

University of Iowa Football

Media Conference

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Kirk Ferentz

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KIRK FERENTZ: First of all, just really obviously pleased to get the victory. They're hard fought all the time, and I congratulate the team on earning their sixth victory, which makes us bowl eligible, and that's certainly not the final stop, but never want to take that for granted. It's significant, and just we never want to take that for granted.

Again, just overall really happy with our team's performance today. I think you play a team like Maryland, they pose some really unique challenges for us, and you factor in the conditions on top of it, I thought our guys did a really good job of being focused, doing the things they had to do to be successful, and overall just a really good day.

I thought our effort was good out there on the field, but I think maybe bigger picture, the week's preparation was really good. I thought the guys were on top of things the way they needed to be, and then it's really been a trend with these guys over the last seven, eight weeks. They've shown up every week and did their best to get ready for the game, and they show up and compete. Happy about that.

You get into a game like this with the weather being like it was, and they were calling for that earlier in the week, so they nailed it that way. But it really does kind of limit what happens. It's not exactly like the bowl game but similar in some ways where you have to be smart about what you do and be realistic about it.

You know, all in all, I thought we really did a good job of doing the things we had to do today, and that included all three phases. Obviously the defense played a tremendous game. I think the offense did a great job of possessing the ball and keeping it on the ground doing a good job there, and I can't say enough about our special teams, especially our specialists. There's nothing routine, starting with the deep snap, Subbert did a great job there, Jackson really did well there, and then both Miguel and Colten did a really tremendous job. Colten didn't have to do a lot, and that's good. But both those punts were really big, and then Miguel, there's nothing easy about what he did today, too, also.

Just happy about that, and overall just it was a really



good performance by our team. We'll enjoy it. We'll enjoy it a little longer because it's not even -- what is it 2:00, 2:30? That's unusual, so we've got a full day to enjoy it, no travel, and we've got to get back at it tomorrow.

Q. Realizing football is a team game, to see a senior like Parker Hesse play like he did, how does that make you feel?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I can't say enough about Parker. He's an unbelievable kid. First of all, he's played a lot. He had to play probably before his time with Drew getting injured. Seems like a decade ago. But everything he does is just quality and first class. He's a student of the game, works extremely hard on the mental part. He's an unbelievable leader in the strength and conditioning program, and just a guy everybody in our program looks up to, whether it's a player, coaching staff, support staff. It's hard to find a flaw with him. He is really kind of the epicenter of our football team.

Q. How important was that to control so much of the clock with the wind today?

KIRK FERENTZ: You know, if you had a wish list, which we all do, that's what you want to do is try to control it. I thought we did a good job of that, certainly in the first half. Again, just a lot of little things that were really beneficial to the victory, those two field goals, then the offense, we got a turnover, Hooker did a great job getting the pick and then driving the ball, whatever it was, 58 yards, I think, but that play to Brandon was not an easy throw by Nate. He didn't have his best day out there, but that was a great throw, and Brandon Smith continues to grow right in front of our eyes, I think, so that was a really big play at a big time. That made halftime a lot more enjoyable for everybody.

So I thought our guys did a good job, and just they're a tough, physical defense. It wasn't easy running the football against them.

Q. After the first drive where you had the interception, I think the next four series you ran at least 10 plays. What does that say about the way your offensive line played?

KIRK FERENTZ: It was kind of frustrating because we were controlling the ball and moving the ball but not scoring. I'm always thinking negative thoughts, I

guess. You always wonder what's going to come back and get us later on. I thought the line did a really good job. Nate was involved in that, too, because they were blitzing a lot, you saw that, and trying to get us into the right play or get us out of a bad play is a big part of that.

There's a lot that goes into that, but the line did a good job, the backs ran hard. Austin Kelly, next man in, we talk about that all the time, stepped in for Brady and did a really good job. One of the guys on the line had an ankle injury on Monday. But that guy played really well, got back Friday and played well.

So there's a lot of things going on behind the scenes that are helping us win football games, but it gets back to guys just really being committed.

Q. You had some big 3rd and 4th down conversions, but none bigger than Nate's quarterback draw.

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I've got to laugh because it's like, okay, maybe try it, but it opened up really well. He did a good job finishing it and getting that conversion. That's something we actually put in this week, and it proved very beneficial for us.

Nate didn't have his best game, but he did a lot of good things out there and really helped us win.

Q. Did you have a game plan early in the week like if the wind is as bad as they say it's going to be, or this is the game plan, period?

KIRK FERENTZ: Our plan got cut in half, a little bit like the bowl, again, where a lot of things we thought would be okay, you kind of toss them out. The biggest thing today, just throwing the ball down the field. That would have been reckless and probably stupid. That's the biggest part.

We talked about how just the snaps and kicks were difficult. Every pass out there both teams, any pass you threw was interesting just because of the conditions. Like Brandon's touchdown there, that was a good ball but it would have been a different throw in the other end zone. The new additions kind of changed the dynamics. So it's interesting.

Q. You used to talk in 2002 about your team showing up and you guys not even having to run practice, they would just run it themselves. Are you getting that from this team?

KIRK FERENTZ: Not quite there yet, but that was that last week of 2002. We had a lot of momentum.

Q. This team feels like it's really good at taking what you guys practice to the field.

KIRK FERENTZ: Just for clarification, because, yeah, we were on high octane at that point. These guys weren't -- it's kind of the Herb Brooks, one of those shots, after beating the Russians. They weren't going to let us give that one up. But yeah, this team, kind of what we're getting at, I think we did a good job preparing this week, but it's been seven for seven. Even the bye week, which is tricky, I guess eight for eight, right, the bye week would be eight weeks. Bye weeks have been tricky, and it just seems like whatever we ask them to do, they're doing it, trying to do it. And we've got a couple guys, don't get me wrong, that need a little encouragement, but most of them are really young. So they're operating the right way. If we're going to have a good season this season, we're going to need to continue that.

The thing I feel best about, and we talked about Parker, I can throw the other 12 seniors in. I think they all get it. They're doing what they can to make sure everybody understands there's no off days. We can't show up and kind of mess around. We're not that good. Nobody is.

Q. How big was it for the defense to get that shutout today and take that confidence going into Penn State next week?

KIRK FERENTZ: They've been playing really well overall and pretty consistently. But today was a really unique challenge, and that's where the preparation -- it's always important, but preparing well and then you have to play with really good discipline against these guys. The other thing you have to do is tackle, and it's everybody on the defense tackles because they'll isolate safeties if safeties aren't making tackles or corners, that's where those big plays come from. It was discipline plus tackling, surely, and I think those two things, we did a good job of that.

It'll be a different type of attack next weekend and another really challenging attack because they've got an excellent team, excellent quarterback. Again, I think it's all about the approach. The guys are taking a good approach, and they're hungry to do well.

Q. Why does it seem like Miguel is pretty comfortable kicking in bad conditions?

KIRK FERENTZ: He works extremely hard, and that's maturity and experience. Just go back two springs ago, right? Our whole kicking situation looked really bad, but he's worked extremely hard and he had a good season last season, now he's pushing it forward another notch. That's one of the nice things about having a senior guy or an experienced player back there, and he's both, so I think that's a big part. But he's just worked hard and he's mentally tough. He's fought through the tough things.

Q. With Ivory Kelly-Martin coming back, what element does he add to your team that was missing before?

KIRK FERENTZ: Ivory can run strong and run tough up inside and then he also can do some things passing game and get out on the perimeter. He's probably the most balanced guy all of them. But I think all three of those guys have really done a good job in taking care of their roles. But to get him back, that's always a good thing, and he's a tremendous young man.

Q. A couple nice plays from Riley Moss today; seems like he's getting more and more comfortable in the defense.

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I agree. He's been competing. Even in that first ballgame, he really competed. They hurt him on a couple, but the way he hung in there and played well in that second half up in Minnesota, to me that's who he is, and that's what we've seen him do in practice since we started back in August. He's a guy that just goes hard. He's got a really high motor, and he really likes playing the game. He seems to really like competition, too. Today was another good day for him. He's doing a lot of good things and doing a good job on special teams, as well.

Q. Have you been impressed by your offense, last week with the heavy passing game and this week was a heavy run game plan, and you guys executed them both?

KIRK FERENTZ: That's our goal is to be balanced and have the ability to play either way. When you're in the Midwest you're going to have days like today where it's windy and tough and all that. So if you can't do some of those things, it's going to be rough for you.

I thought that was really a good thing, and then Nate wasn't exactly clicking. The weather had a lot to do with that. So yeah, if one thing is not going well, you've got to find something else that's going to kind of propel you forward.

Q. You used the term "good season" a little while ago. What's your definition of a good season, and how important is next Saturday to getting that?

KIRK FERENTZ: They get defined every day. It really does. A good season is one where -- to me it's very simple. You max all your opportunities. That kind of ties with that preparation part. If our guys are preparing the way they need to and then -- there's two things you have to do. You have to prepare and then you've got to show up and compete. If you're not as good as the other team, at least you can live with your efforts by doing those things. But when you leave a game out there on Wednesday or Tuesday or you leave it out there because of the things that happen away from the building, those are the things that really are

hard to live with. But if you just get beat, play your best and get beat, so be it, and prepare your best. That's all we're trying to emphasize. Prepare every day, put an honest day's work in and then show up and compete. That's how it goes.

Q. You've got some younger guys in the secondary and the linebacking corps. When you're playing Maryland with all the shifts and motions and it's important to stay disciplined, what does that say about the younger guys that are getting significant snaps?

KIRK FERENTZ: We stole the term next-man-in from the Broncos when Mike Shanahan was coaching them, in whatever year that would have been. That's hardly unique or new, but that's really what football is about because injuries are part of our game. Austin Kelly jumped in there for Brady and did a good job, but our linebackers, it's been a lot of rotation there. It's kind of like musical chairs. Great to get Nick back. But that's been a key.

And then even in the DB room we've had some rotation there. So for the guys to jump in and it doesn't seem like it affects anybody else, that's a big thing. Other guys aren't worried because so-and-so is not in there, we're just playing and we're playing together and they help each other out. It's gratifying to watch that taking place, really gratifying that way.

Q. You put Mansell in kind of early compared to last week when you didn't put him --

KIRK FERENTZ: I'm going to go back to last week, too, again, the worst ball he threw last week was the one that stayed inbounds at the end. We were trying to throw that, it was supposed to be in the stands. We were not trying to run the score up. But yeah, we wanted to get him in there and get him a couple snaps, and we were still planning on keeping the ball on the ground for the first part. He had an opportunity for a completion. He'd probably like to have that one back. He would. But it was good to get him going a little bit, and we threw Petras in there for a snap or two, also.

Q. With the time-outs at the end of the quarters, was that a direct reflection of what you guys learned last year here against Purdue?

KIRK FERENTZ: Well, it was just wind related. We thought they were going to punt the ball, so it's just strictly simple as that.

Q. Can you talk a little bit about Colten and just the journey he's had from last year to this year?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, Miguel is similar to that. We talked about Miguel, who couldn't have been worse a year ago spring and has kept working on through. I wasn't ready to sign off on Colten going into the

season. I didn't know what was going to happen. I know he's been working hard at it, and I think his hard work is really showing on the field right now. He's playing really well for us and doing a lot of good things out there and helping our football team win games. That's the neat thing about college football, and it doesn't always -- you don't always land on your target, but if a guy will work hard and be dedicated and take coaching, they have a chance to improve. He's done that. LeVar has worked hard with him, spent a lot of time, and I think part of that story, too, is LeVar being a special teams coach now because that was a position that was always kind of neglected and kind of lost out in space sometimes.

I think to have a combination of all that, the credit goes to Colten for working hard and working through the tough times.

Q. A lot of guys seem to be talking or saying the words "championship level football team." How close do you think this group is?

KIRK FERENTZ: We've got a lot of race in front of us right now. We're just barely over the halfway point, not even halfway in Big Ten play I don't think. We're 3-1 now. I can do that math. A couple tough road games, three tough road games. It's week to week. There's nothing guaranteed out there, nothing easy, and you just keep trying to put positive steps in front of each other, and if you can do that, then maybe. But it's way too early. We're in October, and that's a long way off right now.

Q. When you look at this team, one week you have a quarterback throws six touchdown passes, another week back, you have somebody running 250 yards, your offense did. This week you shut them out. It seems like any time you get into a certain type of game that you can take it to that level. If it's a shootout you can take it to a shootout. What does that say about your team and the well-roundedness, I guess?

KIRK FERENTZ: I think we're growing, and we want to be a balanced team in all phases. Offensively we talked about that earlier, running and throwing. Defensively, too, like it's -- today was a very different preparation than a week ago, so can you adjust your scheme to make it work against the attacks that you see in college football. That's a big challenge. So all those things are really important. Again, the credit goes to our players. They're really doing a good job focusing on what needs to be there.

I want to thank our crowd again, Homecoming. We don't get to be involved in the festivities, but it was a great crowd, and every game has been that way in Kinnick. We really appreciate that.

And just on a sidebar, how neat is it -- I know we don't have like Will Ferrell and Snoop Dogg, but we had a gold medalist on our sideline today. Lou Banach was back, and that was really neat.

And maybe as big a thrill for me as any was Jim Caldwell was back with us the last two days. Jim to me just epitomizes what you would hope an Iowa football player is. This guy is just a first-class human being, unbelievable guy, and obviously an excellent football coach, too. He hasn't been available for quite a while, so it was great to have him back here and just to have him visit with our team yesterday. It was really special for all of us. I just wanted to mention that. Thank you.