

University of Iowa Football

Media Conference

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Kirk Ferentz

Press Conference



KIRK FERENTZ: Good afternoon. Thanks for joining us.

First of all, first and foremost, we are disappointed we're not able to play Saturday. I think all of us were looking forward to this game, this challenge. Unfortunately it is not going to happen.

We were really close. Felt great about getting those eight games in, really close to getting a ninth. These kind of things happen.

I want to take a minute to congratulate our players and staff for the job they've done during the course of the year. We've been barely affected by the virus - fortunately - over the last 10, 12 weeks, whatever it's been.

I think a lot of it's just everybody being very, very diligent about what they're doing, being aware of the protocols that are in place, everybody paying strict attention to it. Also a little bit of luck doesn't hurt at all.

I want to compliment everybody on the job they've done, especially those on our medical staff here, the doctors and the trainers. The trainers are really on the front line, and Dr. Andy Peterson. The trainers have been on the front line back to June when everything got going here. I can't say enough about the job they've done. Absolutely phenomenal. Just a shame here we didn't make it to the finish line.

Lastly, I want to take a minute to just wish all the Michigan players, staff and coaches all the best, speedy recovery certainly from this thing.

Just a couple other comments here. Tomorrow is national signing day. We'll meet again, have a little bit of a chance to talk about this class. We're really excited about this class. Happy to talk about them when it's appropriate.

Also looking backwards for one second, happy for Ihmir to be recognized by the Big Ten as our Player of the Week. Unfortunately he was hurt, but he really played an outstanding football game. His efforts certainly were

helpful and instrumental in the victory the other day. Fortunately he has an injury that doesn't require surgery. Wish him the best for a speedy recovery here.

Something we didn't touch on Saturday, we did lose Ivory last week, last Tuesday specifically. He did have an injury, a knee injury, that's going to require surgery. When he finishes his finals, he's going to get that addressed.

Just want to take one minute and really compliment him. We have a really good group of backs this year. These guys have been absolutely unbelievable, these three guys, Ivory, Tyler and Mekhi. All three of them have just been great all season long. There's only one starting position. But I can't say enough about all three of them being extremely unselfish, extremely good when they've been out on the field as offensive players, but the job they've done on special teams, too, in particular Mekhi and Ivory. Just absolutely phenomenal. Losing Ivory was a big loss for us on our special teams because of what he's been doing there.

We'll be eager to get that thing repaired, get him back up and running, have him back next year. That's exciting. Happy about that.

I know a lot of awards have come out. We haven't been allowed to talk to our team about them. I guess we'll address that this afternoon in our team meeting. I think our team is very well recognized on the Big Ten awards. Happy for all the guys that are receiving recognition. They've all worked hard. It's important. Great to see their efforts get noted.

A couple other specific things. I know the offensive line made it to the semifinalists for the Joe Moore Award. I think as most of you Joe Moore is a person that's very special to me. He was my mentor in coaching, my number one mentor. I've been fortunate to have several of them. He was first and foremost, really kind of helped shape me at a very early age. That's special.

When you walk in our building, the Joe Moore Award is the first thing you'll see in the atrium downstairs. It's a unique award in that it's the only one that I'm aware of that recognizes teamwork, not just an individual's effort, but the concept of teamwork. Joe would be very proud of that.

For our guys to get mentioned, that's really a tribute to those guys. I think Tim has done a wonderful job with them all season long. You think about the guys that have been hurt, the rotations we've had, the guys have played very productively. Happy for them.

Learned very recently here that Keith Duncan is a finalist for the Burlsworth Award. We've been so fortunate, so many good walk-on stories. Keith is certainly one of those guys, what a story he has individually, and his career has just been fantastic. We'll keep our fingers crossed on that one.

Last but not least, the Broyles Award has been whittled down a little bit. Phil Parker is one of the finalists. I am happy for Phil to be recognized. What a phenomenal job he's done for 22 years, not just since he took over as coordinator. For 22 years, he has been such a valuable member of our staff. Does a great job on the field, a great job recruiting, a great job in all areas. Boy, he's just done an unbelievable job as our coordinator. Norm Parker, our first coordinator, would be very proud of him, the way the defense has been playing. Not all Phil, he'd be the first to tell you that, but he's a big part of that. Keep our fingers crossed for him as well.

The last thing before I open it up for questions, I think all of us are well aware, football has grown into a tough, competitive business. It's a little bit more ruthless than it used to be. Not that it hasn't always been this way. People getting fired, it's kind of a way of life now. It's always been that way in the NFL. Has trickled down to college football, as well.

I was really sad to hear that Lovie Smith had been released. Want to take a minute and talk about that. I've long respected Lovie Smith as a coach, just watching him coach, coached mostly in the NFL, though he was in the Big Ten when I was here back in the late '80s.

Watching him as a pro coach, he does a phenomenal job. I think he's done the same thing in college. Always had great respect for him as a football coach. Since he joined the Big Ten, I got to know him a little bit better. Highest respect for him as a human being, as a person. It's a tough deal, tough deal.

He's going to be fine, I know that. He'll be just fine. If he chooses to work, I'm sure he'll be fine in that regard, too. From my vantage point, it's a real loss for college football. College football needs more coaches like Lovie Smith. My regards to him.

Q. It sounds like there will not definitely be any sort of replacement game Saturday? Bowl game is next for

you guys?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, if there is any talk of that, I'm certainly not aware of it. I'd certainly be against it. This isn't baseball, with all due respect to basketball or baseball, where you play multiple games during the course of a week. We learned the news here this afternoon, I don't know if it's been an hour yet, 75% of our preparation had already been done, maybe 80%, I don't know.

Our staff has been working hard since Sunday morning getting ready for this ballgame. To try to flip it over and play somebody else this weekend, it wouldn't be fair to the sport. Most of all it wouldn't be fair to our players. Wouldn't be representative of the kind of team we want to put out on the field.

I know it's been done. Someone did one earlier in the year. We have late games, so I think that would be a really regrettable thing.

For all I know, it may still happen. I don't know. If it does, I won't be real pleased about it.

Q. The bowl game, I don't know what kind of leverage the Big Ten has with their contracts, just will you definitely accept the bowl invitation if one is tendered? How do you feel about all that?

KIRK FERENTZ: Our thought process since we got going, I know we got going before September 30th, but that's when football became realistic, when we started the daily testing. Our mindset has been that we're just going to have to live the way we're living until January 1st or 2nd.

I think we're all in agreement that's how we're going to do things. That's been our mindset. We've taken it day by day, literally day by day. I think that's all you can do. I'm speaking for everybody in America really. We're all in the same boat here.

Our goal is to play the eight games that were scheduled. We had that ninth game, the concept was alive and well. We were hoping that would materialize. It just didn't work out. So be it. Now you move on to the next thing, which is announcements on Sunday.

I know there's some bowls that may hold out. I would assume hopefully things have settled now. I would assume the bowls that are still standing are still going to push forward.

As long as they do that, as long as one of them will take us, that's our plan. We want to play another game. I can only speak for me right now. We're going to meet at 5:05.



I assume the team still feels the same way.

I think our guys have had a lot of fun being together, I think they've had a lot of fun practicing, preparing. We've had a lot of fun in the locker room the last six weeks. Our goal is to try to push it to another game. If we could do that, that would be wonderful.

Q. The communication in all this, were you aware that Michigan was still having problems? Did this come out of the blue for you? What did you hear from the Big Ten?

KIRK FERENTZ: If any of us say we're surprised by anything...

Going back to March 13th, as soon as the NBA canceled, that was the major shoe to fall or brick to fall. Ever since that's happened, I think everything has been totally unpredictable. You can't count on anything.

As I mentioned several times, the biggest breakthrough for us in my opinion was the daily testing. That gave us a chance at least to sustain something. The fact that we've made it this far I think is just fantastic. Appreciative of that. Thankful for that. Now our focus is what's in front of us.

To answer the question specifically, I know they haven't played in two weeks, right? The last time they played was Thanksgiving weekend. You start thinking about that, that's a long time in a football world. It's a long time, a lot of days. Certainly there was no guarantee they'd be able to return to play. I think you have to consider that.

Also our thought Sunday morning was we're scheduled to play 6:00 on Sunday night, let's get to work. That's what we've been doing. That's what our players have been doing. Also juggling finals, that's a first-time deal.

If there's any good of it now, the guys still with finals have more time to concentrate on it. We'll figure where we're at next weekend.

Q. Are you kind of letting your players go for the rest of the week? Are you trying to concentrate on what usually is a very high-profile day, which is tomorrow?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yes and no. I don't know when we really began practicing in earnest. That was sometime in September. I know September 30th was the first time we could put pads on, operate like a football team.

We've played without a bye basically. But I've told our guys, we did that in '02, we played 12 straight. Everybody seemed to be fine, had plenty of energy at the end of the

year. This is our bye week now. Our plan right now is at 5:05 to tell our guys. That's just when we meet, 5:05. We're going to tell them to study. If you're done studying, relax, enjoy yourself.

I'm waiting to get information, feedback from our medical people what we can and can't do. I'm sure some guys would love to go home. I don't know if that's going to be allowed or not. I circle back to our mindset is we're going till January 2nd. If it means we all got to live the way we're living, that's what we'll do. We'll have plenty of time to come up for air then in the new year.

I may learn something from our medical people today. Maybe guys can leave campus for a day or two. If they could, that would be great.

You talk about sacrifice our athletes have made. What they've done is so atypical of what a college kid's life should be and normally would be. Again, it just speaks volumes to the players we get to work with because they've been focused, they've done their part. Just really proud of them.

Q. There's been some guys that have opted out after this last game around the conference, the country. Did you have any guys that considered doing that or talked about doing that?

KIRK FERENTZ: I'm sure there's probably a lot of players all across the country that have been thinking about it for longer than a week, that type of thing. There's really nothing to comment on. We were ready to go, ready to play. Not quite there. We still had a couple more practices, stuff like that. No, we were ready to go, see where it goes. Can't predict what would have happened between today and Saturday.

We're living in very unusual times. I think we all need to understand that. I'm not judging anybody that makes that decision. Haven't been paying attention to what has been going on nationally.

Guys making decisions this year is probably going to be different than any time we've seen in the past, probably the future, too. This has played weird mind games on a lot of people, not only in sports but just in general. The way we're living right now is not normal, not healthy. Most of us are pretty social. We enjoy each other's company. That's the best part of life, friends, family, all that. All of us have been restricted.

I'm no scientist, but I know that's not good for you. Social scientist. That's not what people do. People tend to do things. At least in our community we've been able to be



together, do what we like doing. That's been our outlet.

Q. What did you see from the guys in practice this week coming off a big rivalry win? Were they pretty fired up for this Michigan game?

KIRK FERENTZ: I think so. We threw them a bone yesterday. We just did a walk-through. We were in and out of the building on Sunday. We shortened the time down which we tend to do towards the end of year. We shortened times down yesterday, did a walk-through, not an actual practice. Tried to give them a little longer.

Today was a workday. The guys were great. Thought we had a really good practice. Was hoping for tomorrow to be one. I was even considering staying inside with the doors open, but staying inside. That's probably the biggest decision I make during the week, whether we go inside or outside, that type of thing (smiling). Pressure's off. I can relax.

Q. I assume you would like to get maybe one more measuring stick to kind of gauge where you're at? Is that the hope as we approach bowl selection on Sunday?

KIRK FERENTZ: The idea is to play and compete. That's why you schedule games. I think everything was of the same opinion. I say 'everybody'. The coaches and players in our conference, I'm assuming every conference in America.

I've coached Maine, an FCS school. I've coached at that level. There is no way in the world we would have had this opportunity if I was still at Maine. I feel fortunate. I know it didn't have to be this way. We had a chance to go and play.

Couple coaches made comments about that. But, coaches want to coach and players want to play. It's what we do. I'm looking at it from the side, we had eight games, feel really fortunate, feel like we kind of beat the odds a little bit there. If we could have gotten a ninth, that would have been great. Not so much a measuring stick, but a chance to go out and play, see if we can improve, take another step forward.

I think we've taken a step forward each and every week this season. That's easier said than done. The staff has done a really good job. But most importantly, our players have been outstanding. They've worked hard, they've played with pride and competed.

I'm really proud of our guys. I can't say enough about what they've done. The leadership we've gotten, the

camaraderie I've witnessed with everybody in the building. It's been gratifying.

It would have been great to play one more game, knowing there's no guarantees. That's not going to happen. Now we move on to the next one. Hopefully there is a next one.

Q. Other data point, a potential victory, maybe a decisive one. Most of them have been that for you over the last six weeks. Might have elevated you into the New Year's six competition. There's a prestige with those. Is that something that enters your mind at all?

KIRK FERENTZ: I mean, it's always good. I think this year you have to put an asterisk next to everything that happens this year quite frankly. Other than watching what individuals have done, how they've reacted to various situations, I think that's important certainly. All that other stuff, it is important. I'm not minimizing it.

We live in a world right now, this playoff stuff is great, but I think one of the downsides if you're not in that conversation of four or five, you're chopped liver. I think we're really missing the boat, missing an opportunity as to what college football is all about. So many stories across the board.

I'm probably too old to fall victim to that. I've lost interest in all that stuff. If we run the table like we did in 2002, end up in a BCS game, great. If we don't, it's not going to ruin my day. It's more about the day-to-day, what our team is doing, how they're growing, how they're treating each other, how they're reacting. All those kinds of things is really what it's about.

We've seen way too many good things this year, way too many good stories from our players on the field, off the field, right on through. That's what my focus is right now. I hope we get one more game.

To play in bowls, it's exciting. The downside of the playoffs is we're minimizing a lot of good stories, a lot of good trips. You guys have heard me say before, I mean, winning in San Antonio in 2001, you don't think that was a big game for us? Holy smokes, that's as big of a game as we've had in 22 years. To minimize that, I'm not doing it. It's all about the players. It's all about them and their experiences.

We'll be thrilled if we get the chance to play.

Q. What were the conversations like with your players when this was communicated to them, how they reacted? The hurt on their face or the vibe you got from them?

KIRK FERENTZ: First of all, it's 2020, so I haven't had a conversation yet. I think after I found out, 10 minutes later it was out on social media. That's how our players found out, which is perfectly normal to them. That's their world.

We'll meet at 5:05. I predict this right now: it will be nothing like the meeting on August 11. That one I'll never forget because you could feel the air get sucked out of the room.

There's nothing to be disappointed about. The game didn't materialize, we'll move on to the next one. I'll encourage the guys to take a couple days, clear their heads out, put their feet up, relax, feel good about what they've done, celebrate what they've done, feel good about it. When it's time to get back to work, we'll get back to work.

This is a bye week come early. They've earned a chance to feel good about what they've accomplished.

Q. You have to feel good about a lot of athletes, kids, that are on your leadership council, guys like Chauncey Golston or Mekhi Sargent, people that have been there for you. They've battled for you. In turn, to watch the way the team has grown, what does it say about them? How instrumental were they in making this year successful for you?

KIRK FERENTZ: We have great support staff and a great coaching staff in this building. Most importantly, great players to work with. I can say that 30 plus years being here now, that hasn't changed.

It's a matter of working through things, figuring out what do we need to do, how can we improve. Just like you do when you lose a game, have a season that's disappointing. We'll had those, as you well know. There's a process to it, the way you go about it.

The guys you mentioned, that is Iowa Football. Chauncey Golston was the other guy. The guy we were recruiting is Cedrick Lattimore. Played great for us, outstanding. But Chauncey was like the sidekick. Oh, yeah, who is that skinny guy? Thank goodness we noticed him, recruited him and he came here.

Mekhi was a guy that KB had been up at the All-Star Game, mentioned it to me in December. I can't remember who got hurt in spring. But circled back, Tell me more about the guy you talked about in December. We investigated a little bit, learned more about Mekhi. Everything was so positive. When he got here, he was even better than advertised.

Both guys came here and worked. Both college graduates

as of next week. They're everything that's good in football. Outstanding players, outstanding people. Kind of guys you want to be friends with, teammates with, right on through, be able to coach.

I can say that about a lot of guys on our football team. But those two guys, you picked two of the best right there. Those guys are just outstanding. Good people are interested in finding, What can we do? How do we fix things? What suggestions do we need? What do we need to look at? How do we find answers to whatever issues we have right now? We've had a lot of those kinds of people in this building. That's the best part about what we do.

Q. Building off the theme here of being grateful, you basically have nine game weeks of preparation. Can you articulate how valuable that is? Other programs maybe had five, six, Pac-12 even less. How much development can you make in that extra time?

KIRK FERENTZ: Considering we didn't have spring ball, we didn't have a conventional camp, it's really important. That's the part, all the folks I'm visiting with here now, you guys in the media, I'm not sorry about this, but unfortunately you guys don't get to see our guys on a daily basis. I'll try to share some stories at some point.

We've seen a lot of growth. Not only the guys that are playing, you've been able to witness that. A lot of guys that aren't playing that have been really improving. That's exciting to me. You guys got to see Seth Benson step in there and play well. You saw Jack Campbell, once he got his feet wet, started playing. These guys are good players. We saw that months ago, right? We saw it actually last year as those guys were growing, maybe not playing.

That's the thing I guess, those things don't happen if you're not out there and working and practicing. We've seen a lot of good growth with our guys. It will be exciting whenever it's time to flip the calendar and move on to our next year, it will be exciting to see what kind of growth these guys have.

That's been part of it, no question. It's a good question because it's more than just getting ready for the games. Those games are the most important thing during game week, but there's a lot of other stuff going on, too.

Q. Usually when the All Big Ten teams come out on the line of scrimmage, I feel like I can see what the coaches seem to think about certain players. In this case I was a little bit surprised. Everybody should be surprised. Tyler Linderbaum was second team on the coaches offensive line. What did everybody miss who voted on that? How could he be second team?

KIRK FERENTZ: I have to really be careful. I don't want to say anything that suggests other players aren't really good. I don't want to say that at all.

I'll just say this. I haven't been around many centers in college football better than Tyler Linderbaum. I'll leave it at that. I've been here 30 plus years. Joel Hilgenberg was a pretty good center. We've had pretty good centers here. I'm not saying he's better than Hilgy. I don't know how many are better than Tyler Linderbaum.

That's All-Big Ten, All-Star teams, all that stuff. There's a lot of subjectivity. I get that. I'm not upset about it. There's no sense in being upset about it. I know how I feel. I hope Tyler recognizes he's a pretty good player. He's more focused on trying to get better tomorrow than what it is that might be said or written.

There's more that goes into being a center than just snapping the ball and blocking. There's so much other stuff to it.

At our place, playing center is a special job. There's a lot on your job description that you have to do if you're really going to be good. Whether it's protections, all these things we expect them to do, just like a quarterback, like a middle linebacker, safety.

Tyler is the total package. He is so committed to doing everything at a high level. Again, that's the stuff that to me nobody else is privy to on the outside, but we see it every day. More importantly his teammates see it every day.

I'm pretty sure he's the only junior on that captain list we've had week in, week out. By the way, it's going to be the same six guys. It's a slam-dunk when they do the voting. Slam-dunk. He's seen in the highest light. It's the stuff behind the scenes that would make me just say if I categorize everybody, hard to think of guys that play better at that position than Tyler Linderbaum.

Q. With some of those guys that are growing that you mentioned, Reggie Bracy, Mason Richman, who from the freshmen class jumped out at you?

KIRK FERENTZ: I'll give you a broad answer, then a specific answer.

The broad answer is I really like our first-year guys, I really like the whole group top to bottom. I say 'I'. I think our whole staff feels the same way. Mind you, we're judging these guys a little different.

I'll say the same thing about our prospects tomorrow. This has been the most unusual year to be a prospect. This is

the most unusual year to be a first-year player. There was no summer school, right? Think about that. These guys came in in June. It was like the 15th, I think, that they got here. They trained like guys have always trained. Four times, five times a week they're over in the building.

I'm like everybody else. Instead of going to class, having a normal life, these guys went back to the dorm and basically were quarantined. Not officially, but that's what everybody has been doing since June.

For all they've gone through, these guys have such a good attitude, it's extremely impressive. Old people always worry about young people, right? Kids aren't what they used to be, all that stuff. I think kids are remarkable, the young population. I see a lot of remarkable things. These guys just illustrate that. They did a great job handling the most screwed-up year ever, in all regards of our life. They've done great.

We're excited to see what the future brings. I'll be happy in 2021 to be a little more specific about that. Right now it's keep our eyes on this season.