

University of Iowa Football

Media Conference

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Kirk Ferentz



KIRK FERENTZ: Moving towards this week, certainly we're looking forward to getting started, like I think everybody is. We're pleased overall with the camp. I think the preseason portion of our schedule went pretty well. As you know, there's a very fine line between success and failure, and the importance of camp can't be overstated. It's a very, very critical time for any football team. I think for the most part the guys made good progress.

Certainly having an opportunity the second year in a row now to work out of the Hansen Performance Center is really fantastic. I've had several pro scouts come through here the last week and a half, two weeks. They all comment they get to see other buildings around the country, and they just can't say enough about it. And then from us, from our vantage point, certainly to have a chance to operate the efficiency, the ability to get a lot more done in an efficient manner I think has really been beneficial. That was big this year, as well.

I think overall the team made a lot of progress, overall, just in general terms, and a lot of moving parts. Certainly like every camp you have guys injured, so we didn't quite have the consistency you're looking for. Hopeful we'll pick that up as we move along. And then certainly last week being the first week of school I think is a benefit. We had the same luxury last year, so it gave us a chance to get into the school routine before we started up with game week like we did this past week. I think overall, a lot of good things there.

I think like everybody in the country, we're eager to get on the game field, and we probably need to, and I think that's probably true of everybody that's playing. Overall our experienced guys made good progress. They did a good job of leading, and then we've got a lot of newcomers with 21 seniors graduating, a lot of newcomers that are going to be entering the fray, and some of those guys will be first-year players.

Certainly looking forward to seeing how they respond out there on the game field, how they compete, those types of things, and you know, like every other year, we've got to finish our game week here this week. We still have a couple days of preparation ahead, and then start the process of playing games, and just anxious to see how the team meshes, how they come forward,

and how we evolve as the season goes on. First things first, this is the game that's on our mind.

Our captains defensively will be Josey Jewell and Desmond King. Offensively you've got C.J. Beathard and Matt VandeBerg. Those four guys were selected by the leadership group.

Injury-wise we're in pretty decent shape. We have a couple guys that may be touch-and-go going into the game, but overall, seems like we're heading the right direction right now. Again, that's always frustrating in camp when you have guys in and out, but we haven't had anything overly major, so that's the good news.

And then just a couple words about Miami. It's like every first game; you're never quite sure about your opponent. I think just in a broad sense, this is the third year of their program going since Coach Martin got there, and I think as many of you know, he had a really good run at Notre Dame with the Notre Dame program, is an outstanding football coach, and if you look at his staff, they've had great stability. Most of those guys have been there for all three of the years. They were either with him at Notre Dame or during their run at Grand Valley, and he did a great job there, National Championships, a lot of great football teams.

I think their staff has a clear idea of what they want to get accomplished. They made good progress last year, won two of their last three games, and just reading what we've read coming out of the camp, I think they really feel good about their football team, the progress.

From my experience, usually year three is where you start really gaining traction and gaining ground as a team, as a program when you're trying to build something new, and I think that's probably what you can expect from Miami. We're going to do our best to prepare based on the film that we have. They've got a lot of returning starters. We expect those guys to be better players just like I hope our guys coming back are better, as well, and just looking forward to getting out there and starting the season.

With that being said, just again, anxious to get going with the first game. Certainly excited about being in Kinnick. That's always a good thing, and it was nice of

them to get it warmed up last Saturday night, so hopefully we can hit the ground running on Saturday.

Q. One of the places where you'll be younger than you have been in a long time is at receiver. How has that progressed?

KIRK FERENTZ: It's kind of a tale of two cities in some ways. I think we've made good progress, but that's one of the areas where we've had some injuries, and that's not uncommon. Receivers tend to have more soft-tissue type injuries, and we've had some of those.

But I think we've made good strides. Matt Vandeberg has been a good player for us for a long time. If you talk about improved players, Riley McCarron really did a nice job for us on a lot of levels last year, but I think we've really seen him take a big step. I think he was a better player in the spring than he was last fall, and certainly he's taken another step forward, so he's really done a good job against some really good players out there in camp, and that's encouraging.

Jay Scheel is making progress, and I think the rest of the younger guys are stepping forward, too, but how ready we are I think we'll find out Saturday, but I think we're making progress there.

Q. Eight true freshmen on your depth chart. Is that new Kirk or just a good recruiting class or what?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I think it's kind of a mix. It starts with, as we said back in January, lose 21 really good players, really good team guys, our seniors, so to fill that void, guys have to ascend in the program. I think we've seen some of that, and then also you have to fill the voids underneath. I think it's probably a little combination of the voids that we have, some of the voids we have, and then also some of the guys that got here. We always feel pretty good about our class, but you don't know until they get on campus, and starting with the work that they did in June, have continued into July, and then most importantly when they put helmets on in August, we saw some good things.

How they're going to play Saturday or beyond, who knows. How many will play Saturday or beyond, who knows that, either. But I think it's fair to say we'll have a bigger number than normal. Based on what we've seen in practice, we're really optimistic they'll play well, and we're going to need that to have a good football team.

Q. Can you talk a little bit about Bo Bower's ascent? He played in the spring because Ben was out and then he comes and wins the job in camp.

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, it's really a pretty good story, and that one is not nailed down yet, but he's really done a great job on a couple fronts. I think first and

foremost, he started two years ago, and the first thing that comes to mind when I think about Bo is his attitude. He's a really positive guy, has been from day one when he got here. Just making the decision to come here and turn a scholarship down at another school says a lot about him.

But he's always been positive. He's always an eager, hard-working guy, very good vibe to him, and he got beat out a year ago, but never deterred him at all. His attitude never changed. He was very, very positive, and the other part about the equation is his ability to be flexible, so moving around, and we have a couple guys that are doing that, at the linebacker position in particular but all over the team. So he's been unselfish, kept a great attitude, and like all guys, you hope guys progress and improve as players as they go along in their careers, and he's certainly done that.

Again, it's not nailed down yet. We may play a couple guys there, but Bo has really had a good camp and done a great job.

Q. Will you rotate guys at the Will spot?

KIRK FERENTZ: I think it's fair to say. We could have a couple guys in several positions during the game. Most of these competitions have been pretty close, which is a good thing, but right now he's our starter and we're really happy with what he's doing.

Q. LeShun has become a leader in the backfield and not just because he has a younger brother on the team. Is that natural for him? Is that something that you've seen, as well?

KIRK FERENTZ: With LeShun? Yeah, it's interesting the two brothers are very different personality-wise, but LeShun has just kind of been really steady from day one, very mature, kind of acts like he's 35 in some ways, and he's got a real steady approach to things. It's very businesslike, and it's really impressive. To have him back there with the backs was a good thing, but certainly for our whole -- not just the offense, for our whole football team. He models great behavior, and I talked a lot about the seniors that we had last year, and certainly he's going to be an outstanding senior for us this year. Everything about LeShun is good. It's really positive and we've been really happy to have him on our football team.

Q. How have you seen Ron Coluzzi adapt to his surroundings, and what do you think of his self-confidence coming in here?

KIRK FERENTZ: I'd say he's done it with great ease, and it is interesting right now, we've got a real young kicker and a real old kicker, two different ends of the spectrum. But Ron, from the first time we met him last winter has just been a really mature, heads-up guy,

and when he got here in June and started working, it's really been fun to watch him. We couldn't watch him punt or any of that stuff during the summertime, but we've seen him certainly since August started. He's done a really good job back there, and I think the extra benefit for us has been that he's a more mature guy being a college graduate already. And with a very young group of specialists, and it's a large group of specialists, to have that maturity and have that confidence, it's really been, I think, beneficial for other guys that haven't played very much.

We, I think, picked up a really good punter, but on top of that a guy that can help steady that group a little bit and kind of show them the way to do things in terms of practice, and when games start to come around, I think help steady guys a little bit.

Q. With the younger placekicker and him having done that before, have you been impressed with how he has handled where he's been put in the lineup?

KIRK FERENTZ: I think it's like all of our seniors. We sure hope they give us leadership and help calm some of the other guys down. Ron just takes care of business. He's really thorough, very detailed, really positive personality, and he's a confident guy, and he's a good player. That helps. So I think just his influence that way is going to be good for everybody in the group certainly.

It just so happens right now our kicker is a freshman. Although I haven't seen him get too rattled, either, yet. We haven't been over there yet with a full crowd, so that might be a different story. Hang onto your hat.

Q. If you have to use a backup quarterback Saturday, is Wiegers the first one off the bench?

KIRK FERENTZ: We haven't made that decision yet. It's kind of like any of those slashes right now, those are both basically coin tosses at this point.

Q. Keith Duncan is your kicker then?

KIRK FERENTZ: If we were playing tomorrow, he would be, yes.

Q. Are you thinking about rotating at kicker?

KIRK FERENTZ: We'll see how it goes. I said earlier that we'd let the competition go as long as we have to, and right now at this point he's won the job, but if we have to take this month or half the season to determine it, we'll do that. Hopefully that's not the case, but we'll start with Keith and let him go.

Q. Do you have anybody else at long field goals?

KIRK FERENTZ: You know, we've talked about that. We don't have a Marshall Koehn on the bench. That's

one thing. So if we're in that situation that's going to be a little bit different this year certainly.

So we're still noodling a couple things around, and we'll have to make a decision before Saturday on that, and that may be ongoing, too. But again, we don't have a guy like Marshall running out there and hitting one, a 57-yarder. Can't count on that.

Q. Has Duncan surprised you with catching on this quickly?

KIRK FERENTZ: You know, yes and no. Jason Baker is the guy that recommended him to us, but I'm still trying to figure out -- as I said on the teleconference, I'm not sure how he ended up here. I didn't know who he was at that point, and we visited for a short while in this room, but they came from North Carolina, he and his dad. I'm not sure what brought them to the Midwest, and he was determined to come here.

Thank goodness. He's really done a nice job. He's just come in and really performed. Seems pretty unflappable at this stage. I really have to compliment him on that. But it wasn't like he was a guy, superstar recruit or any of that stuff. But he's a really good football player, and we'll see what happens here in the weeks ahead. But he's really done a nice job throughout camp.

Q. When you look at CJ, part of what makes him special is his broken -- his playmaking ability, whether it's in the pocket or outside the pocket; however, as many hits he's taken, I'm sure you want to harness him, but will that keep him from making plays if you tell him don't run so much?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I think really the only decision we have, two things, would be how many called runs we have, and it's a little bit like when we had Brad Banks. Brad was a really capable runner, so you always had that equation. And then the other part about it is when he does come out of the pocket, we're not going to discourage him from that. That's one of the reasons he's a good player. Not only can he run or will run, but he'll also break the pocket and throw the ball, too, which is really tough to defend. We're not going to try to control that.

We're hopeful. We're hopeful that he slides a little bit better and protects himself, just use a little better judgment. The play at Indiana, you're not going to change that, and we all saw that coming from the sideline that day, and we all knew what he was thinking, we didn't know if he was physically capable of doing that. I don't know how you take that out of a great player, and that's part of the reason he's a really good player.

But as far as just using a little better judgment about we'll give up a yard for you not taking a hit, those kinds of things, hopefully he'll do that. And Greg assures me he's practiced sliding, as well. I know Tucker was a really good baseball player. Maybe they worked over this weekend on it hopefully. But he's got some of the ugliest slides I've seen since I've gotten into coaching, that's for sure, so hopefully he'll do a little better job on that.

Q. Sometimes he doesn't necessarily get out of bounds quick enough, I think Illinois last year he got hit really hard?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, we don't need him to be the toughest guy on the team. He's already gotten an award, certificate for being tough, so we just hopefully play a little bit smarter so we can keep him healthy the whole season. But you can't play timid, either. It just doesn't work.

Q. How did you guys get to the point of actually practicing sliding with CJ?

KIRK FERENTZ: You know, he played baseball, too, but he was a head-first slide guy, and that doesn't work in football. It's just a whole different mindset, I guess, that kind of training. But he's a good athlete. He'll handle that. Some of those -- some quarterbacks don't slide very well. I can't explain that. Usually they're pretty good athletes.

Q. Would you say that Bo Bower, when guys get demoted like that, a lot of times they just don't come back. Is he just kind of irregular that way, just kind of going against the norm?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I don't know if it's the norm. You hope all players just keep pushing, but it's easier to say that and it's easier to say have a good attitude and all those types of things, but he's lived it. We all have our moments in private where, boy, this and that and that type of thing, but he's never demonstrated anything but a positive attitude since he's been here. He's worked hard, always just has a good demeanor about him, and that's what you hope for in a football player.

That's the thing about sports in general, but certainly in college athletics you just never know how the story is going to turn out until the whole thing runs its course. We're really counting on him to play well, and he was doing a really nice job on special teams, too. Now we've pulled him back on a couple of those phases because he's starting the game, but he's a really valuable football player in all regards for us.

Q. When you make that move Aaron Mends, he's held that position since the spring and then it slips away, do you have to bring him back, just monitor

him?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I think the key thing is starting in January, nobody holds anything, including CJ or Desmond, two of our better known guys. Everything gets earned, positions get earned, just like first downs do and getting off the field on defense.

Everybody has been competing, and we'll let the guys continue to compete, too. There's no finality to any of this stuff now. That's what makes a team good, just letting guys compete and battle out there. I can't say enough about Aaron, too. I mean, he's really got a great attitude. He's a really good young guy. He's improved a bunch. It's not a knock on him at all. It's just Bo is doing a little better right now.

Q. What did Devonte Young do to impress you guys so much?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I think it's a combination. That is a classic combination to the question earlier, just we had some vacancies at that position certainly, a need at that position, plus he's come in and done a really good job. I think he did a good job this summer, watching him train and all that type of thing, it looked like he really kind of fit in. He's a pretty mature young guy and did a nice job in the classroom this summer, didn't seem to be fazed by going to college, any of that type of thing, and then since we started practicing football he's picked up the offense pretty well. And just he's done some things that really impressed us.

There's going to be some ups and downs like you have with any -- not only young player but players that are new to the field, but we're really encouraged by what we see. I kind of see this thing being a group effort, five, six guys hopefully that can help push us forward here, right now if we only have three or four that's where we'll start and then push from there, but I think we're making improvement and getting closer to having a group mentality out there.

Q. It was a long time ago now, but when you last played Miami, looking back, is it one of the more impressive performances your program has had?

KIRK FERENTZ: It really was. I'll go back to the year before, and you remember that just as well. We were lucky to get out of there with a victory. It was really -- that was a tough day. I think their quarterback threw about 70 passes and I think 60 of them went to the right side that day if I recall right, and we had to really fight, and I remember Brad Banks making a great completion down the middle that really kind of ignited us.

As it turns out, that was a really good football team. Both those years they were really good. That was a big win certainly, and what their quarterback went on and has done is really impressive. Yeah, it was a good

effort on all parts for us.

Q. Do you plan to break in any of the true freshmen running backs?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, it's possible. It is possible right now. I wouldn't rule either of them out right now. Toks probably has the better possibility of getting in, but we're considering it for sure.

Q. How about at tight end?

KIRK FERENTZ: It's possible, yeah. It's possible. We like both those guys, too, and Noah (Fant) may get some reps, but both those guys are doing a good job.

Q. Brady Reiff is somebody we haven't seen a lot of. He's either been dinged up or withheld in the open practices. He's on second team. How has he progressed to this point?

KIRK FERENTZ: He's doing well. I would say with our defensive line right now, it's clear we have three ends that are really doing well. The Nelson cousins, are our law firm, and then you've got Parker, also, and then the inside three guys, same way. It's Faith with Jaleel and Nate. Those six guys right now are kind of one tier, and then after that there's a wide-open competition I would say. And right now Brady would be the next guy in line. Sam Brincks is right there, as well. Those guys are pretty close.

We'll just keep pushing hard to keep those guys moving forward, too. Guys like that I think have a chance to really -- even though they may not be playing a lot, improve in practice, and we've just got to keep trying to work that and develop some depth.

Q. What have you seen from Josey in that leadership captain position?

KIRK FERENTZ: You know, Josey has been pretty much the same since he showed up here, even on the scout team. He's just been really consistent. We talked about LeShun being serious; there's another guy, Josey has got a real serious demeanor, very mature, and he's just a joy to have out there on the field. He's not maybe the most vocal guy, but when he talks I think everybody kind of pays attention to what he's saying, and we're just really glad he's on our football team.

Q. You guys have the experience of playing in some of those premier bowl games before, Orange Bowl, of course. What have you learned in those seasons following that maybe you've changed or implemented this season to avoid that letdown?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I think it's twofold. The bowl games are a separate topic, and that was a topic we spent a lot of time on in the out of season, just going back and revisiting our approach to that. But you know,

as far as moving on, we move on. Whether we go to a bowl game or not, good bowl or maybe a lesser, it's just a new season, new approach, and basically you start from scratch and obviously you have a group of players back with you that form your nucleus.

But you know, it's a journey. It's week to week. There's so many twists and turns that can take place during the course of a year, and really it just gets down simply to focusing on what's important. I think our team for the most part has done a pretty good job of that. You're never quite sure, but I think we've kind of kept our eyes on the road and tried to take care of today.

Really if you want to look back at last year's team, that's what they really did a great job of. There's so many things you've got to do during the course of the year, but once you get to the game week portion, the ability to really focus on preparing for whoever it is you're playing that week and then you've got to show up whether it's 11:00, 2:32 or 7:00 and be ready to go. Last year's team really passed the test. Not that we were perfect, but they didn't get distracted, and that's really the challenge, I think, that's out there for this -- every team, but certainly for us. We just have to look back less than a year, and if we can learn from that group, just that portion alone, we'll give ourselves a chance to be successful. It really doesn't matter where you were in December, it's more about I think what you're looking at as you look down the road a little bit.

Q. Is it fair to say that some of your teams are better at avoiding distractions than others have been over the years?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I think it's true for any team, probably anything in life. There's just a lot more distractions right now maybe than there used to be in my opinion. It's easier to -- I mean, every coach is trying to get that, but it's easier to talk about it than execute it. You know, the more guys that are focused on improvement on this week, today was Tuesday, having a good Tuesday practice, and then they're going to come back in later on here and look at that tape, what are we going to take from it, and then you move on to the next portion, if you'll do that and take care of your body, get your rest, all those kinds of things, and then you've got to hit your books on top of it, and don't jaywalk on top of that, so there's a lot of things that these guys have to do. And if you can keep focused on the things that are truly important to being a good college athlete, then you've got a chance. And if the more guys do it, at least then the talents and abilities that you do have are going to get utilized and go towards trying to have a good result. I think that's a big challenge.

Q. Do you see enough at tight end and fullback to keep those personnel packages --

KIRK FERENTZ: Yes and no. Yes and no. We're still working on the tight end thing, and injuries have factored in there a little bit. Jon Wisnieski has missed a lot of time. Nate Wieting, who was really doing a good job, he missed some time, too, some significant time. Peter Pekar has really done well, continues just to be -- he's there every day and doing a good job. We've looked at a lot of guys there. We're a little further behind there.

The fullback situation, I really -- I don't know if I'm allowed to say feel good about anything, but I do feel pretty good about that. I think Drake Kulick and Brady Ross have really done a good job, and those two guys we lost, Macon and Adam were two of the best guys on our football team last year. You talk about that leadership part, if you counted up how many snaps they played, maybe not as impressive as some other guys, but what they did for our entire football team, attitude, all that stuff, really invaluable.

But I think we have two guys in Drake and Brady, nobody works harder than those two guys, and Austin Kelly has been intriguing, as well. I'll even throw in Steve Manders, who there's another guy, I'm not sure how he got here. He's somewhere from Maryland. Jim Reed had some connection in there some way, somehow. He's the only 45-year-old guy we've got on our team, but I'll tell you what, he's done a good job. He really is -- it's just amazing the growth that he's shown over three years' time.

Q. Looking at Miami, I think they've got 10 returning starters back on offense. They struggled at times obviously last year, but they have some tall receivers. What kind of challenges do they pose?

KIRK FERENTZ: Well, we've got a lot of respect for them. First of all, they are a veteran team in our estimation. They've got a lot of guys back, nine, ten, however you count them. They've got a lot of guys back offensively, defensively, about seven. Like us, their specialists are new, so they're going to ride the roller coaster like us probably a little bit, but we've got a lot of respect for them. Their receivers are dangerous and they're good players.

So you know, we're treating this like any other game. It's an opening game. That's big. I don't care who our opponent is. We've got to be ready to go.

Again, you talk about history, just look back historically, we've looked really good on opening days some days, and other times not so much, including 2009. With all due respect to our opponent, that was a good team that we played, but we were really fortunate to get the victory that day.

To me, my message to the team is more about us getting ready and feeling good about the way we're preparing, and then more importantly coming off the field feeling good about the effort we played with and the energy, and did we play smart, all those things that really determine success or non-success. That's the thing.

Over the course of 12 games, if you do that consistently, you've got a chance. If you don't, you run the risk of not having a good outcome.

Q. You've played teams like Miami before, even 12 years ago, Northern Illinois a couple of times, Northern Iowa gave you a great game --

KIRK FERENTZ: More than a great game. According to my son Steve, they beat us. Sitting on the couch eight months later, he was right.

Q. But then you look at some of your neighbors, your rivals, Wisconsin is playing LSU. Why not go that route and why go this route?

KIRK FERENTZ: You know, we've got 12 games scheduled. We play in a really good conference. My guess is we're going to -- every one of the 12 games will be challenging. Just look back last year, we were relaxed in one game in the fourth quarter a little bit, but after that it's college football. So to count on games like that, that's still iffy, if you think those are going to happen. If they happen, great, but you'd better expect a real battle, and I think you just have to look historically, it's kind of the nature of football as you look around.

You know, we'll get plenty of excitement all season long. Hopefully we'll be ready to go Saturday.

Q. You've been mentioning stories, as you like to call them. Seems like an immersion camp; is that a good sign, that you look back historically and see these things emerge?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, you hope you see development. That's what it's all about. You could go through the whole roster, but some guys come to mind, like Keegan Render has gotten a lot of time playing with our ones and then certainly with our twos. He's really improved. Just a lot of neat stories. Riley McCarron, just mentioned him a little while ago. He was a good player for us last year, but I think he's taken another step forward, so that's neat. And there's a fifth-year senior. Keegan is a younger player. I think Miles Taylor is a better player than he was last January, and that's good news. But he should be. He's had more practice, more experience.

Parker Hesse, there's another guy that kind of got thrown in maybe a little bit before he was ready. We

didn't have many choices last year. To watch him grow in the spring and now taking another step, I think he's really poised to have a good year this year.

You watch those all around the board, and that's kind of neat to see, and that's what you're hoping for. It's what it takes if you want to have a good team.

Q. When you look at a guy, Anthony Nelson, he's on the one line now. Seems like you've got a lot of those types of guys. What's he done to --

KIRK FERENTZ: We'll see how good he is. He's playing against guys I think are pretty decent. The guys on our ones aren't bad, and he's giving them more than they want sometimes. I mean, he's just a hard-charging guy. He's not as mature or big or as developed yet as he will be for obvious reasons. He's a second-year player. But it's not like he's out of place out there, either, when he goes against the ones. I think we have good competition there, and injuries have factored in there a little bit there, too. We had some guys miss a little time, so that opens a door, but somebody has got to step in, and he stepped in, and to me he's right there in that mix right now, whereas maybe eight months ago you wouldn't have known.

Q. Some of the position battles at linebacker, have they kind of maybe opened the doors a little bit to maybe a little bit more flexibility in personnel packages?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, it was a real priority for us in recruiting a while back. Yeah, I think we felt like we needed to increase our depth and also help our special teams a little bit by recruiting linebacker-type guys. I think we're seeing some good things develop. We may play a couple freshmen at that position, as well. I think that's likely to happen, and those guys will contribute to special teams, too, and then if we're doing that, then they're working in the one and two groups, too, so they're getting exposure to our scheme, and hopefully we'll be a little bit better prepared there.

I think that group, we're gaining depth there, and that's probably a good thing.