

University of Iowa Football

Media Conference

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Kirk Ferentz

Press Conference



KIRK FERENTZ: Good afternoon. Hope everybody had a good week.

Just start out by recognizing a couple of our players. Great to see Matt Hankins and Riley Moss are going to be finalists in the Thorpe Award. I know Zach VanValkenburg involved with the Lott award. Happy for those guys and wish them the best for a lot of reasons.

Last week you got to meet with the four coordinators. Hopefully that was beneficial and helpful. Share a couple thoughts and we'll get moving on to Wisconsin.

As I said last week, it was a tough loss obviously last time we were out. We have a 24-hour rule. It's tough to put that into action. Probably the best thing that happened to us was getting back on the field Wednesday, having a chance to start moving forward, actually thinking about football again. That was great.

I think it was productive for us overall. Our team needed some time physically to get regrouped a little bit emotionally. Tough seven weeks certainly for all of us.

I think overall as I've been saying, we got a pretty young group of guys. This was important for them to regroup. You think about last year, we only played eight games. A lot of irregular things last year. Good chance for everybody I think to get back, get their feet back underneath them. We've seen some growth and I'm optimistic there's more to follow. That's where our focus is right now.

As we sit here, we're 6-1 right now going into the second part of the schedule here. Obviously, very important stretch for all of us.

You look out there, last weekend is exactly what kind of illustrates what I've been trying to say for the last seven, eight weeks: there's a lot of good teams out there, competitive teams out there, and games get decided on Saturday. That's what it is. Everybody wants to predict them, but it's not that easy.

Again, last weekend was a good example of that. I think that's what we're looking at now. There are a lot of good teams in our conference. It's a five-week stretch. Really that's where our focus is right now. What can we do, most importantly obvious at this point is this week.

Shifting into that, playing Wisconsin, our captains this week will be Tyler Linderbaum, Matt Hankins, Jack Koerner, Spencer Petras, Ivory Kelly-Martin. Riley won't make it. He won't be ready to go. Deontae Craig looks doubtful unless something special happens there. Another week probably with those guys.

Wisconsin is a trophy game. Always starts there. A lot of respect certainly for what Coach Chyrst and his staff have built up there, what they've done, how they've played so consistently for so long. Paul has done a great job since coming back. Went to school there, has been in that program, certainly understands the DNA of the success that they've had.

When you watch his football team, it's what you'd expect. They're a big team, physical team, athletic team. Very aggressive. Play outstanding defense. Offensively really starting to hit stride now. Last week was certainly I think a big week for them.

Just like you'd expect, they want to feature the run. They did a great job of that last week. Two really good backs. Very good up front. Got veteran receivers. Tight ends as good as you're going to find. Really good there. They play hard on special teams, play well on special teams.

It looks like they're hitting stride right now. Really a good football team. It's going to be a big, big challenge for us. Certainly a trophy at stake. That's important.

All in all, just good to get back on the field and start competing again. We'll look forward to that opportunity and challenge.

Our kid captain is Madison Williams, a nine-year-old from Carlisle, nine-year-old and already had 19 surgeries. Really a great story. Glad to have her honored this week as the kid captain.

Q. You said throughout the year from the outside looking in, there are problems with the offensive line.

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You didn't look at it from that lens. When you had time to go through the bye week, what did you see? How much growth did that unit make from then to now?

KIRK FERENTZ: I think it's pretty much where I left it a week ago Saturday. We're doing some good things. Had some clean runs the last couple weeks that were very well-executed, what we hope for. Some really positive gains. Too many inconsistencies. That's always a challenge offensively because it does take all 11 to have good execution.

Defensively, sometimes you can get away with a mistake. If they don't catch you at the right spot, it really isn't as notable. Tends to be in the running game. You even compound that, you might have a seven, five yard gain, somebody doesn't get a block downfield that is doable, you're eliminating those plays that are 15, 20 yards, even beyond that. Those are the battles we're fighting.

We're still young, we're still inexperienced up front. That's probably our biggest challenge. You look at it coming into the season, have as good a center as there is in college football. Two other guys that are pretty veteran, but both those guys are limited by injury. The good news is they're working their way back. Hopefully this five weeks they'll be full speed and that will help us. But we still got a lot of young guys working. Those guys have a chance to improve more dramatically than a veteran player typically. That's the race we're running.

Hopefully we can take a step forward this week. It won't be easy. These guys are really good on defense. The run game especially where they average 55 yards a game. 200 is probably not realistic, but we have to run the ball to have a chance to win.

Q. How helpful has it been to have Tyler's experience with a young group?

KIRK FERENTZ: Tyler is an outstanding player. No matter what position, those guys are special. It really helps. With our youth, again, having two of our veteran guys missing time, somebody has to help lead the way. He's been great that way. He's a really encouraging guy, says what has to be said.

The big thing I appreciate is the way he does things. First class all the time. Top effort all the time. That's even in the spring. I can't remember him having a bad play let alone a bad practice in the spring.

You hope you have good players around the whole team to help everybody elevate their performance.

Q. Do you anticipate continuing a rotation, especially at guard? Do you think you'll slow that down now?

KIRK FERENTZ: We'll see how it plays out. The other thing that factors in when guys are hurt, their conditioning level is not what it should be or could be. That's the importance of being able to practice, just build up that seems like the term right now is 'callous'. Heard that on the radio. I like that. That's good. You know what I'm saying, being game-ready, all that type of thing. We'll gauge it.

I think we're gaining ground. I'm optimistic there. That will help us. Some other guys are getting really good experience. We're seeing good things with them, too. We're just going to keep pushing forward. They're going to be fine.

Q. Do you think everybody is kind of set in their positional groups?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, we're pretty much kind of in the right sections. Just a matter of how many snaps they can play per game.

Q. When you saw how Wisconsin prospered on both sides of the ball against Purdue, compared to you guys the week before, what struck you about what Wisconsin was doing and how it applies to what you have to do against them?

KIRK FERENTZ: Well, I don't want to speak for Paul. If they played like that every week, they might be 7-0. The teams they've lost to are really good teams. You have to factor that in.

They played, just watching the tape to me, pretty much flawlessly the other day. I think you can say the same thing about Purdue two weeks ago. That's an illustration of football. It's not automatic. You don't get to carry things over one week to the other. Hopefully you're building all the time. Sometimes when you're building, you take steps backwards, too.

I think the key thing is don't overreact either way, just try to do what you can to keep moving forward and seeing what you can do to improve as a team.

I think certainly Wisconsin, I don't want to speak for them, but I can't imagine that wasn't their best game this past Saturday. They looked impressive in all three phases. Again, I'm not saying I know what they want to do. I'd be happy running the ball like they did. Both backs, just about 300 yards between the two of them. Their line played really well. Tight ends, the whole nine yards. They played

a good game. The turnover battle was clearly in their favor.

That's what you're shooting for. I'm sure they're looking to do that each and every week out. We'd love to do the same thing. We all do things a little differently in our personalities. The idea is to play great football, not turn the ball over, play clean football. Wisconsin's done a really good job of that since the early '90s.

Q. Stanley and Spencer combined for 39 and 15 as starters. Not a knock against them at all, but they're not the most mobile guys in the world. Is that a philosophy recruiting-wise for you guys at quarterback? Kind of what you can get, I guess?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, we'll take the best guys we can get in any position. Brad (Banks) wasn't our first choice, high school player. Chuck Long wasn't the first choice either. It was Doug from New Jersey, going to Penn State.

The story is - I wasn't there - they went out and called Chuck and said he was going to Penn State. We ended up with Chuck Long who had no offers to speak of at that point.

We played with Mark Sindlinger who might have been six foot at center. That's kind of how we've recruited. I think same thing with quarterbacks. We're trying to get guys we think are really good players. I can't remember who the high school player was we liked better than Brad. It wasn't Brad Banks. It wasn't the Player of the Year in the Big Ten or the AP Player of the Year.

You take the best guys that you see out there. The quarterback situation is especially like that. We're committed to building around the quarterback I guess is what I'm saying. Beathard probably of all the guys last 20 years, at least since Brad, probably the best athlete we've had. That worked pretty well. So did Stanley. Spencer has done pretty well, too, as a starter.

We don't necessarily get to pick the guys in a mold, like the pro guys do. We're not quite in that ballpark.

Q. The other part of the running game is the running back position with Tyler leading the way. How would you assess how he's progressed, especially in this game? Could you foresee him having an uptick of carries?

KIRK FERENTZ: We'll see. We'll see how the game plays out. Ivory is doing great, too. Has been injured a little bit. He had a little soreness a couple weeks ago. He's bounced back and doing really well.

Feel like we have two guys there, give us a good veteran punch. Both of those guys have played a lot of football, played good football. Next tier, Gavin and Leshon, younger guys, but we're encouraged by them, too. They do some good things. We'll see how it plays out.

Q. How important is the fullback position to your running game?

KIRK FERENTZ: Depends what personnel group we're in. We are trying to run out every personnel group we have. But Monte is a really good fullback, as good as we've had. It certainly helps when he's out there. He's been a little nicked up, too, as you might imagine. Fullbacks tend to get that way.

Hopefully this rest will help everybody, having a week off. The older guys not having contact hopefully will be good for everybody.

Q. You didn't mention Lachey. Is he back in the mix?

KIRK FERENTZ: I'm sorry. Yeah, he is. He practiced this week.

Q. At cornerback, it seemed like Hankins was bothered by a shoulder in that game.

KIRK FERENTZ: He's practicing, too. He and Roberts are our two corners.

Q. What is the prognosis with Riley?

KIRK FERENTZ: Again, it's week by week or day by day actually. He's gaining ground. We're optimistic. Hopefully next week, but there's no guarantees.

Q. Roberts and Hankins?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, this week. Unless something happens, hit a deer or something like that on the bus ride up. We did one year. I think it was coming home.

Q. Your freshmen wide receivers seem to have accelerated in their development. Do you feel as comfortable with them now as you do with your veterans who are in that high rotation?

KIRK FERENTZ: I'd say pretty close, yeah. They haven't hit the wall. Maybe it's coming. Hopefully not. But they've been running around, doing good things in practice, good things on the game field. We're encouraged by both those guys. They really have grown and done a lot of good things. Brody Brecht is back on the field now. Getting to

see him play football, which is good, coming off an injury.

Really happy with those guys. Playing pretty much five guys out there. We'll keep rotating them.

Q. When you look at Arland in particular, playing multiple receiver positions is not easy, especially someone at that age. How has he been able to do that? What kind of confidence do you have?

KIRK FERENTZ: Some guys just do it a little bit more easily than others. Other guys, especially younger guys, let's just keep them in this one spot, let them develop a comfort level, see if we can move them later.

We try to throw a lot at guys, gauge where they're at. He doesn't seem to be affected by it. Maybe part of that was he was a quarterback initially out of high school who ended up playing receiver, running back, all that stuff. Maybe he's used to it from what he did in high school.

Q. When you look at Keagan, seems to be mature beyond his years, very serious, pretty physical. What are some of the talents that he has at the X? How can that be used more frequently?

KIRK FERENTZ: I think you just kind of hit on it. It's hard to make him smile. He will every now and then. He's pretty serious about what he does. He's worked really hard at it.

Again, just hasn't been overwhelmed by what we've asked him to do. It's good. We came into that position, obviously one of the guys we thought would be able to, I'm not saying help this year, but Brody we recruited for that spot. At least it's given us some help maybe where we didn't expect it as much. That's been good. We'll keep pushing forward and see what he can do.

Q. You and the guys have talked about splitting the season into two. Now that we're actually here, how does this feel like the beginning of the season and what ways is it a little different?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, it was good to get back to work Wednesday. That was our first time on the field with everybody. That was good. It's like anything, especially after a loss, there's nothing that makes you feel much better. There's such a sour feeling till you get on the field and actually start not only thinking about moving forward but actually doing something to help move forward.

Wasn't real scientific. But it's the way our season fell out this year. Talked to our guys at the end of camp, it's a seven-week block. Let's see what we can do. We do get

credit. It's not like at the start of the year we won six straight last year, there's no credit or carryover. We actually have something in the bank right now so that's positive.

All that being said, all that matters is what we're going to do here moving forward. I think guys understand that. It was a good time to break that mentally. Now it's like running a five-lap race as opposed to seven. Five is a whole lot easier. This is like a 400, I guess. Believe me I never ran track in high school, but it's basically run as hard as you can for the whole race. That's where we're at now, full speed ahead and we'll see where we're at when it's all over.

Q. Considering how familiar you are with the Wisconsin program, does that heighten or raise your awareness of any surprises that they could throw at you this week compared to other teams?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, it's a little strange because there's a lot of continuity within both programs. In some ways, date yourself, think back when Pittsburgh and Baltimore were playing in the early 2000s. They pretty much knew what each other were going to do. In the NFL you play teams twice a year. That's really kind of a strange phenomenon, too. You really get to know people really well that way.

Again, just a ton of respect for what they've done since the early '90s when Barry took over. I think they got an idea of what we're going to do, we got an idea. Still there is that spy-versus-spy stuff. You don't know what you're going to start out thinking of each other. But it's probably going to boil down to playing clean football. If opportunities do present themselves, then you got to do something with them. If you can cash in on enough of them, you have a chance to win. If you don't, you're going to be the loser.

Again, that ball security thing is just huge, really huge. That was a big thing this past Saturday in their ballgame. That's so true in football, especially when two teams are pretty competitive against each other.

Q. Running back from Wisconsin, Allen, 17 years old, three straight hundred-yard games. Have you ever seen anything like this?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, Tony Dorsett, who is my age. I think he ran for a hundred plus every week his first year in college. Weighed about 165 at Pitt. That was 19, whatever it was, 73. It doesn't happen often. We just got done talking about Keagan's maturity. Certainly you can say the same thing about this young guy.

What's really interesting if you look at their depth chart from last year, the running back position last year versus this year, you got three new names. Obviously they did a really nice job, no slight against the players that were there last year, but they've really done a good job of addressing that position.

That's one thing, if you think about Wisconsin over the last 25-plus years, usually starts at the running back position. They've got somebody, you know who they are, or you soon thereafter learn who they are.

Q. Seems like these two teams, the players over the years, play so frequently, similar styles, there's almost an added excitement knowing it's going to be a physical battle. Do you get that sense? Is that something you ever express to them? Do they inherently know the mettle of their foe?

KIRK FERENTZ: Our guys?

Q. Yes.

KIRK FERENTZ: They know. Especially the guys that have played, they know. I can't imagine there's anybody bigger in the country, man for man, essential on the offensive line. We're probably at the other end of the spectrum, quite frankly size-wise. If you look at sizes of the offensive lines, we're probably in the bottom 10%. Everybody is big now.

Their guys are big, strong, and physical. They really try to block you. It's been that way. This will be the 23rd year I've got to witness that firsthand. You know going into it what it is.

Flip it over on defense, too. Their interior guys are big, their linebackers can play center. Probably bigger than Linderbaum. That's how they're wired, that's how they're built. It's worked really well for them.

I'm not saying they're the New York Giants defense in '86, but parallel. If you look at the size of the guys on those two units, big people. Super veteran on the back end. All those guys are like three-year starters. Kind of hard to find the weakness in there.

Q. Do you sense there's an added energy because of that physical nature?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, because you might get run out of the stadium if you're not ready to go (smiling). You know it's going to be a battle. Yeah, that's motivating because they're a tough football team. They always have been.

Q. I think Phil said Logan Jones is back. Is he in the mix at all?

KIRK FERENTZ: He's back working. Yeah, he's missed so much time. I don't want to keep going over that. Especially with linemen, he's a really good prospect. We're so hopeful he would be in the mix. When he had surgery, you miss so much time. Those 15 days of spring practice are really important, especially on the lines for building guys.

He's a really good prospect. We love having him out there. But it's just good to have him back out there. He's not quite there yet.

Q. Did you mention Ince, he was out last game?

KIRK FERENTZ: He's practicing right now. Fingers are crossed. Hopefully he's doing a little better. I think that week will help him a little bit.

Q. How big they are, especially on the offensive line, what do you foresee in terms of challenges or keys to stopping that rush offense? Does it help coming off a bye week that they are able to be fully rested?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, that will help certainly. If you're a fan watching, like I think they were credited for 10 throws Saturday, a lot of fans don't appreciate that.

But I think if you watch the film, if you understand the pressure that they put on you, because they're just coming at you, they come at you, come at you, all of a sudden one of those things... I'll fully admit, I'm not a great fan, TV fan. I was kind of doing some stuff at the counter. Purdue punted the ball down there, terrible field position. I put my head down, doing something. I pop back up, next thing you know it's on the 25 at the other end of the field. How did that happen? They hit a 70-yard run. I saw that on film. I didn't see it on TV. I'm trying to figure out how the hell did the ball get down there that fast? That's what happened.

My point is they run it for two, run it for three, then all of a sudden there goes that one, somebody doesn't fit where they're supposed to fit, these backs both find it really well. You got to tackle them, too. The next play, when they scored the touchdown, Purdue had it defended, they couldn't tackle the back, the guy is in the end zone. Two plays, 85, 90 yards, doesn't matter. That's the pressure they put on you. They love that game. They just love to make you feel that pressure. They're going to mix some pass in with it, too. You can't just sell out totally.

It's a different kind of pressure than, like, somebody just

throwing the ball every 23 seconds, one of those deals. That's hard, too. It's just a different way of trying to torture you, I guess.

Q. You've dodged overtimes this year. How about the Penn State thing last week?

KIRK FERENTZ: That was one of those things you couldn't take your eye off of. I did watch.

I had two prominent thoughts. I'm not so sure I buy this new rule change first of all. I'm not sure I liked what I was watching. Then the other thing I was amazed by, there were no commercial breaks. They went from here to there, down there, back and forth, like a tennis match. Those commercial breaks are excruciating. I don't know if it's as bad for you guys as it is for us.

That was kind of interesting. Those are my two observations.

Q. Did that seem like any way to decide a winner of a game?

KIRK FERENTZ: No, not for me. I haven't watched a hockey game in 10 years probably. Like the shootout stuff, I'm not a big fan of that. You play for an hour, you go back and forth. It's like shooting a free throw thing at the carnival or something, the state fair. You get a Kewpie doll. I'm not a big fan of that. I don't think anyone asked about that one either.

Q. That and election day.

KIRK FERENTZ: Save that one for next week.

Q. You don't have to take a day off next week, election day?

KIRK FERENTZ: I think we do.

Q. For local schools?

KIRK FERENTZ: I think we do. Dog catcher, tax collector, all that stuff. Pretty sure.

Q. Vote for Phil for dogcatcher?

KIRK FERENTZ: I like dogs. I wouldn't want to do that (smiling).

Q. How does that throw things off when you don't have that Tuesday to practice?

KIRK FERENTZ: We'll cross that bridge next week. I get

it. I know there's a presidential election. Thank God we're three years away from the next one. Yeah, we'll see next week. Hopefully we don't have to address it.

Q. Coach Leach down at Mississippi State despises candy corn. Are you in the same idea with that? What is your top three ranking for Halloween candy?

KIRK FERENTZ: I'm not that colorful. I mean, he's a fascinating guy. I highly recommend his book.

I'm thinking about Wisconsin's line right now. That ain't candy corn, I know that. We'll see what we can do.

Thank you.

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