

# University of Iowa Football

## Media Conference

Saturday, October 9, 2021

Iowa City, Iowa, USA

## Head Coach Kirk Ferentz

### Postgame Press Conference



**KIRK FERENTZ:** First and foremost, just really pleased for our team and it was a really good win for us. Certainly the guys had to work hard for it. And just really proud of our team.

It was a tough game. We knew that coming in. Knew that it would be. Penn State has got a great talent, great athleticism. They've been playing really good football. So just really proud. We got off to a tough start, slow start. Our guys just kept working, kept pushing through it.

Talk to our guys all the time. That's why they play 60 minutes. There's a clock out there. So it's all about trying to finish the game and do what we can the best we can.

Got off to a slow start I think pretty much on all phases. We weren't sharp defensively. Obviously weren't sharp offensively. I they were making it hard on us, reactive defensive. But I think everybody just kept working and pushing.

And to be behind like that and keep our foot on the gas I thought was really impressive. They're a good team. We've had tremendous respect for them. Continue to. They're a team that can make things happen pretty quickly if you're not careful. So, again, really happy about that.

Every week, the goals are really simple, to try to come out ahead on the score at the end of the week and then also to improve. And playing a game like that where it was tough, it was really gritty, that's going to be a good thing for us. I think that will serve us well down the road.

We'll look at the film tomorrow and see what it looks like, where the improvement is. But I felt like our tempo parts of the game was really good, really encouraging. I thought our offensive line grew a week ago. And they did some things today that were impressive. So, hopefully, we'll see continued growth there. And the tape will tell us where else we need to go to work as well.

Some obviously big plays in the game. I thought our defense -- I think we only got one sack. But, again, good

pressure. Same thing last week. We had no sacks, but the guys up front were affecting their play. The rush and obviously Jack hitting the quarterback was a big, big play, kind of like the bowl game two years ago. It was a good, clean hit, good aggressive play. And that's what happens when you let a guy come running in there like that.

And then offensively, Chuck, Charlie Jones' play on that touchdown was a really smart play. Great effort play, a smart play not putting the ball at risk. Keagan Johnson, young guy giving us a spark there. And then, obviously, Petras and Ragaini on that touchdown was really huge.

Lot of good efforts defensively up and down the board. Hankins making that stop on fourth down right in front of our bench. Just teasing, we may move him to linebacker. That was a good tackle where he just basically stopped the guy. That's really hard to do. Just emblematic. Got a pick on top of it. And then Shudak, great job with the field goals and then finish up with Tory.

It's ironic, Jason Baker was in the locker room. When we beat these guys in 2000, Jason was the MVP in my opinion. Just changing field position and what Tory did today with an assist to Terry Roberts and Ivory down there. Can't say enough about that. That impacted the game.

And then tying that in, the ball is down in there tight, and our fans did a great job. They were into the game. We knew they'd be ready to go at the start. They were more ready than we were. Just wanted to make sure our team understood that they can't play the game for us. They did a great job all the way through. What a great scene at the end. That's really special. That's what makes being in Kinnick special.

The only thing I'll top it off with. Think about this. Just step back for one second. You got the Slater family being honored, you've got Bob Stoops, Marshal Yanda out there. I'm not sure it can get any better. So it was just a really good day. And I want our team to enjoy this smartly but enjoy this tonight. They deserve that. Then we'll turn our attention to the next one tomorrow. I'll throw it out for questions.

**Q. You kind of touched on it, but the student section at the end of the game was chanting MVP.**



KIRK FERENTZ: They're smart football folks. Iowa football fans have always been smart. They know when to cheer. They've always appreciated defensively -- it's my 30 plus years here, which means they're smart because especially in this day and age, nobody really cares about defense. But they're smart. And then the special teams part too.

What a great week for Tory. It was his birthday I think Thursday. I don't think he's been home once. So it's tough. It's tough. Worry about other guys getting to ever go home, and he hasn't been home. So just an unbelievable young guy. So glad he's on our team.

**Q. Did anybody go over to Australia or did you get --**

KIRK FERENTZ: Lavar did. He was already committed to us. Lavar did it and sealed the deal or at least got to know him and his family a little bit.

**Q. You've got great punters, you've had place kickers, great gunners. Have you ever got a collection this good?**

KIRK FERENTZ: We didn't talk a lot about it coming in, at least publicly. But that's one thing I felt good about in August. There are a lot of things I didn't. But the fact, to your point, we were veteran at those positions, those critical positions. Gersonde hasn't done that before. And he's done a nice job all season long. And that's really important because if the placekicker doesn't have confidence in the holder and snapper, it's a tough deal. But Ryan's done a good job there. I know I said publicly we all felt like Shudak is a starter. He and Keith were just so close. And he's 28 years old. He's teaching in the engineering school -- I'm joking. He's still getting a master's. He may be teaching here eventually. So we all knew what he was. And then Tory just continues to get better.

And then Charlie. What we didn't know about Charlie was the kick return aspect. He was a great punt returner, but he's done a really good job with kick returns. And for my money, he's turned into a really good receiver too. That's great to see.

**Q. Kirk, how much did that touchdown pass get set up earlier in the game? In the first quarter play, you had a similar play where Spencer rolls out, hits a levels pass in the flat. Does that set up that Ragaini touchdown in your opinion?**

KIRK FERENTZ: It doesn't hurt. It's part of what we do. And the touchdown play is something we felt good about during the week. But these guys -- I don't know if we've played anybody that's brought more pressure than them.

They were 40, 50 percent anyway. But I'll be curious what the final number ends up being. You worry about that a little bit because it can get a little bit sticky. But just executed so well. And that's not an easy throw for Spencer. He did a great job. And Nico's been just so dependable for us.

**Q. People talk about complementary football. That's what they say a lot of times. But each unit made a major contribution to the victory today.**

KIRK FERENTZ: We're still, whatever, six games into it now. So these rankings are still kind of -- there's a lot to be decided. But, nonetheless, these were two good teams today. And it's true all the time for us, but especially in a game like this where, you know, the competition is about as good as it's going to get.

For us to have a chance, it sure helps if we're hitting and complementing all three. And I think that's what ended up happening today. So that was really huge. That's where I go back to -- I was teasing Jason Baker. He really changed field position in 2000. It was the same thing with Tory today. A little different, but he was really pinning them in there and making them go the long field.

**Q. You already brought up a 60 minute game. All your kids brought up 60 minute game. Was there any point today where your internal clock was going, okay?**

KIRK FERENTZ: I think it was about 6 something when we hit that touchdown, I think. Right? So that was good. My fear at that point was going down and getting the field goal and then having to come up with one at the end.

So, yeah, for sure. You're always kind of measuring that stuff and what have you. But we had pretty good confidence in our defense at that point too. Flashback to '04 on that one. Just kind of had that same feeling for us.

**Q. In some ways, Spencer is kind of like Ricky Stanzi. You don't know where things are going to go -- not to the other team, in the other direction.**

KIRK FERENTZ: He's a little better in avoiding those pick sixes.

**Q. He was like one of nine in the first quarter. Then he ends up having a second half that really helped spark the team. What pace has he grown into this? And seems like the team has a lot of confidence in him.**

KIRK FERENTZ: They do. I think we've had confidence in him even when it was a little bumpy a year ago. I know the outside world didn't share maybe as much. We get to see

these players day by day. And teammates get to see each other also. They know how invested he is. He's not a weak-minded guy. He's on the right track. That was a tough first -- whatever it was, one of nine? That was tough. It didn't feel so good on the sideline either.

I go back to last year, his best outing really was his worst outing. Started so poorly at Illinois and then coming back. That's what this game is about, especially if you're playing high-level competition. It's hard to just have things go the way you want or the way they go in practice everyday. At some point, you've got to figure out can you push through it. We're lucky. We've got a lot of guys that will do that.

**Q. Do you ever worry about patience with the team? Does it change year to year? Today you had a lot of drives get into Penn State territory and then end. How do you assess the patience of your team?**

KIRK FERENTZ: It's just football. I got torched for saying that in '14. But it is the way football is. There's ebb and flow. And, again, we weren't playing the Brookline Midgets. Those guys were pretty good.

So you just have to keep trying to punch and just see if you can find something maybe that will go for us. We were hunting and pecking a little bit in the running game. And things weren't going well for Spencer at all in that first quarter. He wasn't seeing things. It wasn't really happening.

But when you play tough competition -- I'm not saying it's to be expected, but sometimes it does happen. You've just got to work through it.

**Q. Do you teach patience? Or is it something you have to identify when you're recruiting?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah. I wish we could say we were 100 percent on that too. Some guys just do things better than others. It's always been that way. But I think the coaching part is for us to continue to explain to players it's not always going to be smooth or easy. I wish it would be. It would be great if it was.

Last week is a perfect example. None of us saw that coming. It worked out to be a game where you're comfortable in the fourth quarter. But that's so unusual, especially in conference play with this conference. They've just got to understand it's probably going to be tough. You better expect it to be tough. It's not great, but expect it to be tough. And sometimes you've got to just keep playing and hope something -- somebody sparks you or something good happens. And teams that do that, learn how to do that have a chance to be successful.

**Q. How important were the fans today?**

KIRK FERENTZ: They were so good from the start. And one of the points I made back on Monday with the team was that we knew we could count on that. Just absolutely knew we could count on that. But, again, it's still for the players' job to play the game. Fans would love to come out on the field. And they did afterward. I got a great escort. You talk about some good blocking there.

That's like the flip of it. We were on the road a couple of weeks ago in a tough environment. The flip here is that the fans aren't going to get it for us. They're not going to deliver it. They want to help you, but you've got to play. And our fans are so good. It goes back to 30 plus years of history. And they know when it's a big game too.

**Q. What is the emotion like for that celebration in the locker room?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Awesome. It's fun just to watch the guys. They're young. They let it go. And it's fun. So that's what they're supposed to do. It's fun.

**Q. You mentioned that sometimes fans don't get excited -- not your fans, but fans don't love defense. Is there any extra pride or sense of self having that identity in this era of college football?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah. When I was here in the '80s, we played pretty good defense. And I always got a kick out of Coach Fry, the white pants, the shades, scratch where it itches, exotics. All that stuff that he had. Go back to any big game, including Michigan where it was 12-10 or whatever. It was all about good defense, field position, not giving up big plays, and then trying to find a way.

So he was the all-time best at having people totally buffaloed on look over here and meanwhile he's doing that. We played pretty good defense. And Bob Stoops is one of those guys, he was just a tough-minded guy.

So it's just my experience in sports and watching, if you play defense, you've got a shot. No matter what sport. And if you don't play defense, I'll tell you, it's a little scary. And when we got here, one of the luckiest things ever in my life was Norm Parker so -- there it goes. That's the foundation right there.

**Q. So Dotson, 17 targets, 48 yards receiving and one punt return for one yard. I know you were really worried about him. And then on top of that, it may be easy for people to think you're facing a backup quarterback. Your defense delivered for you time and**

**time again.**

KIRK FERENTZ: Again, their quarterback was in for reasons, and that's part of the game. It's a hard game. So, yeah, we have great respect and still do for Dotson. He's a really good football player. Just watch him. He's really good. So to keep him contained and controlled, that's really good for us.

They did some tough things to us. Those little screens out there on the boundary and blocking up, put us in some tough situations. And, again, I don't think we started out at the kind of tempo we want. And they had it going. But our guys settled down a little bit and started playing.

**Q. How is Riley?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Hopefully good. We'll find out. I'll know more Monday probably. When I see you guys Tuesday, I'll have an answer. But optimistic at this point. But we'll see.

**Q. Kirk, a couple of weeks ago, you mentioned you were not concerned at that point about the offense's production. To see them execute a play like that late in the game with the game on the line, how big that was for you to see and for them as a unit?**

KIRK FERENTZ: That's -- to me, I'm a bad stat guy and always have been because I really don't care all that much about them other than the turnover takeaway thing. That is important. You can move the ball, but you've got to have it when it counts.

And today, they made it really hard on us, especially the ground game. At some point, you've got to step up and do something. And it was a great play call and great execution. But there were some really good things going on that maybe weren't as dramatic that were good to see in that second half. Just pleased with the way the guys responded. At half-time, nobody had their head down. They realized we were in a game. And going to go out and try to finish this thing off. And they did a really great job.

**Q. Nico Ragaini said in the second half he was just screaming his head off for the defense and trying to cheer for them. And Jack Koerner talked about how much these guys care about each other. Jack Campbell's talked about that a bunch this season. I know that's something every team has to have, but do you feel like this team is special in that way because they talk about it a lot?**

KIRK FERENTZ: We're only halfway home. But they're off to a really good start there. I've never seen really good teams that don't feel that way. No matter what sport even,

you know, NBA basketball or whatever. When you get that going, you've got a shot. And these guys do. That's genuine. The leadership we've gotten from our most experience guys, not just seniors but some guys that have played, that's given us a chance to be 6-0 right now.

**Q. These guys are good. Do you think they're really good? Are you starting to buy in a little more?**

KIRK FERENTZ: We've got a long way to go. And our approach to this whole thing has been seven weeks and then we'll figure out -- we'll assess things. It's not midterm, but during the bye week, you know.

So right now, it's just kind of been next one up. But we are going to enjoy this one. I promise you. And then we'll take a look at the next one starting tomorrow.

**Q. Do you think the seventh week will be hard?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, yeah. Absolutely. I think one of our hardest games was Colorado State a couple weeks ago.

**Q. But I don't mean performance as much as just getting on that even keel again?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah. You guys know the scores better than I do. Each and every week -- and unlike the '80s. There were some games in the '80s where it would be tough to figure out how to lose this one. But the last 23 years, to me, it seems like usually they're all tough. And as soon as you start thinking it might be a little bit easy, that's when the door slams in your face.

That's the trick. You've got to get everybody else to understand that. Because we've been there. And we've had games right out here not that long ago that were really disappointing. So it's not ancient history.

**Q. 2015 when you were reaching kind of this same point in the season, you allowed the team to kind of take a step back I think it was during the bye week.**

KIRK FERENTZ: During the bye week. Yeah.

**Q. Yeah. And kind of, okay, allow yourself to think big and then come back and then it's more back narrow. Do you anticipate that same type of mental approach if next week goes --**

KIRK FERENTZ: You're getting way ahead of me because we could be crying next week at this time or we could be really happy. We've just got to figure out how to have a good game next week. And then -- but I'm a great believer



-- it's just like tonight. I want our guys to feel good because they should. They fought like hell today. And they deserved the win.

It wasn't easy. There's nothing about easy. And they can feel really good about that. Celebrate a good block, celebrate a good tackle like Hankins made. Those are good things. That's how good football happens.

**Q. You've been through some of these types of moments going all the way back to '85 when you were an assistant, against Michigan, a couple years ago at Iowa State. What do you do during those crowds?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Tonight or on the field?

**Q. On the field?**

KIRK FERENTZ: I had good security. But in the old days, like when nobody cared if I got run over, I just got up against the wall and you just go right down and you're safe. That's the only way to get out. I did learn that whatever year it was, '80 something. Probably '81 I guess, right? Because we had a few of those. That's the only way. You've got to go out and shake hands and then try to navigate your way. That was tough.

**Q. Where does this rank for you over the years? I know it probably takes more time to really -- but where does it rank in your mind right now?**

KIRK FERENTZ: It's way too early to say that. But it was a really good win. There's no denying that. Everything about it. Not only the game. Our fans. It's always more fun to be at home and let them share in it.

But the way we did it. Really proud of our guys the way they did it. In that stamp collecting moment, we'll look back and rank, you know, like they do on surveys and stuff. Maybe we'll rank where things are. But I'm really happy for sure.

**Q. The guys talked about you in the locker room getting emotional and how much that means to them. What does that mean to you?**

KIRK FERENTZ: I got that gene from my old man. There's no denying it. No sense in it. But we're all enjoying this. We're all enjoying this. We enjoy each other and respect each other. So it's a pretty good deal. Pretty good deal. I don't know how good a team we are to that point, but I know we've got a really good group of guys. It's fun. Staff included. Everybody involved has been really great.

**Q. Offensive line, a lot of young players that**

**contributed a lot. What did you see in them?**

KIRK FERENTZ: I see continued growth. I'm anxious to see the film. Last Saturday it was fun to watch the film against Maryland because you saw that.

One highlight for me today, I saw DeJong about five yards down the field mixing it up with one of their marquee guys. I'm glad to see a walkon from Pella not backing down from some guy who's a celebrity player. It was just really good.

Our guys are competing. If they start believing in themselves a little big like that. It's tough for younger guys, especially on the interior where it's really physical. But if we can get those guys believing a little bit and start thinking maybe they can do some things, there's a lot of room for growth. I'm encouraged by that.