

University of Iowa Football

Media Conference

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Kirk Ferentz



KIRK FERENTZ: Good afternoon. Glad to have everybody here. Just start with a couple current events. First of all, just great to have Pat Green here with us today, but in the bigger picture just to have him here on Saturday for the ballgame and this whole initiative of him and both bands participating with the wave. The wave has just been such an unbelievable event for everybody involved, and we're so proud that it's happened right here in Iowa.

But it's been a great, great thing, and I think Pat's song is just the absolutely perfect song for the event, as well. So it's so fitting and so great that he's here. And I don't want to speak for him, but I think his whole connection on this thing is -- anybody that sees this on TV or in any form, just kind of gravitates towards it. He and his wife are parents of two kids, and I think any parent certainly sees it as a very, very special thing, as well. It's great to have him here.

Another little detour I'll just take current event wise, I heard coming into work this morning that the NFL commented on the call that was made over the weekend that potentially could have cost one of the teams a game on the slamming of the quarterback thing. It's kind of interesting that it's one of the clips I did see Sunday night. I saw another penalty had been called, and it really didn't look like a penalty to me, just to the naked eye. It really has nothing to do with us, but it just kind of ties in. Last week I went on a little tangent about cut blocking in our level, and my concern is I think the same thing they're experiencing in the NFL we're experiencing on the same level with cut blocking. It's just a subjective and technical call that they're making. The bottom line is whether you're talking about the quarterback rule or this thing, you're just putting so much pressure on the people who are officiating the game, and they're out there working their hardest, doing their best, and we keep passing legislation that puts a lot of pressure on them, and I'm not sure it's fair pressure.

The parallel I'd give you with the targeting deal, it came out initially, then they had the good sense to say, okay, we're going to go back and review it. They've done the same thing with onside kicks. I just kind of see us going down that road. You can't review every play. I guess my commentary is it just seems like we're passing some legislation or making rules that are really

tough for the officials to officiate and I don't think it's fair to them. I don't think it's good for the game necessarily either, and certainly not talking about player safety, I'm talking about some things that are just pretty obvious and used to be absolutely fine.

Moving on forward here, captain wise this week, we've got four outstanding guys representing the team. We've got Parker Hesse, Nate Stanley, Matt Nelson, and Brady Ross. Those are the four guys going out for the toss on Saturday. Just looking back for one second, certainly pleased with the way the team played on Saturday, coming out with a victory against Iowa State, it's always a tough game. I thought our team really played hard. As I said the other day, they played together, and that was probably the best thing we did. Overall at this point, really pleased with the progress we're making. That being said, you look at the tape, still plenty of growing and developing that we have, a lot of opportunity for improvement, and that's really where our focus is as we move on right now.

Obviously the defensive line played well. They were relentless out there and really set the tempo for our team, our defense. Offensively we still have work to do in terms of timing and tempo, developing a rhythm, but that's just going to come from practicing and good execution in practice.

Basically we just have to play cleaner football, and that's the objective each and every week as we move forward. Speaking of moving forward, now we turn our attention to Northern Iowa, and Northern Iowa is an outstanding opponent, a very traditional program. As long as I've been here, they've been a strong, tough program and do very, very well in a very tough conference that they play in.

That's the starting point for us. This team looks no different, and we only have one game film. Again, it's kind of an unusual circumstance. We're in week three but only play a team that has one game film right now, and much like us in our first game, it took a while for them to get started and they got it going in the latter part of the game and looked to be really good.

I think all you've got to do for us is look at the last three series we've had Northern Iowa, whether it be in '14, whether it be in '12. Both of those, 11-point and 8-

point wins, but more specifically the 2009 ballgame where we had a really good football team and were losing 13-3 in the third quarter, and basically it was a miracle finish for us to win the football game.

That's what we expect when we play them on Saturday. They're going to come in here looking to win the football game, playing tough like they always do, and really it's up to us to make sure we're ready to go, make sure we're improving and ready to kick off. With that, I'll throw it out for questions.

Q. You mentioned the last three games. Is that something you have to reiterate to your players, that this is not going to be a walk in the park, not to look ahead to Wisconsin?

KIRK FERENTZ: Absolutely. Well, these guys have played well against other people, too, not just us. I mentioned the conference that they play in. I'm not an expert on FCS football, but it seems like that has really grown into a tough, competitive league. You think about the teams that they have to play week in and week out. And what they've done, they've played us, they've played Iowa State, played Wisconsin, it would have been '14, '13. When they go on the road, they're tough.

But I mentioned our three games because those are games we all as coaches were involved in, their coaches were involved in, at least Coach Farley, and there's a common denominator between all three of them. They show up to play, they show up and they're playing to win, they play tough, they play hard, and we're going to have to work hard to come out victorious here.

Q. When you were recruiting Parker Hesse, did you give any sort of look to Marcus Weymiller, and what have you seen from him since he's been at UNI?

KIRK FERENTZ: We try to look at everybody, and their roster is very heavily populated from Iowa players. You think about guys on their coaching staff, you've got like Bryce Paup, who was a pretty fair player. I remember asking Bryce, it's probably been eight or ten years ago how that all happened. I think he said there were like 13 guys on his team in high school. You know, just things like that happen. Kurt Warner, you go right down the list of guys. And we've been pretty fortunate finding guys, too, that way.

You're talking about two guys that were really good football players in high school, and they both have continued to grow and both are really doing a nice job in their given programs right now.

Q. Right now the passing game, is it just a matter of just kind of growing things almost where it's a

young wide receiver that gets rerouted or takes the wrong release or the quarterback not adjusting necessarily to when a tight end gets rerouted?

KIRK FERENTZ: That's fair -- your profile of it is really fair right now. It's a lot of little things typically, and it's easier to talk about getting a rhythm and all that type of thing, but it really gets down to execution. Typically one thing affects another. So yeah, if a receiver doesn't run the right route or take the right release, those types of things, he's not where the quarterback expects him to be, it's not good. Sometimes the quarterback doesn't make a good decision or read things out properly, protection can break down. There's so many things that can go haywire in the passing game. And the bottom line is we haven't been consistent enough at this given point. That's hopefully something we'll keep gaining ground. To be a good offensive football team you've got to be balanced, and that just helps everything if we can get that going.

Q. Is the passing game always the hardest thing to take from a practice field to a game?

KIRK FERENTZ: Again, I kind of see everything kind of collectively because when you're throwing the ball well, it makes the run game a little bit easier and then vice versa. It all kind of goes together. I don't think there's necessarily a pattern to it. Every team is a little bit different. A year ago at this time the sky was falling defensively for us, right, we gave up 40 plus points. It's just a different circumstance now. But the bottom line is there's always something to work on. There's always a challenge. The big thing is how do we attack that challenge, how do we get better during the week. Repetition is really important but good repetition is more important, so that's what we're trying to get on the practice field right now.

Q. When you look at the growth of Brandon, in the opener he runs kind of a go-around, gets pushed close to the sideline and doesn't have the leverage he needs and ends up in an interception, but then again, the way he made the big play the other day, he was able to take an inside release on a guy who has played more on the outside so he's understanding where the D-back was positioned and then was able to stack the D-back to get --

KIRK FERENTZ: That kind of says it all right there. It's really the first time, to me at least, that he's really kind of used what he has, what he possesses. It's good when you play towards your strengths if you're a player. But that looked like a legitimate Division I college play where a guy really took what he has and made it work for him. For me at least that's my favorite Brandon Smith play thus far in his career, and hopefully he's got a lot more down the road here. But you've got to start somewhere, and at least it looked like he had a good feel for what he should be doing, and he got a good

ball there and it looked like a good football play. That's what we're hoping for more of those.

Q. For reasons you're already detailed, there's risk involved in playing Northern Iowa, but you've embraced it. Why have you embraced it?

KIRK FERENTZ: I think it's the right thing to do. And Gary and I are same page on that one just like we are on the Iowa State series. It's good for our state. They relish the challenge. I think, again, I really think we're a very unique state of 3 million people, you've got two teams that won bowl games last year and you've got an FCS program that's always in the playoffs. They're always chasing the championship. I think it's something we should all embrace, and I think that's our plan is at least to continue that.

Q. Was Ivory back at practice?

KIRK FERENTZ: He's not. He's gaining ground, and we haven't rolled him out yet for this week, but he's gaining ground, and we'll see day by day.

Q. How would you assess your corner play so far this season?

KIRK FERENTZ: Good. Well, I mean, good enough, I'll put it that way. I don't know if good is the right word. But I don't mind telling you I had some concerns in my mind going into the game. The guys that they threw out there, they're tough to defend. You worry about giving up the big play because they've gotten a few of those over the past X amount of months, and right on through. Number one was not giving up big plays the other day, be it the running back or the receivers, and for the most part we did a pretty good job there that allowed us to have some success. But obviously the corners are a big part of that. Playing smart, not doing dumb things.

Q. Has Jack Hockaday cemented that middle linebacker role?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, right now he's working No. 1, and that's remained pretty constant. He's done a really nice job, and we're just going to keep moving everybody forward. Djimon jumped in there. We'll see how that goes this week, how they both practice. But everybody gets graded during practice, but Jack is doing a good job, and he looks confident out there, and that's great to see.

Q. Is that something that you didn't know until he got on the field because you've talked about that before like with --

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah.

Q. You kind of need to see what happens on the field?

KIRK FERENTZ: I kind of dropped that hint out there in

August. You have to get into game play. It's just like every position, and see how they react to things out there. He's done a good job. He's not playing perfect, and we didn't play perfect on defense. We got away with a few things that could have been costly, but we got away with those, and so we still have a lot to work on, and Jack has got some stuff on his list, too, from watching the tape on Sunday.

Q. It's obviously been a while since you guys had this much change or this much competition in September at linebacker; do you like what you see?

KIRK FERENTZ: We keep people out of the end zone, I'm fine with that. I don't care what the combination is. But the bottom line is, yeah, our production has been good, but I think it's healthy. It's really healthy. I wish we had that at every position. You don't always have that luxury. When you have guys making each other better in practice, that leads to positive things, and it leads to faster improvement typically. Yeah, I think it's a healthy thing right now. Nobody is elbowing each other out of the way. They're just out there playing.

Q. What did you see from Djimon on tape, his play in his first game, first start?

KIRK FERENTZ: I thought he did a lot of good things. He looked confident, first of all, which is not always the case for a guy. He hasn't played at all, so for him to be out there doing that, that was really good.

It goes back to the game exposure thing. You're just never quite sure how a guy is going to react, and that's a big game for us. I don't know about anybody else; that's a big game we were in last Saturday. So he could have shrunk, but I didn't see him do that. He was running around making some plays and looked confident and looked comfortable for a guy who's never really played a significant amount of snaps, so it's a real good starting point for him certainly.

Q. Michael Ojemudia was saying he described his situation as kind of like a business, him being a student-athlete. He treats it that way. Do you see that with him? He says just the time management and everything, it's like a business, he said.

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, we talk to our guys a lot about that. In fact, Coach Moore, Tom Moore, used that term to our players about you are your own business, and how you choose to run your business is going to determine if you're a business of value or not. Players' jobs is to bring value to a team. But yeah, we talk to our players all the time constantly about routine because they just have so many things on their plate from a lot of different standpoints, and we hold them to a pretty high standard from a citizenship standpoint, academic standpoint, and then obviously we want them to go out and play winning football. And you just can't

do it if you're not somewhat organized. I mean, I didn't have a clue 40 years ago when I played. It's just such a different world.

But I think it's great training for guys when they leave here. I think they're prepared to do things like have a real job maybe, be a good spouse and raise their kids, that type of stuff. It's good training, but it's hard, and if you're not really organized, and typically it's like our older guys know how to watch film better than younger guys, and our older guys know how to manage their time a little bit better. You're young, you're invincible, but at some point you're going to break down or not maximize your abilities if you're not really organized.

Q. You're starting to get some contributors from Iowa Western. Can you describe what it's like to kind of foster that relationship with a junior college and have -- I don't want to say a common line all the way in --

KIRK FERENTZ: I'm only smiling because the first one was almost accidental; I'm thinking of Nick Easley right off the bat, and thank goodness that accident took place. We just kind of stumbled into him. My first conversation I remember vividly I was in my room at Tampa in the bowl game and spoke to him right before or after the holidays. I guess it was after Christmas. He's just come in and done such a nice job -- he's such a good guy and a good football player.

Then Mekhi is a little bit off the beaten path, too. It wasn't like he was hot in demand, but KB saw him, and the more we got to know him, the more we liked him. We had an opening, and just so glad he's here, too.

Yeah, it's all good stuff, but I think it speaks highly of their program. These are two guys that have really fit in with what we're doing, and they've done it really kind of seamlessly. They've just come in and gone to work and really done a good job.

Q. When you watch the tapes on Sundays, what have you observed with Nate and maybe why he's struggling a little bit early, especially in terms of accuracy?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I think he looks like he's pressing to me a little bit. I've never played quarterback. I did throw one pass -- yeah, one pass in 10th grade. I completed it, too. I didn't have my contacts in and I couldn't see. I just hauled it out and some guy caught it; it was a miracle. That's a long story, we won't go there. But I did throw one pass in my life, but I'm not a passer. But I know a little bit about throwing a baseball, and you can't aim a ball, I know that, when you throw something. I think he's doing a little bit of that right now, trying to be too perfect, and then the points earlier we're just not quite

there in terms of sync. Just going to keep working at it. There's no pixie dust or pill we give a guy or something like that. It's just working through it and developing confidence.

Q. What about Smith-Marsette? You said you got good news on him --

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, the X-rays were fine, so things are good there, it's just kind of day-to-day right now. He didn't work today, either, so we'll see where he's at tomorrow and take it day by day.

Q. What do you think of the swarm, and why when you came back to Iowa did you decide to continue that tradition?

KIRK FERENTZ: Well, like most things, I had no idea what the swarm was or why we were doing it when I got here. I mean, I wasn't real aware, back in 1981. But as I was here through the years, I obviously learned the origin of it, what it meant, what it stands for, and to me it just -- like the wave, it's another great Iowa tradition, and I think it's something when I came back being part of this culture for nine years, there wasn't much of it I didn't want to embrace quite frankly, so that was one that we really grabbed on to. I think it's really a powerful thing. Any player, any of our former players that have taken part in that, that's really a special thing, so they understand it.

That is a tradition that will continue as long as I keep coaching. Next guy has got the right to do whatever he wants, but I said before, I think that's one of the neatest things about the wave. I can't see the wave ever ending. No matter who's coaching here, the wave will endure, and that's pretty neat. Two pretty good traditions in sports.

Q. Some of your players said that Brian kind of gives them a history lesson about the swarm, what it means and what it stands for at the end of camp. Is that something you discuss with Brian, or is that just what Brian feels because he participated in it?

KIRK FERENTZ: It's either Brian, LeVar or KB; those guys have all been in it as players, so to me it's even more impactful when a former player passes something on to the current players, and that's a great opportunity to just tap into that relative background there.

Q. Curious how much you guys have talked about the redshirt rule; just from the outside do you have like a list of guys you'd like to get some game action if you get a big lead in any game?

KIRK FERENTZ: Are you spying on my practice schedule today? I actually was writing that down today on the practice field. It's something obviously we're keeping track of. I don't know that we'll have a

discussion this week on it. I think we kind of have an idea of what the working potential participants are, and then injuries affect that, like Henry is playing running back right now because we're thin at this point, and we were thin on Saturday. So that impacts it, too, and the first objective is win a game, but we kind of came in with a tentative plan in August and the idea was to reassess things over the bye week, and that's kind of where we're at right now.

Q. Coach Pederson at West Branch is going for his 300th win on Friday. What do you know about him and what have you seen from him in your overlapping -- what stands out about him?

KIRK FERENTZ: Butch has done such a great job. His son Lance is doing a great job, as well. Bo Bower most recently coming out of that program, Marv Cook. I think that's one of the things I really found unique when I came here to Iowa, the state of Iowa, is the high school coaching in this state, whether it's Pat Mitchell, Ed Thomas, Duane Twait, you can go right down the list, Walt Fiegel, Curt Bladt, currently coaching at Harlan. Think about how many bus rides Curt has taken: Football, wrestling, track. And their away games are not like 10 miles down the road. So you think about our state is in my mind really rich in coaches like that. They're doing it because they really love kids and they love coaching. They're not doing it because they're trying to be whatever. But all those guys I just mentioned in my mind are legends, and Butch is certainly in that category. Those guys are rare people.

Q. Matt Nelson, his journey here started at defensive end, he's a defensive tackle right now, he probably played his best game Saturday --.

KIRK FERENTZ: He did.

Q. How did that happen? He's a guy who's studying medicine and he's -- how does that reconcile?

KIRK FERENTZ: The first two things I think of when I think of Matt, he was taking organic chemistry a year ago I ran into him down there. He was getting a sandwich in the weight room, and I asked him what the hell he was doing. It was that three-week break where nobody is supposed to be here, but he was taking a 10-week course because he is premed. So again, you go back to time management and sacrificing things, he's certainly making a sacrifice. Mike Elgin did the same thing, but he had 900 job offers when he finished up. So these guys get the big picture. They understand that.

The other thing I remember about Matt, he was significantly recruited and chose us whenever it was, I guess in June or maybe even May, I can't remember.

But what I remember distinctly was he showed up at our camp like two weeks later and couldn't get enough coaching. Like he kept getting in the front of the line. He wanted to get in here and be coached, and I'm thinking, boy, this is unusual for this day and age, for a quote-unquote, big recruit. He wasn't trying out, he just wanted to get better as a football player. That's how he operates. He's a really sharp guy, great teammate, and then he just continually improves. I agree with you, Saturday was his best effort as a Hawkeye, and it was great to see it.

Q. It feels like there's a lot of mentoring going on with Matt, Parker, and I want to say Sam. I think they're doing a really great job bringing the younger defensive linemen along --

KIRK FERENTZ: Are you guys like peeking into practice or our meetings? You guys know more than you're supposed to (laughter). But no, you're right on the money. Those guys do a great job. I think all of our coaches do that. Reese and KB really promote that, and that's part of the benefit of having older guys in the program is they're trying to work with the younger guys and share experiences with them so they don't go through some of the hardships that they went through. But usually you do anyway. But these guys are team-first guys. They're unbelievable.

Q. The schedule, starting the season with four home games and then you have one home game in the next six Saturdays, what do you think of this?

KIRK FERENTZ: It's funny, I haven't been asked that yet. I've been waiting for months. But I haven't been asked that one.

I don't think too much about the schedules. I knew that question was coming, and it's kind of funny because flipping the channels somewhere before we went back to work in July I guess it was, and there was a Big Ten special on the time Michigan State played Wisconsin for the Big Ten Championship, regular season game. Like whose idea was that first of all, that's stupid. And then secondly, my answer would be like at least in the second part of the season we're not going to Japan. We're playing in the Big Ten. The road trips aren't that big a deal. They're easy, and you go there, you play and you get back out.

Compared to being at Maine where you're on a bus for eight or nine hours, it's not that big a deal. But it's the way it shook out and the way they come to you. That's the way it is.

Q. The four straight home games to open the season, that's very seldom done by anybody. Is it problematic --

KIRK FERENTZ: It sounds like maybe they do in the

southeast. I didn't mention a conference, I just said a geographic area of the country.

Q. Would you rather have them scattered just a little bit?

KIRK FERENTZ: I really haven't thought about it because it's out there for us. Big thing right now is playing well this Saturday. If we do that, I'll be happy and then we'll figure out what to do the next week.