

# University of Iowa Football

## Media Conference

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### Kirk Ferentz



KIRK FERENTZ: Good afternoon. We're looking forward to this Saturday's game against Minnesota. It will be good to get back on the field. It was a frustrating, disappointing loss for us on Saturday. So needless to say, eager to get back out on the field and start competing again. Like every Sunday, went back, reviewed the tape, looked at every play. Really tried to look at what we did well. A lot of things there and the things that we didn't execute, came up short, and things we have to get better at.

Really, it gets down to, like most games, it gets down to execution and experience. Lot of times those things go hand in hand. So that was really the conclusion there. As we move forward right now, we'll try to do a better job seeing if we can't improve our execution. Really, it starts out with recognition. Better recognition and communication goes hand in hand there, and then it just gets down to really better fundamental play and finishing plays, whether it's finishing a block, finishing a tackle, pass play, et cetera, those types of things.

Things I am pleased with right now, certainly our attitude has been good, stays good. The work ethic has been good. I think we're getting good leadership on our football team. So happy about that. Obviously our goal every week is to win every football game. That's what we set out to do. So to lose three games basically at the end of all three of those games, it's disappointing, a little bit frustrating, certainly, and not easy for the players to deal with. So the biggest thing we have to do right now is get back up on our feet and really go to work on solutions to see what we can do about performing better on Saturdays.

This week the meetings have been good, the workouts have been good; they've been spirited. Thought our execution was really good this morning. We're going to have to continue that throughout the week, and the goal is simply to play our best football on Saturday. That's what it takes to win. So that's the goal.

Minnesota comes in here, same record as we have. They're a team that's enjoyed success. They're a nine-win ballclub last year and beat Washington State in their bowl game. Got a lot of players on their team that understand what it takes to be successful. They're a good football team. The last two times we've played them, both games have gone down, basically, to the

last possession.

So all that stuff lines up, and then certainly to be back home in Kinnick will be good, a night game in Kinnick is always very, very special. Now with Floyd at stake on top of that, that's an extra bonus. I know both teams are excited about that.

Our captains this week are Josey Jewell on defense, Ben Niemann on defense, we've got Matt VandeBerg offensively, and Kevin Ward special teams. So those are our four guys there. We'll expect Josey to play. He's practiced the last few days. Unless he suffers a setback of some type, we expect him to be in there. James Butler we're not sure about yet. We'll have to measure that daily as we go along. And Brandon Snyder, as I alluded to Saturday, won't be with us this week. We'll take it week by week after we get through this week. I'll throw it out for questions.

**Q. Josey was there by your side for the National Anthem and I lost track after that. How hard did he petition to play on Saturday?**

KIRK FERENTZ: No, really the decision got made Friday when they tested him. Just kind of prepped him for that, just to be ready for the worst prior to the examination. You know, that's what the doctors felt was the best thing. So we knew it could go either way. The thing we wanted to do was be smart and just try to talk to him about giving up one week to have the rest of the season as opposed to putting himself at risk.

**Q. So the conversation kind of ended there?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, yeah, didn't expect him to accept it or like it, but that's really kind of the thinking behind it. Bottom line, he just wasn't strong enough on Saturday.

**Q. When you look at your rushing attack, what do you see?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Football, we want to pass it successfully too. We've done both with success. There have been some years we've run the ball better, and other years we've been pretty successful throwing it. But ultimately, we want to do both efficiently. And to that point, we're not running the ball right now effectively enough to be where we want to be.

**Q. Your players said practice has been good this**

**week, is that a good barometer for Saturday?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, they really practiced well. There are examples of where they practice well and don't show up and play or vice versa, but I thought they were better. The most important thing for us, quite frankly, and it's true of most teams, but where we're at right now, every practice is an opportunity for our team to grow and get better. We're clearly not there or we wouldn't have gone through three losses like we have.

So if we're going to be a good football team, which has been our goal this year, to be a good football team and win out here, we're going to have to improve every day. We've got to treat practice like it is special because it is. Maybe in November '02 it wasn't quite as critical that we practiced as well because that was a good team, and it kind of goes hand in hand.

**Q. After you watched the film, it wasn't nearly as bad as you thought on Saturday. Did you kind of gather that too after you sat and watched it?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, well, it's never as bad as you think, usually. Not never. Never is never a word to use, right? But, yeah, we're not that far away. But we've got to get there. To that point, first thing I'm thinking about in hearing that question, the guy made a shoestring tackle for them there on the first drive. I think it was the first possession. That thing comes out of there, it's a matter of inches sometimes. That's a cliché. But you step out of that tackle, and boom, he's in the end zone.

But those are the things we're not doing quite yet. That's just an illustration that is an obvious example. But there are a lot of things like that.

**Q. Brady Ross says he loses IQ points when he listens to the outside noise. Is that kind of the mindset of this team right now?**

KIRK FERENTZ: I encourage them to not pay much attention to it because I can only imagine what it is right now. Normally I'd read it all -- well, I don't read it all. But I kind of skim it on Wednesday nights a little bit just to see what it's like. But I always have people telling me what's going on. I can pretty much tell. It's pretty predictable, you're not doing as well as you like, what it's going to be.

So, yeah, it's really counterproductive to improvement and that's what we're focused on right now.

**Q. What does Kevin Ward mean to this program?**

KIRK FERENTZ: He's not Travis Perry, but there are a lot of parallels between the two. The guy hasn't really been a career starter here, but we haven't had a better guy come through than Travis. He was a walk-on prior to him coming here. I can't tell you how many people -- he was an Iowa guy, Des Moines guy, area guy, people

from that area just commented on what kind of person he was. So we had a really good feeling about him when he came here. Did a great job as a special teams guy. Added so much more to the program than just what he did on the field. I would say it was comparable there with Kevin. Little different, because Ryan was his brother, so we knew about Kevin through the family.

I actually tried to recruit his dad unsuccessfully back in the '80s. So there was a link that way. But the way he's worked here, he's been a really good special teams player. The players keep voting him as a captain. I think that's been every week now. That says a lot about him also. At the end of the day, Josey's out, so we slide Ben over and he jumps in there and plays a really good game.

So those are the kind of stories that fly under the radar, but that's what it takes to have a good football team. His attitude has been stellar ever since he showed up.

**Q. Miquel kicked that field goal at the end, what have you seen develop about his progression?**

KIRK FERENTZ: I think the big part of the story to me was how bad he was in the Spring. I should say collectively. The group was just really unimpressive this spring. Very inconsistent. Then Shudak got hurt in the out-of-season, and that compounded it. That was a position I was really concerned about in August going into the start of camp. Let me correct that, July. We started in July this year.

So going into camp, I was really concerned about that whole group. Fortunately, he and Duncan performed better. But Miguel's really done a good job. As inconsistent as he was and erratic as he was, I'd use those two words, back in the spring, he's really been the other way.

But it's kind of like your quarterback situation. Until guys get out in games, you're not quite sure what's there. I think the other day was a good representation of that. Tough opportunity that first time into that wind, and that was tough the other day. The game was on the line, certainly when he nailed that 48-yarder. I think we've seen an awful lot of growth. Really happy for him and proud of him for him pushing through. There were questions about him not that long ago.

**Q. When you look at Nate, a little over halfway through the season as a starter, how do you think he measures up to other guys? The numbers say, wow, terrific and then the execution, how does it fit for what you've seen?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Well, Ricky (Stanzi) didn't really win the job until about this time, a little bit earlier. Turn of

September, October in '08, that's when he won that job. So it was a battle for him to get on the field, first of all. Nate, you know, won it coming out of camp.

But I think the one commonality, my memory's not all that good, but the common thing I think about guys that are good quarterbacks, typically, are how they handle adversity, how they handle bad plays. To end up on the starting field, you have to be pretty good in terms of skills. But how are you going to handle the tough situations? Every quarterback goes through them, every player goes through them. But quarterbacks, just a more visible world they live in, and everybody's got an opinion about quarterbacks.

But to me, that's been his strength. He's handled the things that haven't gone so well. Seems to be unaffected by it. I'm sure he is. But he just kind of goes back to work and keeps playing. But I think that makes us feel good that there is a chance here for him to continue to grow.

**Q. With the freshmen in the OL, is the approach what the problem is?**

KIRK FERENTZ: It's everybody, as much as possible.

**Q. Because they are younger players?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, but there is a process for everybody. Especially in the lights. I don't care. You could be a 22-year-old freshman, that would help a little bit. Physically you'd be a little bit more mature. But still, the first time not playing is tough. That first season, typically, is pretty tough. It's a learning experience, just like the quarterback position. It's maybe not quite as cerebral, and there are not as many things those guys have to think about mentally. But the challenge, play after play, is being consistent and doing things really well. That's a tough position to be good at. Both of them are off to a good start. Tristan's biography is a little bit shorter than AJ's. But they're both doing a lot of good things right now, and I think we're seeing good progress. There are going to be some ups and downs, but we feel good about those guys being in there.

**Q. Can you shape things to their strengths, or does it just not stop for that?**

KIRK FERENTZ: I mean, there are things you can do, certainly, for any position to help out a little bit. But we're going to try to play the way we play, and the challenge is for those guys to be able to do it. They're both capable. They've shown that in practice against good players. So the whole thing now is just consistency. Getting a little confidence, and the only way you get that is to go out and play.

**Q. Is there confidence?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I think there are some good things going on there. Really you have to keep pushing. Really get it turned on during the week and that's where you make a lot of progress. So you look at the tape, examine what you didn't do well. Lot of times it's foot work and things like that. It's easier to do stuff in practice when there's not quite as much excitement and adrenaline going. The old John Wooden thing, be quick but don't hurry. When you hurry, a lot of times you lose your technique. You abandon it and little things like three-inch steps can make a big difference in terms of how a play comes out.

**Q. Going back to Nate, his teammates said they have full confidence in him, because they've seen it happen with Iowa State. They also think his demeanor was a maybe a negative because he wasn't really necessarily the talkative type three months ago is now a positive for him. What makes him so successful mentally, cerebrally, that projects it to his team?**

KIRK FERENTZ: It's just what he is, who he is, really and the way he projects himself. Just him being him. There is nothing put on about it. He's just a genuine guy. Most good players are like that. The ones I've been around, you bring up the trip to Ames. You know, he and C.J. are very different quarterbacks, very different permits that way. But it's kind of a proving ground for C.J. coming out of Ames.

We felt because there were really some sticky situations in '15 over there, and to watch him handle that, in his first time in an environment like that, and Nate is the same way. Different quarterbacks you see them handle a really tough situation or a couple tough situations really well. So it just gives everybody confidence. There is something to this guy. Whether the guy's a talker or non-talker, tall, short, all that stuff. It's just how they conduct themselves.

Brad Banks was out here in '02. Worst moment he could have, same opponent, second half what a worse moment you could have for him to come back the way he did. I could only imagine how he felt after that. But what he did to fix things and move forward, I mean, that's the beauty in the game. If a player can do that, a team can do that, you feel really good about what you accomplish afterwards.

**Q. You've got two fifth-year senior tackles out, how much do you feel for Coach Polasek?**

KIRK FERENTZ: He's been around the game. There's probably no way to predict, as much as we all try to predict what's going to happen or what things are going to look like. There is no way to predict it. It's just part of the challenge of any sport. Pitchers in baseball hurt

their elbows and all that stuff. You know, so how do you make those adjustments? How do you make the pieces of the puzzle work? You hope those things don't happen, but when they do, you've got to go from there. But Tim's been around a lot of successful football, a couple different programs, and he's done a really good job with it.

You do the best you can do. That's what we ask our players to do and that's what coaches have to do also.

**Q. Alternate uniforms this week?**

KIRK FERENTZ: I can honestly say, if it was this week, I'd probably know. Is that fair? Although I could be the last to know too. I'm more worried about the game than the uniform, so I've kind of been that way for 19 years. It was interesting, we got here and we were all worried about Nike versus whatever we were in at that point. I don't want to go backwards, I think. But, anyway, I've seen guys score touchdowns in both shoes. It really doesn't matter what we wear. Let's score touchdowns. Let's think about that. But I get it. I'm learning.

**Q. How can you relate to a first year coach, with the things you saw?**

KIRK FERENTZ: That's part of football and coaching. Those guys won nine games last year. I'm not feeling bad for any of the things that have happened. They had a good football team last year, and we had to fight our tails off to beat them up there. There was nothing easy about that game. Nothing easy about the one two years ago.

I think anytime you take over a program, it's kind of like talking about the injuries, you just never know what it's going to be like. There's always an adjustment period going on, that type of thing. It's just part of the deal. But they've done a good job. They're well-coached. They play hard, play with a lot of energy, and they have a lot of good players. So we're going to have our hands full once again.

**Q. Have you been part of a program where the program's different and you're trying to implement something new?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Well, I knew what Iowa was. But this is a much different program when I got here, got back than it was in '89. Lot of different players, lot of different coaches, that type of thing. Coach Frazier retired in the mid '90s, and Carl Jackson went off to the NFL. So some of the common denominators weren't here anymore. But there is an adjustment. Even if it's an in-staff change, it's still going to be an adjustment for anybody taking over. It's never seamless. There are always things to be addressed and challenging. Anytime you get a new head coach, things are going to

be a little bit different no matter who it is. It could be head coaches, a former head coach's twin brother and things would still be different. It's just part of the process.

**Q. What do you need to see from James Butler for him to play?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, he's cleared. We've just got to feel better about the ball security part. There is no reason to think that we haven't. We probably have to hit them a little bit tomorrow and tackle them a little bit which we normally don't do. But just to make sure he's confident and make sure we're confident. The tough thing here is that you really aren't going to know until he gets in the game. Then we don't have that. Once he goes in the game, it's over from the NCAA side, based on what I've experienced personally. So we're not going to bank on any leniency in terms of how they interpret his eligibility moving forward.

**Q. The Minnesota game in 2002 was the day that your fans stormed the field, tore down the goal post, had roses all over the place. How incredible is it to see your fans go on the road to a rival and do something like that?**

KIRK FERENTZ: I have a good friend who I coached with at Maine actually who called right after that and he said he's never seen anything like that. He's probably right. It's probably never happened before. He also said your fans aren't very smart. They tried to take it through a revolving door (laughter).

That's enthusiasm maybe rather than physics, or whatever that might be. But that was kind of a storybook year. That was like '15 out here on -- or excuse me, 1981 was kind of a storybook thing too. It's one of those moments you always remember. Roses coming out of the press box and what have you against Michigan State, I guess. But those are things that are really -- not the last step in a really good journey, but it was a really important step, certainly.

**Q. Did you have a conversation with Glen Mason about that afterwards?**

KIRK FERENTZ: No, he was here a couple weeks ago. We actually got to visit. We didn't touch on that. He hit me up for some tickets, actually, on a game later on. Happy to do it. He's a great coach.

**Q. You mentioned it's just a matter of time with Boone, getting healthy??**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, it really is. It's just a matter of kind of pushing forward here. I'll probably have more on that by the end of the week, quite frankly. But it's been tough. It's really been hard.

**Q. Where are you on punt returner?**

KIRK FERENTZ: We'll keep an open mind on that. The other day was a tough day. You had the sun, you had the wind, and that guy hit that one, it was like, are you kidding me? That is something if we knew he was going to hit it with 65 yards, we would have had him back at 65. But, I mean, wow, that was a huge play in the game, too. Just flipping field position. That's crazy. But those things happen.

**Q. How much do you work on that in the week just in terms of trying to get Josh more acclimated and?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, we do it in practice. We rotate guys in there, and we have three guys that we feel pretty good about. A lot of it is a feel thing, so you just kind of go from there.

**Q. How often do you meet other teams and coaches on the recruiting trail?**

KIRK FERENTZ: As a head coach, you don't see anybody. We were talking about that the other day. The first two years we followed Joe Tiller and Gary Emmanuel, I must have been in like seven houses in a row after they had just left. They were like 7-0 on every one of those prospects. But it's just kind of weird. It was almost like we were reading their mail or whatever.

Every now and then we'll run into somebody, but it's not very often anymore. It's less and less. Though I guess there have been two in the last couple years. Not Minnesota, but two in-conference people where we went in and they went in, or vice versa. I don't know. It just seems like things get different. I'm only allowed in a school once anymore or a house once, so I'm a little bit more in a bubble, I guess.

**Q. A couple players during interviews talked about bringing back the live pig aspect of the rivalry. What do you think?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Those guys are way ahead of me. I have not given any thought to that. Not sure what we'd do. We'd find a really nice home for them, I know that. Then you've got to worry about someone like the Paulsons trying to kidnap it, and who knows what they might do. So probably not a good idea. Floyd is pretty good just the way he is right now. He looks happy. He's doing well.