

University of Iowa Football Media Conference

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Kirk Ferentz



COACH FERENTZ: Good afternoon. Just looking back, very pleased with Saturday's game as I mentioned the other night. Just a tremendous crowd, great environment for the football game. We appreciate that.

Thought the guys had a good week's focus. Did a good job preparing. Then certainly were ready to go at kickoff. For the most part played a pretty clean game. Pleased with that part of things. Looking at the tape Sunday, like always, there are plenty of things we have to work on, plenty of things to be corrected. That's part of the process this week certainly.

It's a new week and we certainly have a big challenge on our hands right now, so that's what we're preparing for.

Captains this week will be the same four guys, Desmond and Josey defensively, then C.J. and Matt on the offensive side. Those four guys will represent the team for the coin toss.

Medically I think we have a good chance to get Parker Hesse back. I'd kind of compare him to where Jay Scheel was a week ago. James Daniels hasn't been ruled out. We'll see what he can do. He's moving around pretty good right now. We'll play that day by day. But we certainly can't count on him.

Like always, you have a handful of guys that are day by day. We'll see how they respond during the course of the week. Hopefully we'll be ready at kickoff. If not, we'll play with the guys we have.

All that being said, a couple words about North Dakota State. Certainly you look at them, they're a model program. They've had amazing success. Five national championships in a row, which I'll elaborate on in a second. That's awfully impressive. Five wins the last five times out against FBS teams. I think it's 8-3 now since 2006. All those I assume are on the road. They're no strangers to having success on the road going into venues and playing well.

I think probably the most impressive thing to me is if you look at those championship seasons, it involves five playoff games per season - excuse me, four. So you multiply that times five, long story short, 20 games

where you have to win or go home. They've been successful 20 out of 20 of those. That's an amazing run. That's almost really hard to fathom in some ways.

It carries over to this year. They've already had two overtime wins. If you look at their team right now, they don't have a guy in their program that hasn't been part of a championship. They have great belief in what they do, and for good reason.

Bottom line, good players, really well-coached. They play hard, they play physical. To me their style of football reminds me of the last two teams we played at the end of the season last year, Michigan State, Stanford. So it's a different kind of challenge for us.

Faces change through the years with North Dakota State, names change, faces change, but the way they play looks very, very similar. My Kodak moment would have been somewhere late in 2007, 2008, they were still playing in the Metrodome. I remember them beating Minnesota, how well they played in that ballgame. It wasn't a fluke by any stretch. The way they played in that game, it's still the same thing you see over the last couple of years.

They've done a wonderful job up there. It's a big challenge for our football team. We got a lot to get ready for this week.

Q. Akrum Wadley, two touchdowns last week. It seems like he's real evolved as a complete back.

COACH FERENTZ: He's grown as a player, that's the biggest thing. He's had talent since the time he got here. If we think he's thin now, he was really thin back then. But he's grown as a football player. He's just a little bit more aware now, more conscientious, like a lot of other players at other positions. But he's done a really nice job. Has had a good preseason. Has done a good job thus far.

Q. What do you remember picking up George Kittle at the very end of that recruiting cycle? He was a tweener then. Did you ever expect him to become the blocker he is five years later?

COACH FERENTZ: That part is a little surprising. It was a projection. As does North Dakota State with their recruiting. They do a great job of that. Certainly I was familiar with the family. Coach Bruce. Knew of

Jan's career, tremendous basketball player. You talk about athleticism in the family, certainly had that.

What we saw on film we really liked. We weren't sure what he'd be, a tight end, an outside linebacker. But we thought he was a pretty good football player and a good prospect. He's got a really good attitude.

In answer to your question, probably the biggest surprise maybe of the whole thing has been his ability to block. He does a great job in practice. It's been a couple years now where he's really learned how to be aggressive in that regard, works hard at it. He's done a really good job.

Q. You've had terrific tight ends over the years that have blocked like that, gone on and had great careers in the NFL. How important is to it have a tight end that can set the edge the way he can? Almost like a tackle.

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, for us that's important. That's a really hard job. That's the hardest job I think a tight end has, is to try a block a down guy.

We've been fortunate. All of our guys, most of them had to learn it, develop it. I think about Al Reisner. We threw him in that Illinois game in 2007. He looked about 12. He wasn't a strong blocker then, but he developed into one. If you can be well-rounded as a player, that's good. Certainly George has that ability.

Q. You mentioned comparing them to Michigan State. Other guys compared them to Wisconsin. What about them is Big Ten like?

COACH FERENTZ: Just their style of play. They play with fullbacks, multiple tight ends, run the ball, throw it. They are very versatile, multiple. But they're going to block you. They're going to come out and block you. If you try to block them, they play blocks. They're not trying to run around and slip people, finesse them. That's not their style. I'm not judging styles or systems, what have you, but that is the way they play.

I go back to that Minnesota game. It was in the Dome, so it has to be a few years ago. That's how they looked then. You throw on the film now, it's the same thing. They're well-coached. They play hard, very aggressively, very confidently.

Again, faces are a lot different, but, boy, they just keep playing well. The belief that their team has, their players have, is really evident. Probably no better example there than the quarterback, right? They get the second player in the draft, out last year for the majority of the season. Young guy steps in there, plays tremendous football. Playing good right now. It really speaks well to the environment that they've created up

there.

Q. Does Daniels get enough credit for his speed when he rushes the ball?

COACH FERENTZ: Probably not. I teased him the other night. I said, You're going to screw up your reputation of being a possession back. Everybody talks about possession receivers. He popped a couple big ones now, had a couple big ones last year, too. LeShun is probably a little faster than people might think.

Q. Did you see the end of the Central Michigan game?

COACH FERENTZ: No, I haven't seen it. I heard all the details.

Q. Do you guys have a rule book expert on your sideline when stuff like this comes up?

COACH FERENTZ: I'm not going to stand here and say we would have caught that. We have people that are pretty well-versed.

We learned something the other night about the kick interference on the punter. Learned something there about planting foot versus swing foot, which I thought the referee made that up. I didn't accuse him of that, but we questioned him. He was right.

I'm not going to say we're experts on it, but I think we know the rules pretty well inside and out. It's an unfortunate situation, it really is. We run that same play. We use it with a receiver out there. I don't know if that would solve the problem. We've run that by officials in our conference. It's just an unfortunate circumstance.

Q. North Dakota State, a unique challenge knowing they circle these dates every year?

COACH FERENTZ: We probably have to have a scheduling meeting. We've taken on UNI two years ago, Illinois State last year. Both of them have already - we're FBS, right - already beaten FBS teams this year. Now we have North Dakota State. This is just a walk in the park for them. We've gone to the top of the mountain trying to play the best teams in that division.

Again, I marvel at the fact that they've won as many playoff games in a row as they have. It's like looking at Bill Russell's record in playoffs. It's ridiculous. But it's a real credit to them.

Q. You and your players know what you're getting into with this program. People look and think, There's nothing for Iowa to win here.

COACH FERENTZ: I'm not really too worried about perception. I'll go back to our '09 season, the first

ballgame against UNI that year. We were very fortunate to win that ballgame. We had a pretty good team that year.

That illustration right there, when you play anybody that's good, UNI was very good that year, they've been pretty good traditionally - North Dakota State, ditto - you got to get ready to go. We'll let other people worry about perception.

All you got to do is look real close. That quarterback they had last year, holy smokes. They have a lot of good players. They just don't have 85 of them. Their top 40, I would say, probably is as good as anybody's.

Q. Your conference commissioner came out and said to no longer play these against FCS schools. Is it unfair, especially geographically, the Dakota schools would be natural semi-rivals to you, rather than the MAC?

COACH FERENTZ: They didn't involve me in any of that level of decision making for obvious reasons, as you can imagine. I'm guessing it goes back to the perception thing.

The reality is that North Dakota State not only can play really well against FBS teams, they have played well. Just look at them on film. They're a first-class team. I'd say the same thing about Illinois State, at least the team we played last year and prepared for. We're getting ready for them that year, we're looking at the championship game where they played North Dakota State in that game. You're looking at teams that are really good football teams.

I'm just guessing there's good reason for the decisions we made as a conference. I certainly support that.

Q. Does the style of play something familiar that your guys can prepare for?

COACH FERENTZ: It's probably not exactly like us. But Wisconsin is similar, some of their schemes are similar. The big thing is it's a little change-up from what we faced the last two weeks. It's another kind of challenge for you. No different than if you play a team like this and then switch to a tempo team or whatever.

It's a new kind of preparation. It's something we're going to have to try to get down in three days' practice.

Q. They really are selling mountains and beaches up there.

COACH FERENTZ: They're selling their school and their program. They've done a great job. One of the guys in the room here had a lot to do with that. Certainly Gene (Taylor) was a big part of that. Tremendous coaches. Chris has done a great job

there. Has been there during the entire time this run they had. Craig Bohl did a tremendous job as well. But they've had a lot of good players. Again, the jerseys change, but they just keep playing well.

I did have that thought. We might have to start recruiting North Dakota because they have a lot of guys in-state that play well for them.

Q. You cross paths with them quite a bit.

COACH FERENTZ: We do. We haven't ventured that far north. May have to get Reese a new car or dogsled to help him out.

Q. Has the reduction in scholarships over the years narrowed the gap?

COACH FERENTZ: I think so. I think it's been good for everybody. I'd advocate for that. But if we keep adding games, we may have to have another discussion on that.

These guys have played 15 games. Think about what they've done. Four extra games times five, it's two seasons in five years.

Q. One of the things you often say is this program, you need stories to emerge. How does Matt fit in that?

COACH FERENTZ: He's another story. It's a real testament to our expertise as recruiters. We thought he would be a gray shirt guy. We've had two candidates thus far, Julian Vandervelde and Matt. Julian ended up playing in the NFL. Matt certainly I think has that opportunity down the road.

Bottom line is they're both excellent players. Matt played as a freshman. That's how smart we were. But the guy is a ball of energy, works hard, got great attitude. He's a really good football player. He's improved with every step along the way, too. He played really well for us last year. He's a big part of what we do right now.

Q. How did Wadley come out of the game injury-wise?

COACH FERENTZ: He's okay. Backs get banged up. That's part of the deal.

Q. You mentioned a couple other guys in your opening statement that are day-to-day. Anyone of significance?

COACH FERENTZ: We're going to have that all season long. A couple guys limited work or no work. We'll have to see how they are at the end of the week.

Q. C.J. is off to such a good start. What has been the key to his success?

COACH FERENTZ: I got asked that at halftime. Kept getting pressed about what he's doing. He's just playing well. It's a result of him being a senior. He works hard. He's a great kid, great player who works really hard, has a good attitude, practices. The fact that he's practicing every day has really helped him.

That's what you hope for, any senior is going to play at a higher level. That's what he did as a junior. Nothing magical about what he's doing. Certainly he's more confident, which older players tend to be than younger guys.

Q. What do you see from C.J. when it comes to off the field leading the offense?

COACH FERENTZ: Ever since we named him the starter a year ago January, it's not like he acted any differently. But I think he embraces the responsibility that being the quarterback has. It is a different position. There's certain positions that are a little bit different inherently. Quarterback in any kind of offense, doesn't matter what you do, that type of position.

He's just done a really good job. He embraces that. Does it within his personality, the framework of his personality. He's a very genuine guy, very humble guy, yet a very dedicated, hard-working guy. Proved last year just how tough he is mentally and physically. When you have those kinds of attributes, players tend to be drawn towards you.

Q. Good FCS programs tend to have a player or two that slips through the cracks. They seem to have a few as well, like Nick DeLuca, Zach Johnson left guard.

COACH FERENTZ: A lot of familiar names and some that weren't so familiar, too. They do a wonderful job. If they are recruiting somebody, that gets our attention. I'm not a big one for, Who is recruiting this guy? I rarely ask that of our staff when we look at prospects. If North Dakota State is looking at them, that does get my attention because I think they've done a wonderful job, not only guys in Iowa, but in the Midwest.

You just look at their roster. They've pulled guys from 'Big Ten states' that are really good football players. Kind of us like getting Josey Jewell. We almost didn't get him. I don't think they're involved with him.

It's a great thing about evaluation and prospects, what have you, especially with high school players. You just never know what they're going to do, how they're going to grow, et cetera. The quarterback last year, as I understand it, really grew in high school. Was a 5'10" guy, grew to 6'2". What happened since he got out of high school is pretty impressive, too.

But certainly they've got a good eye identifying prospects, and more importantly developing. They get better year to year.

Q. You're averaging 40 plus a game. How much of that is C.J.'s growth with what he's able to do at the line of scrimmage and helping you guys score more points?

COACH FERENTZ: I think his growth and him being healthy, that's a good combination certainly. We're only two games into it. Polls right now, statistics, I don't even look at statistics outside of your turnover/takeaway margin. That is important because you're trying to build something there. Really till you get to mid-season, I don't weigh those stats too much.

Q. You said after the game that the mental part, the football IQ part, wasn't there for C.J. early but really jumped. When did the talent and the IQ stuff intersect?

COACH FERENTZ: There's no Kodak moment, breakthrough moment. What we saw during the '14 season, just as the season went on, I think you just saw a guy, things were really starting to click for him. He was starting to make a little bit more sense.

Everybody's got a different rate of where things happen. Again, quarterback, there's just so much that they have to know, so much responsibility that we can give them. It's a matter of how much you want to give them.

When is all that going to take place? It's hard to define. To me at least it was during the '14 season. That's what we were seeing behind the scenes. Part of the reason we opened it up there in December and made that decision. Again, we're talking about two good players at that time. Wasn't like one guy was doing bad, just two good players.

Q. Does it come with a certain amount of expectation?

COACH FERENTZ: Not necessarily. This is strictly opinion. I can't back it up factually. The one advantage of his family background, I don't think like anything overwhelms him. It's not like, Wow, look, I'm here. He's seen some really neat things that maybe some other guys don't get to see in a couple different venues, a couple different genres, if you will. I think that's probably healthy for a guy.

But Carson Wentz didn't get that exposure, and he did pretty well, too. But I think it does help for sure.

Q. The year before he got thrown in against Wisconsin, kind of a rough outing for him. I think he was a freshman, like '13. You got a guy with a

big arm, throws it all over the field, misses a lot of short pass routes. Does it take a while to harness somebody who has that kind of live arm, put him in a structure, allow him to blossom?

COACH FERENTZ: To me it's maturity and learning. Every position goes through it. Quarterback, everybody sees them. Everybody has opinions about quarterbacks. For the most part, just about every position. I remember Tony Moeaki coming in here. The comparison I give you with Tony, when you get a really good first-round draft pick. The guy shows up, it's like, Okay, we got that one right because this guy just does things really easily.

That's very, very rare when that happens. Tony, when he showed up, wherever he was, he fit right in. Put him with the third team, looked okay. Second team, looked like one of them. First team, looked like one of them. For some guys that happens. That's so rare. Most players have to really work at it. Again, quarterbacks are out there for everybody to see and everybody to have an opinion about. Usually you have to learn and learn through the school of hard knocks. That's usually how it works.

Q. How much do they learn accuracy during their time here?

COACH FERENTZ: Some guys are better than others. I still remember my mentor, Joe Moore, came out here spring ball in '85. When he got here the night before he was asking about Chuck Long. I said, He's pretty good. He goes to practice. That night he said, He's good, pretty good. I saw him throw like 55 passes. He counted them. I saw maybe two where a guy had to really reach for one. They were all right there. That was a big part of Chuck's game, was his accuracy. Again, that's something that players develop.

Q. You mentioned that Moeaki, Fiedorowicz, guys that look the part at tight end. George probably had to make himself. How does George fit in that overall?

COACH FERENTZ: Time will tell. Time will tell. Three scouts at practice today. Pretty much tell them the same thing every year: We'll know a lot more in November. That's really the truth of it. Unless you got a first rounder like we were just talking about, Jonathan Ogden, didn't take long to scout him. Sit there for about three minutes and you leave.

Most of our guys we'll know the whole story in November. We'll really know how their careers went. You talk about a tight end, go back to last year with Henry Krieger-Coble. You know how much better he was in November as opposed to the November prior to. That's the goal for every player.

Q. Rugamba your third corner now?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, that's probably fair. Pretty fair.

Q. Big jump.

COACH FERENTZ: He's our first guy in sub defense, that type of thing. He's done a good job so far. Hopefully we can coach him up and work him along.

Q. Ton of freshmen the other day. Anybody that kind of jumped out at you?

COACH FERENTZ: No, no Oscar-winning performances. It's good to get them out there, get them that exposure, get them on a game field. It's way different than practice for them.

You never count on those things, but when you get them, it's really great.

Q. When you look at takeaway margin, red zone percentage, a lot of different stats early on in the season, a clean sheet. How much do you appreciate what your team has done?

COACH FERENTZ: That's kind of what I was referring to when I say we've played pretty clean football for the most part. We've done a pretty good job taking care of the ball. Penalty-wise we're doing pretty well. Those kinds of things, the red zone stuff. Stats, again, aren't huge right now.

Hey, you certainly like to be building a good base, for sure. Those are things we work hard on in practice. We spend a lot of time in camp on all those areas, like everybody.

So you like to see that that work is maybe paying off a little bit. But it's just going to keep getting tougher and tougher each week. It's like we were talking about, individual players, the real test is how can we run this whole race. We still got 10 laps to go here. We barely got our feet in the water right now. We got a lot of work to do.

Q. How did film of Keegan and Lucas look from yesterday?

COACH FERENTZ: It was encouraging. Lucas found out, it happened Wednesday, we didn't know till Thursday basically that he was going to be playing. Thought he did a good job. Maybe didn't know enough to be nervous, I don't know. Anyway, he did a pretty good job. Something we can build on.

Same thing with Keegan. Both those guys have been gradually climbing the ladder. Thought both of them had a good spring last spring. Compared to where they were last November, December, they've come a long way.

They can get better, though, too. It's encouraging. Both performed pretty well.

Q. In a simple word, is the big difference between LeShun this year and last year decisiveness?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, that and maturity. I would say maturity, like we're talking about C.J. He feels better, is more confident, sees things, which ties into being decisive, too. He's hitting it hard.

Q. What do you do as coaches to help players who have surgeries? How do you keep them from not going backwards?

COACH FERENTZ: That's a great question. We had a young man in here this weekend as a recruit. Talking about getting into physical therapy, training, what have you. There's two aspects to that. Kind of like strength and conditioning. There's that physical aspect of trying to work a player back. But I think the hardest job, the most important job, our medical staff doesn't get near enough credit, there's a lot of lonely hours they spend with players.

The worst thing for any player is to be injured because you just don't feel like you're part of it. You feel like you're on the outside looking in. I don't care if it's a minor ankle sprain, you miss two days. It's how you feel.

You can imagine for players that have surgeries, things like that, their path back is hard. The time they spend rehabbing is really hard. The mental games that get played, it's really difficult.

I think as a staff we probably do a good job, try to do a good job of reinforcing to the players to be positive. The guys that are with them, the trainers, student trainers, are with them when they're alone and isolated. The feedback they get from those people, it's really important.

That's what they do. They're experienced in that regard. Yeah, the mind games that happen when you're injured, when you're out, it's a really different psychology. You always worry about that, especially in-season because the coaches, everybody is looking straight down the road at the game coming up.

I think we all try to do a good job. But the people on the frontline are the medical staff. They do a great job. It's critical.

Thank you.