

University of Iowa Football Media Conference

Tuesday, October 16, 2018

Kirk Ferentz



KIRK FERENTZ: Good afternoon. Just a couple quick words going backwards, Indiana recap. Certainly it was good to get the victory for us. Really pleased about getting two victories on the road, Big Ten conference games, that's always a good thing. Hopefully that will help our players gain some confidence.

I think also one thing they saw, when we execute and really focus, we have a chance to have a good football team. But that being said, there's still a lot of things we need to clean up and improve upon. That's really in all three areas. That challenge doesn't ever stop.

One obvious thing coming out of Saturday, way too many penalties. We have to do a better job there, clean up our play there.

Moving forward to the Maryland game, our captains this week will be Parker Hesse, Nate Stanley, Keegan Render and Jake Gervase, four guys going out for the toss. Third straight homecoming, unusual, at least this one is ours. Good to be back at home, be playing in Kinnick and hosting a homecoming game.

Really want to express our appreciation to the fans. Our fans have been great all season long. I know we will have a great crowd out on Saturday and we appreciate that.

That being said, our fans aren't going to win the game for us. We know that. We have to go out and play well. That's certainly going to be the case against Maryland. They're a really good football team, 4-2 record, 2-1 like us in the Big Ten.

As we look at them, first thing that stands out, a little bit like last week, we don't have a lot of familiarity with them, haven't played them since '15. Only played them in a two-game series. Almost like starting over again, a non-league game in some ways.

What we have found is they're a really good football team. They've got a lot of really good players, very talented. They've got good size, good speed, good athleticism. They can do a lot of things very, very well I think in all three phases.

The special teams, they play hard. Have a lot of guys

that present problems for you, good return guy on the kick team, their runningback is a very dangerous return guy. Just a bunch of guys that play well on core. A lot of guys that have play roles on core, special teams, they're very aggressive, very well-coached. That's first and foremost.

You move into the defense, they play a three-man front up front. Again, they've got big, physical guys in their front seven. Good secondary, those guys play well. Our focus is going to have to be really good and preparation is going to have to be good there.

Flipping over on offense, it's not like playing Georgia Tech exactly, but there's some parallels, primarily their strength is in running the football. When they throw it, they tend to be real big plays. I think the parallel to Georgia Tech is there's just a lot of things going on.

It's a really important week for us mentally. It's a different preparation than we're used to. Do a lot of shifts, a lot of motions, a lot of things to different sets to catch you off guard.

The thing that jumps out at you is how many big plays come out of it. If our guys aren't on the same page, communicating well, you open the door for some really big plays. That's a big danger of playing these guys.

Obviously they have good players, big physical veteran line, probably as big as we'll see. Several runningbacks. Quarterback is a very dangerous player. They play two of them actually. It's going to be a big challenge for us. That's really kind of where we're at at this point.

It's going to take a good week of preparation on our part. We've got to finish the week out. Again, we don't know a lot about Maryland, haven't played them in quite some time. We really have to do a good job of making sure we know all we can. I'm sure they're trying to do the same thing. Go from there.

Injuries real quick. Brady left the game the other day, Brady Ross. He'll be out this game, probably a couple. We will see how that goes. It's going to take a couple weeks at least to heal.

I mentioned Jack, doesn't look good. I guess doubtful

is the right term. I would not count on him being back with us.

On the positive side, Ivory started practicing yesterday morning with us. Nick Niemann the same way. I think both those guys will be ready to go on Saturday, bearing the week.

Q. The physical nature of play that they have, particularly in the run game, does that limit your opportunities in the personnel versus the base 4-3?

KIRK FERENTZ: Not necessarily. They still play some three-wide stuff, all that. They are a physical group. We'll just see what their personnel dictates.

We'll keep that door open. I'm sure there will be some situations where we'll have an opportunity to do that. But having Nick back obviously helps us a little bit, gives us a little bit more experience. We consider him to be one of our better players.

Yeah, that's the decision we'll make there on that, even if the opportunity presents itself, which personnel group we want to go with. In that case, we're talking about two guys that we have a lot of confidence in.

Q. Is there one thing you can point to in particular, the passing yards game is as good as it's been since '05, is that just a matter of things coming together at once?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, me personally, I just think we're a little bit more experienced than we were. We were really inexperienced last year at the receiver position, tight end position, quarterback position. Other than that, we were doing okay (laughter). We had backs that had some experience.

I think just kind of a combination of those guys being more experienced. I'd throw our tackles in, too. Those guys are both freshmen, when Boone and Ike went down, that was pretty early in the season. Just had a lot of young players last year on offense. I think it showed at times. We were very inconsistent. Sometimes we looked really good. At least right now we're a little bit more consistent. We certainly can improve in that area. I think we just have a little bit better balance now, better experience.

Q. Obviously the passing game stole the show Saturday. Your runningbacks both averaged over five yards per carry. Seemed like from the beginning you established tempo in the running game. How important is that for your offense?

KIRK FERENTZ: It sure helps. As you know, we want to be balanced in a perfect world. If that opportunity is there, hopefully we can get that established. You can

take one thing or another away if you choose to. You can take the run away if you need to.

Saturday I thought we did a good job of being balanced. One of the better plays we ran, third-and-12, whatever there, going to the right of our bench where we hit just a little run in there for whatever it was, 13. Got the first down on it.

If we can play that way, it makes us a better football team. Sometimes you can. It's more fun when you can. But that's not always easy to do.

Q. Safe bet at the beginning of each season that you're going to lose a runningback for a game or two. The group back there, what has been the key to having those guys ready to go, even with Ivory out a few weeks?

KIRK FERENTZ: I don't know why I was talking about injuries last week, probably because we have guys injured, right? 2002 is the aberration where we sailed right through with that. I think D.J. Johnson is the only guy that missed significant time. Every now and then you're going to have a year like that.

Typically you're going to be rotating people around at all positions. The runningback position is kind of that way. Has been this year obviously. We've been down a guy frequently. The good news is we've had two to go with, that's good news.

I think all three of those guys are really coming along well. Mekhi did some good things the other day. Ivory, when he's in, has been good, too. When you have two guys, that gives you a chance to go through.

Some people have gone through with one and had no issues. We had that with Shaun (phonetic) back in '08. Usually not the norm.

Q. It feels like you guys are getting more explosive plays, without a fleaflicker, have you seen an improvement in pass protection?

KIRK FERENTZ: Part of that I think is we're a little bit more cohesive right now. Offense, as you know, is so intricate. One guy can break down. It could be an opportunity for a good play, one guy breaks down, just looks like nothing. Whereas on defense, you can blow something, if the offense doesn't catch it, you can get away with it sometimes defensively. I think especially in the passing game, that's true.

Then the other component the other day was just the coverages we caught a couple times. Feast or famine situations for both teams. We were able to come out on top on those.

Q. You mentioned Georgia Tech. Norm Parker would have had five weeks. Phil Parker gets five, six days. How does he approach that?

KIRK FERENTZ: That was a big point in that ballgame. We had so much time to get there meticulously. As you might imagine, we do some work out of season to be prepared. Not that it's exactly the same. Coach Canada, we have some experience with him. At least in my mind what stands out most recently when he was at Pitt a couple years ago, watching them play Penn State, give Penn State a lot of problems.

But the trick is getting the scout team to execute. That was really a big issue with Georgia Tech. At least we had some time to train them a little bit so the defense could get a representative look. It's tough to create a look that's going to be as synchronized, as quick, replicate the speed we're going to see Saturday. I think that's a big, big challenge for us.

Our defensive guys have a challenge trying to get it down, then also get it down at the right tempo and speed. That's a big challenge. I think that's part of their effectiveness.

Q. When you look at what Matt Canada has been able to do with this program, after what they faced with the ongoing situation, seems impressive. This is a program that doesn't have a ton of tradition like Ohio State. What do you know about the way he's done this, him as a person, the way they've been able to execute?

KIRK FERENTZ: I don't know all the details of what's going on there. I just know it had to be a really challenging time for everybody there, their entire staff and football team. The way they're playing, you have to give everybody credit.

It starts with him. He's certainly been the one that pulled them all together, kept everybody going in the right direction. When you watch film, you would never know there was any turbulence there. That's impressive.

Then our paths have overlapped a little bit through familiarity in the conference. We have some guys that know him from the Northern Illinois connection, that type of thing, too. Everything I've always heard about him is just stellar. Most recently he's been recognized nationally. It's kind of interesting, his trek. He's been very highly regarded as a really good offensive coach. I think he's shown an ability to do more than that, just really pull everybody together in a cohesive unit. It's very impressive.

Q. Who would you say your best corners are in run support to date?

KIRK FERENTZ: I don't know. I guess we're going to find out, aren't we. We'll just keep going with the guys we have, keep practicing, seeing how they look.

They're all going to have to be able to step up and do that. It's not the same as, but I remember playing over at Pittsburgh, not when Coach Canada was there, the first half of the '14 game, they were wearing us out into the boundary. That was part of our problem, corner support was not very good. We kind of got that corrected in the second half, played much better.

We're going to get tested everywhere this week as far as coming up and run support, also tackling, most importantly tackling. They have guys that are tough to get down.

Q. Start freshmen again?

KIRK FERENTZ: That's our plan right now. I think Hankins is pretty close to being about there, same thing with O.J. At least we have some guys to pick from. We'll let them compete this week.

Q. The offense is playing pretty well right now. Take me back when you promoted Brian to offensive coordinator, was there maybe a different kind of pressure on you and him because he was your son? Did you feel that when this promotion was made?

KIRK FERENTZ: Not really. I think probably it's like we've had three of them play here, three sons play here. It really hasn't affected me or impacted me in a great way, other than I feel fortunate that way to watch them every day, be around them every day, even if I'm not working with them directly.

But really it gets down to them having to do their jobs. I think the pressure was really on them, all three of them, to prove themselves to most of all their teammates, prove their worth to those guys, show they deserved to be on the team, then also deserved to get whatever spot they got.

I think that's probably fair to say it's more on their shoulders than mine. But really what it gets down to, I've got a job to do, he's got a job to do, he had a job before that to do. When they're playing, they have a job to do, too.

I think most of us involved, we're trying to bring our best to the team, do what we can to help the team be successful. I think that's how he looks at it. I don't want to speak for him. Been around him a while, so I think I understand how he thinks pretty well.

Q. Are there times during the games when he makes a call, you think, Not sure?

KIRK FERENTZ: I'm a great second guesser, you kidding me? I'm like a fan.

No, it's amazing. I mean, it's unbelievable, but it is. We operate like we've always operated. Whether it was Greg or Ken, fortunately we haven't had eight million play callers. Whoever is doing it, that's a really hard job. Appreciation for that at a young age. There's always, Geez, I'd do this or that. It's easy to say that, I've learned that real fast.

Whoever it is calling plays, we all correspond a little bit between series. When the guy is in a series, that guy is going with it. Maybe it's a situation where we'll say, We're going to go for it on fourth, those types of things, give him information so he can do his job as well as possible. I try not to second guess. That's a hard job. Boy, it's a hard job.

Q. Did you have a chance to watch the Monday game last night? Your thoughts on so many Iowa players playing different positions.

KIRK FERENTZ: Sitting out here eating dinner before the game. The sound, maybe it was on, looked like a really nice promo on C.J., and his family. What a story that is. We saw that up on the board, saw some footage of him in black and gold. That was great to see.

Then I actually got to see the last two series. I saw San Fran go down and throw the pick real deep. Saw Rogers lead them back. That's as much I saw of the game last night. Five guys playing. Matt Tobin released last week by San Fran. Otherwise it would have been six. Five guys out there on the field. Daniels rushing, Beatherd. Saw Kittle catch a ball from C.J. Those are all kind of neat things. You're more interested in pro games when you have a personal connection like that. That's pretty cool.

Q. Do you have a lot of guys drafted too low?

KIRK FERENTZ: They're probably the guys we recruit. You think about Micah. We stole him from the MAC, right? Daniels was going to Villanova, which would be impressive if he's a basketball guy. Obviously he's not at his height.

I guess they don't quite fit the parameters, whether it's size, speed. Desmond King, same way. C.J., weighed I think 170 when he got here. They don't all fit the mold maybe. I think what we see is they end up being really good players.

Marshal is probably the centerpiece for that discussion. Marshal never looked pretty in his stance. I told guys, He won't look pretty in shorts, but when you start playing football, your line coach will be pleased you drafted him. They don't maybe tick every box. When it

comes time to playing, doing what you're supposed to do, they're pretty good at that. Almost sneaky good sometimes.

I believe Micah Hyde has sneaky speed, Desmond the same way. You don't see people running them down, catching them. They got enough speed to get to where they want to get. Part of that is understanding.

All those guys we're talking about, they understand what it is to show up and work every day. That sounds pretty mundane and boring. Six years in the National Football League, it was amazing how many guys didn't understand that concept. They got by because they had great ability, great this and that. At some point that road ends.

I think our guys do a good job of giving themselves a chance to stay alive, be productive for the team they're with.

Q. All the guys in the game last night were starter groups. Do they come in with something to prove?

KIRK FERENTZ: I don't think it hurts. Doesn't hurt. I'll throw this one out there, too. Brandon Scherff, who was not a big recruit, I hope he had at least three stars. Drafted fifth. I know how he works, too. But he's unaffected by it. I guess that would be the point.

Brandon got drafted really high. So now he can -- I don't know if he's done it yet, I haven't asked him if he was shooting boars out of his helicopter. That was what he was hoping to do it someday. If he wants to, he can do it. Still the same guy he was. Trying to be a good football player and good teammate.

Q. Is Phil in the realm of Bill Brazier?

KIRK FERENTZ: Bill is like a model. Seriously, I was a young guy, but Bill was such a role model for all of us. Such a veteran guy. He was unbelievable. Both Bills. Bill Snyder the same way. Carl Jackson. We had some guys on that staff. I'm 20 whatever I was at that point, so I needed a lot of that.

But, yeah, if you want to start talking about résumés and things like that, Bill had one, he would never tell you that. He was just an outstanding coach. Then Norm the same way. Phil is a very humble guy. Very humble, very competitive. I think that's one thing that's been pretty consistent.

We played pretty good defense, not from day one, but that was a goal from day one. That's one thing we really tried to hang our hat on, work from there. I think Phil has done a great job with it. I think we have a really good staff. All those guys communicate well, talk about issues, what the problems are going to be this week. They're something new every week.

Q. As a head coach, what is your interaction with the defensive side? I imagine a veteran staff, you probably don't have to look very much.

KIRK FERENTZ: One of my goals when I came here was model it like Coach Fry had it. I don't think he worried too much about the defense because he had great trust in Bill. I was never fixated on 3-4 or 4-3 or any of that stuff. My picture was more how we were going to play.

I knew this, we couldn't give up big plays, missed tackles, blown assignments. That's the stuff I'm more interested in. To me the coordinator and the staff is shaped the way we're going to do it.

Guy might want to blitz 90% of the time. That's okay if we're not giving up big plays. We saw that Saturday. Live by it, die by it. There's a certain way we're playing, our guys have done a great job, have done a great job for 19 years defensively.

Q. Phil seems to connect with recruits?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I've got a circle of friends that are kind of unique. Rita could tell you that. But a lot of them are like you, you like him or you don't. Resonates or it doesn't. But that's probably pretty good. When it comes to recruiting if what we say doesn't resonate, probably isn't going to work out well in the end. Just as well you get guys that have some kind of connection.

The connection with Phil, it's a little off the charts. I'm not going to even try to analyze that one with some of those guys, the way they interact with each other.

Q. With Ihmir showing up every week, is that the role you expected him to grow into?

KIRK FERENTZ: We loved his energy. He loves football, first of all. It was really evident. He's just a football junky. He's very much into the game. He loves the game. He studies it, all those kinds of things, studies the history of it, which is kind of unusual especially in this day and age. Awfully exciting on film, but really thin. There were some size limitations there.

Going back to C.J. Beatherd, some point the guy is going to grow. Only 17, 18 years old, a young guy. All those things will take care of themselves. We're trying to find a player that we think really is going to fit in with what we did. We really liked what we knew about Ihmir. We also knew the high school coach. That gave us a comfort also because we could -- Coach Logan gave us great insight, reliable. You knew it was going to be reliable information.

Yeah, it was kind of a no-brainer for us.

Q. He's like Akrum, is this a Jersey thing?

KIRK FERENTZ: I don't think everybody on their team was like that. When you watched their film, you could see these guys really liked playing. Then again, Coach Logan verified that. Started with Coach Frank Verducci, Sr. That's how the whole ball got rolling. It's fantastic.

Q. When you look at the chemistry of this team, it seems evident they maybe not individually but collectively like each other, genuinely feel a bond that you don't always get. Do you see that? How instrumental is that to success?

KIRK FERENTZ: I think it's huge in success. I think it's huge in any team activity or group activity. I do see it. It's been ongoing.

It's interesting. I think teams develop personalities, good bad or indifferent, as the season goes on, year goes on. I said it back in April, I'm not sure what our personality was. It was kind of bland. We had good guys, don't get me wrong, but I don't think the team started. Took place over the summer. Usually does, because it's a really intense period of training.

Things show themselves a little bit I think during the month of July. But as it went on, the guys in front have been so consistently doing a good job. We don't have many of them. As I said the other day, I think we got a lot of guys in the junior, sophomore class right there with those seniors. That's kind of come together a little bit.

We're going to get tested the next six weeks. We're only halfway through the season. There are going to be more bumps in the road, more adversity to face, those types of things. We'll find out more about the team.

I feel good about the guys we have. They're all committed to doing things well. I haven't seen any cases of ego setting in or that kind of stuff, this or that. Those are the kinds of things that get teams off the track sometimes.

Q. When you look at their seniors, they've ridden the wave a few times. Do you think that's helped them become mentally tough, executed that mindset?

KIRK FERENTZ: Absolutely, yeah. If you hang around four or five years in a college program, there's going to be ups and downs, or else you're just not paying attention. Some guys are so oblivious, they kind of pass through there. If you're really involved, you're going to experience that.

Being on the scout team is humbling. But the game is

humbling. I think it's a great experience. I wish every player could go through it, work a year before they came to college, too. Had to get up and show up to work, earn a paycheck, then maybe they'd appreciate some of the things they have a little bit more. That's part of life. We all get humbled every day. If you're paying attention, you learn from it, you understand there's benefit from it. It can pay off for you as you move forward.

At the end of the day, no matter how the season turns out, I feel really good about these 13 guys moving on into the real world. They're going to do a nice job. They're a quality group of guys.

Q. We asked Nate if he watched C.J. in the Monday Night Game.

KIRK FERENTZ: I could have predicted that.

Q. How coachable is he at this point? I imagine supremely.

KIRK FERENTZ: He's been coachable from day one. Playing quarterback, at least the way we play, that's such a demanding position. It is so hard. It's a course in itself. It's probably six or eight hours. I don't ask them how many hours they're spending, but they spend a lot of time. You have to go out and perform well. There's some people that spend their living doing it. So you can imagine.

He does a quality job in the classroom. We've had a run of guys doing a great job in the classroom. C.J. was a tremendous student. These guys have great pride. They're meticulous.

We all miss the Monday night games, the Sunday night games, I saw three plays in that one. Looked like a great game. That's the tradeoff right now. We'll have time for that stuff in January.

Nate is totally committed. He wants to go out and perform well. He understands the preparation.

Q. More quarterbacks in the league, on the fringes, starting with Ricky, does what they do in school translate?

KIRK FERENTZ: It helps. I think the way we play helps. You still have to be good enough. That's the real challenge. Certainly I think C.J. has a bright future. I'm sorry he's playing for the reasons he's playing right now. He has a great future in the National Football League I think. I felt that way years ago. I think Nate does, too, whenever that time comes.

A big part of it is the guy going to work at it or just come in and show up. You can't do that at that position.

Q. Would you consider Toren Young a favorite?

KIRK FERENTZ: Most of us have favorites, right? I guess I don't, but Toren is a favorite of mine just because he works so hard. He's a guy when he's on the field, he energizes your team. Amani Jones does the same thing on special teams. You might count the snaps, you don't appreciate the full value of what they do for our football team.

Players like those two guys that have such positive attitudes, they're tough, physical players by nature, to me they just kind of pick everybody up. Bob Sanders is the most vivid example I can give you in this program in the last 20-year history, of a guy that energized a football team. Certain players have that ability. I'mir has that to a degree. He's not big and physical, but he's reckless. He's nuts. He'll throw it in there like he is big and physical, and he's not.

Those guys really I think just help energize a team and give them a little bit extra drive.

Q. When you look at Devonte Young, moved over from offense to defense, what is the reason for that? The value of him on special teams. What is his value?

KIRK FERENTZ: I think his value has really grown. He gets the credit for that because at receiver he was doing okay. The knee injury really slowed him down. He was doing okay. Nothing really specifically outstanding. Other guys were moving by him.

He kept a great attitude. He's worked extremely hard on special teams. He's doing a lot of really good things out there. We talk to guys all the time about finding a role. Sometimes you just have a role, you don't find it. Your role might be being on the scout team when you're redshirted, to the point earlier. That's a really important role. Every role is important or we wouldn't have them on the team.

To his credit, things weren't going great for him at receiver, but he's been working hard at special teams, immersed himself fully there. There's answers on those tapes, if you'll immerse yourself a little bit.

Two weeks ago, three weeks ago, whenever it was we had the injury problems on our back end. Phil went to him, asked him if he'd be interested. He jumped right in there. He's trying to learn on the fly right now. He's just trying to help the football team. Can't say anything but great things about him. He has a cool number, 17 instead of 80. That's his reward. Those jerseys are a big deal.