

University of Iowa Football

Media Conference

Saturday, September 18, 2021

Iowa City, Iowa, USA

Coach Kirk Ferentz

Postgame Press Conference



Iowa 30, Kent State 7

KIRK FERENTZ: Certainly first and foremost, pleased to get the victory today. This is the kind of game we expected. We knew Kent State was a good football team. They're really competitive. Coach Lewis and his staff have done a really nice job there. We knew they'd come in and compete hard, and they weren't going to be taken a backseat to anything or anybody.

Happy to get the win, and it's going to be a good experience for our team because there are a lot of things to highlight that we still have to get better at, and that's a process. That's the race that we run all week long.

Overall, we had a pretty good week at practice. I thought the effort today, our guys were ready to go and they played hard, and there were a lot of good responses out there to some things that didn't go so well, so happy with the responses.

As far as areas of improvement, obvious the penalties hurt us today. There's no great explanation for that other than concentration or just being out of position. Either way, that's something we have to do a better job of. They are always inopportune, and we had a couple today that really hurt us, especially that one drive opening the second half there, two major penalties. That's not a good thing.

Defensively we try to pride ourselves and try to weekly do a good job against big plays, defending big plays. I think most defensive teams do that, and we weren't real successful doing that today at times.

Special teams were overall pretty good. Tory did a nice job, especially that last punt, but we missed a couple opportunities, too. Even there it was kind of indicative of maybe some of the challenges that we were facing there.

The bottom line is that we came here to get the win. That's the best you can do. Week to week we're just trying to win the games in front of us and got that done. I thought there were some good efforts; good to see Goodson get going

here a little bit and get him on track, and hopefully we'll see some growth I think up front on both lines, so hopefully we'll see that when we look at the film, but my sense is that's probably the case. We're going to keep pushing forward, but happy to get the win.

Q. What was the explanation you got on Tyrone's dropped pass?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, so obviously that rule is non-possession or a drop, I guess. I was tempted to challenge the replay, but that would be stupid, and I don't want to be so blatantly obvious that I am hardheaded or whatever.

That was one concern, and I haven't seen the replay, so I can't comment on it. My bigger concern was the mechanics of it. I felt bad for the officiating crew because that's a good crew. They worked a good game today, and they looked like fools out there because they're at the mercy of whatever decisions get made upstairs.

To me the bigger point of contention is that they had to adjust the chains. The chains got messed up so they stopped play. Another delay in the game, which we already have about 12 of these four-minute breaks for commercials, now you have a delay there. And then they challenged it -- it got buzzed after the chains finally got straightened out, and I know we have a rule on the length of a delay now or a review, so for good reason. If you can't make up your mind, then it's a moot point.

But I guess we have to get a rule now about is there a limit on how long the guy upstairs can decide before they decide to replay it or review it. Better get my vernacular correct.

Anyway, it's a little frustrating to say the least, but hopefully this gets cleaned up during the road.

In my humble opinion, the people on the field should be in charge because they're the ones that look like fools and they have nothing to do with this. Anyway. That's why they call that guy the referee, right? He's responsible.

Q. I'm looking at the statistics; you had perfect balance between rushing and passing today, 206 rushing yards, 212 passing yards. It's almost exactly

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identical. You have to be happy about that. I think your offense played pretty good.

KIRK FERENTZ: We were, yeah. We still have a lot of things to work on. Our execution is not where it needs to be yet, and that's going to be a weekly process. There was one point, I jotted it down, 324 to 233 yardage-wise, and it felt like it was the other way, and part of that is just the way they play. They're tough to defend.

But yeah, there were some good things going on kind of subtly. Good to get Tyrone running the ball a little bit better, and hopefully we'll be able to improve on that weekly.

It's a four-quarter game, too, so we got some yardage in that fourth quarter, too. But pleased about that. But there's still things that we're leaving out there.

Q. You mentioned line play. On the defensive line when you look at seven sacks plus all the holding calls they had on them, that I would think would be a positive. A kid like Lukas Van Ness who really has a chance to show, had some great moments. How important is a game like in his development?

KIRK FERENTZ: Every snap is important, especially for these younger guys. That's what I've been trying to say the last two weeks. On both sides of the ball. We've got a lot of guys that haven't played much, and Lukas is one of those guys. We've liked him. He works hard in practice, and you like what you see. There wasn't room for him last year. We didn't have openings for him to get involved. But all those guys, he's doing a good job, Deontae Craig, Yahya Black got his hands on a ball. So that second year group of guys. And really Logan Lee in my opinion is in that group as a year older chronologically, but he's missed so much time.

So we've got a lot of guys that haven't played, and then just to see those guys keeping pace, not that John Waggoner is a veteran but he's been here longer. Noah has been here longer. Certainly Joe has been here a little bit longer. think that's encouraging, really encouraging.

I felt like we'd match up against their guys. They're well-coached, their guys up front, but until you get on the field you're never quite sure, and it's a credit to them; they were working hard out there.

Q. The 95-yard drive today, how important was that not just for the result of this game today but for the progress of your offense and building confidence knowing that that's something that they can accomplish when backed up like that?

KIRK FERENTZ: Driving the ball is important, especially when you're backed up. We've had a few of those over the years. It really helps build confidence. It's kind of illustrative in a lot of ways of what it takes to be a good offense is just concentrating play after play, not worrying about trying to make the big play, and I think sometimes I get the feeling standing there we're trying to force things a little bit too much sometimes, and that's -- you want a player to try to do his best, but just let things kind of play out, and it's the same way on defense.

That was really good, and we made some tough plays during that possession, as well. Even Sam's touchdown catch was -- that wasn't a big window right there, but Spencer got the ball in there and he made the catch. So that was really good. Those are the kinds of things that will help build a team if we take advantage of it. They're going to see the kind of execution we had there versus some of the other possessions, and hopefully that's how you learn.

Q. You had a lot of non-starters on both sides of the ball make impactful plays today. Quality depth is not a constant; why is it so good right now at this point in time?

KIRK FERENTZ: Probably part of it is we've got so many guys that -- maybe shouldn't be on the second team but were on the second team.

We're a pretty young football team. I'll go back to the first day of spring ball where there was like 70 hands that had never gone through a spring practice, and it just dawned on me walking out -- it wasn't like I'd been thinking about it, but I was behind a couple young guys and I'm thinking, geez, didn't have spring ball a year ago and then -- so how many guys. We've got a lot of young guys on our football team. But we've liked what we've seen. I've said that since January. We've really liked how they work, all the things they do, but that's not football.

You get 15 days in the spring, and they're trying, and that's one of the reasons I'm optimistic right now. I know we can get a lot better, but we need to. There's not a lot of time for fooling around right now. We need to be doing it every day.

I think we can still learn how to practice better. It's not that we had a bad week but we're not at that level you need to be to really be clicking.

Q. Goodson really anchored your offense today; how much do you attribute that to the improvement on the offensive line and just Goodson as a player?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, the one we hit on around the left end, with all due respect to Tyler (laughter), but that is a play that we want him in the backfield for that play because it kind of plays to his deal.

But right from the start of the game it was pretty apparent. Coach Lewis was on Wisconsin's team back in the early 2000s, and they played the same front, Wisconsin, and opened up with it against us in '02, and it was designed to stop the run, try to slow things down. The play that first play was just a matter of them over-pursuing. We stuck it out to the right and then pitched it to him on the left. But they made it tough.

To Tyler's credit, he did a good job running, good to get him on track, and hopefully we can keep building off that.

Q. Kent State came into the game as the bottom 15 team in the country in rushing defense. Is that something you had targeted maybe from Monday coming in?

KIRK FERENTZ: I don't know if unconventional, unorthodox, some of the things they do up front (are different). So it was like three straight weeks where as you're preparing it's a little bit of a tough challenge. That was difficult.

It's just with a little bit more seasoned group up front you feel a little bit better about things, but we're learning every day up front.

I'm pleased with the way the guys' attitude and the way they're going about it, but we just learn every day. If there's anything good about this, it's three different kind of preparations we've had. Hopefully we'll benefit from that as we go along, and one of these days we'll see some things that we're accustomed to seeing on a routine basis, maybe.

Q. What did you think of Spencer's performance today? Early on it was kind of disjointed, then once he got going on that long drive he hit a lot of check-downs but then he was 17-of-22 over the last three quarters.

KIRK FERENTZ: I think he settled down and played pretty well. The first stat that caught my eye was right there with the interception stuff. He's doing a good job making good judgments as far as that goes.

There were a couple throws, I'm sure he would tell you the same thing, that you've got to make that throw. That's the next step. But that'll come. That'll come. I think maybe he's pressing a little bit too hard at times. That's just my

unprofessional opinion because I'm certainly not an expert on quarterbacks, but I think sometimes he might be trying a little too hard. That touchdown pass was pretty good. That looked pretty good. That was a tight little spot.

Q. Are you really not an expert on quarterbacks?

KIRK FERENTZ: No, no. I just know how they make me feel. That's about the extent of it. Some make me really feel good and other ones scare the heck out of me.

Q. How much confidence does it give you and your defense when maybe the secondary is having a little bit of an off day and your front can pick them up with forcing a fumble on the 1 or a safety in situations like that?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, both those were good plays, and historically we've done a good job, You'd rather the ball not be down inside the 5, but we've had a lot of good illustrations over 22 plus years where somehow, somehow we force a field goal or we get the ball back. Even four-down situations. That's something we try to emphasize with our guys, like you never give up, you just keep playing and maybe something good will happen. Today it did.

But then the flipside is you don't want to be down there. My high school coach, we didn't have a goal line defense because he said, if the ball is down there you guys stink and that's the way it goes.

So you want to try to avoid those situations, but it was good for us. They had a long drive there, so at least we bowed up and made something positive out of it. That's where the focus will be tomorrow is on those plays that got them down there, and two penalties on that drive, and you've got to clean those up because when you get in a real tight game, it's just not going to cut it for you.

Q. Ivory has had a long couple of years; he came back and did some nice things with the offense but obviously he's had some ball security issues. What do you say to him? What's your thinking about him going forward?

KIRK FERENTZ: Keep his chin up. Just got done telling him that, and just hang in there; you're going to be fine. He's a top-quality guy. You guys probably noticed he got voted as a captain this week. That's his teammates voting him in, not the coaches. But we all cosigned that one.

He does so much for our team beyond running the football. He's a good running back, a very talented running back, he's made a lot of good plays for us, and he's just got to

work through it, and he will. He's a high-caliber guy.

Q. Going back to the safety, obviously a bit of an unforced error there on the snap, but Jack Campbell was talking about when the offensive players looked up you guys want them to see 11 guys in their face causing problems, and that's basically what the quarterback saw when he turned around on the goal line. Do you feel like that's kind of defining, that that's what this defense has been doing all season, a play like that where one error and it's a major problem?

KIRK FERENTZ: Love to clean up the things that didn't go so well today, but yeah, again, to go back to what I said first and foremost, pleased with the effort and the mentality of our guys. I think they're really trying, and they care about each other, and they take pride in that.

Yeah, it's a good place to start. Now we've got to get some other things cleaned up a little bit more.

Q. Was Gavin's involvement a product of Ivory's ball security?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, at that point you just felt like, hey, let's give Ivory a break and just make sure he can regroup. For me that was one of the positives in the game, not Ivory's challenges, but I thought Gavin did a really nice job. He made it tough run out there. When it's time to get a guy in a game and things are kind of tight, you're always a little bit reluctant, but this experience today and what he did I think is really going to help him move forward. Certainly our confidence in him grows when we see him play like that. He did a good job.

Q. You had to go through two pretty highly emotional games along with just being two tough teams right off the bat, and you played Kent State. What do you think about the team, how prepared mentally and performed mentally was it at that same level you saw the last two weeks?

KIRK FERENTZ: I think maybe the detail part wasn't as good, and the penalties to me reflect that. I guess that would be the first thing I'd point to. But then Petras took care of the ball.

I guess the whole thing to me is a good -- everything in a season is part of a learning experience or a learning opportunity, and we played two games right off the bat against ranked teams, veteran teams, et cetera. Now you've got a team that's pretty experienced, especially with their contact quarterback position, their skill guys, so it's a different challenge. But now everybody expects you to win. First two games it's like a jump ball at best. If I'm

talking to my friends that like me, they say, yeah, jump ball, you guys got a chance. Everybody else, you guys stink. But now there's no way we can lose this game, and I think I saw a couple headlines this morning -- I still read papers. I saw a couple of headlines like, it's just too easy for everybody to say this is going to happen. It doesn't just happen in sports.

To me all three of these things are good, they're unique and they're all good things for us to learn from, and there are good things we'll take from all of them. Really the key is what do we learn and then what do we demonstrate. During the course of the season you've got to face all that stuff. You're going to be underdogs, you're going to be on the road and then playing against a team that, quote-unquote, that you're supposed to beat. Somehow, somehow you've got to stay focused and improve.

That's really probably the biggest thing I think all of us as coaches are concerned about, how can we grow, how can we improve, hopefully we'll grow from this experience, and we should.

Q. Speaking of growth, you look at somebody like Riley Moss, and a couple years ago he had a really tough experience as a true freshman at Purdue, and that's enough to sink anybody if it happened. Well, he grew from it, he had a tough first half or at least a series there, but he didn't -- it didn't seem to bother him. What kind of growth has he made and how has that helped your defense?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I think that's illustrative of the reason I've enjoyed this team so much. I don't know how good we are. We'll figure that out three months from now, but I don't know how good we are, but I like the guys we work with, and that's a great example. Guys like Ivory, guys like Riley, they're going to fight through that stuff. They'll work through it. They realize this is all part of the deal, and you're going to get caught maybe doing some things or maybe looking where you shouldn't look or that type of thing. When you do you pay for it, but quality people learn from their experiences, and got a guys on our team like that. I just named two guys that are veteran guys that have gone through the hard times and all, so they've got a little bit more confidence to come back from those things. But that's part of this experience for everybody quite frankly.

Q. Is them knowing that you're not going to punish them or stick them in a corner part of them succeeding?

KIRK FERENTZ: Not everybody. Who are we talking about? (Laughter.)

Q. Two guys that have been mentioned, they're going to be all right, and you pretty much said so. Is that because they know that they have your trust?

KIRK FERENTZ: You know, they've got resumes. Both those players have been in our program. We know them, really know them, and we've got faith in them.

Younger guys you've got to handle a little differently sometimes. Guys that are a little bit inexperienced, and the biggest thing I worry about with younger guys is just scar tissue; can they handle getting a little of that because that's part of life, too, so you might be a little bit more careful bringing them back. But those guys, I know they've prepared, I know they've done the work they need to do, and if something bad happens it's not because they weren't taking it seriously enough. All players earn that trust with coaches, not just me, but everybody on our staff. We all feel that way.

Those guys have proven it year in and year out, they really have.

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