

University of Iowa Football

Media Conference

Saturday, November 13, 2021

Iowa City, Iowa, USA

Kirk Ferentz

Postgame Press Conference



Iowa 27-Minnesota 22.

COACH FERENTZ: Certainly welcome, everybody. Just sitting here thinking, the '81 team, it's so good to have them here, the Fry family, have them here with us, and it's been great to have a chance to interact a little bit. Thinking about having a guy like Andre Tippett with us yesterday. He was kind enough to come out to practice and visit with the team.

First of all, one of the things I explained to our players, we throw these terms around so easily. Hall of Fame or All-conference and all that stuff. This guy is a two-time Hall of Fame player. Both levels, college and the NFL. There's so many outstanding players that never make that mark, so it's fantastic. He is a Hall of Fame person, too.

Where I'm going with this whole thing, the one thing he shared with our team yesterday was just about the grit and resilience of the '81 ball club, and that's how I feel about tonight. Today the guys did a heck of a job. Obviously, we're really happy to get the win, but we had to earn this. The guys worked hard. Each and every week it's all about improvement, trying to get better and moving forward, and our guys did a great job of that this week. We had a good week of practice, preparation. Got back late last Saturday night, and the guys pushed forward and did a heck of a job. Really proud of them that way.

They prepared, competed, and Minnesota is a veteran football team. I didn't really emphasize that on Tuesday. I didn't want to psych any of our guys out, but if you look at how many starts they have offensively up front, the quarterback, that one receiver is a very experienced guy. They have a lot of guys on defense that have played, too. We have great respect for them.

We knew it would be a tough game, tough assignment, and they did a good job of controlling the football. They ran it what felt like was 400 yards. When we had opportunities, we capitalized and made some big plays. Protected the ball for the most part pretty well, and offensively drove it, hit a big pass play to Charlie. Keagan did just a fantastic

job of making more than something out of more than nothing really. Then the blocked field goal was huge. Certainly a big play, and then Tory at the end with two punts to put them -- gave them the start on the 90-yard field to go.

All those things are important if you are going to win, and these games are physical, they're tough. That's what you would expect in this conference. You expect it in November. Again, just proud of our guys. Great to move to eight wins, and it's the best we could do this week, and the guys did a great job of that, and certainly great to have Floyd back in our building for another year.

Just happy about all those things. We're going to enjoy this win for sure. We'll go back and look at it tomorrow, learn from it tomorrow and hopefully have a better week of practice than last week. Last but not least, certainly just want to thank our fans. It was another great environment in Kinnick, and they really help bring us home, so appreciate that.

A special thanks to the military, all the military folks that were here, those that follow our team and certainly great to have the F-35 pilots here, too. That was a special treat for us, and they got to visit with the team. Appreciate them taking time and having an interest, too. Those guys are Iowa natives. That helps.

It's all good. Fire away. You can't bring me down tonight, try as you may. Fire away (Laughter).

Q. What was the strategy when you got the ball at the 3-yard line late in the game?

COACH FERENTZ: They would have, if we lost, I know that. Believe me, I had that thought at the time. There are two ways to go. You try to go score right now, which they would have been happy with. And then the other thing we wanted to burn a little clock, so, it's a chance -- it's five points or it's whatever it would have been. It felt like our defense would be okay with the time that they got back when they got the ball back. 44 seconds. Felt like we would be fine, so we felt you had two choices. We thought that was the smartest.

We were not planning on losing three yards on that one run play, but that's the way that worked out. Caleb just



stepped in there and did a great job.

Q. Your defense was on the field for 40 minutes. Yet, at the end of the game as gassed as they probably were, they still came up with two huge sacks. VanValkenburg and Evans at the end. What does it say about their resilience to be able to weather 40 minutes of pounding like that and still come up with those big plays?

COACH FERENTZ: Go right back to what Tip said. Great resilience, and the facts are they had their way with us in that first half. They were really working us. They did some themes schematically that they don't normally do or at least don't feature, and they clearly had a good plan there. It took us a while to adjust to that. Not only schematically, but we weren't playing some of the blocks very well. It's tough because they're big and they're strong and they're physical, so they were getting us turned a little bit and creating creases and those backs do a good job of finding it. A lot of credit to them.

I do think we tweaked a couple of things, but more importantly, we just played better in the second half and played a little stronger. I thought we got stronger as the game went on against a team that's really big and physical and veteran. I'm really proud of our guys. I thought they responded. Then, regarding Zach VanValkenburg and Joe Evans, they're trying to get them in that situation, which we didn't have them there very much, and we finally got that, and it was almost like watching slow motion to watch Valk come inside on that stunt, and then the rest of the game they had the back and the tackle double. It was good to get to that point finally. That was one of our goals.

Q. Were you angry about the chop block -- do you think it was a chop block, or were you just mad at the play, the flag being picked up?

COACH FERENTZ: I was upset the flag there was and then it got picked up. I'll say this, I really appreciate the candidness of the official, and I appreciate him coming over and telling me what he saw, what he thought he saw, and the decision that was made. You can deal with the honest truth, and I really do appreciate it. We have good officials in this league. Although the reviews, some of the spots I got to see. Not sure about that.

Q. A couple of your stand-out players in this game were in here earlier. Charlie Jones and VanValkenburg. You didn't go to them. They came to you, basically. You got any observations about that, about recruiting and how sometimes it's the flip-flop that works?

COACH FERENTZ: We've had a million players -- million is an exaggeration. A lot of players that came through the program that were maybe lower level guys, according to everybody when they came out, and players change. It's like our team. Our team has grown. I felt like we took a step this week. I'll go back to last week. Your starting quarterback can't go, and somebody steps in. You're on the road playing a team that's tough and gritty, but, it's funny. And I'll go back to Jack Heflin, too. There's another guy that had a nice career at Northern and came over and fit in well with us, and I'll say the same thing about Charlie Jones and Zach VanValkenburg.

The thing about Zach, it's hard to evaluate looking at the Division II film, but the one thing about him, he went hard, and he is a smart, mature guy. You feel like if you get a little time, maybe this guy can grow into something. He has.

And then Charlie, to me was a real wild card. He almost kind of annoyed me earlier when he got here, and he knows this. Some idiosyncrasies, and I'm sure he feels the same about me. You see him in live action, once you get to live action -- and we don't practice kicking live -- we knew pretty quickly last year that, boy, this guy has great judgment fielding balls. He is reckless and just daring on the return part of it.

The other part he has really developed into a good receiver, as we saw today. That's a real credit to him. He has worked really hard at that and got no problem with that. Love players like that, and that's certainly how he is. He does a lot of really good things.

Q. Since you set up it, how is Spencer doing?

COACH FERENTZ: Hopefully better. I think we're gaining ground. It's going a little slower than maybe we thought, but one thing I've learned about medicine, I'm certainly not an expert. One thing I've learned about it sitting through medical meetings through 23 years, you can't predict everything and can't gauge things. We'll continue to take it day by day, and the good news is I feel like we got two quarterbacks now that we have faith and trust in.

Q. What did you see from Alex today in his first career start?

COACH FERENTZ: Same thing. I don't know if anybody in the staff made it a big deal, but we just all acted like it's his turn, it's his time. He is the starter this week, and he is a pretty even-keel, as you have probably seen. I thought he did a really good job. He made some good throws. Would have been nice if we could have hit that last one to Arland Bruce down there, but we'll see it on tape. Good

decisions. The ball security part, played clean football. We had the one with Nico Ragaini trying to do a little too much, but in these kinds of football games, those things are all big, and we don't take them for granted. We all have a lot of confidence because he prepares hard and works hard and he really cares.

Q. What's the next step for him in his development?

COACH FERENTZ: Just keep playing and keep growing. Like every guy out there. There's no specific thing that he is lacking, other than experience.

Q. You guys only had the ball for 20 minutes, but Alex didn't take a sack today. Your offensive line probably more consistent as probably they've been this season. Just kind of evaluate what you saw, how your offense --

COACH FERENTZ: Those 72-yard plays kill you. They kill your possession time, but -- I'm joking. Actually, I came off the field Wednesday feeling good about the way we had practiced for three straight days, and almost to the point where I didn't want to watch a practice tape because I figured I would find some things to shoot holes in, but I felt like our guys were gaining some ground. Especially up front. It was a good day. We can't practice in pads as much as you would like this time of year. It just isn't realistic. I was hoping that would show up today, and I think it did. They competed hard.

We've got things to work on, but, again, you lose your left tackle last week too, so all of a sudden, guys just keep playing, they're filling in. I think we're making progress, but it's going to be -- we're not going to -- I don't think we'll arrive this year, actually. Maybe if we play in January we'll arrive then. See what happens.

Q. You got clipped on the 68-yard pass play. The defense came back right away, two-point conversion, and then the rest of the game the way they played.

COACH FERENTZ: I thought they really grew as the game went on. The guys did a great job, and, again, going back to that last situation, we had confidence if we put him back out there with a five-point lead we would be okay. Put a lot of pressure on Minnesota to score. There's a big difference between a field goal and getting in the end zone and then we don't want to give them too much clock.

Those on-side kicks, I hate those. Anyway, it all worked out. I was proud of the defense because they could have caved in. It was a tough game for them.

Q. You took a lot of shots down the field today.

Probably more than usual. Was that just part of the strategy or the way that they were covering your receivers?

COACH FERENTZ: It's part of the plan during the week. The one thing you never know is what are they going to do Saturday because people change up a lot. You are never quite sure. The big play to Charlie, it was one that we were kind of tracking what they were doing on first downs, and we figured, hey, it might be time to take a shot, and luckily, it was there. It was a good job by both Alex and Charlie working up there.

Q. Talking about Keagan, to be able to break a tackle the way he did. We have a very experienced lineman being one of the two guys that was there to hit him, and he is able to pull away from that. He did it with Penn State, too. What is it about him that makes him able to make those types of plays?

COACH FERENTZ: It takes some strength. The bigger thing is it just takes a guy who is really competitive. You mentioned the Penn State one today; Arland last week on that around, he wasn't going to get tackled. You can see why we've been so impressed with those guys because they just act like football players. I would love to tell you we coached that, but we're trying to coach everybody to do that. Watching that play on the replay board -- I couldn't see from the sideline, but watching from the replay board, it was impressive. A great effort. That's one guy just making a great effort, and sometimes it takes that.

Q. Off of that question, how impressed are you with Keagan's ability as a true freshman to develop into one of these key targets and a prominent offensive player on this team?

COACH FERENTZ: We're playing some freshmen that I'm not sure we did it by design or do it by design, but those two guys, since they've gotten here have really acted like they belong, he and Arland. They play a position where you have a little better chance, I think, of competing with older guys. I can't say enough about Connor Colby playing in there at guard. I haven't seen tonight's film, but he is working at it, getting better.

The thing you are impressed with him, he is a flat line guy. Not in a negative way. There's not a lot of peaks and valleys. He just shows up and keeps working. I can tell you, he is mentally tough. He has proven that already playing with some nicks and all that kind of stuff.

Our whole team, it's kind of like a divide. We got a good veteran group, and they're doing a really good job of leading, but then we got a lot of guys that haven't played a

lot. We're 10 games into it, so that's certainly a little different, but we don't have -- if you look at our roster, the experience compared to the team we played tonight, there's a big, big difference, and that's encouraging to me. I can tell you that.

I do think about that a lot, and that's one of the reasons I think this team is going to improve if we keep our focus where it needs to be, and we got to practice well, but the older guys are helping us with that focus part of it, and the practice part.

Q. Do you guys talk about first place? There are only two weeks left.

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, we talk about that. Yes and no. We went through a two-game losing streak there, and at that point it's about how we have to get back up on our feet, and really we're cognizant. I talk to the guys about November football just in general. One of three things that are happening: You are ascending, tanking, or just kind of like getting through it.

In a lot of conferences, this is where things get decided. In the NFL, it's usually December. What are you going to do to hit the gas pedal? It's a tricky dynamic because you can't practice like you do in August, so you're navigating that and navigating injuries, mental state of guys, all those kinds of things. I go back to the leadership. I think that's where things show. We've had two good weeks now this month.

I'll go back to the '81 team. We were 5-1. We were everybody's darlings, for obvious reasons. It was a pretty good start after two decades of futility, and then we lost two games, and I remember those feelings. You remember losses more than you do wins, and it was Illinois and Minnesota. Minnesota got the ball rolling here, and then Illinois. Then we came back and beat Purdue here, and ended up running the table in November.

I'm not worried. I'm worried about it, but I'm not saying we're going to run the table or end up in Pasadena, but it's possible, I guess, right? I know this. We have to try to win nine first. The first thing we have to do is win nine, and sure would be good if we did it next week.

Q. Padilla had three touchdowns, nine yards per attempt. Played pretty well. Spencer's injured. Is it safe to say he is your guy for Illinois next week?

COACH FERENTZ: We'll see what happens in practice. I don't know. Spencer couldn't have thrown it today. We would have maybe used him if it was a four-minute situation, that type of thing, just to manage things, but we'll

see what happens next week.

Again, I feel good. We have two good quarterbacks. I think all of us trust at least everybody internally we all trust both of them.

Q. It's not very often that you give up 200 yards rushing in three quarters to two freshmen. What went wrong there?

COACH FERENTZ: They had some good schematic things that we had to really try to adjust to, and then, you know, a lot of times it's about players, too. They have good players. These guys run the ball.

Last week they fell behind. That took them out of their comfort zone a little bit. Today the game was close enough all the way. They're able to do what they want to do, and they're pretty damn good at it, quite frankly. A lot of respect for them, but, again, I'm proud of the way our guys improved as the game went on, especially in that fourth quarter. We bowed up when we had to and got some stops.

Nobody wants to give up 180 yards rushing. At least I can tell you we don't. That's not the neighborhood we want to live in, but proud of the way guys responded, and it's ultimately about finding a way to be successful. If it takes a punt return, blocked punt, you know, whatever. That's what it takes. There were two great punts to put them down there. That's the beauty of team football, and it's week-to-week, and you play a team like this, these guys are probably going to run the ball against most anybody.

That fourth down play they had, I mean, you know, I'm not an expert, but that was Auburn in the Outback Bowl two years ago. Same damn play. At least the same situation. Shame on us there, but that gives us something to work on and hopefully we'll be ready to go."

FastScripts by ASAP Sports