

Vrbo Citrus Bowl: Iowa vs Kentucky

Wednesday, December 29, 2021

Orlando, Florida, USA

Camping World Stadium

Iowa Hawkeyes

Offensive Coordinator

Brian Ferentz

Running Back Ivory

Kelly-Martin

Press Conference

BRIAN FERENTZ: Good to be here with you guys this morning. Saw a few of you guys the other day out in practice a little bit more informally. Good to see you in a slightly more formal setting. I don't remember the last time sitting at a podium like this.

Certainly, we are excited to be down here. Felt like we have had a pretty good -- going on three weeks now of preparation. You have to handle the different Bowl phases, which players have done a really nice job of. One of the most exciting parts of a Bowl game is always getting to work with the young guys and spend a little bit of time with some of the more developmental aspects of our roster. I felt like we really made a lot of progress earlier in the month.

Now as we have honed in on the game, feel good about the way the guys have handled the preparation, and certainly changing scenery is always a little bit of a question mark as a coach. You worry when you make that trip how you are going to handle it.

But because of guys like Ivory and the leadership they have provided, some of our more veteran guys. I really think a lot of our young guys are handling this trip pretty well, dialed in, focused. We are really excited to get on the field on Saturday and compete against a very good Kentucky defense.

Q. How much tinkering can you do in a month with the offense, and how much just big picture do you feel like it needs going forward after this season?

BRIAN FERENTZ: It's like every year, right. You have to



go back and evaluate what you did, what you did well, what you didn't do well and where you can improve, right. I think it always is going to come down to how you can utilize your personnel, how you can utilize what we have on the roster to go out on Saturdays and give us a chance to win.

So, over the course of the month, certainly, you get an opportunity to do some of that. You certainly have a lot more time to dive into some of the self-scout and the tape. Then, you have a lot more time to go back and work on some things.

But you are not going to change your identity overnight, and not that you want to, either, right. What we have really tried to do over the last four weeks is focus on things that we have been successful doing, things that we feel like we can match up against Kentucky and move the ball and change field position and score points when we have those opportunities.

So, I feel like it has been a productive four weeks, but ultimately we will find out on Saturday somewhere a little bit after kickoff.

Q. What are you trying to accomplish during bowl prep going into next season?

BRIAN FERENTZ: We are going to tinker every year. We will make a lot of strides between now and next season. We are always looking to improve, right.

Do I have the answers to that question right now, what everything is going to look like next fall? No. I wish I did. I'll know more in January, and then I'll know a lot more in February. I think once we start practicing in March and April, we'll know a lot more.

But, that will be an ongoing process all the way up until September 1, 2, 3. I haven't gotten that far ahead, but whatever date that thing kicks off, it's going to be a long process here.

Q. I wanted to ask you about your offensive line. First, Cody Ince was at least working with the ones a little bit yesterday. What is his health status after a tough year?



And then two, some of your freshmen that have kind of sprinkled in from time to time, Beau Stephens, David Davidkov, and Connor Colby, what's their trajectory for next spring and then also beyond?

BRIAN FERENTZ: I'll start with Cody [Ince]. Obviously it has been a very difficult year for Cody being banged up, in and out of the lineup, had some personal issues along the way that didn't make things any easier, right. Lost his grandfather.

So, I think it's been an up-and-down year for him. It has been a little bit of a roller coaster. But over the last three weeks, he's been out there steadily practicing and improving and getting back in the swing of things. And the more Cody can play, it's going to help us and solidify things up front and take pressure off some of the other guys as well if we can get that rotation going.

So, I'm excited to see him on Saturday, and I think he'll be a part of what we do as of right now and expect him to play well.

As far as the young guys, obviously Connor [Colby], you guys have seen that growth, week to week, right. That is right out there for everybody to see. He is out there, and unfortunately sometimes part of growth is failure. In fact, it is really the only important part of growth. He has had it in a very public arena, right, his successes, his failures.

But the other two guys, David [Davidkov], Beau [Stephens], we have Gennings Dunker out there working these last three weeks. Really excited about the young guys. Mike Myslinksi is another young guy that has done a really nice job. He has been with our second group for most of the season.

So, we really feel like some quality reps and developmental time has spent with those guys, but next spring is going to be really big for probably really all four of those guys that we just mentioned. Then Griffin Liddle is another guy, we are looking forward to getting back out there at some point. He is still working through some surgery and recovery.

I feel like those guys have made a lot of progress, but I feel comfortable telling you they need to make a lot more progress as we go here, right. Everybody is on the right trajectory at the moment.

Q. Guy to the left of you has seen a lot of adversity over the last few years. How have you seen him handle all the ups and downs of that?

BRIAN FERENTZ: Sure, well, I'm glad -- we're going to have to ask you a question at some point, right.

I just can't say enough about Ivory [Kelly-Martin] and how he has handled everything, right. I think back to throwing him in there as a true freshman, ran the ball very well for us. Probably a lot earlier than maybe he was ready to, but played very well for us.

And then the injury situation is one thing, but one thing I always point to with him when I talk to people about him -- I go back to the 2019 season. When we felt like we had a bunch of good backs, and there just weren't going to be enough carries to go around, and asked him to redshirt, and he did that. It's one of the most unselfish things that I have ever seen as a coach, and I think it's hard to do.

And it's hard to do for anyone, but certainly a skill player that touches the ball and has had a lot of success for us at that time touching the ball. In fact, that was really coming off the Iowa State game when you played extremely well, and feel like you were a big part of why we won that game.

So, the thing I'll always remember about Ivory when I think about his career is some of the unselfish things he's done. You think about some of the plays he's made on special teams; there's not enough guys anymore that have that mentality, and one thing that I really respect about Ivory and everything he's done here, he's always put the team first.

We are living in a world where that's getting a little bit harder to find. To ask a skill player to go out there on special teams and cover kicks and be a gunner and do some of the dirty work -- a lot of guys aren't interested in that when they come to us. They have been big stars wherever they are.

He had had a very successful prep career at two different schools, but from day one, all he did was work when he showed up. He didn't have a lot to say. Had a lot of work to do and did it, and that's what I'll remember, and that's what I'll appreciate.

At the end of the day, we can look back at statistics and all that stuff and measure people's careers any way we like, but when I think about players, I often think about their contribution to the team. I'm not sure anyone has made a greater sacrifice for our team than Ivory did in 2019.

Q. You talked about you can't change the identity of the offense overnight, and you're not sure you want to. What is the ideal identity of your offense, your program's offense, and why?

BRIAN FERENTZ: Well, I think when you think about the offense, you need to think about the team, right. So, I just

got done complimenting Ivory on the kind of team player he was. Our goal is simple: We want to win football games, and ultimately we are trying to compete for and win a Big Ten Championship.

We weren't able to do that this year. We came a little bit closer than we have in years past. I know offensively, you know, perhaps we haven't had the statistics or the measurables or all those things, maybe we are not that exciting.

But at the end of the day, our job is simple: We need to change field position, and we need to score points. That's really it, because we are a three-phase team: We play defense, special teams and offense. We win when all three of those phases are working together.

The identity is simple: We need to be a group that can support the team and win games, however, we need to win those games.

One thing that's never going to change, and this is just one person's opinion, football is a physical game. I think there's two things that make football unique relative to other sports. One is the team aspect. There's not many sports, you know, all due respect to European football, but I don't understand that game particularly well.

But I know this: We share a similarity in that we have a lot of players on the field at one time, right. I'm not a big basketball fan. Very much enjoy watching ice hockey. Probably ice hockey and wrestling would be my next two. You think about those sports, wrestling, certainly an individual sport with a team element. Ice hockey is the type of sport where one player can make a very significant difference on the ice, right. If you have the best player on the ice, there's less moving pieces; he can be super involved, much like basketball, right.

Football, the team element of football, 11 pieces moving together, tremendous execution required and tremendous synergy required. That can be a huge, huge benefit. Then, when you think about team football in a further aspect, you think about the three phases working together, that makes it a unique game, right.

If you have all three phases working together, you can overcome some challenges that you have in matching up against a particular point. That's the team aspect.

And the second aspect, I know we are trying to take it out of the game desperately, but there's a physical aspect of football. And the last time I checked, on Saturday we'll be wearing full pads. We'll have shoulder pads on, helmets, pants, the thigh pads, the knee pads -- maybe not the knee

pads, but at least the thigh pads, right, the whole deal.

They try to create rules where we can't practice with pads on. They try to create rules where we can't practice at all. But at the end of the day, this is a physical game. And you can make up the difference perhaps between you and an opponent, you can close gaps with the togetherness of team and with the physicalness of the game.

That's what we are always going to be built on. And I think, at the end of the day, if you want to look program-wide, look, our job offensively is to fit within to that goal, but that's always going to come down to running the football. I think you measure any football team by how well they run the football, how well they stop the run, and how well they cover kicks, which speaks to the physical aspect of the game.

You look at our last game, you look at the rushing numbers, I think that bears out the result. It's going to be hard for us to win like that, right. So what we need to do, our identity is always going to be based on being physical and being able to run the football.

That doesn't mean that you're not going to do other things, right. Because you have to score points, and all of that -- that's the special sauce, right. So, that's what you're trying to build every year and find the right ingredients to get to those things.

But, at the end of the day, if you're scoring points, and you have the ability to run the football when it matters, you're going to have a chance to win football games.

So when I look at big picture, macro, global thoughts, that's what we're looking at identity-wise.

Q. I wanted to ask about quarterback. Where do things stand going into Saturday, and how will what your decision be for Saturday impact Sunday, January, April and beyond?

BRIAN FERENTZ: Sure. You know, I have to be honest with you, I can't worry about how what we do on Saturday is going to impact the future. The goal right now is to win the football game on Saturday.

I will tell you, and I'm not saying I'm being less than honest with you, but this is a position that I relish. I told you guys this, whenever we visited last before the Illinois game, to be able to sit up here and say, I don't know who our quarterback is going to be, we'll see on Saturday at kickoff -- no. I think we have pretty much made our mind up on what we are going to do on Saturday.

But, the reality is feel comfortable with both guys and feel like both guys can give us a chance to win the football game. I think both guys have strengths and weaknesses, as we have seen throughout the season, and it's my job as a play caller to try to play to those depending on which route we go.

But, I think both guys have acquitted themselves very well at various points in their career, and feel very good about where we are at with both of them at the moment.

But on Saturday, we are going to go with the guy that gives us the best chance to win. Ultimately, that's going to be a coaching decision. How players take that decision, you would have to ask them. But all I've ever tried to do with those guys is be transparent, communicate very clearly with them, but also understand we're living in a different world and guys have to make decisions for their own future and their own self-interest at some point as well, which I totally understand.

Q. Obviously we heard Coach Ferentz talk about your contribution to the team. So wanted to find out from you, what do you feel has been your greatest development as a player, especially as it relates to what he shared with the team identity?

IVORY KELLY-MARTIN: A lot of what Brian said is pretty true about my career here at Iowa. Since my freshman year, I've been starting off with special teams and trying to make an impact in any way I possibly can. As a football player and as a competitor, I want all those individual accomplishments for myself.

But, the big thing that's always pushed me with football has always been my bond with my teammates and my relationship with them, the way I interact. And, that's all shown throughout the football field in the way I play. I play for them. Once, we accomplish stuff as a team, and since I've been in high school, I've been able to understand the best teams are the teams that are closest and able to bond with one another and play for one another. Then, we are able to accomplish more on the field just through our relationship and the way we are with each other.

So, that's something I've always tried to preach to my teammates. Like I said, as a competitor, I want all those individual accomplishments, but I know sometimes the opportunity is not going to be there. Sometimes you are not always going to get that play.

And playing on an offense, there's a lot of guys that have that ability and can really do everything, but there's only one ball to go around you and might not get that chance out there on Saturday.

So, I have always pushed myself to just continue to do as much as I can for this team because that's ultimately all I can do in those situations. I don't control what we call out there on the field, and it's simply just 'be ready if the opportunity does come.'

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