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Press Conference



GARY BARTA: Thanks for coming on short notice. Back on June 15 we were here and I spoke to you about some racial issues related to our football program. I announced the separation agreement with Chris Doyle, and I also announced that President Harreld had retained the services of an independent third party to do a review of the football program, and so Coach Ferentz and I are here today to respond to the review and then also just provide some updates and some perspective of things that have been going on since then.

We now have several sources of information, if you will, going back to the diversity task force, some very candid and frank conversations with former student-athletes directly and the same from our current student-athletes, and then now the report from the independent review.

For those of you who have gone through it, I'm sure you would understand when I say that getting direct and critical information, criticism, is sometimes difficult to hear. That said, we needed to hear these things, and we need to get better.

We talked a little bit about it in June, and you'll hear some of the same topics today.

I am grateful for every former student-athlete and current student-athlete who came forward. Two important dates related to this situation, June 3, when James Daniels began, the former player process -- and I mention James' name because he's in the report. I'm not going to mention other former players by name, but he spoke up and I'm grateful that he did.

And then on June 8, I referenced when we met the last time about a team meeting where current student-athletes were very candid in expressing their anger and frustration, and these conversations really opened the door to dig deeper.

When you combine those conversations with now this report, it makes it clear where we've fallen short and where we need to get better. It is helpful that all these sources are consistent, that the issues that we've been identifying and had identified going into this review, I certainly feel like there are consistencies in what we knew we had to get better in.

First of all, Kirk and I have had several conversations over the last several weeks, and these are some observations now and thoughts about the review, but they probably spill over into some of the other conversations.

Kirk, first and foremost, is responsible for the football culture. He creates it. He sets the tone for it, and he has to hold people accountable for it, and he's fully accepting of that responsibility, and he's worked hard in recent weeks to help us begin the process to improve the culture.

At one point in the report he acknowledges that he gave too much responsibility, maybe too much unchecked authority to one individual, but beyond that, he acknowledges that it's broader than one person. It's an issue, a cultural issue throughout the program.

That said, on June 15, based on the information I had, based on my 15 years of working with Kirk, I shared that I still had great confidence that Kirk could lead us through this and continue to lead this football program. I take a lot of comfort in the fact that the report, after interviews with former student-athletes and current student-athletes, confirms that they share that confidence in Kirk's ability to move forward and lead this program.

Next observation, the "Iowa way" is described, perceived by many, especially our African-American student-athletes, as the white way. Some of the comments, and by now hopefully you've had a chance to read it, don't feel supported, don't feel welcome, can't be my authentic self, harder to succeed as a black player versus a white player. In the report is also a reiteration of Kirk's desired definition for the Iowa way: Earn a degree, maximize football success and have a fulfilling college experience.

Clearly there's a disconnect between the vision that Kirk has for the Iowa way and what he wants it to mean and the way it was being experienced by some of our



student-athletes, and in particular our black student-athletes. That's an area where we need to focus. How do we get the vision that Kirk has for the Iowa way and have it be experienced the way he envisions, and that will be an important thing going forward.

Our student-athletes don't feel, haven't felt and need to feel that they have a place where they can be heard and where they can be listened to. Within the football program, there have been numerous individual conversations, position meetings, team meetings. I'll let Kirk describe those more since I have not been involved. I've been involved in a couple of team meetings. Historically Kirk has relied on a leadership group, and he'll continue to do that, but he's expanded that group and made some changes.

And then specifically one of the things we have to do a better job in as an athlete department is make sure that there are places, outside outlets for football student-athletes who have issues and concerns. They don't feel comfortable expressing them within football, that they have a place to go, and I'll talk about that here in a moment.

Recruiting, making sure that or in this case expressing concern that there's a disconnect between a message that we send in recruiting versus what some student-athletes experienced when they got here, particularly or specifically I think it was mentioned creating a family atmosphere versus then when I arrived not understanding that the Iowa way and the expectations that were connected to that. So a disconnect in that recruiting message.

There are several areas pointed out where we need to improve from these student-athletes, and I won't go into all of them. Again, Kirk will be able to more specifically speak to some of these. Appearance expectations, whether it's hairstyle, clothing, jewelry, tattoos, sleep bands, weight management, and then a reference to rules, and the number of rules, the way that they felt they're being held accountable to these rules or being called out if they weren't following these rules. As it pertains to rules, I don't think it'll come as a surprise, when you run an organization, when you have a team, you have to have rules. And so having rules isn't the challenge. The challenge is and my expectation is for football and for all of our teams, make sure the rules are fair, and in this case make sure that without any kind of racial bias, make sure that the expectations are well-known in terms of any rules, and then make sure that the follow-through, the carrying out of those rules or any discipline related to those rules is fair and consistent.

So that certainly came out in this report.

Strength and conditioning expectations and treatment. Kirk has already talked about some changes there in terms of job responsibilities, and drug testing was also mentioned and I'll talk about that in a moment.

Among this report or within this report, there's some good news, and again, I'm not downplaying the fact that this is very critical of some of the things we have to get better in, but what I say is good news and what I was grateful to hear is that -- and this is from the report -- there was uniformity from the current student-athletes that things have significantly improved since June. Now, understandably there are also some student-athletes in the group who are taking a wait-and-see attitude. They want to make sure that these improvements are long-term and not just a short-term reaction.

I'm going to move on to moving forward, and then several things that I'm going to mention moving forward, and then I'll let Kirk come up and say a few things. First of all, moving forward, I have great confidence in Kirk, and it all starts with him. His willingness to improve the culture in the areas that have been identified. He sets the tone, the expectations, and then needs to hold everybody accountable. I have been grateful and not surprised but impressed with the amount of energy and passion and work he's put into this going back to June, and we all agree that this is just the beginning.

A few things moving forward specifically: Strength and conditioning, Kirk can talk about it more if you have questions, but an acknowledgment that maybe some of those job responsibilities need to be spread out a little bit among the staff. From a reporting standpoint, the head strength coach for football does report to the head football coach. It also has a reporting line to assistant athletic director for sport performance Terry Noonan. One of the things we have to do -- and we have that throughout the athletic department. We have several dual reporting lines, either in athletics or then to areas on campus. In this case we just have to reinforce that reporting line and that relationship.

All of the strength coaches, the athletic trainers, the sports medicine team, the sports psychology and nutrition are all reporting through that sport performance group, and moving forward just making sure that those reporting lines are reinforced and carried through.

Under the area of the DEI accountability group that was previously named the diversity task force, DEI, diversity, equity and inclusion, was previously called the diversity task force, that's headed up by Broderick Binns. I know most of you if not all of you know we promoted Broderick, went from interim to permanent. He's now the executive

director of diversity, equity and inclusion. He reports outside of football. He no longer has an office in football. He'll work closely with football but not report up through football.

He's had that diversity, equity and inclusion accountability group meet a couple of times now, and they've had conversations. You may recall back to June, one of the things we want to do is make sure there is a bridge between a team sport and any resources they may need or desire somewhere else on campus, and one of the things we've talked about with this DEI accountability group is certainly building relationships and trust with student-athletes, making sure they understand it's a place they can go if they have questions -- not always concerns, might just be questions, want advice, but certainly if they do have concerns it's a place they can go and create a bridge to some other resource on campus if they need it. Looking at culture, team rules and relationship.

And then annually that group reporting to the president, to myself, to the head coaches, because this position in this group is for all sports, not just for football, but certainly in this case that report will go to Kirk in terms of how things are going in his sport and also the President's Committee on Athletics, the PCA.

Student-athletes having a voice and engagement, again, ongoing conversations individually and in the team environment in football along with the leadership group. Kirk may have already expressed publicly about the leadership group and expanding it, but it is also in the report.

And then continued engagement with the former player advisory committee that Kirk put together, working on getting advice on graduation rates, on recruiting, on culture, team expectations, and then life after football, helping our football players as they get ready to enter the world, whether it's networking, career advice, et cetera.

As it pertains to recruiting, just reevaluating all facets of recruiting, specifically addressing that concern between what we represent and the experience and very specifically talking about that expectations. If we're going to use the term "Iowa way," I don't know if we will or if Kirk will or not, but clearly understanding when you become a Hawkeye, this is what you can expect. And then having those groups, the leadership group, the former player advisory committee and the DEI accountability group, having an opportunity to look at those recruiting changes and give their advice on how that's working.

Drug testing, we have reviewed all of our policies, protocols and procedures. We do feel that those are

where they need to be. Just want to make sure that they're transparent, they're consistent, and then making sure -- we have not audited them on an annual basis, but for the next several years and maybe ongoing, we'll have them audited again toward that goal of -- by somebody outside of athletics toward that goal of just making sure there's transparency, and then the final moving forward, the report does indicate that they provided us with four personnel reports on either current or former employees, and based on that information -- it was anything where there was an allegation that was directed toward an individual, and so based on that information, the first thing I'm going to share with you is that there are no personnel changes planned. We will and have begun the process of internal follow-up. That internal follow-up will occur privately and it will follow university HR policies and procedures.

And then more broadly in terms of education and training moving forward, football has been included in and involved in training for the whole athletic department. They will continue to be involved in that, and then Kirk and I have talked about also some specific training just for football in the areas of unconscious bias, micro-aggressions, racial injustice, et cetera.

This has been admittedly a challenging journey, and it will continue to be, but it's also a healthy journey, even though it's obviously been played out publicly and we have a lot of work to do and we've made mistakes. One of the things that I do, every time we hire a new staff member in the athletic department, they within their first couple of months have to meet with me, and we just -- part of it is I want to know if you're walking through the hallways and I recognize you. With 250 plus employees I want to know, okay, you work here, tell me a little bit about yourself, I'll tell you a little bit about myself, and I always end with win, graduate, do it right. And as it pertains to doing it right, it occurred to me in thinking about this, one of the things I always say is you will make mistakes. As an employee of this department, you will make mistakes. When you do, admit it, acknowledge it, and then learn from it and get better.

In really a broad sense, that's what's happened in areas of our football program. We've made mistakes. We're working hard to correct them. They're not going to be corrected overnight. I want to again apologize to any former student-athletes, current student-athletes who have had a bad experience within Iowa football, and we're going to work hard to earn everybody's trust moving forward.

This report focuses on football, but the lessons and improvements that we've talked about and that we're learning apply to all of our sports throughout the entire department. We've already had individual team meetings, all-staff Zoom meetings that Broderick has already

organized over the past several weeks, and that's important to continue.

Finally, the Big Ten has created an anti-hate, anti-racist task force. We have a couple of representatives. One of the representatives not an Iowa student but a student-athlete from another school said the following, and it just fits perfectly with what we're going through: This is a process, not an event. And the changes need to be long lasting, not just a news cycle.

I agree with those sentiments. I know Kirk shares those, as well, and so a lot of good changes are underway, but realizing that it's going to be a process and it's going to need to be ongoing.

KIRK FERENTZ: Thank you, Gary. Appreciate the comments, and good afternoon to everybody. Appreciate all of you being here to join us. I'm glad to have the opportunity for all of us to be together and talk about the independent report and the findings. As you know, I've not made any public comments about specific issues, just out of respect for the process, and today I'll be happy to address any questions you may have afterwards.

As a coach, I've always considered myself first and foremost a teacher. In the past few weeks I've been committed to being a student. I've spent a lot of time listening and learning from experiences of many of our former players and current players, and the experiences that they've shared.

As the review explains, many of our black players felt that they were not treated the same way as their white teammates. I was saddened and disappointed to learn those feelings. Before June 4, I would have said we had a healthy program. The stories I've heard in the days and weeks that have followed have changed that.

While we've always prided ourselves in running a program based on discipline and accountability, based on my former player conversations and this review, it's shown that many of our black players felt like our program did more than that. I want to apologize to those players for any pain, any frustration that they felt at a time when I was trusted to help develop them as a better player, better person.

The majority of our players that we've heard from are players that were part of our program four years ago or longer. I'm thankful that they shared their experiences with me and spoke to many of them about some of the changes that we have made in the past year. While we have made some strides, we still have a long road ahead of us.

There were a few key takeaways. First of all, I am

responsible as the head coach. I've prided myself on running an NFL-style collegiate program, if you will, which means position coaches have autonomy and freedom to develop the curriculum and the coaching style that they choose. The former players' experiences show me the need to be more involved in every aspect of the program so coaches and staff are carrying out the responsibilities in a manner consistent with our expectations.

We're focused on creating a more inclusive culture for everybody, players and coaches. Over the past weeks, I've learned our culture was not as strong as I thought. Many of our black players felt they had to conform to a white culture, and in some instances coaches had crossed the line from demanding to demeaning, and that's never acceptable. We've already made several key changes to our program, most notably with the leadership in our strength and conditioning staff. As Gary hinted at, we've reorganized the department, spreading out the responsibilities across several staff members to diffuse issues of control and feelings of favoritism.

In other aspects of our program, we've instituted player suggestions, starting with just game day protocols, so when we do get the green light to play, we'll be able to institute those. They've also included lifting restrictions on social media, dress code, our approach to body weights, increasing the amount of time that we meet, talk and listen to one another as a team.

Lastly, this review has reinforced my belief that the heart of coaching is relationships. We spend a tremendous amount of time and energy recruiting players to join our program, and we're invested in every player that we bring into our program, and that commitment to them as individuals can and should grow even more once they're on campus.

Everyone's life experiences are different, as are their insecurities and struggles. I'm not different. We can all work harder connecting here, even more with each other to better understand each other's perspectives. This has certainly been a moment of truth for me as a leader and for the program. The release of this independent review will not be the end of the conversation. Really it's just the beginning of our next chapter in the program's history.

Our players always talk about leaving the jersey in a better place, and that's my commitment to do the same thing with this program.

Q. Kirk, the diversity task force report that came out in 2019, this report seems kind of similar with what it's charging and then you had your players come out publicly, former players come out publicly last month. Why was it necessary for those guys to come out



publicly last month? Do you feel like these changes would have happened had they not come out?

KIRK FERENTZ: I think I said at the last press conference I feel like I dropped the ball after I met with the players last August, and we made changes there which I thought were important and significant. I think the players would agree. But where I'm going on that, I did say I dropped the ball. I never met with that group in December, and in retrospect, first of all, we should have met, but I'm not sure these things would have come about, quite frankly, and I really think the turning point took place at the end of May, started at the end of May and then certainly carried over to the meeting that Gary referred to. That was a very defining moment I think for our football team and our program on June 8. I've never been involved in a meeting where a player left emotionally. It was really raw, emotional discussion, very honest discussion, and to me that really just has kind of really opened up lines of communication.

You know, just the term "mask" even, that term, that was loud and clear in the task force report. That's taken on a much different meaning, no question about that. Since that time, I'll even allude to this, before that, 20 plus years ago, Marvin Sims talked to me about 'driving while black.' I just came out of the NFL six years on a submarine, and he explained to me what that term is, and it was explained to me in a much different way that last week of May. I believe it was the last day of May, there was some things on TV that day that I referenced also last press conference, three people being stopped for driving while black. You see things through a little different lens, I think. I imagine a lot of Americans are doing the same thing right now, just seeing things different in our country a little bit.

Q. It appears that Chris Doyle is the only one that's being punished for this, at least on the surface from what we can tell. Are we supposed to interpret that that he was the main -- we just had to get rid of him and start moving forward because that's the way it looks.

KIRK FERENTZ: My deep dive really began in earnest on June 5. There were a series of tweets, and that's basically for an entire week. I want to say I was meeting with our team or doing something directly related to the team. I was on the phone with former players, and my questions were, what needs to be fixed, is it fixable, and then third question, if I'm part of the problem, we'll get out of here.

That's when it began, but some themes came across loud and clear, others were not as clear. But the bottom line is it was just some of the things in the report, but as much as anything, just really being aware of what our words are and what our actions are, and going from there.

I think at this point right now, as Gary alluded to, the moves that have been made have been made, we're prepared to move forward, but that being said, I think we all have a lot of learning to do, and that's number one on the list right now, good communication and also growth and learning. That's paramount for our whole program right now.

Q. Coach, the one paragraph that stopped me dead in my tracks when I read it, it was about a current player that you have, and he was saying that one of the coaches told him, freshmen players, that what you're doing right now is you're going to get on a boat and leave your past life behind you. That's a little bit tone deaf to me because as an African-American, that boat might symbolize something different for me than it would for a lot of white players who look at the Mayflower opportunity coming here. Slave ships, 1619, they came here for centuries to this country. So you see the visualization? That's a difficult passage for me. Is this coach still on staff? Is this true? It hurt me.

KIRK FERENTZ: That is not the word choice that should be in there. And again, we're all learning. I just learned something about that, but I take that in a different way.

And really, our players aren't leaving their past behind them. No player should leave his past behind him because we're all a product of our past. There's a lot better way to state that, no question about that. The message should be what we're doing here is really important. I do talk to our players every year that what you've accomplished in high school, it's great, that's why you're here, you've been selected, but what we're interested in is what you can do moving forward, and that's for every player on our team, whether a fifth-year senior or first-year guys. The focus really is what are you going to do on a day-to-day basis while you're in this program academically, football-wise and also character-wise. I certainly don't condone that. And appreciate your feelings on it.

Q. I imagine this process has been full of self-reflection for you, for your entire career, not only at Iowa. Is there ever a point where you look back and you think of maybe something that enabled Chris Doyle to become the powerful force that a lot of your former players feel has been almost too divisive, too powerful? Was there ever a point where you look back and you think, I should have done this to do something different, to come to a different conclusion?

KIRK FERENTZ: I think that's one of the things I've really wrestled with as much as anything. I referenced or used the term "blind spot" previously. How do you see things

quicker? How do you hear things better? Those types of things. Gary alluded to part of it in retrospect. In my mind we had that position in charge of too many things, and I guess it's twofold. It's a matter of I'll go back and look at it now, what we've done as a staff is, okay, what responsibilities can we move, what are some of the things that maybe were being monitored that don't need to be monitored, really aren't that important, and then the third part, the things that we are monitoring and the things that we are deeming to be important, are they reasonable, are they really reasonable, and then we went out and solicited feedback on that with our players.

It's kind of a multilevel discussion, in some ways, and to have one person with as many responsibilities in retrospect was probably a mistake, and as we move forward, those will be diffused out a little bit, just so the players aren't being corrected by the same person time and time and time again because that sounds like my marriage, quite frankly, right. My wife raises the kids and she's the heavy and I come home and I'm okay with everybody. I think there are things that we can do moving forward that will be better.

Q. Some of your players in the report have spoken about lists being kept of things used against them. Are those things being done anymore? Are those all done?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yes and no. So there are things that Scott kind of referenced, some of the things that we looked at, sleep monitors, for instance. We're trying to advocate players getting good sleep. It's good for every human. But we came to the conclusion on that that it's probably better right now where we're at right now, that'll be an optional thing for all of our upperclassmen. It will be mandatory for our first-year players in the vein that we're trying to educate you from coming here with poor sleep habits. We're making that assumption. Most incoming players have that. So how can we better make you aware of what you're doing, when you're going to bed, how many hours of sleep you're getting, those type of things, but the strength staff will handle that one-on-one with the players. It'll be extremely confidential. I'll be the only football coach that has access to that information, and my conversations will be the same way: Hey, we're just trying to educate you on what you can do better.

There are certain things that will not be a listing or an incentive or a disincentive in the Hawkeye championship program, and I think we went over this with our players. Hopefully if we keep a list on those things, the players all agree, hey, this is reasonable and it's fair, and then the other part is there are certain things that really aren't negotiable like class attendance, punctuality for a medical

appointment, whatever it may be. If somebody is going to give you their time to tutor you or treat you medically, I think it's just a good life habit to be on time and be there prepared to go. Certain things are not changing. Those won't go away. But other things obviously we've talked about, and to a great extent.

Q. The current players that you have, they have all agreed that things have improved. What have you noticed taking place? What differences have you noticed in terms of this group?

KIRK FERENTZ: It's been a challenge because we've been socially distanced from our players. We've done a lot of Zoom things and that type of deal, so that's been a challenge. But every meeting I've had, I've met with the advisory group now I think or leadership group, excuse me, five times. We've had great conversation, great dialogue. I think things are moving in a very positive way, but Gary ended with a quote there that really to me is maybe the most significant or second most significant component of this whole thing is what we do moving forward.

I've requested that of our leadership group as well as the advisory committee, to hold my feet to the fire. Let's make sure we're staying on track. Let's make sure we are not having five meetings and then dismissing it, that type of thing. I think we've all learned a great deal in the last two months, but it can't be yesterday's news. We need to keep the dialogue going, and I'll predict this, if we're doing our jobs right and doing them better, we're not going to have the kind of meeting we had on June 8. But that was a significant meeting, it was powerful and very impactful, and it got the ball moving forward fast, which was great.

Q. How was this report not seen by Chris Doyle and his reaction?

KIRK FERENTZ: As I said, that was a judgment basically I made and Gary was very supportive, and the question I make, and this is true of any coach on our staff, the question is can they do their job effectively, and the weekend of the 6th, 7th, I couldn't envision Chris being able to go in the room that Monday and being effective with our players, and then that judgment as I looked down the road further and just based on where we're at as a program in this period right now, I didn't think it was in anybody's best interest. Chris is an outstanding coach. I know with his next opportunity he's going to do a fantastic job, but everything is based on where you're at as a program.

But that's not the end of the discussion. There are a lot of things that we've talked about, that we've discussed, unearthed, learned, and it's top to bottom, we just have to do a better job, and it all starts with good candid

communication, and most importantly it's taking appropriate action and then being fair and equitable with how we move forward with it.

Q. Despite the accusations against Brian and Seth Wallace, I know there weren't as many, but can we assume you're confident they can move forward and keep doing it based on what was said?

KIRK FERENTZ: As Gary's comments reflected, our plan right now is to move forward. That being said, though, this is an opportunity for our entire staff to learn. To me one of the great things about life and coaching, you learn every day. There's always things, and a lot of times things you don't anticipate, but that's our job right now moving forward. It has begun. It's begun in earnest and it will continue.

And then there will be cases where yeah, some special attention will be given, whether it's mentoring, counseling, whatever, whatever steps we deem to be appropriate, to make sure that everybody is doing what they need to do to help our whole program move forward.

Q. Your own definition of the "Iowa way" changed through this, and what do you want people outside this program, this building to think of when they hear that term?

KIRK FERENTZ: Gary's review asked me basically the same thing, my definition of the Iowa way, and the goals haven't changed. It's graduation, it's having a good experience or maximizing your abilities and your experience in football, and those are both hard to do, and also being a good citizen, good character person, moral person outside the team activities.

Those things haven't changed. I said the program is built on the foundation of discipline and accountability, and anytime you're involved in anything that's demanding, I don't care if it's a playwright, a novelist, whatever, you need those things to move forward, and mental toughness is certainly a big part of that.

But all that being said, it's all about the delivery. It's all about the message. I think that's probably been the biggest learning experience here. Again, if we're asking our players to do something in the Iowa way, then it's got to be fair, equitable and reasonable. I would liken it to this or I'll give you this comparison: 21 years ago we were a team that was 1-10 that needed a lot of accountability and discipline, and we operated in that mode. Things were very stringent, very regimented, if you will, internally. Again, when our players leave the building, whatever they do is what they do, as long as they're doing things right.

But we were in a different place, and four years later we had a really outstanding football team, but that was a gradual progression. I said that to one of the members on the advisory committee the other night. He referenced that, and I said, that's when the building began. That's where it started and never ends.

But we're in a different place right now, and I think I've said this the last press conference, we've got a bunch of guys on our team right now that know what it takes to win. They want to win, so we're in a little different place. And my conversation with Mike Daniels, not to name too many players, but his message really kind of resonated with me. He had a good way of putting it. The point was that if we're a little bit more reasonable and a little bit more open-minded on some things, we'll derive really even better benefits, and I think we're seeing that right now with our players.

The point is things change year to year. Every team is a little bit different, and if we do get to play this year, I think we have a bunch of guys that are committed to winning. That being said, every player, every person needs guidance and needs direction. That will never change, and that's our job.

We have to be smart about how we do things and what we choose to deem important and how we reinforce those things and teach those things.

Q. A passage in the report mentions how you previously believed it's better to keep politics and football separate in a team environment. You told investigators your views have changed recently, and I was wondering, will players in your opinion feel confident to express free speech and independent thought in any way they see fit, whether it's politically or otherwise? And what gives you that confidence?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I'll go back whenever it was, three years ago. But in a perfect world for me personally, when people go into Kinnick, it's to go watch a football game, fans, players, players compete, enjoy the competition. But it's in a team frame, and quite frankly there are a lot of things to me, that's the beauty of sports is to run away from some of those things that are out there.

But I did not support the use of Twitter then, either. So we've changed our opinion about social media, and I still have concerns about it, but our focus will be on education that way.

I think much of my views have changed a lot about the National Anthem and just how we execute it and we're still in discussion on that, but I told our players yesterday, at

least the leadership group, that I still feel the same way, in a perfect world, to me sports should be just about sports, but I think we're in a different time and a different place right now as a society, and I appreciate the dialogue we've had.

We've had two separate meetings. This last meeting was not dedicated totally to that topic, but I really respect and appreciate the way our players are talking and the way they feel, and more importantly as I said last press conference, it's clear there are people on both sides of the discussion, but it's clear there's a real respect for each other.

I think I said this a couple weeks ago: It's lacking nationally from my vantage point, but I see it with our team, and that is more important to me right now. Yeah, that's more important.

Q. A lot of players have said that they come to Iowa and they're ready to go, they're excited, and yet there's a kind of a message set on the first day, a lot of times it's derogatory, said in a derogatory fashion. Has that been discussed not only with the change in leadership with the strength and conditioning program but across the board for young men who are put in a defensive position right away and not integrated into the program right away?

KIRK FERENTZ: I think it's really important that we reshape our perspective on players entering the program. There is an Iowa way, quote-unquote, "Iowa way," what we expect, being on time and ready to go and doing quality work.

But really, the first year to me has got to be -- we've got to better emphasize the transition part of that first year because the reality is only a handful of players are going to be on the game field most likely for significant time during the course of the year. But the majority of the guys are in the first year really of their development, not that every player is not developing, but I think we definitely have to reshape that and do a better job, and it is a challenge because in past in a normal year, quote-unquote, "normal year," Junes have become everything but -- like it's been camps, it's been these satellite camps, all those kinds of things, so it's really pulled us away from our players, and then on top of that, July is a big vacation month for football coaches typically, so there's a little bit of a rub and a challenge there, too, but I've got some ideas on how we can bridge that.

Bottom line kind of goes back to the idea of just making sure we get more time with those players, especially the incoming players and we're getting them off on the right

step, realizing that very few are going to be out there at a critical time, and the week during the season, let's just focus on getting the basics down, and most importantly just learning the basics and coming back the next day with a good attitude. That's probably the most important ingredient right there.

Q. And later in the report, several players expressed skepticism about these changes. I think the quote said, It starts with the head coach and down the line, expressing a culture beyond Doyle that was corrosive in some ways. That's a lot on your shoulders. Are you willing to kind of carry this forward every day --

KIRK FERENTZ: To me that's a synopsis of the whole review in my mind. Gary mentioned, as I alluded to, the last quote he gave is really the most important step moving forward. I think we've had two great months, really significant months in this program's history. That's all for naught if we don't have follow-through.

And again, I've encouraged our players, call me out, and same thing with the advisory committee, and those guys are pretty good at calling me out anyway, so it's been not entertaining, painful at times, but I have faith that they'll continue to probe and continue to ask questions.

As we walk away today, that is the most important aspect of this whole thing in my opinion.

Q. When you think about going into an African-American athlete's home for a recruiting visit, have you thought about how those visits might be different going forward?

KIRK FERENTZ: I haven't given it a lot of thought. I'll tell you this, I'm not quite 65 yet, but I've never really had any difficulty going to anybody's home in good situations or bad situations because it gets down to telling the truth, it really does, being transparent, talking honestly and directly. I really haven't had that be a challenge and I don't anticipate that.

It's like being here today. There are questions I'll have to answer I'm sure with some, but that's part of what we do, and what we do is all out there right now, so it's my job to take responsibility for whatever may have happened and make sure that we are taking the necessary stops to show growth, to show improvement and then continue those steps moving forward.

Q. Chris Doyle has really been made out to be a villain here, a bad guy. You just referenced before that you think he'll do great in his next job. When you hear these stories, how much validity do you give to them

and what's your view of those, and did you not notice any of those things if you did feel like those things were happening?

KIRK FERENTZ: I'll just say this in general terms: I'm a head coach. I hear complaints about a lot of things. Yesterday I heard complaints about our food, which one player commented on the scrambled eggs, which I've had those scrambled eggs. Are you kidding me?

Anyway, the point there is that I've got a better filter, I guess, or better see or hear some things, but it's not about one person. This discussion is not about one person, it's about us as a program. What are the things that we need to do to avoid having a report like this come out? What are the things that we better need to do?

One of the people on the committee said it best probably a month plus ago, month and a half ago, he made the comment that Kirk's team will tell him what the problems are, and I think that's what started on June 8, and I think that's what has transpired, and the most important thing is as we move forward how do I better ask questions and better get to the truth. Using former players has been a great vehicle, no question about that, but what about our current players.

Because right now they're talking very freely, but is that going to be the same way a year from now. As we move forward, how do we keep that process going where players can feel free to talk very candidly about things.

Q. You mentioned some players throwing out that you might need to get out of here. Did you seriously consider that at any point, and what was maybe the toughest conversation you've had that really kind of -- that just kind of hit home?

KIRK FERENTZ: Well, I can tell you the toughest one, Gary and I were just talking about it yesterday, it was Saturday, June 6. That's easy. The way I'd frame it is my encouragement to all of the guys I talked with was let's just take the gloves off and say what you've got to say. And I'll also say this: A lot of those players to my knowledge, I'm the last guy to know this, but to my knowledge, they'd go on social media, they weren't talking publicly but they were -- players were heavily invested in this program. I got very candid feedback.

Just in a nutshell, my responsibility is to be committed to the program. Not me, the program. So whatever we have to do to move the program forward, that's what we need to be doing right now.

Anyway, but the point there again is that I got very candid

feedback from just about every player I visited with. Some real specific, some more general, but over the course of a lot of phone calls, a lot of discussions, and then matching that up with current players, what they were saying, players from the last couple years, more younger vintage, there are things that you just start to see and it shapes some opinions.

Q. I know he's not here to speak for himself, but what do you think Brian has learned from this thing? Do you think this has been an eye opener for him and do you think it needed to be?

KIRK FERENTZ: I think if there's anybody in our program right now that's not changed from two months ago then they're just not paying attention, like they're not paying attention. I'll say this: During these two months it's been really challenging for everybody involved. I would say this: I think we have a really good staff, and we've got a good coaching staff, support staff. I'm appreciative of the support we've gotten institutionally, and I have every confidence we're going to move forward and do fine. But I'd like to think everybody has been affected. I would like to think that. If anybody feels they didn't have any role, even if it was one player not feeling good about their experience, then that's one too many. We've got to try to do a better job.

And I'll say this: We all realize not everybody is going to leave happy. We all realize that. But everybody needs to leave knowing that they were treated fairly and given equal opportunity. That's fair. And the expectations were reasonable, not something other than that.

Q. One of the former players you reached out to was Akrum Wadley. What was your reaction when he said he regrets playing here?

KIRK FERENTZ: Surprise. I won't comment on any individuals. I commented on a couple who I spoke with and did not identify who I spoke with on June 6. But it was surprise and also to some degree -- surprise because some of the things were just flat-out not true. Not true. I mean, we have never held back a black card from any player. I'm not a great record keeper. Ben Hensen is meticulous. Never happened. It was stated, I think, that I said derogatory things in a press conference about an individual. Those are a matter of record, and some of you may have looked those up. I'll stand behind what I said in those press conferences. As recently as May 26, his mom and I were having good conversations. I had no sense it was that bad, quite frankly.

I'll address that, too. And during the course of -- we got back from California, conversations with his mom about

trying to get him placed in the XFL, work that probably his agent should have been doing, but trying to help and I knew some people in the XFL. I think he went to Atlanta as a result of that conversation, so yeah, I was surprised.

Q. You have several young black assistant coaches who a lot of players relate to well on the recruiting trail, have said a lot of good things, a lot of good people. Will they have more of a voice now within your program that maybe before because they were younger and there was a certain structure that maybe their voices were muted or maybe not as loud as others?

KIRK FERENTZ: I don't know if they'll be more, but I think everybody has been -- I've talked about the players, right, since June 8. Players have been really free with their talks and thoughts and opinions. I would say I've seen the same thing in our staff meetings. It wasn't just players, it was the whole staff.

And especially that early part of that week, that's where -- that was the most impactful part of this whole thing because we had two team meetings and we broke up with the coaches into smaller groups, and then we went through the process of taking all the feedback, putting it on the board, putting it in categories, and then I've worked through those categories with our players, the leadership group pretty much systematically now for five meetings.

Those are more like day-to-day changes and I think everybody is enthused about those. But it's been a group effort, group process, and I've seen the same conversations in our staff meetings, very, very straightforward and very candid opinions.

I'm hopeful that's what everybody will do as we move forward because that's how we have to keep pushing this thing.

Q. Early in this report it says current and former players were overwhelmingly positive in their evaluation of the coaching staff with three exceptions, and then it says those three exceptions verbally abused and bullied players. There's a pretty big gap between overwhelmingly positive for most staff members and then verbally abused and bullied. I'm curious why we know about consequences for theoretically one of those people but not two more. There's such a gap between those reviews.

KIRK FERENTZ: Sure, and I stole a player's words, a former player and staff member actually shared words with me, the demanding versus demeaning. I think that's where the line is, and all coaches have to be careful of that.

Probably most of us, teachers, coaches, anybody that works with other people. You have to think twice, act once.

So that is unacceptable. Is there a pattern of it? That's a question you have to ask. Is it correctable? That's the question you have to ask. Those are judgments that I've had to make and then I've got to answer to people, too, about those things.

As I said earlier, I'm confident we're going to move forward. I'm confident there will be less of that kind of feedback from any of our players, and I'm also not naïve enough to think somebody might not say something wrong, but I've said this before, too, if you do that as a coach or a teacher then you need to circle back and make sure before that player leaves the field or leaves the building that -- I'm sorry about what I said out there, here's what I meant, all right.

Basically in my mind, the construction, the corrections and teachings should be directed at actions and behaviors, not -- it should never be personal. That's a key component teaching or coaching.

Q. Has your confidence in the ability that theoretically these actions can be corrected or improved from these other I'm assuming two people that are still on the staff, does that confidence come from the players that you've talked to saying, look, I had these frustrations with this person but I believe we can work things out?

KIRK FERENTZ: It comes from players, but it also comes from my exposure to things and how much I'm able to see and not able to see. I can't sit in every meeting room, obviously. That's impossible. So there's a lot of -- that's where the feedback really comes in from different people. But yeah, I'm confident that we can move forward. Otherwise we would have done something differently.

Q. Obviously recruiting is in a weird spot right now, not being able to go out and have visits. What has the feedback been from the recruiting trail because some of these things I think had probably come up before and you guys have had to confront -- how have you dealt with that and how have you seen an impact?

KIRK FERENTZ: Just like our players on campus, we've been very transparent and very direct with our recruits, too, and so they're not reading about this as yesterday's news. They're hearing it from us, and I would say they've been fantastic. We've been well-received, and we've talked about the things that we consider to be issues that have been addressed and things we're going to do moving forward. They've been absolutely fantastic. But it's a long road until December or whenever signing ends up being,

but the players have been great.

Q. You mentioned earlier about being receptive to players calling you out on things and that type of thing. We obviously saw what the task force report in '19 that players brought those concerns to you through various channels. When that happens in the future now, why will your reaction and your receptiveness to all this be different than before?

KIRK FERENTZ: That's something I've got to safeguard against, but again, just pertaining to the task force, to me it's all about the lens, the lens I saw it through. I thought we addressed what we needed to address, the hats, earrings, and those were important and still were important to our players, and I get that better now, and I kind of got it in August, but I think the key point is just the lens that you're looking at things through; particularly the last two months since the end of May versus prior to that point, a lot of viewpoints have changed. But I'll tie that in also with evaluation of people. You've got to ask better probing questions to get more honest feedback so people can feel comfortable telling you about what needs to be addressed, and again, we're getting that right now, but we need to continue on that path as we move forward.

Q. Gary, the majority of players you met with were current players. Was that by design? If you total up based on the bar graph, it was maybe 17 or 18 former black players were --

GARY BARTA: So I don't know if it was by design or not. Remember, an independent review truly is an independent review, so they came up with a strategy. What I've read is what you've read, that they interviewed about I think it was 111. I do know this. I know that they offered to meet with every current student-athlete. I didn't ask why that strategy, but it makes sense to me because people currently living in the environment wanting to give that group the most opportunity. I don't know exactly how they selected the former players. I do know they've said it in the report that they were reviewing a lot of the social media, and then every time they spoke to somebody, I was told they asked is there anybody else we should talk to.

Again, it wasn't by design in terms of -- I don't think President Harreld gave them that direction. I think that's just the strategy they used.

Q. Are you the one who ultimately decided that no additional punishment for coaches or staff members should --

GARY BARTA: Ultimately that's my responsibility. Obviously taking in all the information. It's not a done

situation yet, but I felt confident enough to share with you today that we don't have any changes in employment in terms of who's here and who's not. But the follow-up is still ongoing in terms of moving forward.

But I did feel confident, and yes, that's my responsibility. Certainly in one case, if it's an employee that reports to me or reports to Kirk, we'll talk those things through, but ultimately, yes.

Q. Was Husch Blackwell empowered to give you things that go in personnel files, or was that up to university discretion?

GARY BARTA: I don't know exactly how President Harreld and Carroll Reasoner -- they do these reports. They work in higher education a lot. I do know that our attorneys make it clear that conversations about personnel matters must be private, so that I'm sure played into it. You don't see specific personnel mentions in the report, and I think that's pretty standard for legal reasons, so I'm not sure exactly how everything vetted out.

Q. So they're not officially in the university files?

GARY BARTA: The information that they shared with us?

Q. Yes.

GARY BARTA: That will go into their personnel files, yes.

Q. Do you feel like you should be transparent about those things? Do you feel the need to be?

GARY BARTA: No, because it's against the law. I get what you're saying, and if we separate with somebody, that becomes very public. But in terms of personnel costs and performance evaluations, those are never public discussions. I understand why you're asking, but...

Q. Do you feel like -- the Brian situation is something that he was second to Doyle probably in terms of complaints. Do you feel like you need to have a firmer, I guess, relationship with him in regards to some of these things?

GARY BARTA: Well, I know this. I'm going to take those four letters that I received and I'm going to go through all of them and based on what they shared with us, we're going to make decisions to move forward. My relationship with Brian, I've shared in previous conversations, we really do have personnel discussions. We really do have performance evaluations. I really do have conversations with Brian because of the fact that his dad is the head coach, but beyond that, again, we'll take anything in those

files and we'll react to them based on what's in those letters and react to them based on those letters.

Q. How can you say you're not going to fire anybody if you don't know what's in the file yet?

GARY BARTA: No, I've read the letters. I've read the letters. I'm sorry if I gave that impression. I've seen the letters.

Q. Do you believe there was systemic racism in your football program?

GARY BARTA: I'm not an expert in systemic means. Did we have a culture that was not fair? Yeah. Yeah, I believe that. I'm not ready to use a term for it, but we have to have an environment where everybody feels like they're being treated fairly and equitably, and we've learned that that wasn't happening across the board.

Q. What gives you the confidence that the same leadership can fix the problems?

GARY BARTA: Good question, but again, as I've described before, I have had a chance to work with Kirk now for 15 years, so that's a starting point. I've watched him make changes when he's needed to make changes during my time. I've listened and we've had several conversations about his desire to change, and so in this case immediately took responsibility, immediately started working through and finding out where we needed to head, and then as I mentioned at the outset, I believed this would be the case, but I was very pleased to see that the conversations with former and current players confirmed what I believed, that Kirk is a leader that can move forward with this program.

Q. When you met previously with James Daniels, did he ever discuss Chris Doyle and his impact on the program and the power that he wields?

GARY BARTA: I'm not going to talk about specific discussions I've had with current or former players, but through previous conversations, and Kirk alluded to this, when someone would bring something up, it was probably less direct, less specific to an individual necessarily, and compared to the way it is now and compared to the way it has been since June 8. Again, I'm not going to go into conversations that I've had with individuals.

Q. Do you think that the situation that unfolded regarding rhabdo and then the aftermath had any impact on Chris Doyle becoming as powerful a figure in the football program as he did?

GARY BARTA: I don't know about that. I know for those of you who were around back then, I didn't know what rhabdomyolysis was at that time. I third party did come in and review everything and we made changes moving forward, so I felt comfortable with the way we worked through that and have worked through that since then.

Q. With regards to Brian, he's a guy that's kind of worked his way up the ladder, probably aspirations to potentially be a head coach sometime. With what you know about him and what you've learned, would he be a guy that you'd be comfortable hiring as a head coach if he keeps progressing the way that he has? Is there anything you've learned that would make that kind of like off the board, off the table?

GARY BARTA: I certainly have opinions about all of our staff -- it's fine for you to ask, but I'm not comfortable sharing. I've watched Brian grow from being an offensive line coach, I've watched him grow into being an offensive coordinator, and I have appreciated a lot of that growth, but that's probably as far as I'll go right there. But he and I have talked a lot about his future over the years.

Q. So you haven't learned anything that would eliminate that possibility at all?

GARY BARTA: Again, I'm just going to continue to move forward and have conversations with him privately about what his career goals are and any way that I can help as he's working toward those goals.

Q. This question isn't meant to be asked in an interrogative vein, but how does an athletic director and how does a head coach, how are they not fully aware or how do they become unaware of problems of the magnitude that this one has had?

GARY BARTA: No, I'm fine with you asking. That's a fair question to ask. I described a little bit back in June. I didn't go into any more detail, but I indicated at the time, we were made aware that there were some issues. We didn't have all the specifics we have today, and we set out a plan to try to work on those issues and get better.

Again, I'm admitting fully at this point that I thought some of the plans that we had put in place were working. I thought things were getting better. What was I basing that on? When I would walk through the building, when I would go to practice, when I would go to games, when I would travel on the road with the team, my personal observation was that things seemed very cohesive and very positive. I would watch former players, black or white, come back to Kinnick Stadium and see the excitement and the camaraderie between coaches and former players that

were coming back. I was getting reports through exit surveys and interviews that were positive.

Again, I go back to were we asking the right questions. Were they comfortable, even though they were anonymous in the surveys being frank with us. The answer is probably not. So we've got to find a better way, as Kirk was saying, to get people to feel comfortable speaking freely, and we have to make sure that they have a place they can go if they're not comfortable talking to me, if they're not comfortable talking to Kirk or anybody on his staff, and I do envision maybe it's the leadership group that's now feeling more empowered. Maybe it's the former player advisory committee. Maybe it's the diversity, equity and inclusion group. We just have to make sure, one, we're listening, and two, they have a place to go if they don't think we are listening. I thought things were improving. I was wrong. We've acknowledged that, and we're working hard to move forward.

Q. Gary, you executed the separation agreement with Chris before you engaged with Husch Blackwell. After you read the report, did that confirm that that was the right action to take?

GARY BARTA: Yes and no. I think Kirk described pretty clearly the conversations that he had, what led to that point and just the decision at that point that in order to move forward -- I think I even said it that way on June 15, in order to move forward, we felt this was the way we needed to go.

I still feel like that was the right decision. I don't know if it's based on a report, but I still feel like that was the right decision.

Having the former -- the current players indicate that things are much better -- again, I'm not attributing it to one person because that's not the case, but I do still feel like it was the right decision, not just based on one report but based on just kind of the totality of where the team feels like it is right now.

Q. How confident are you that this environment doesn't exist in other sports?

GARY BARTA: I'm not going to be confident just by assuming it. One of the reasons we do have the diversity, equity accountability group, one of the reasons -- and that initial report going back to the diversity task force was not all football. It was our entire department. If you go back to why we created it in the first place, black male student-athlete graduation rates being significantly lower than our white male student-athletes. We're the ones that -- that happens nationally at some level, but we wanted to

do something about it at Iowa, and we're going to, and it's still very high on our list of goals, and I'm not assuming that everything is perfect or going well in any other sports, and there have been a lot of discussions. I've been encouraged by all the discussions going on in the department with members of our staff, black members of our staff. I've been encouraged by some of the team meetings that are going on, both black and white student-athletes, but having great conversations to learn more and understand each other better. I'm not assuming that -- I'm assuming that we've got to make sure there are no issues like this in other teams.

Q. What impact could Broderick have on this process?

GARY BARTA: Well, one, Broderick is an incredibly sharp person who has grown up in this department. He played here. He understands the University of Iowa. He understands Iowa athletics, and one of the things I've seen in him -- first of all, he was very confident in his role in football, and I knew that he had some passion to go not a different route but beyond just football, and I have seen when we named him interim back in I think it was August of last year, there's just a passion that he has in his eyes every day, starting then that I've seen continue. He understands the role. He's been a former student-athlete here, so he certainly can relate.

One of the things that was important, though, in order for him to be effective in my opinion, and this isn't a knock on football, he has to be seen as not a staff member of football, he has to be seen not as someone who reports to the head football coach but somebody who reports outside of football, reports to the athletic department but also has a reporting line to the university diversity, equity and inclusion, the head of that area.

I think he can be very effective. I took way too long to get to that. I think he can be very effective for those reasons. And he's now experienced something that most people who work in those roles, if they happen to be African-American themselves, they can relate to that, whereas obviously I can't, but now Broderick has worked through something that is as public and as challenging and he's been involved in these challenging conversations. I think he's also helped us with our entire staff in coordinating these kinds of learning and listening conversations. He's had a lot of experience real quickly in that job and is doing an amazing job.

Q. What have been the opinions and your conversations with Bruce Harreld regarding this?

GARY BARTA: You know, Bruce is somebody who tells it

like it is. Absolutely the first time he started to hear about where this was headed, he expected me, Kirk to make sure we handled it appropriately. Don't try to sugar coat it. Let's go forward. Let's find out where the issues are, and let's fix them. He's been very supportive of Kirk remaining as the leader. That was a conversation I had with him early on, and he didn't waver on that for a lot of the same reasons that I shared with you. His expectations are this better get better. It better improve. He expects it from both Kirk and myself. But also very supportive.

Q. Did you share the diversity task force report with him?

GARY BARTA: He had it from the very beginning.

