

University of Iowa Football

Media Conference

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Kirk Ferentz

Gary Barta

GARY BARTA: Well, in today's world, no such thing as a surprise. But just a little bit of background.

First of all, I know a lot of people were asking me yesterday and over the last couple of days, where are you going, where are you going?

Truly, until today, we didn't know for sure where we were going. This afternoon I received a call from Randy Levine, the president of the Yankees, and Mark Holtzman, the executive director of the Bowl. They invited us to join them against Boston College. Of course we said yes, gladly.

And a couple of thoughts. First of all, to our players, I never want to take for granted the opportunity to stand at this podium this time of year and have another chance to play another football game. I'm happy for our players, happy for our coaches and our staff, and everybody, our fans.

One of the things that -- whether I was talking to the Holiday Bowl, the Pinstripe Bowl, whoever I was talking to -- they talk about our fans and Kinnick Stadium and the wave and all the great, great story lines that they bring to the table.

So I never take for granted the opportunity to go to a Bowl. New York City, I don't know if many of our fans have been there during the holidays. It's amazing, with the Rockefeller Center, the 9/11 Museum, chance to reflect back on that. It's just a great place to be, so we're looking forward to it.

Q. Last week, clearly your fan base wanted Nashville. I know there's a lot of hoops to jump through, and I know you can't always deliver on promises like that, but do you feel like it was a missed opportunity?

GARY BARTA: There certainly were fans who shared with us that it would be easy for them to drive from Iowa to Nashville. There were fans who live out in the East Coast who were telling me they are thrilled we're coming out there.

At the end of the day, hopefully our fans know, it's not a selection process by the university to the Bowls. It's



we provide all the information to the bowls, and we have a great bowl lineup. The Big Ten in my opinion has the best bowl lineup of all the conferences in the country.

I've spent the last two weeks making sure all of the bowls with whom we were likely to be associated with, have all the information about the number of alums we have in that area, our TV ratings, making sure they had all the data, and I gave all that data to them.

At the end of the day, again, just being reminded that the university doesn't choose which bowl. They are gracious to accept whatever bowl we're invited to.

Q. You said before you made that preference known to the Big Ten; that that's what your fans wanted to do. I know there was discussion a few years ago when this whole thing was changed -- but that seems to not be the case and the bowls are still selecting just like they did before.

GARY BARTA: They are, and the league being in charge is really about the Big Ten talking about principles, not going to the same bowl twice; having bowls from the East Coast to the West Coast to the south.

So the Big Ten being in charge is really meant to be more of a principle setting process, and then letting the bowls select going from there. And that's really how it's unfolded. They still select. They just have principles that are a little bit different than they were before we had the new Bowl lineup.

Q. How much push, if at all, was there, Iowa versus Northwestern? Any discussions there?

GARY BARTA: Again, what I did with every Bowl -- I'm a little biased in that discussion. I talked about Iowa versus Northwestern. I talked about the fact that, you know, they beat us in overtime, but consider the wins that we had, and also, our fan base, our television ratings, and I shared all that with the Bowl in Nashville, as well as Holiday Bowl, as well as New York.

So my job is to make sure the bowl executives and their TV sponsors and boards of directors have all the information about when they select Iowa, what they are going to be getting, and that goes back to a credit to Kirk and the reputation that he and our team have, as

well as the reputation of our fans.

After that, then it's just up to them to make their decision.

Q. When you spoke with the Yankees, what was the No. 1 factor for them, whether it was the fans or the wave; what was the No. 1 thing for them in selecting Iowa?

GARY BARTA: All of the above. You brought up a good point there. Several story lines as you head into this season. I shared with them that if Kirk wins the bowl game at their place, he'll become tied with Hayden Fry as the all-time winningest coach in Hawkeye Football history. The wave has become just a feel-good story about what the State of Iowa is all about. I think it's been well documented and I think that's something of allure.

We went out to Madison Square Garden over the last several years when we played the NIT and the national championships for wrestling. And then most recently when Maryland and Rutgers were added to the Big Ten; that corridor, of course, there's hundreds of thousands of Big Ten alums in that area, as well as close to 20,000 Hawkeye alums living in the area. I think it was a combination of all those things; that, combined with TV ratings, the fact that our fans travel in big numbers to Bowl games.

Q. Do you expect the travel numbers to be similar this year going to New York?

GARY BARTA: I think the answer is yes. It's hard to predict what the numbers are going to be.

One of the things, I think the last two years, the attendance at this bowl, the Pinstripe Bowl, has been around 37,000. And if you combine Iowa's history, the local fans that will go out to New York, as well as the East Coast Iowans, whether they are alums or fans or just grew up in the State of Iowa, as well as Big Ten fans who live out in the Eastern corridor. I'm confident that the attendance can hit that number higher.

I don't know much about Boston College and what kind of fan base might follow them there but clearly it's nearby.

Q. Do you have an idea what number you're talking about of people?

GARY BARTA: Well, as I mentioned, we have about 20,000 alums that live in that corridor within a few-hour drive of Yankee Stadium. And so that's the only number I can give.

We also know there's tens of thousands of Iowans who live out in that corridor. I just don't have a number for

it.

By the way, the Yankees, if you're a sports fan, it's a great opportunity, as I have in the last couple of years, to go to Yankee Stadium and see the brand that the Yankees represent. I've talked to Northwestern and Indiana, the experience that the Yankees give to our student athletes, it's a first-class trip. So we're really looking forward to that.

At the end of the day, the momentum we picked up playing at Nebraska, I was really excited about that and excited for our players and our coaches. And then Kirk and I were just talking about that, combined with the opportunity to win an eighth game; what great momentum going into the 2018 season.

So that's the focus. Whether we play in New York, Iowa or anywhere in between; that last game, having a chance to go out with some more momentum.

KIRK FERENTZ: Thanks, Gary, and welcome to everybody. We're really pleased to be selected to the Pinstripe Bowl. I think it's really a unique opportunity for our football team to have a chance to travel out there.

As Gary alluded to, it's one of the bowls that was in play over the past week and I know several people in our office have talked to folks that have gone out there representing the Big Ten and have got nothing but just tremendous feedback about the kind of experience it is for the players.

So we're excited about that, and I think a big part of that, as Gary alluded to, also, is just the involvement and support by the Yankee organization. They are very much committed to making sure players on both sides have a real great opportunity.

So it is unique. It's a different part of the country. And probably, at least in my time coaching here, the last time we were out in the New York City area would have been the Kickoff Classic; I guess it was in '87. I know our players really enjoyed that opportunity.

Probably the scariest thing right now is to think that Akrum Wadley might be our tour guide during this trip. That's a little frightening to me.

But in all seriousness, bowl games are special, and the biggest thing is that we want our players to have an enjoyable month, and also, it's an opportunity to win a football game.

So a lot of work's involved in that. The players understand that. The whole idea is to improve and try to go out and win our eighth game and that's really,

simply, what it gets down to.

Just a quick aside. I want to congratulate all of the players who were recognized for All-Big Ten this past week. We had a lot of really nice honors bestowed, and especially of note, Josey Jewell being the Player of the Year, Big Ten Defensive Player of the Year, as well as linebacker of the year. Certainly Josh Jackson being recognized as the Defensive Back of the Year. And then also Chad Greenway for the humanitarian award. I think that's very, very fitting for all three of those guys.

We are all hopeful that perhaps Josey and Josh have an opportunity to pick up a national award this week; the Nagurski and Thorpe Awards are both in play right now, and I'm also very confident that both of them are going to get All-America recognition. Which is a really fitting tribute to two very different career paths, if you will: Josey, established player, established starter, and Josh, a first-year starter. So both outstanding stories and just pleased for those guys.

And just lastly to wrap it up, bowls in general again, I think the beverage thing for me at least as a coach, and I think our players feel the same way, it's a chance to extend the season. An opportunity to play one more game together; it gives us four more weeks together. Typically that involves being together over the holidays, which is kind of unique and different.

But I always remind our players that, you know, playing college football is a really small window, unless they are dumb enough to get into coaching. It's really going to be a small segment of their lives where they are in a unique situation over the holidays. That will be the case here and the biggest thing is it's the chance for the 2017 season to finish up and the seniors to finish up on a real positive note. So we're hopeful of that.

Certainly proud of the fact that this is our 15th Bowl now in 17 years, and the credit goes to our players on that one.

Lastly, we're playing a very tough Boston College team. I don't know an awful lot about them other than they really finished with a real positive note winning five of the last six ball games. They are playing good football. I'm very familiar with Coach Steve Addazio and the kind of teams that he's put together, going back to the days at Temple. It will be a tough, hard-nosed football team and certainly we have some familiarity with Coach Reid being there, Jim Reid, who is a tremendous person, tremendous coach, doing a great job on their staff, as well.

Bottom line is we're going to have to be at our best to get the job done, and that will be our challenge here

over the next couple weeks. We'll try to get ready as we do all the other things you do in December. I'll throw it out for questions.

Q. Akrum was beaming down there going to play at home. How special do you expect it to be for him?

KIRK FERENTZ: Wait until all his friends and new friends start calling him for tickets. Then he may not beam -- it's not always easy going home for ballgames. That's the next thing he's going to be challenged with.

I think for he and Ihmir, certainly those are two guys that grew up pretty close to Yankee Stadium. It's got to be exciting and I'm sure their families are very, very excited. It's always neat to have that kind of opportunity to play in Yankee Stadium. I'm sure those guys will be hopefully at their best.

Q. You're a baseball guy. What does it mean to play at Yankee Stadium and how is it different?

KIRK FERENTZ: I was just thinking about that earlier. I don't know if I've ever been involved with a football team playing on a baseball field or a stadium. I'm sure we have at some point. Just doesn't pop to mind.

I was also thinking, I had been to Yankee Stadium but I was in the original one and I was probably five years old. I also got lost in New York on that same trip. My grandparents lived there for a while. My parents tried to get away in a cab but the cops stopped them and made them take me.

So anyway, it will be unique. I've never been in the new Yankee Stadium. I'm hardly a veteran New York guy, so I think it's going to be really a great adventure for all of us to see a very unique city and see it in ways that most people don't get to see it.

Q. How many discussions did you have with fans that really wanted to go to Nashville, because there's a country music connection, natural tendency to go there. How many said they wanted to go to New York or the Holiday Bowl or whatever?

KIRK FERENTZ: I really haven't talked to anybody. I read the papers and I probably knew as much up until today as anybody did about where we're going to go. Obviously nobody knew. It's just the way things fell.

But any time you can drive to a bowl, an easier drive, I think that's always popular with the fans. I think back when we played in Atlanta back in the 80s, it's a little further, but doable. That's always a factor, certainly.

Nashville is a great town, no question about that. My daughter lived there for three-plus years. It's a great town. It's a good bowl venue and at some point we'll probably be there but it's not this year.

Q. I can't remember was last year the first year you changed the bowl to a shorter trip, or this year?

KIRK FERENTZ: Last year was, yeah. I think we squeezed it down a little bit.

Q. Still the same>

KIRK FERENTZ: No, the big difference is in Tampa, we were practicing at the University of Tampa. We could have walked there. That won't be the case this time.

I think we'll try to treat this a little bit more like a business trip, if you will. Try to get as much of our preparation done here where we have the friendly confines, convenience, all that type of thing.

And then, you know, try to keep our preparation work minimal out there.

Q. Speaking of that, you're well aware of the bowl drought the program has.

KIRK FERENTZ: I've read about that, yeah.

Q. What can you change? Is there more you can change?

KIRK FERENTZ: Well, it's like any game. You have to prepare well and then certainly play well on game day.

I think you guys get tired of my answers, but every game is a unique experience and bowl games are the same way.

This one's unique in terms of bowls just because of logistical setup that way. I think you have to navigate through finals. You have to navigate this period right now. And then once we get out of finals, how you handle that two-week block or less than two-week block, it all factors into how successful you're going to be.

And this one is a little bit unique just because we're playing a little bit earlier. Roughly we've got about a week and a half after finals finish to get ready. We have to make sure we have it really well thought out, and bottom line is, taking a team out there that's going to be prepared and also ready to play fresh and ready to play.

Q. You talked about each bowl is unique. Last year you guys finished strong with three wins. Because of how up and down this year has been, and the bowl game is earlier compared to what you're used to; how does this one feel compared to other years?

KIRK FERENTZ: I think it feels a little bit different, more so because we are going to New York City. I joked about the Tampa thing, but when we did practice

at the University of Tampa, you couldn't ask for a more convenient setup. And the one year in Scottsdale was the same way. We were literally three blocks away from our practice. So you factor those things in.

I guess what I figured out in 1981, our first trip to the Rose Bowl, you don't want the team on a bus all the time. You've got to be careful of that. But ultimately, again, you factor all that stuff in, it really gets down to the preparation you have and what you do on game day.

You know, we haven't been the most consistent team this year. Hopefully we'll have a good set of practices and preparation as we get into this thing, and hopefully we'll show up and play our best football of the year. That will be our goal, and I'm sure Boston College is going to try to do the same thing.

Q. You said your knowledge of BC is limited. What do you know about them?

KIRK FERENTZ: I probably saw 10 or 15 plays whenever they played Florida State. It was a Friday night and I was up in our hotel in Kirkwood. I don't watch a lot of those games at night, but I remember watching 10, 15 plays and they looked pretty good. They are a pretty good defensive football team. Again, I don't have real extensive knowledge. I'm not an ACC expert by any stretch.

We have a couple weeks to get up to speed on that. I do know this about Coach Addazio's teams: They will be a physical, hard-nosed team, in general, that's kind of how BC has been for a long, long time.

Q. Do you think Jim Reid is doing to run or has similar defense to what you guys have done when he was here?

KIRK FERENTZ: Don't quote me on this, but my sense is it probably looks a little bit more like what we saw at Virginia when he was there. I think he's got a certain package. He kind of melted in with our scheme.

I think he's a little bit more comfortable in a different package, but the similarities will be that they are a hard-nosed, aggressive defensive football team. That's how Jim coaches football. They will be energetic, I'm sure of that. We'll have our work cut out.

Q. The last day or two has been almost a return to 2015 where you seemed to lose for winning that week, and in this case, a lot of the talking heads were really coming after Ohio State for losing here by 31 points. What did you take away from what was said, and did you feel insulted or do you feel honored that they talked about that?

KIRK FERENTZ: You know, you might be disappointed.

I don't watch a lot of TV. I watch the games and I've heard some of the stuff secondhand.

A couple things. First of all, as much as we all want to predict in August what's going to happen, this is a great illustration of, you can't do it. The games get played on the field, and as smart as we all try to be, we can't predict what's going to happen week-in and week-out.

I think that's why college football is so exciting, and quite frankly, the NFL is, too; once the playoffs start, it can be really interesting. I'm sitting here thinking about the Giants -- one of those years they won the Super Bowl. I think they won every game on the road to get there.

As much as we all try to predict, you can't do it. All I know about that game is that we were trying to win the game, just like we were the other 11 games. We played good football that day, and that doesn't diminish who they are or what they are. They are an excellent football team. They showed that last night. Those are two very good teams playing in the Big Ten Championship.

Q. Gary Barta said something, that you're one win short of Hayden Fry. Were you aware of that and what does it mean to you?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, somebody brought it up last week. I haven't thought about it. I'd be really happy to tie, I can tell you that, just the total honestly, because that means we're going to win this game, which would be really good. To me the motivating factor to win this football game is for us to get our eighth win.

You think about our seniors this year, the guys that we have, and the first guys that come to mind are the four linebackers that we have, really what they have done in their careers.

You know, I'd like to send all of our seniors out with a win first and foremost. That's one of many benefits of winning the Bowl game. That's a good starting point right there. So that would make it a really, really good thing.

Q. Because of losing five straight Bowls, there seems to be a lot of weight put on this game, especially being 7-5, and getting to eight is better than seven. Do you feel that?

KIRK FERENTZ: No, I've got to tell you, I don't feel any different than I have any year. There's never been a bowl that we haven't tried to win. I can't think of any games that we haven't tried to win.

So it's as simple as that. I don't know if we'll be favored, not favored. Typically we're not favored in

bowl games, but we weren't favored against Ohio State either and we were able to win that.

So it really gets down to trying to win a football game and navigating with the uniqueness of the month of December. Those are the two really big things.

Q. How much free time will you have, and what will you do; maybe ideas, team activities in New York, have you thought about that?

KIRK FERENTZ: As I kind of alluded to, you might imagine, we did a little prelim stuff on all of this. You have to. Part of the Pinstripe stuff, I got some information the last couple days about what it entails. First and foremost, the 9/11, not that you're happy about seeing that, but that's something personally that, you know, I never seem to get time to do anything, but it's on my list. I think that's got to be very, very impactful. That in itself will be a great educational experience for our football team.

I understand they do something at night. I'm not sure what kind of show, but I was at a Broadway show a hundred years ago when I was teaching school and that is really -- it's like any live performance; it's really special.

So those kind of things I think will really be neat for a lot of our guys who have never been anything remotely close to New York City. And I know Chicago is a big city, too, but it's still different. It really is; always has been.

You factor that in with the Yankees, like it or not, the Yankees are a recognizable brand, so there's something really special about all of that. You combine that all together, and it's going to be a unique experience for all of our guys.

Q. You talked about what it means for Akrum and Ihmir to be going home, but what do you think bringing the Iowa brand to the New York City can do for you guys in the long run?

KIRK FERENTZ: I remember playing in a couple Kickoff Classics out there. It wasn't New York City but across the river in Giants Stadium. We had great turnouts. I know the fans that went had a great time.

And back in the 80s, we had more players from that area. Bernie Wyatt recruited a lot of guys from North Jersey and New York City, that type of thing. It was good.

I think, you know, certainly Akrum has got a big fan club, I know that, and I think Ihmir does, too. It's really going to be neat for those guys. I think it's going to be neat for all of our players to play in Yankee Stadium.

And Gary Dolphin is a lifelong Yankee fan, so he's probably the happiest guy in America right now about this whole thing.

Q. How are you guys health-wise? And one guy, Boone Myers, is there any chance he can get back?

KIRK FERENTZ: I doubt it. We'll see. I'll have more updates on that next time we get together. I'm sure we'll get together sometime before we leave.

I'll put it this way: If we played yesterday it might have been a little tricky. We had some guys that came out of that game a little bit nicked up, but hopefully by this Friday, we'll be in pretty good shape for practice.

Q. The last week or two weeks, we've seen players from other programs, where if they were going (pro) -- they would sit out Bowl games. Do you ever have any fear of that happening here?

KIRK FERENTZ: You know, anything's possible, and you never say never. I developed the philosophy when I got to Maine after about a month on the job, I told my wife, "If I ever come home and say I'm surprised by anything, just hit me with a bat." You know, that would be really stupid. Anything's possible.

I don't get that sense from our guys. I think they are committed to playing this game. Again, it's our last opportunities for the '17 team to be there in total. My sense is they are all going to be excited about this opportunity. I really haven't seen them since the announcement, but I'll see them tomorrow morning, so hopefully they are all fired up and ready to go.

Q. You haven't played a bowl game this early since, I can't remember when. I know in the past, you were like the lone voice of wanting to keep games and get everything done before Thanksgiving and now you get a chance to give them a holiday. Is that a positive out of this?

KIRK FERENTZ: Well, we're going to make it a positive. We'll make everything a positive. Yeah, they will be home for New Year's. I don't know, if they want to push Christmas back a little bit, that's great. There's some upside in anything. We'll be playing on the earlier end.

It's kind of like playing on Friday, the Friday after Thanksgiving. It's really nice to be home Saturday and watch everybody else sweat, watch them work and we've already got ours finished.

I think there's some positives in that, and you know, we're going to make this a really good experience. I think it's going to be just great.

Q. Any thoughts just on the coaching carousel?

Have you monitored any of this in the last week?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, it's entertaining. Some are really interesting. College football has become entertainment and I think certainly the dollars keep getting bigger. It's like anything, so things get a little more interesting in that regard, too.

The pressure's more than it used to be. You know, I think all that stuff. It kind of revolves around -- but it's interesting.

Q. I know you don't want it to be a distraction, but Josh Jackson's future, it's out there. What are your thoughts on that at this point?

KIRK FERENTZ: Any time you have a really good underclassman, it's always a possibility. The last two years, we've had two guys that have opted to stay with us with Desmond and Brandon the same way. Both those guys were playing great.

What I've told them, and I'll tell our guys that are in that category right now is that you've already won the game. In effect. You're a really good player. When you're 26, you're going to be playing in the NFL, which Desmond is going to be doing, same with Brandon. It's really nice in life when you get to do what you want to do.

But it's like recruiting. I always tell recruits: It's not my job to decide what's best for you because how the heck would I know. I think that ultimately has got to be up to the individual, and we don't want anybody staying here if they are not (all in with) both feet in the ground.

I think we've probably got a couple guys that have some thinking to do. Biggest thing is just get them good, factual information, so they know what they are deciding on instead of speculating, that type of thing.