big punts that really impacted the game. Glad to see that. Certainly the punt returning aspect was a little bit better. Keeping the ball off the ground. Keith Duncan couldn't have done better in those points, every point's big in a conference game, so I thought he was really wired in. You don't get to field two onside kicks too often, but our guys it a good job on that they looked prepared and came up with the ball.

So some things we're going to have to clean up, that's

not going to change. When we don't give up big plays on defense we tend to be pretty solid, but we did give up a couple today. Obviously still working on finding our rhythm better, rhythm offensively, and we'll continue to press on that. And the special teams part, just the consistency. Giving up that one kick return we scored and they bring it right out to our 38, I believe it is, because somebody's not where they're supposed to be. Then kick return, we bring it out a little bit and end up taking a 10-yard penalty, so we end up with the ball on the 10. So those kind of things we got to do a little bit better at. That's the challenge of football.

We have another big week in front of us and that's where our focus will be starting tomorrow.

The crowd was outstanding. They have been great all year long and today was kind of one of those gloomy midwestern days Big-Ten days and they were there start to finish and certain appreciate them being right there at the end for us. So say thanks to them.

Last thing, I know this is already been in the news, but Mike Reilly, certainly, our condolences go out to the entire family. I never saw Mike play but I've heard a lot about him as a player and then knowing him as adult. I can totally see that just he was such a great guy, so enthusiastic, and really enjoyed the game, really enjoyed the people around him. And fortunately I was able to be here when Jim, his son, Jim, played, walk-on guy who ends up being an all Big-Ten player and just a tremendous young man. So condolences to the entire Reilly family, that's a big loss to everybody.

Q. What kind of legacy did Mike leave here?

KIRK FERENTZ: -- The Mike I knew, first of all, a legendary player. A great football player. Played linebacker, which is right in the center of all the action. And I met him as adult, that's really where I got to know him. So he was just always so positive, always so enthusiastic and just to me struck me as a can-do guy. And things were a little bumpy there for a couple years for us and it was, like, hey, you guys are going to be fine, you're doing the right thing, just keep pushing forward. So that was a part I appreciated. And then, again, to know his son Jim the way I did and get to know his dad a little bit later that was pretty cool.

Q. Matt Hankins was the first one to greet Riley

Moss after he got that interception off the field, he showed up post game and said all that matters is the victory. How important is that type of leadership from your players?

KIRK FERENTZ: There are a lot of good things today and that was one of the best things I saw. I noticed that just like you did. He's the first guy out there to congratulate him. I think it's just representative of the kind of guys we have on our football team. They're great young people, they care about each other. And Riley ended up having the hot hand, did a really good job there. Matt's a good football player and I'm just glad both of them are back with us. Started last week and we'll be a better football team with both those guys playing.

Q. How does maybe what Riley went through last year as a young guy, how does help a young guy grow in his career?

KIRK FERENTZ: Coincidentally that was another Kodak moment, we gave up a lot of points against these guys last year. But that's the value of experience. And we had I think four freshmen playing pretty prominently roles defensively, the two middle linebackers playing for Kristian, certainly Riley and Dane Belton played a lot today too. So experience, you can't hand that to anybody. But the biggest thing is it's a tribute to him, the way he's worked since last year, and he was really coming on in camp doing some good things. And then when we lost him to injury, that hurt us a little bit. Not only defensively, but also special teams-wise. So the credit goes to him, though, experience doesn't count if you don't make it work for you.

Q. You guys played really well today on defense as you said. Especially rush defense. According to this you guys only gave up 33 yards. You continue to play real, real well against the run. Maybe comment on that if you could?

KIRK FERENTZ: That's really not Purdue's DNA, they don't hang their hat on that realm. But there's almost a danger there in my opinion at least when you play a team like that because if you take that for granted then next thing you know they're hitting you for 8 yards, 10 yards and those are really painful. So I thought our guys for the most part we gave up a couple runs today but they were pretty focused out there. And if you can at least make a team a little bit one dimensional it gives you a better chance to play well defensively.

Q. Do you know anything definitive about Brandon Smith's health situation? And secondly, how would you describe the performance he gave today?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, some of the big plays, obviously were involving him. Things that we need to clean up on, we had an alignment penalty that kept, took whatever that was, 34 yards off the board for us.

So, yeah, he's, and we talked about Riley growing. I think Brandon and Ihmir, you think about where they were two years ago and the way they're playing right now. Brandon has really learned how to use his size and his ability. So he's doing a great job. As far as the injury goes, so far it's positive. They did a fluoro or whatever, but sounds like maybe a bone bruise or kick or that type of thing so we'll keep our fingers crossed on that.

Q. Over the course of your career are there games you look back on where you don't have the great style points but you get the win that's important for the season?

KIRK FERENTZ: Like most of them, frankly. It just seems that's how they go. But it's funny, Bob Sanders was here and on Monday and I told the guys, I think one of our most important games in 21 years was Indiana in 2001. And at some point you just got to find a way to get it done. That's what you have to do. It's not always going to be pretty. That game was hard and difficult, but it gave us a chance to have a little momentum moving forward. And, when you're in conference football that's just what you have to expect. When it is easy, boy, that's, you go home that night saying how did that happen? I'm proud of our guys the way they persevered and it wasn't easy there going down the stretch for sure.

Q. The way Keith is kicking the ball you're pretty confident it's going to go through, first of all, and the fact that he had to sit behind Miguel after getting a taste of it to come back even better says something about him?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, he almost kind of surrendered a couple years ago and not in a negative way, but he was kind of like, you know, when he wasn't playing he kind of leveled off there for a little bit. But the credit goes to him. Just like talking about Riley, Keith has just worked so hard behind the scenes the last couple years. And he and Caleb are both practicing really well. So I think all of us have total confidence in both those guys and it's a real tribute to his hard work and focus. But that's growing up. That's just young guys becoming a little bit more mature and learning how to do things.

Q. Nate Stanley gave you a solid game, made that tackle --

KIRK FERENTZ: Absolutely. That would have been huge had he not done that. But that was a good effort. That's the way he's wired. He's going to give everything he's got out there. Had a couple runs mixed in there, too, that were good. But it's been a little bumpy, our protection hasn't been a hundred percent, I thought it was better today, our rhythm isn't right where we want it to be right now. But he's pushing forward, he's leading us, and bottom line is he got another win and I'm really

happy about that.

Q. How kind of two halves there, you guys field goals in the first half, touchdowns second half. What was the message at halftime and was it frustrating in that first half having that?

KIRK FERENTZ: It is. Coming into the game we talked about the importance of scoring touchdowns. Not only getting in the red zone but scoring touchdowns because it is huge. Especially in conference play. You can go through the schedule usually and it's just a big difference, four versus three. So I don't know if we did anything magical at halftime, but we did a little better job. And that was the frustrating part to drive the ball like we did and then not be able to finish drives. We're going to have to keep working at that.

Q. It felt like you guys did, maybe kept the tight end a little more in for protection this week or I don't know if that was maybe for the running game also?

KIRK FERENTZ: A little bit of each. These guys are a blitz outfit. They bring pressure and they have three straight years against us. So that was expected. That's kind of their DNA. So it was part of the mix, yeah, try to help us out a little bit that way.

Q. Does it change any schematic things with you guys?

KIRK FERENTZ: Oh, sure, yeah. It's, it, there's cat and mouse there in everything you do. There's all kind of protections. You can go as far as eight, I guess sometimes you can go nine, but eight-man is really unusual, seven, five and six. So it's a little bit of a roll the dice. If they're blitzing do we want to try to get the ball out quick, knowing where the free guy's going to come from and hope for a catch and run, those types of things. And then the other way to do it is just try to block it all up and somebody's got to work open. So it's cat and mouse and they caught us a couple times, we caught them a couple times today. A couple times we thought they were coming, they didn't. Really didn't have a good answer and vice versa. So that's just part of the gymnastics that go on during a game.

Q. When you hear that your team -- or excuse me, when you hear that Illinois beat Wisconsin, does it give your team any kind of a lift and does it give it any of a lesson?

KIRK FERENTZ: Well, I think the lesson is that football, conference football at least, I think is tough. It's my 30th year in this league now and it's really hard to predict what's going to happen and when people start thinking that they know the answers ahead of time, boy, that's when bad things happen. So I have no idea what happened in that game other than I heard the score. The other important lesson for our team is you keep playing, you keep playing and celebrate a win, my

mentor near the end of his life said celebrate a good block and we don't do that enough. When you win a game, celebrate, enjoy it, feel good about it and then we'll critique it tomorrow and worry about it then. But the whole idea is just keep pushing forward and have a good week and put it to bed the next day and keep going.

Q. What did it mean to see John Waggoner get his first career sack?

KIRK FERENTZ: That was great. That was really good to see him out there do that. I double checked with him, I was pretty sure it was his first one. So I double checked with him in the locker room and he verified that so I think that was fantastic. I'll throw Joe Evans in there, too, another freshman, you mentioned freshmen. Joe's doing a good job really trying to push that pocket in the latter part of the game and I was impressed from the sideline what he was doing too.

Q. Talking about Bob Sanders being here, what has he meant to this program even after he went on to a pro career and beyond?

KIRK FERENTZ: Well to me he just helped change the tempo of our defense back in 2000 when we put him in against Wisconsin. And he changed the tempo of special teams right off the bat. Then when he started playing defense -- I told the story to our team yesterday, same thing happened with the Colts, right, when they went to the Super Bowl. When he was out the scores were a lot different, the yardage was a lot different than when he was in. He just makes everybody around him better. And there's a Jordan quote, a Michael Jordan quote about some guys want to do it, some people hope to do it or wish to do it, other guys make it happen. And that's Bob Sanders, that's who he is. And proud of just the adult that he is right now. He's raising a beautiful family, he's a tremendous young person and just really, really happy for him.

Q. And then why go to the locker room with the three timeouts and 38 second rule?

KIRK FERENTZ: We had it on the 25 and I was a little ticked, we must have had a lack of communication on the kick return, I thought it was a returnable ball and we fair caught it, but that's one more thing we better get cleaned up. I was not in a good mood at that point, quite frankly. If we had squirted out then we probably would have gone with it, but I was a little upset at that point.

Q. With Bob Sanders, how do you think the message was received by your players and especially somebody like Geno who is from the same part of the world as he is?

KIRK FERENTZ: Well, it's interesting now because

people aren't always appreciative of tradition and history, that type of thing. But I think our players have all been smart enough to figure out -- and we talk about Bob frequently just what he was and how he did it, did things as a Hawkeye and the impact that he had. So I think everybody in our program has a pretty good knowledge of him. Hopefully they who now Kinnick is and, but you talk about an impactful player over the last 20 years. So he's been around the building a couple times, it's just great when's back here and he still looks pretty good, looks like he could still play. I checked with him yesterday and he wants no part of that. He's happy being a dad.

Q. The last drive, how encouraging was it to see your guys getting off the ball and Mekhi running the ball hard, especially with the clock winding down in the fourth quarter and you guys trying to salt away the win?

KIRK FERENTZ: That was great. Everybody in the stadium knew what we're were going to do there. And probably the only thing I would correct, I would like to stay in bounds on that one to left. But we got a first down so, you know, but yeah to finish it off that way, yeah it was really big and really pleasing and hopefully we can just keep pushing forward here and building off that stuff.