

University of Iowa Football

Media Conference

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Kirk Ferentz

Press Conference



COACH FERENTZ: Couple thoughts about last weekend and the week coming up. Before that I'll kind of veer off for a second. Coach O'Keefe starts his meetings with a moment in history. I'm going to give you a points to ponder item here today.

A couple years ago the NCAA passed a rule that basically said you can't start any activities until 6 a.m., which I think is a good rule for student-athletes. No question about that.

Still trying to figure out, we have NCAA drug testing, everybody goes through that. That's not a surprise to anybody.

But we had more than a handful of athletes that had to be here at 5:30 a.m. today to have an NCAA drug test. I'm trying to find the logic in there. I'm sure there is somewhere if you can explain it to me after last year's waiver process, good luck on that one.

The other thing it's a random test. And I think 22 athletes tested. 16 were in a room two-deep. That's an interesting random definition for me, too.

Anyway, just start with that. Things to ponder. Things to get you distracted from what you're trying to do. Seems like we have something every week.

Anyway, back to last week. First and foremost, it was good to get the win. Our football team needed to experience some success. And have a good locker room, certainly. Really happy about that.

It's never easy against Northwestern, home or away. They're a tough team. Have been forever. And Saturday is no different. It's challenging. Certainly in the fourth quarter. And our guys fought to the end as did their team.

Happy for our guys. I think the tape reflected some improvement. Glad to see that. Certainly we got plenty of room to continue to improve. And that's the task in front of us right now.

And it's important for us moving forward. Certainly going to be important for us this week as we look at Minnesota coming to town here.

Just in general, we always talk to our guys about November football. Just how important it is and that really is where teams get defined. That's what they get remembered by typically.

You look across our conference and really college football. There's a lot of teams right now competing for meaningful positions in conference races, all that kind of stuff.

And I've said it repeatedly, not that anybody cares, but preseason polls don't mean a lot. This is where things get sifted out and defined themselves.

There's plenty of opportunity out there for us. Plenty of opportunity for a lot of teams in our conference. It will be interesting to watch see what happens over the next couple of weeks for sure. For us it's pretty easy. Our focus has to be in what's in front of us three tough competitive games in front of us. It leads into this week certainly with Minnesota coming to town.

Captain-wise for the game. We have the same guys as last week. Tyler Linderbaum, Matt Hankins, Jack Koerner, Jack Campbell. They'll be out there. Wrote down a depth chart Sunday night based on where our team was at.

If we were playing tomorrow, Petras, Richmond, and Roberts would not be playing. Riley has a good chance to play and we'll see how the week plays out. But those are probably the four most notable injuries at this point. We'll see where that all goes.

Regarding Minnesota, they're a tough football team. A good football team. They're playing hard for Coach Fleck and his staff. No big surprise. A lot of veteran players there. As I look at their team, a couple of thoughts. They got off to a challenging start. They were 2-2 at one point. Lost if not the best running back in the conference one of the best running backs in the conference.

Certainly, a real leader on their football team. Yet they played through that and came back and have won four out of five since that time. And played good football. They're a big physical team, both sides of the football. Quarterback



is one of the most experienced and dangerous quarterbacks in our conference. Really good player.

They run the ball extremely well. Got some talented receivers. Defensively, and this is true of their whole team. They have a real identity. They know who they are what they are and how they do things. Defensively, that's very clear they're very veteran, well-coached and know their scheme inside and out and do a great job on special teams.

It's going to be a real challenge for us. We'll have to do everything we can to be ready for it on Saturday. Obviously, we are excited to be back at home after being gone for a while.

It feels like a month. That's going to be great. And on a side, it's fantastic that the '81 team will be able to be recognized and have a reunion. Really neat that timed up where Andre could be back. Andre going into the College Football Hall of Fame. The thing about that one of his teammate, Bob Stoops, few years back, two guys going into the College Football Hall of Fame. That's a pretty cool thing.

Obviously Coach Fry, with the timing of his passing, the pandemic, great to have his family back here, too. That will be special, too. For Hawkeye fans to be able to recognize all those tremendous people. I think that's a neat thing.

Lucas Moore is our honorary captain of this week from Fort Dodge. And Lucas had open heart surgery three months of age. And is just doing great now. I understand he plays the drums. Big sports fan. It will be great to have him with us on Saturday as well.

Q. How is Spencer feeling and has he been able to practice at all?

COACH FERENTZ: Our strategy really has been to rest him. We'll see what he can do tomorrow and see how he looks. He's feeling pretty well. It's a matter of throwing the ball effectively and that ultimately was the decision Saturday.

It was real clear on that last throw just couldn't get the zip on it that he needs to. Medically, he's clear to play. If that makes sense. That's how every decision gets made. There's a medical component. And then the rest of it is can a player play effectively. For a quarterback if you can't throw it effectively it's tough.

We'll see tomorrow. All of us are the mindset that Alex will play and we'll see where it all takes us from there. But

Spencer's done a great job. Great leader. Team-first guy and has a really good resumé.

Q. Medically, Petras can play but would he be the No. 2 quarterbacks on Saturday, or is Hogan the 2 until you find out more about the Spencer?

COACH FERENTZ: He has to be. Because right now Spencer is not practicing. Deuce has to be ready. And that's his task. And it's pretty simple. The medical part of it or at least what guys can do and can't do dictates what we're going to do.

We have to prepare mentally. Alex is going to be the starter and then Deuce will back him up and we'll see what we can do with Spencer.

Q. You haven't been in this situation very often. Not since really Owen Watts and Stanzi went down in '09. This is only the second time. What are your thoughts about Deuce Hogan now moving into that role as the No. 2 because things can happen and he might get thrown in there?

COACH FERENTZ: Absolutely. It's probably the biggest gap. The advantage of being 2 you get a lot of work during the course of the week. Hard to practice three quarterbacks. NFL teams talk about it all the time. NFL, it's hard to practice your 2 guy unless your 1 guy has played in the league 20 years and he doesn't need quite as much work.

It's a challenge. He's been here for a while paying attention and watching he's gotten some work but not as much as Alex got. Alex is much more prepared to go in.

Q. In terms of the offensive line, when you went back looked at the tape, what good signs did you see from them, progression in that game, maybe the pass game before that?

COACH FERENTZ: It's hard to articulate line play, especially I've always had a hard time. But you can see by the way they're playing, the tempo, the confidence, aggressiveness, those two things usually go hand in hand. Just a little bit better on little details. Techniques. Those types of things.

But we've got plenty of room for growth. And I think it's pretty obvious you've got a guy who is just playing for Kennedy a year ago, playing right guard. He has a lot of room for growth. I love his attitude and the way he works but that's kind of the nature of the beast. That's where these days in between the games are so important to have a chance to work and I'm guessing we're like most teams.

Everybody has challenges and hardships. Everybody has players that are out because of injury or playing less than 100 percent.

So I imagine most people are like us. We kind of cut back our times contact, all those sorts of things. It's an even bigger challenge for the players to be honed in on the little technique things and little detail things that make them better players. Would be easier if we went out in pads four times a week and go to work but you can't do that it's not realistic if you want to play Saturday.

Those are the challenges. And the challenge there it's easier for a more mature player to understand how to practice without contact versus the younger guy. But that's the situation we're in right now. I think the guys are growing.

We're seeing that. And then all the other things you're trying to do is match up against your opponent what their scheme may be. You have all those things going on at once.

The better we can run the race the better off we'll be this Saturday and hopefully the one after that and the one after that.

Q. With Mason being injured, Jack Plumb moves up to starting tackle. Tyler Elsbury on the two deep, what have you seen from him to be able to --

COACH FERENTZ: He's been practicing all along like Deuce. He's getting better. He's been there a couple of years now.

He understands what he's doing. It's continual growth. Continuing to increase your tempo. The pace you play at, those kinds of things. Part of that is confidence. Part is repetition and getting more settled in.

But it's next man in. It's like we're not the only ones. I referenced Minnesota took a hit right off the bat. And those are hard. They're hard on our football team. They put pressure on your football team or you have pressure points.

Part of the challenge is how well can you run that race. We are getting stretched a little bit thin. We don't need much more challenge there.

Q. Is Cody Ince back this week, and who is behind Elsbury at that point, at tackle, would you look at Cody there?

COACH FERENTZ: He's a possibility, absolutely. All

those guys are. Elsbury, Cody. Colby could slide out. You hate to take a guy who is in his first year playing and move him around too much. Didn't seem to have a problem in camp. Keep all options open until we get this thing settled down a little bit.

But Cody at least seems to be, last week it was kind of dicey but right now, based on today, looks like he's ready to go.

Q. Looked like Mason got kind of rolled up behind his knee, his left knee or whatever. Is he a week-to-week thing now?

COACH FERENTZ: It is. And you are right on the money. I don't know if those braces work or not. But we've had two of them now, Linderbaum had one earlier in the year earlier where the braces are trashed. And the guys walked away and are walking now.

So I don't know if they work or not but I'd say yes. Especially in those kinds of situations. So, yeah, it's day-by-day. But it could have been a lot worse. You saw it on film. You're lucky to walk away from one of those.

Q. Sounds like Riley Moss is back to practice. How is he looking?

COACH FERENTZ: Just seeing him out there is good. It's really good. Nice sight. We'll take anybody back we can get, especially a veteran player like him.

But he's feeling pretty good right now. Unless we hit a pothole along the way he'll be full throttle Saturday. Anytime you're getting guys back that's a helpful thing especially veteran players like Riley. He was playing at a high level.

Mason was. Credit to Jermari for the way he's stepped in, because a couple weeks ago he was our fourth guy down the list and stepped in and did a really nice job. Got caught peeking a little bit the other night but, quite frankly, I thought that would happen sooner than it did. Good life lesson for him and he'll move on. But this is hopefully going to help him in moving his career forward too.

Q. I know you like baseball analogies. A lot of times top prospect pitchers, they like to start them out on the road. Not having that home pressure, that type of thing. But now Alex comes here for his first start at home. What's the mentality, how does the mentality change, I guess?

COACH FERENTZ: I'm laughing. You're way ahead of me right now. I like the analogy. But it's like what choice do

we have here? What choice does Alex have? He's got to be ready to go.

I can't say enough about Spencer, what he's done this year and last year, the way he goes about his business. I can echo that about Alex. It's a good room. Those guys are really serious. Spencer and Alex are together a lot. You'll see them out here eating together a lot. They spend a lot of time together.

I just can't say enough about the way Alex just went in and performed. And I'm not a quarterback guru or any of that stuff but you watch players and it made you feel like offense, it's no big deal he's ready to go. This is the opportunity he wanted.

Not in the circumstances, but hey, it's time to get in there and play and he did. Didn't think much about it. Based on what I've seen for two days he's handling himself the way he does. I don't want to call him low-key but he's a steady even-keeled person, it helps in that position certainly.

Q. Is that something you expected from Alex? Did he exceed your expectations with his poise how ready he was?

COACH FERENTZ: You just hope that guys are going to step up do a good job. Had no reason to think he wouldn't. But still players have to do it. They are the ones out there playing the games.

But I thought he just kept a real clear head and kept a real good demeanor about him and really executed things pretty well for us.

And there's no way to learn, better way to learn than being thrown into a game. That's how you learn. It's like driving a car in some ways. At some point you have to get on the highway or drive in the city.

It's all positive. But there's going to be ups and downs like every player but just really happy. He's practicing well right now.

Q. What are your thoughts on the way your defensive line and your run defense in general, because you're going against an offensive line that's older than probably a third of the NFL offensive lines?

COACH FERENTZ: These guys are huge.

But the right tackle has been there forever. He's a veteran guy and a good player. You talk about leverage being important. It's going to be critical this week because obviously we can't match them size-wise.

So for us to understand pad level and all those kinds of things and being where we're supposed to be and hoping we can fill with our linebackers and DBs, it's going to be critical, because they put a lot of pressure on you.

Some formations where they get real big. Put a couple extra linemen in there, that type of thing. So communication starts there, being where you've got to be. And then trying not to get knocked off the ball, too.

A lot of challenges and they've got backs that run hard. They have backs that run hard and they're working down the depth chart but those guys have been impressive.

Q. I know you guys took a look at Irving, Bucky Irving during the recruiting process. And he seems to be throwing guys in there and they're all producing. What do you think of him?

COACH FERENTZ: I have to tell you, I'll go back when Coach Kill was here. Seems like whoever the next guy was, whoever was out there, 15, couple guys, kid from Georgia. Where did these guys come from. They're good. Whoever they put in there seems to be good. And the streak continues. It's just like one of those movies that keeps rolling over and over and over.

Their line is different now and their system's a little different, but a lot of parallels between the way they attack.

Q. After Spencer's 100 percent, do you still see Alex competing for the starting spot?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, Alex is helping himself or helped himself Saturday. So the good news as we stand here today, which is really premature. We have two guys that have played pretty well. We know more now than we did a week ago. That's for sure. And I'd love to have both guys healthy, ready to go. See where it all goes here.

Q. What do you attribute kind of the even-keel level mentality that you have had as a coach for 40 years or whatever; is there a mentor?

COACH FERENTZ: Kodak moment. I guess we're all wired the way we're wired, probably, to some degree. I remember distinctly, can't give you the year, it was probably '93. I tend to live and die with every play and have done that and that's not a real healthy way to go about this.

Ozzie Newsome was like Mr. Freeze and I asked him, one time, I said how do you just stand there, because I know what I was feeling internally.

His message to me was, you're not going to survive in this league if you're riding the wave every play. There's a lot of wisdom in that.

That's a guy who had a great career, not a good career, Hall of Fame career. Hall of Fame career as a general manager in my mind. He is one of the best in the game at what he did there as a GM.

But time teaches you. And again kind of goes back to, it's like I told our team, just Friday night, if we've prepared well, then go to bed with confidence. If you haven't, then it's like taking a test; you know you might be in trouble.

You prepare as well as you can. And realize, too, this is a really competitive endeavor that we're all participating in. And just look at league records right now. There's a lot of good teams. As my wife always tells me, half the teams win, half the teams lose. You don't want to hear that crap, but it's part of the deal.

And guys speak, if you can't handle disappointment, you probably ought to find a new job, because if you're teaching kids or coaching kids or parenting, you know, good luck. Good luck having a perfect record on that one. It doesn't happen too often.

Q. I was looking at Padilla's bio in the media guide. Back in 2017 in high school, said he won the Comeback Player of the Year Award. Do you know anything about that? Was he injured?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't remember that detail. I remember doing the home visit, what a great family. Dad played at Colorado State. And I think he was a center, which I obviously have an affinity for that. But just a really good family. Alex had a really nice career.

Was clearly a leader in the program for him. It's a good program that he played in. So that's a good question. I'll have to ask him that one.

Q. Good day for your running backs last Saturday. What are your thoughts on the first game of Tyler and Gavin in the whole game, how they complement each other and what challenges Minnesota provides in terms of running the ball?

COACH FERENTZ: I didn't mention Ivory, he's day to day too. But it's a little delicate there because it is a foot issue. It's tough for a running back.

But Gavin did a really nice job stepping in there. It's kind of like the fourth-and-two we ran out here two months ago, or

month and a half ago. Gavin is kind of a quiet reserved guy, at least around us. But he plays strong and steady. He's really a detail guy. He's kind of older than he is chronologically. Plays older. Really mature player.

He's a different type of runner than Tyler. That does give us a good balance there.

I am really pleased with what we've seen. We're high on Leshon too. Thought he might get some opportunities Saturday. Didn't work out that way. But I think we have three guys right there that are on the right path right now and certainly it was good to get Tyler going a little bit.

It's going to help us, especially in November in the Big Ten.

Q. You were working on the other side of the ball. Any memories of Tippett?

COACH FERENTZ: Are you kidding me? I always tell the story, but I came from the University of Pittsburgh. My first experience in Division I football. And that was not a good team, it was one of the great college teams.

Somehow we coached it down to an 11-1 team. It was unbelievable. You get Marino. Trocano, two NFL quarterbacks, 1-2 punch. Trocano was actually the safety. Marino got hurt and Trocano came over and started, won six, seven games, won them all. And then he played for Browns as a quarterback, I believe.

Great player. Two Hall of Fame offensive linemen. I don't think Fralic is in there, right? Fralic was a year later.

Defensive front five. Ricky Jackson, greatest college players probably ever. And three interior guys all played in the NFL. Really stacked team.

And I think we had 12 guys drafted that year. And maybe three first-round, 17 guys in camp. I remember that number exactly. So five free agents plus 12, came here in '81 and the talent wasn't quite the same.

So it was my second stop in major college football and a little disparity with the talent level. But it dawned on me so quickly when I got here.

One thing that was very obvious that team was tired of losing. They were tired of losing. They were motivated. They were together. And the coaching staff was really cohesive.

Coach Fry, never met anybody like him in my life. What a magical experience that was. Having no idea what would happen. How could you and why would you?

To your point, one guy that stood out was Andre Tippett. Who is that guy? My story, three weeks after I'm on the job here two weeks, maybe a week, two guys come to my door at night. It's Andre Tippett and Brad Webb. You have Andre, an NFL Hall of Famer, college football Hall of Fame football player, and Brad who looks more like me. But these are our two captains on defense.

Brad was a walk-on, ended up being a great player. Law school, whole nine yards. Anyway, they were knocking on the door. They wanted to meet me or say hello, wanted to know if I had any film. They knew I had been at Pitt, they wanted to look at Ricky Jackson and Hugh Green.

They wanted to get better. Andre Tippett looking at somebody else's film, how do I get better and improve. You wonder why winners are winners. That's a pretty good illustration of both guys.

They didn't play for me, blew me off, they wanted the tape, that's all they wanted. They got what they wanted. I'm glad because those guys played and that was a salty defense. We couldn't run very well, but we were a salty, tough defense.

Q. After a couple of quieter days for the secondary, three interceptions, how helpful to have that pass rush to force some bad throws?

COACH FERENTZ: It's huge. Turnovers are such a big part of the game. Again November football, they're important all the time. It's one step that counts. November really critical. So it's one thing you've got to protect the football. We did a good job of that and avoiding stupid penalties.

I think we did okay there. But takeaways are such a good thing. Such a good thing. I say we didn't turn one over, we had a punt blocked. That's like a turnover times three sometimes. But defense put the fire out.

Those takeaways are really big. And just great to see it.

Q. What do you think of the defense or the secondary calling themselves "The Doughboys"?

COACH FERENTZ: I'm all for it. I don't know what it means but I'm all for it. Dough, like that kind of dough, turnovers. I think that's what it means.

Q. Money.

COACH FERENTZ: I thought it was like turnovers, right? (Laughter) Silly me. Do they spell them both the same

way?

Q. Z at the end, they brought up a dollar sign, S instead of Z, said he's going to take it back to ...

COACH FERENTZ: If they're cashing in on NIL, I'm all for it. Good for them. Capitalist society we live in. I'm all for it.

Q. The receivers, your two freshmen have always kind of played at a higher level than their age. But the other day they seemed to take another step forward. Keagan especially with a lot of targets but then Arland Bruce, you could hit him with a sledgehammer --

COACH FERENTZ: That was impressive.

Q. Just seems like they're ascending. Do you see that, too, that they're becoming go-to-type players?

COACH FERENTZ: They've earned everybody's confidence, just through their play. They practice the same way. Obviously we don't tackle in practice like that. But they play, they're focused. They're beyond their years focused and take practice really seriously.

And I mean the guys are silly but it's just it's rare when -- doesn't sound that hard, but to get guys that are really wired in, they're pretty uncommon. It's amazing.

Just like those two guys knocking on my door back in June or July of 1981. It doesn't happen all the time. It just tells you how guys are thinking and why guys are successful. These two guys are off to a good start. We've been saying it since spring ball just how they've operated.

Love to take credit. I don't know that any of us taught them that. I think they just came this way. I'm not sure who taught them. And then the other thing kind of interesting, I don't know how heavily he was recruited, but he's just a good player.

I think he was the first guy to win that Samoan award down in Kansas City. Very prestigious. That says something about a kid. If he can do it as a junior. Hinkel's team's never lost from 8th grade on, whatever sport.

A lot of things about that. If you can identify that, something's got to be going on, because it's not like he's 6'3" or 220. Doesn't look like an Ohio State player. But he plays good. And that's what you're looking for. It's a real compliment to him.

Q. How did you not take, get Bortz over on the offensive side, just didn't have --

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

COACH FERENTZ: I didn't have any clout back then obviously. And the way we played defense, that's where he belonged. I think he was All-Big Ten as a true freshman. I was not there that year. I think he only weighed 220, 225. Talk about a hard, just strong, tough guy.

The way we played defense, a little bit like some of these 34 teams. You couldn't block them. And then guys like Tippett and Webb made a lot of tackles and the guys behind. So what a great player Mark was. Just a really tough, hard-nosed guy.

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