

University of Iowa Football Media Conference

Tuesday, November 2, 2021

Iowa City, Iowa, USA

Coach Kirk Ferentz

Press Conference



Q. (Question about the offensive line)

KIRK FERENTZ: I think we're thin at pretty much every spot up front outside of the center position. I don't think we have a lot of flexibility right now, and I think probably the guys that are at guard will stay there, and the guys that have been playing tackle, three guys there, we'll just keep working with those guys and see how it goes.

Down the road, you never know, but right now, the immediate future, probably what you've seen is what we have. We're best served just to keep those guys in their spots.

Q. What did you see from Plumb with his start?

KIRK FERENTZ: He did a good job. Fought hard. Had some good plays and bad plays. Probably say that about anybody right now, and part of that's a credit to Wisconsin, but also he did some good things. I think he's improved and everybody in the group is improved, and we have to improve faster.

Q. How do you get someone like Tyrone more involved on offense?

KIRK FERENTZ: That's a question we're trying to ask and answer in some ways. He's got film, plays on film that have been documented, and certainly if we can get him more involved, that would be a good thing. But it's easier said than done. We're trying to probe every option there might be to try to get the thing moving a little bit more.

Q. Parents, family members speak out from time to time on social media. How do you address those things when those things pop up?

KIRK FERENTZ: I really don't and haven't unless there's something that needs to be addressed. I'm not aware of anything. Is something out there?

You know, everybody has opinions. You can sit in the stands and hear opinions. I've done that at my kids' high

school games, and it's horrifying to me, a horrifying experience. I'm talking about three kids that played in a really good program and had a lot of success. It's an emotional game to be a fan or a family member, but from my perspective our families have been really supportive and encouraging. I hope every parent would be. I know Mary and I, that's always been our role as parents is to try to be encouraging to our kids and also teach them when it gets bumpy, you push through things. That's part of life. That's what we try to do as coaches do.

Q. During times like this it's easy to ask what kind of changes need to be made. How do you make changes during the season, and is it more a matter of just being better at what you guys do?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, it is. You can't change your system wholesale in season. That would be really counterproductive, and you can't go out and get mercenary players, either. That's not part of the deal in college football.

You try to forge ahead. I guess if there's any good thing here, we have plenty of experience. You can go back historically and look at a lot of our seasons. Can't think of many that didn't have bumps and adversity along the way.

Really all you got to do is look at the last three years. We lost three in a row three years ago; we lost two in a row the last two years, and things turned out. I think everybody was fairly happy at the end of the season. At least internally we all felt pretty good about our team and the way we did things.

But that's the great thing about sports and really life, too; it's how you handle the bumps and what are you going to do when they do come. If they don't come, that's wonderful, but it's usually not real life. It's certainly not college football too often, at least not for us.

Q. We talked to Spencer; he said he's okay to play and all that, but just checking the box, he's your starter, right?

KIRK FERENTZ: Expect him to, yeah.

Q. I know you walked into Evanston six years ago and without a quarterback and got it done --

ASAP . . . when all is said, we're done.®
sports

KIRK FERENTZ: Thanks for reminding me of that one.

Q. But you did get the run game going that day. Is that something you need to focus on this week?

KIRK FERENTZ: It would help us every week. As you know, in a perfect world, and the world is certainly not perfect right now, but in a perfect world we'd like to be balanced and be able to do both, throw it and run it. It helps in every game. To be able to run it effectively -- nobody had visions of running for 200 last week, I can assure you. Just look at the stats; it would be unrealistic.

You have to run the ball effectively, and when you need to or really want to, it sure helps. That's always a goal for us, and we'll continue to work hard on that. Same as the passing game, you're just trying to figure out what can we have the best chance of executing and then try to be proficient at it, and somewhere along the lines if somebody makes a big play, that really helps, too.

Q. It looked like the other day that Wisconsin was targeting Jermari, at least in the first quarter or so, and he gave up a couple passes, but then after the rest of the game, looked the part. How did you feel like he performed, and what's his path going forward, especially this season and beyond?

KIRK FERENTZ: It's a good start. He had to go in there and play, and no question they were going to check him out. Why wouldn't you? He's our fourth corner and really it's kind of how it came out of camp, and that's where we're at right now. I think he did a good job.

You always worry about a new guy maybe being a little too anxious or too jumpy out there, but I think he handled the situation pretty well. Looks like he'll be playing again this week, too. It's going to be another test for him, and probably see a few more passes this week. Maybe not, but I would expect we might.

Q. It can be easy for offensive guys to be frustrated after a rough couple of weeks. As a coach, do you talk to your players about balancing using frustration as a motivation and making sure they don't press too much, and how do you go about doing that?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, it's simple. When things don't go well, you can surrender, just feel sorry for yourself and all those types of things, or you can try to use it as motivation and focus on improvement. That's really what the game is all about certainly.

Not that it's the same situation, but go back a couple years

ago we lost back-to-back games and scored 15 points, one point different, and last game of the year that year we scored 49 with a pick six at the end of the game. Again, the idea is it's a long season, and really what we need to do right now is maximize this seven-day block and then just keep pushing forward.

We're going to have a tough challenge again next week, too, so the next four weeks are going to be like that, and it's really what we've got to focus on is what we can do right now with this opportunity. Like I said, at the end of the season we'll be able to look back and kind of go through the whole thing and chronicle it a little bit.

Q. What were some of the hallmarks of those teams, '16 getting crushed at Penn State to winning against a No. 2 team, as you said, then a couple years ago the Michigan, Penn State situation. What did they have that you can draw on both just mentally, tangibly and intangibly?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, first of all, the game is a game of mental toughness. It starts there. These are moments where you really find out where you're at on that.

Then the other part, the teams that fight through it, you typically have good leadership. They're getting good leadership from within. And then they've got maturity. It takes maturity, as well. Maybe that's tied in with mental toughness.

It's easy, we can't be fans. We can't ride the wave. We can't be up and down. We have to stay focused on what it is we're trying to accomplish, and that's easier said than done because each and every one of us are human. We've all got feelings and emotions. I promise you, nobody felt good. That was a hard bus ride home, and we've had a few of those over the years. If you go out and compete, then that's part of the challenge and part of the risk.

How do you bounce back from that? Those references that you just put out there, those are the kind of answers you're looking for. It's not so much about the winning and losing but what are we going to do to move forward, and the results take care of themselves, they really do.

We can control how we want to respond, and that's a challenge every team that loses faces. Q. The team we're playing against this week has done the same thing. Sometimes it's season long, like two years ago they were 3-9, then they won the Big Ten West.

Q. Is it just foundational in some ways with the way --

KIRK FERENTZ: I believe it is. It's not a fluke that they've been in the championship game two of the last three years. There's a reason for that.

I will go back to '06 out there when they weren't very good, and turns out we were teetering at that point, and felt like they ran for 400 yards that day. I think it was 200 plus, 250 or something like that, and beat us. It wasn't a contest; they beat us straight up. I'm pretty sure we were the favorites; I'd have to go back and look at that stuff.

I just remember what it felt like. I know they showed up ready to play, and that's what I would expect from them, just that's in their DNA in my opinion. They're a really prideful program.

Q. A lot of players on offense today spoke to pounding the rock, hammering away at the rock as a means for being successful. A lot of what you just talked about these last few minutes, what have you seen from this year's group specifically on offense in terms of adapting that mentality and pushing ahead and trying to be successful?

KIRK FERENTZ: The guys are coming to practice every day and working hard. That's a credit to them. Their attitude has been good. That's been consistent. Now it's about improvement, having that improvement show, and that's the funny thing about football, and probably a lot of things but football especially, you never know when that's going to surface. You've got different groups within an offense, too, or a defense or a special teams.

All you can do is just try to push as hard as you can intelligently. You can only practice so long and only have so many contact periods, those types of things, especially this time of year. You've got to be smart about that.

But it's just you just keep chipping away. That's all you can do is keep chipping away and hope at some point you start to see some production and some cohesiveness that you're looking for as a result of working at it the right way. But it's all about how you work at it, and that's all you can do.

Q. How much of a transition, I guess, when you have a first-year offensive line coach, does it take to maybe teach how you do things, and is that maybe part of what's --

KIRK FERENTZ: No, I don't think so at all. I really feel like from the time George interviewed with us, it was just, boy, we're on the same page. That hasn't been an issue at all. Certainly you go through them getting to know the coaches and vice versa, but I don't think it's been an issue at either

spot. I feel really good about that.

It's just a little bit more about youth and injury I think than anything else, and just we've got to be patient, but not too patient. We've got to keep pushing and make improvement. Hopefully with every repetition guys get in practice or a game, they're gaining some knowledge and getting ready to push forward or in some cases maybe getting a little bit healthier.

Q. Obviously your area of expertise, are you spending a little more time in that area this week?

KIRK FERENTZ: No more than normal. I watch every week, obviously. My eyes are just kind of that way. I'm like a trained pig that way.

But no, I've always taken an interest in it, and totally have total faith in the way George coaches, love it, and I like the way the guys are working. It takes time. Boy, it takes time and repetition.

You go back, whatever it was, '17, I guess, where Ike and Boone were both out, so you're playing with a couple guys that are a little bit younger and they turned out just fine, and I think our guys will turn out just fine. But there's some growth process going on there when you've got two young tackles playing.

Those things are realistic. You just keep pushing forward and seeing what you can do to get better.

Q. When your offense struggles, it seems like one of the narratives that comes out is you have to modernize. When you hear that, what's your reaction?

KIRK FERENTZ: Blitz more on defense if we're not stopping people or blitz -- yeah, that's so predictable. The trick is getting everything to mesh at once, to get that '02 offense and that '04 defense to be on the same team. You get that, boy, I will tell you, you're in business. That's what makes it challenging, I think, for most programs. It's a challenge because you just never know where those strengths are going to lie on a football team and then you just try to yield toward them.

But yeah, I'm not even sure I know what modernize means anymore, quite frankly. To me the end game, the end result we're all shooting for, it's not about winning or losing but really it kind of is because that's how people feel good or they feel bad, and my wife has said that for probably about 40 years now, it's as simple as that.

I feel like we've for the most part been able to find a solution somehow, some way fairly consistently. Nothing is

perfect certainly, but fairly consistently. That's what we're trying to do right now. We're trying to find the next solution.

Q. Did you get an NCAA waiver for practice today?

KIRK FERENTZ: We did. It was one of the more ridiculous exercises I've been through as a head coach. Not that anybody really cares. It was in part of the discussion last Thursday during our Big Ten conference call. I think I'm allowed to say that.

I'm just really confused whether it was a policy or a rule and then the waiver process. I'm not a big fan of up until the new transfer policy that we have, at least now we've got a rule, I guess it's a rule, I don't know if this engagement thing was a policy or a rule, I'm really confused on that because I thought everybody was taking today off. A month ago I thought I heard that and then all of a sudden I heard there was a waiver process. We had people in our building wasting time going through that process, and then who knows what hour, who's going to make the decisions. Certainly no signatures were at the bottom of the decision, at least not to my knowledge.

That's really confusing, and it's really confusing when you're trying to get ready for a game on Saturday. I'll just interject one other thing, too. I heard some talk about it started with sports that were in championship seasons. We are in a championship season every week, in football every week. We've got 12 games, period. We're in championship season.

The lack of clarity really confuses me, and that's a little frustrating. I don't mind telling you that. It makes coaching football seem really easy.

Q. When did you know you were going to be able to practice today?

KIRK FERENTZ: I'll tell you, the drama was killing me. I don't know if it was Friday, Saturday, I don't know, but we had a plan both ways. It's silly to waste time on things when it could just be laid out, and everybody just said, okay, we all do it this way or we do it that way.

Q. There was an article in the Wisconsin State Journal on Monday where there several Wisconsin defensive players quoted as saying every time Iowa came to the line, they knew exactly what running play was going to be run. I know in the past, you've talked about the self-scouting especially in the bye week. How do you react to that, kind of the predictability question?

KIRK FERENTZ: I'd say based on their stats they've had a pretty good idea of what everybody is running against them

because nobody has really run it well against them outside of Michigan. I think that's the only team. And Army, too. Army, that's what they do, option attack.

We are fairly predictable and there's certain formations, all that type of thing. But I'm not too concerned about that really, quite frankly. They played a heck of a defensive game, and they have been. They've been playing pretty consistently all year outside of that Michigan game.

Q. No longer controlling your own destiny, but how confident are you in this team still being able to take a Big Ten West title?

KIRK FERENTZ: All we're trying to do is win this week. Simple as that. That's really what we need to be focused on right now. That's really where it's at.

I hope our players understand that. Like all that stuff, that type of talk, that's our goal, obviously, why wouldn't it be, but the rankings, all the other stuff right now, just it comes if you deserve it, and you find that out at the end of November. Right now we really need to focus on this week. If we deserve to be there, we'll be there, but you've got to earn that.

Q. A lot of defensive players in the post presser and today spoke about their performance and how it might have been a good performance but it's not up to their standard, especially turnover-wise they've kind of been at opposite ends of the spectrum, first six games, last two games. How would you assess where they're at right now, and what's the key to getting back to forcing more of those turnovers?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, that's a good illustration, we had a hard time getting a stop two games ago, and we came back, and last week we were better at it. Just an example of you hit games sometimes or patches, and you keep pushing forward. I thought our defense made progress.

You're not going to get a lot of turnovers from Wisconsin typically, and they're playing in a way right now where you don't have to expose themselves that way, so I don't want to say it was predictable, but it was going to be tougher to get a turnover or a takeaway this past Saturday just by the nature of the way the game played out and the way they play.

But it's the same thing there. It's just about trying to match up this week against Northwestern, face the challenges that they're going to present for us and see if we can get a plan to stop them, and then if we can get some takeaways, that would really help us. They come from being aggressive and being sound, and that's where it all starts.

Q. Is there any validity in your mind, Alex is a little bit more mobile quarterback, they're having protection problems, put someone in there who can extend plays a little bit more? I'm not saying a starter, just like during the game even?

KIRK FERENTZ: Really haven't given any thought. Purdue did a good job rotating quarterbacks, had a lot of success doing that, but we haven't given that much thought at this point.

Q. That's not something you think about? Protection is not good, maybe we should have a mobile guy in there --

KIRK FERENTZ: No, we're trying to focus on improving the protection right now. Hoping we get to that. That may be plan C. We'll see.

Q. Do you and Pat Fitzgerald have a relationship? And how have you felt you've influenced each other and Big Ten football as a whole over the past 15 years you guys have been here?

KIRK FERENTZ: I don't want to speak for him, but I think there's a mutual respect. I have a lot of respect for him, and I think it's mutual and genuine. Pat was a really good football player. I wasn't here during that, but he's easy to envision. He took over that program in just what couldn't be a tougher circumstance. You want to put things in perspective, that puts it all in perspective. He's just done a great job.

That's easier said than done. That's a tough circumstance. I'm not saying he wasn't prepared for it because that's not the case at all, but until you go through (it). It's like any new job, first year on the job there's always a lot of learning going on, and Mark Murphy, the AD, I think had that in mind, too, encouraged Pat to maybe bring in a veteran coach to take his place as an assistant, just a little bit more guidance, but the bottom line is Pat has done a great job with the program. Outsider looking in, he went there, he lives and breathes that program and has been from my vantage point just a huge asset for the entire university, not just their sports programs or the football program.

I'm not so sure how important any of that stuff is anymore in college football, but I think it's a pretty good story, and he deserves an awful lot of credit. You get measured, I think, as a coach by how your team maximizes what they have, and to me if you look at what they've done over the years, they've really done a great job of that.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

