

University of Iowa Football Media Conference

Saturday, September 10, 2016

Kirk Ferentz



KIRK FERENTZ: We're certainly pleased to get the victory tonight. At the beginning of the week our focus was just on having a relentless week of preparation, starting with our concentration and execution on both sides of the ball and special teams. The goal there is to improve, and that's something we're trying to do on a weekly basis.

I thought the guys just had a really good week. Most importantly, focused on the right things during the course of the week. So really proud of the way the guys prepared this past week, and then certainly tonight they showed up and competed, and that was great to see. The thing I'm most pleased about is just the fact that we played good team football. It was complementary team football, and that gives you a chance any time you do that. That was a highlight for us.

The other thing was just the next man in. Last week we had two guys that couldn't go. Jay Scheel couldn't go, and then Parker Hesse came out really early, and good things came out of that. Anthony Nelson came out and did a good job, and Jerminic Smith, and then tonight James Daniels couldn't go, and Lucas LeGrand seemed like he played a good game if the sideline, and little later on, Keegan Render in there. So just happy about that. That's a good sign.

Then just lastly want to thank our fans again. That was just a tremendous crowd. Kinnick's a special place anyway. But night games in Kinnick, fantastic. Tonight was certainly no exception. I really appreciate the students too. They were there early, made a lot of noise and stayed late. So we certainly appreciate that. With that I'll throw it out to questions.

Q. Coach, C.J. and Matt Vandenberg, seemed to have a special relationship going. Can you talk about that a little bit?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, they started, as we developed last year, I think C.J.'s got great faith in Matt. Matt's a tremendous football player, works hard. Same guy you see is what he is in practice as well. So he missed a little time at the end of camp and was a little off last week. But certainly he's back in the rhythm now.

C.J.'s an outstanding player too. So it was just good to see those two guys execute some really tough plays.

Q. What did you think of some of those catches that Matt made?

KIRK FERENTZ: Those were really good plays. Really well thrown balls and he had that one drop, and that was too easy probably for him. But if you can make some plays like that, that's going to make you a little tougher to defend.

Q. You know the series is always difficult and usually comes down to the wire. To play the first half you guys played, obviously you'd love to script something like that. But that's got to do good for the locker team and all that stuff?

KIRK FERENTZ: That's all positives. Except I'm a coach right, so the first thought I had was 2002 which wasn't so positive. The big thing was encourage our guys let's keep our foot on the gas and keep looking at the road. Don't get distracted. So all those wise words and we came out and sputtered in that second half. We didn't do much offensively the first couple series, but then we regrouped a little bit and did some good things.

I think that's when Niemann got the pick. Nice job converting off that. We got field position and got points out of that.

Q. The improvement from week one to week two, it looked like it.

KIRK FERENTZ: We didn't play great last week. Just wasn't terrible, but we didn't play great, and way too soft in the rush part of things. Just they mushed it up in there too much on us. You know, that was a little discouraging. So I thought our tempo was better tonight. I thought we were a little more aggressive, looked more aggressive. The guys were really hustling to the ball. It looked like a better team defensive effort tonight for sure.

Q. Did Josey respond the way you wanted to see him respond?

KIRK FERENTZ: You don't have to give Josey a lot of guidance. That was one of those bang-bang plays. There's not much anybody can do about that. They are going to happen. You hope they don't, but they are going to happen. I don't think anyone said a word to Josey. He was upset at himself because he couldn't play.

That's what you work for is a chance to play in the game and he didn't get that opportunity. But he was right back with us, back to normal on Sunday. He's a guy I think you can pretty much count on what you're going to get each and every week with him.

Q. How valuable is it having him back? Having him in there to correct the defense as much as he does?

KIRK FERENTZ: My Kodak moment, Josey goes back to our bowl game two years ago where we weren't playing very well, and the game was pretty much out of question, second half. Just the effort, tenacity that he played with in that game, those are things that just indicate, hey, this guy's for real. He certainly showed that last year. We'd expect nothing less from him. That's the way he is on a day-to-day basis.

Q. Any update on James Daniels?

KIRK FERENTZ: He wanted to play tonight and that was out of the question. But naturally he got hurt on the next to last play on Wednesday, just our lucky day, right? So I wouldn't rule him out. It's not the same as Parker Hesse, but maybe kind of like that. Parker had a chance this week but didn't respond during the week. So probably realistically we're probably a week out yet. But we'll take it day by day.

Q. How do you think Lucas LeGrand played?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, speaking of Josey and knowing what you can count on. Now if you had seen Lucas three weeks ago in practice you wouldn't have been quite feeling too good about things. So we were kind of riding the roller coaster with him a little earlier in camp. But the last couple weeks he's really practiced well.

So you never like to lose a player, certainly, but I think we're all confident that he would step in there. His teammates all support him and did a really nice job tonight from the sideline.

Q. How important was success in the passing game tonight?

KIRK FERENTZ: The best thing for us is if we can be balanced. That's our goal week in and week out. But defenses dictate that, so you can't control it. But if you can make some precision plays in the pass game, that's a good thing. Both our backs are really running well right now and doing a nice job there too and that takes support. Not just the line, but the fullbacks, tight ends and receivers. The receivers blocked really well last week.

Q. How important is Matt VandeBerg?

KIRK FERENTZ: We lost two really good seniors a

year ago with Tevaun and Jake Hillyer. Matt played really well for us last year, so it's not like it's a total surprise by any stretch. But he is the leader of that group right now. I think he feels a responsibility that way, and he's doing a good job with the other guys too. But first and foremost, you like to be able to count on a guy hitting the field and playing well. All of us as coaches feel really confident in Matt.

Q. How much nuance goes on in the quarterback position, throwing the ball, in and out of plays run checks, whatever. But when you look at C.J., he does it so flawlessly, but I know there is a room full of what he's done to get to that point. Where's this team with somebody like him? Does he just amplify how good you are?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, that's kind of what he was lacking three years ago. He's always had the talent and all that kind of stuff, but every position has its nuances and things that you have to learn, so that's paramount. But the quarterback position is more challenging mentally and physically probably to play than any of them.

So he's worked really hard at that. He's done a great job. He's got great confidence, I think, and sees things out there pretty well. He prepares hard. He's a smart guy and prepares hard. The nicest thing is he's able to practice right now, which is a big, big departure from the last eight, nine weeks of last season. So as you might imagine, when you practice a lot, things become a lot more, just reaction time is a lot better to things.

Q. From your experience, how much would a film session help Lucas LeGrand?

KIRK FERENTZ: Just to get that first one under your belt is always important. I think all of us felt pretty good. We were a little worried about the shotgun snaps the first time. But it was a good environment against a big rival. So all those things factor.

But on the positive side, Thursday afternoon, Friday his demeanor was great, and he came through the building Thursday. He didn't show any signs of being -- he practiced really well yesterday morning. He didn't show any signs of being outwardly nervous, and maybe wasn't smart enough to know to be nervous. I don't know. But that was encouraging, and, again, I know his teammates really support him well too.

Q. When you look at C.J., does he get the recognition he deserves? I know you're not a big promotional guy, but yet again, you look at what he's able to do and should he be in that conversation for the Heisman?

KIRK FERENTZ: You know I feel about that like I do rankings. Probably the closest guy to be in a Heisman

Trophy candidate we've had in 17-plus years now is Brad Banks, right? And nobody knew who Brad Banks was in September. So you let things talk for themselves. Let your actions speak for themselves.

My theory on that one is kind of like your team, if you're good enough, people will recognize it and you'll be where you should be in the end. But there are a lot more important things than talking about them or worry about what's being said. It's a lot more important to be doing things than focusing on those things.