

# University of Iowa Football Media Conference

Tuesday, October 31, 2017

## Kirk Ferentz



COACH FERENTZ: Start off by reviewing the game Saturday night. I was certainly pleased with the overall effort of the football team. I thought the guys played with a lot of energy and certainly a lot of toughness. Our defense played well, good discipline, good communication and holding them to 10 points, holding any Big Ten team to 10 points is certainly a highlight. Happy with that.

Another great crowd in Kinnick. Any time you play a night game it's really special and our fans were great start to finish. Appreciate that. We are going to need their help on Saturday, too. So hopefully we'll have a great crowd at 2:30 as we get ready to play Ohio State.

Speaking of Ohio State, coincidentally it's been four years since we played them. Last time we played them, somebody told me they were ranked third then, as well. Typical when you play Ohio State. You can expect just a great football team to go against. And this team is really no different. They have been one of the premiere programs in college football. Go back to the 80s. They have had outstanding players, outstanding coaches, and this team is certainly fits that description.

We face another big challenge. I think, it's something we have had the experience with, certainly, playing Penn State early in the year, Michigan last year; and really the commonality is it's going to take our absolute best football to have a chance to compete against these guys.

They are a tremendous football team, and you know, for us to play well, we're going to have to play with a great defensive effort out there, find a rhythm offensively and then just take care of the basic things such as ball security, eliminating the penalties that are drive stoppers, and obviously play well on special teams.

That's our focus right now. That's where our attention is. It's going to be a busy week. We're two practices into it and happy so far with the way we're going. Our captains this week will be Josey Jewell, Sean Welsh, James Daniels and Kevin Ward.

And just take one second to kind of close the loop on the incident that took place up in the press box the

other day. It was really an unprofessional act by Brian, and we have had discussions, as you might well imagine, several discussions about it. Our athletic director, Gary Barta, will visit with Brian later on today.

The bottom line is what was done up there was inappropriate and it's got to stop. It's not acceptable and Brian is fully aware of that. With that being said, we're moving on and our focus right now is on Ohio State, so I'll throw it out to questions.

**Q. You mentioned the defense. What's reflected in the last few games, the scores --**

COACH FERENTZ: The biggest thing is production in the red zone. That's always been important for us. That's kind of how we're built.

So you know, being able to keep them out of the end zone, however you do it is really important, and the guys have really done a good job of that.

So that's something we're really pleased about. It's been a good team effort, certainly. Have got to come up with some plays at times. All in all, just really pleased with the guys keeping the points off the board.

**Q. Josh Jackson, last few games, has really seemed to climb the ladder. What have you noticed about him?**

COACH FERENTZ: The biggest thing with him, and I said this back in August, I thought he seemed to be one of our more improved players on our football team.

Just watching him go through that out-of-season program; had a good spring last year, and Josh has always been a talented guy; but that maturation process players have to go through. He's worked hard in the out-of-season program. He's a couple years into the right program now. I think he knows his position a little bit better; the expectations of what we're looking for and he's done a great job of playing defensive football for us. He's been a good special teams player in the past.

Really I think that light bulb kind of started coming on a little bit back in 2015. You saw him competing as a nickel back and just his whole demeanor has really grown since then.

**Q. What do you remember about the last Ohio State game?**

COACH FERENTZ: We won. That's the first thing I remember which is a really happy thought. The other thing I remember is Sam Brownlee actually made one of their better players miss, and Sam was not known for his running skills necessarily. I think it was like a 17-yard gain on a third down, and it was a really good play against a good player.

**Q. Was there any kind of discussion about discipline for Brian, suspension or anything, or is that ongoing depending on his meeting with Gary Barta?**

COACH FERENTZ: I think Gary will meet with him and Big Ten will file a report. Gary has had communication with them, and I think whatever everybody feels is appropriate, that's what we'll abide by, certainly.

**Q. Gary is officially his boss because --**

COACH FERENTZ: Direct supervisor --

**Q. -- in your case, you're an advisory position to this in some ways?**

COACH FERENTZ: I still coach here. I'm still the head coach. If any of our coaches I think act in a way that's inappropriate, and believe me, I've been guilty of that, too. It has to be addressed. It's just something you can't do. Takes away from your focus on your job, first and foremost and secondly it's just not professional. You can't do it.

**Q. What challenges does it present when you don't play Ohio State regularly in terms of preparation?**

COACH FERENTZ: You know, it's really kind of become the way of the world in our conference right now. It's, I don't want to say frustrating but it's another challenge that we have because of the rotating schedule.

I think because of the expansion. We had Nebraska at one point where it was a one-team jump and then two more. Just the whole dynamics of things have really changed. I'm not sure there is a pattern to the rotation. I'm sure there is. I just don't understand it.

All that being said, and then on top of that, coaches change so much. Coordinators, head coaches, whatever you. It seems like every week, you're kind of -- not necessarily in first-game mode -- but you're trying to dig up some information, that type of thing. That's just the nature. But that's college football. It's one more challenge.

But again, the thing that has not changed, they have got really good players. They are very well-coached, top down to the bottom. They are really well-coached.

You know, however many films we have now, eight films, we've got a lot of tape. The challenge is really trying to match up against them in any phase. They are really talented and really well-coached in all phases.

**Q. Do you look back to the Bowl game when Urban was coaching Florida?**

COACH FERENTZ: Not at all. Other than I remember the fake punt they ran from the 23-yard line or something like that. But that's a head coach's call right there. I mean, that's filed away.

You know, so many years, it's a whole different deal here. Coach Wilson is the offensive coordinator, so there are some parallels there from what we saw when we played Indiana, whenever that was, probably '15 I think. So you just go off your memory bank. You look at what they are doing off the tape and the challenge is to get ready for this team right now.

**Q. You've had success against every Big Ten team except Ohio State. It's kind of the same way with Hayden. Are there too many things to attribute that to? Is it talent?**

COACH FERENTZ: I'm guessing if you checked any coaches' record in the Big Ten that didn't coach at Ohio State, they might have the same concern.

Paul Brown, go right down the list, whoever has coached there. They have had really good teams. Some years better than others.

**Q. Is it a matchup thing at all? Michigan you could say the same thing, but you've had a lot of success against Michigan.**

COACH FERENTZ: I don't know why that's happened necessarily. But, 28 years in the league, to me, overall, they have had as good of talent as anybody. Six years in the NFL, looking at draft boards, if you go back and look at the drafts, they typically have guys high.

Then on top of it, I'm trying to think of the last time they had a guy coaching or staff, that you said, boy, that's an okay staff. I mean, they have had really good coaches, good players, and that's a good combination. Probably say the same thing about Alabama.

Although, you go back to Coach Saban's first year down there and they played in the Independence Bowl, I think. A little different story there. Ohio State has just had such a high level of consistency, and that's a real credit to their entire program.

**Q. How much interaction have you had with Urban Meyer?**

COACH FERENTZ: I've seen him at Big Ten meetings when I go to them. I go to the ones that are mandatory. I'm always there, believe me. I'm not in that league where I can skip meetings that are mandatory. I wouldn't do that because I don't want to get fined.

**Q. The last couple times you played them, twice in eight years or whatever it's been, they have had tremendous quarterbacks who have made big-time plays at inopportune times for you.**

COACH FERENTZ: Back to 2010, thanks, yeah. Been trying to get that one out of my memory bank.

**Q. Is 2013 still in your memory bank --**

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, that's in there, too. Between he and Hyde, it was a tough order.

But again, that's them. Trying to remember the last time they have had a bad running back, or a bad quarterback, for that matter. Probably hasn't happened. Maybe even before they had some problem at quarterback, I believe, they weren't running or humming the way they normally do.

But overall, I think of our series in 2003, I don't think there was an offensive touchdown scored, I think that's correct. It was all special teams points for the most part. Didn't play them in 2002. In '99 and 2000, forget about it. We got slaughtered. And then same thing in '05 and '06. I think they pretty much named the score.

But in '09, it was overtime. It was basically the Big Ten Championship game before they had one. That was it and we were right there. In 2020 we were right there fighting with them and '13 was a heck of a game. We just kind of didn't have enough there in the fourth quarter.

We had some really good football games with them. We had some that weren't so good. I do know this: If we are going to have a chance to win, we are going to have to be there in the fourth quarter and that's going to be easier said than done. We are going to have to really fight our tails off to get there.

**Q. You always slug it out with whoever you play. You're generally the most physical team on the field or try to be --**

COACH FERENTZ: Pretty physical, yeah. They are pretty physical.

**Q. This program, for many programs, there's an intimidation with Ohio State and you never seem to let that affect you. Is that something you bring up as, hey -- one big crazy play. '13, Brandon Scherff was the best player on the field.**

COACH FERENTZ: We don't want to go into a recruiting contest against these guys or the combine because we'll get killed. For us to have a chance at all, we have to understand that we have to really come up and play our absolute best to have a chance.

You know, that all starts with how you think. If we think -- and they are a really good team. When you watch them on film, I'd hate to be the defensive line coach. How do you figure which four guys to put in? They are all really good players. I'm talking about like eight of them and there's probably more than that.

But it's just -- we've got to understand that, you know, we've got to be ready to play football or it could get turned real fast. They have done that to a lot of people this year already where they have put 60-some points on the board and it can happen quick. It starts with how you think. You've got to go in there, try to give yourself the best chance to be successful and then most importantly, you've got to pay the price here in the week and then you've got to compete at game time.

**Q. Defensive linemen, the rotation -- are you starting to see the benefits of that?**

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I think so. I think so. We saw Anthony in the fourth quarter had fresh legs. He wasn't all drained. Because you're going against guys that are typically 300-plus pound guys and they are coming at you every play.

So I think rotating a year ago, we were pretty much in a six-man rotation. I think that's a helpful thing for us. We're going to need every bit of energy we can have in that fourth quarter to have a chance, but again, you've got to get there first and that's going to be a challenge.

**Q. In 2015 when those guys had -- the defensive linemen --**

COACH FERENTZ: Well, you'd like to get there, but the challenge is to get there and you have to gain confidence.

You know, if you look at us right now -- like I really think -- Nate Vejvoda, we knew we could count on. He's a senior player. Kind of like Louis in his last year. He got beat up a little bit as a sophomore and then kept getting better.

You know, Cedrick is really on that upward trend. He's a guy who is developing. Matt Nelson, going inside and then having some injuries. We are starting to see him really -- he's starting to grow right now. He's playing more I think the way he wanted to.

So you know, it's a process and the good news is at least I think last couple weeks, we're seeing those guys start to show that maybe they can get up on that level

where Vejvoda is already at. The more of that, the better. So hopefully we just keep building that thing a little bit. And Sam Brincks is another guy I like. A year ago Sam was solid, but he's really elevated his play now, too, and that helps us, and AJ -- it's a pretty dynamic process.

**Q. Why was Sam #60 on Saturday?**

COACH FERENTZ: Oh, that's a long story. I won't get into it right now. He can walk on his hands, so if he walked on his hands, you guys would have thought it was '90 -- or actually '09, I guess. Takes us right back to that game, that overtime game.

**Q. You mentioned the defensive line. Is this the best defensive line you've seen this year?**

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, this year they are pretty good, yeah. Penn State's is pretty good, too. Those guys are really active and good. These guys, and they play them all over the place. Their ends play over the guards, and it's a really well-conceived scheme that causes a lot of problems matchup-wise.

It's going to be a big challenge for us. We're going to really have to be our absolute best up front.

**Q. This will be the second Heisman candidate coming in, J.T. Barrett. What have you seen out of him, and is it kind of crazy to look back and to think that people were criticizing, telling Urban to bench him after the Oklahoma game earlier?**

COACH FERENTZ: I'll answer that question: Yes. It's more than crazy. It's stupid, and nobody knew that more than those guys. They know just how good a player J.T. Barrett is. That was ridiculous, whoever was saying that, if anybody was.

He's a tremendous player. I just hope he doesn't have as many yards as the last contender we played, because boy, that guy was really good, too. That's part of the Big Ten. You play against really good guys that are just outstanding players. That's part of the challenge.

**Q. He does a lot of different things well. What do you pick first?**

COACH FERENTZ: He's a winner. When I watch film, the guy's a winner. I don't think he was highly-recruited -- I don't remember the story. I think he was kind of under the radar a little bit but whoever identified him really saw something.

Good things come in all kinds of packages, and he's certainly that kind of player. You know, we've already talked about the quarterbacks they have had, how dynamic they were and all that.

But this guy is just a really accomplished football player. And to lead your team back the way he did the other night against a really good football team, those are two outstanding teams playing against each other. Doesn't happen by accident. The guy playing the other quarterback position that night was a really good player, too.

**Q. Always seem to have dual threats now at quarterback. Does that complicate things and make it even more challenging for you guys?**

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, when we played the '13 game, my feeling walking away, I've said this before, it's like you're playing 12 guys, because they have that extra guy, that extra dimension. And it makes it a challenge, yeah, it certainly does, if a guy can pull it down and run a little bit and do those kinds of things. Especially when you have so many other players that are so good. You can't zero in on that one player.

**Q. The long ball, how key is that going to be this weekend to try to open up the run game?**

COACH FERENTZ: It's going to be important. We're going to have throw the ball. I don't know how many deep balls we're going to be able to throw because that means you've got to hold the ball for a while, and these guys get back there pretty quick.

So it's a little bit of a challenge, like the Michigan game last year where you know, those guys close things really quickly' and I'm thinking about Penn State in '08. Looks like there's a hole and all of a sudden, everybody's right there, that type of deal. That's kind of the challenge.

That play you're talking about, that's representative of us right now offensively. Not only did we not complete it, but it ends up being a turnover.

We've got to somehow get past that a little bit, that and the penalties.

**Q. You switched Ross Reynolds in with Keegan Render. Is that something you will do again?**

COACH FERENTZ: I think it's fair to say, we've kind of got six guys right now I think that are in that category. Yeah, you can see more of that, or, you know, see it again.

**Q. The other day, I think there was eight different drives where something happened where you had a holding penalty was called, four or five drops. Is the offense just beating itself right now, because it looked like you were moving and then --**

COACH FERENTZ: Those are the momentum killers. That's the thing about penalties. They are momentum killers.

You know, if you have a high-powered, explosive veteran offense and you've got a chance maybe to overcome those things, even five-yard penalties, there are statistics on that what it does in terms of percentages. But certainly the major penalties were dropped balls, especially dropped balls that could have been positive plays or the ones that we haven't hit.

That's the difference between a team that's in sync and a team that isn't quite there yet. It's not for lack of trying. Our guys are working hard and doing a lot of good things and I think we're close in a lot of areas. That's the race that we are running right now really. We've just got to keep pushing as hard as we can to get up and over.

**Q. What James Butler brought to the team -- how do you view him and what that means for him going forward?**

COACH FERENTZ: I think it was a confidence builder for all of us, because you're never sure of a guy coming off an injury and in his case, it was a little bit unique, too. You know, the turnover that did take place, I don't think was related to his injury at all.

So it's just one of those things. He's such a quality young man and he's a guy that I think gives us some energy and his leadership; we don't have a lot of seniors in that huddle. So you get another senior with good eyes stepping in that huddle. That's a really, really, positive thing for us.

**Q. Snyder, any hope for him this week?**

COACH FERENTZ: We won't see him this week, no.

**Q. Same knee?**

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, it is.

**Q. What do you think of the uniforms? Do you like them?**

COACH FERENTZ: You know, I couldn't sleep. Because we showed that video -- you guys have probably seen it now. It came out, right? I couldn't sleep Saturday night. I was so excited. And it was even better to see the helmets. We wore the helmets in practice today. I was trying to concentrate on what we were doing but I just kept looking at those helmets. Those are awesome.

I know everybody is going to like them. I said, really, what I hope, after the game, people say: They really played well in those uniforms. Those awesome uniforms.

I haven't seen it yet actually in person, so I don't know. I'll reserve judgment until I see them in person.

**Q. In recruiting, do kids ever ask you about alternate uniforms?**

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, and we probably keep moving. You know, when I got here, I tell you, I got more questions about our shoes, changing shoe brands. I won't bring up in what we were in or what they wanted to go. I'll let you guys connect dots on that.

But I was hoping somebody would ask about winning. Like how about playing better. That might be a really good thing to focus on. But I get this. I've really changed my approach on all this stuff. I'm really for all this stuff now; if guys play. If they play well, I'm all for it.

**Q. Change the uniforms -- would you have wanted to do the same thing to where they are now?**

COACH FERENTZ: After Jim Zabel said, it was only two bad decades of football. I think that was a good time to change.

I mean this in all sincerity: That's reverence for what Coach Fry did for this program. We went back to the original; the ones that he brought, put us in.

I remember like it was yesterday reading in back -- they had this Sports Illustrated -- get myself in trouble here. Do people still read magazines? I don't get Sports Illustrated anymore. You guys remember that, older guys in the room? I still remember Coach Fry saying, "We may not be very good when we snap the ball, but we're good coming out of the huddle." I remember that like it was yesterday. I had no idea who Hayden Fry was or who the Iowa Hawkeyes were. But I remember reading that quote because I'm from Pittsburgh.

I mean, that was the psychology in his mind was just try to change things and straight ahead, let's go.