

University of Iowa Football Media Conference

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Coach Kirk Ferentz

Press Conference



KIRK FERENTZ: Just a couple words about last season, first of all, I am just really, really proud of the 2021 football team. For them to experience and go out and earn 10 wins, that's a really significant accomplishment, so very, very happy for the team and the way they did that, and it just really continues to add to the success that we've been able to earn here as a program since the start of the '15 season, so just proud of everybody's efforts there.

I think at the start of the season probably expectations were probably a little higher internally here than they were on the outside, and I think that certainly helped us, and as a result of our players' efforts, the good work that they did out there, their focus, we got off to a good start, really strong, a good string of wins there together, and rose in the rankings probably a little too high. But faced a few challenges there at mid-season. Really proud of the way the guys bounced back from that. They kept working, they kept fighting, and kept believing in themselves.

Certainly proud of our efforts and their attitude. What they achieved after a couple bumps to win the Big Ten West and go to Indianapolis, those are certainly significant accomplishments. We've still got a little work to do there in Indy, and that's on the list, so go from there.

Two tough losses at the end, but I think the bottom line is we just had a really successful season, and just really proud of everybody's efforts on that front.

I think really what's important right now is what we do moving forward, like every year. For some players it's the end of their college career. They're moving on to professional football or their adult lives or real jobs, and get that opportunity. We have three guys that declared for the NFL that had eligibility remaining with Tyler Linderbaum and Tyler Goodson and Dane Belton. They all chose to make that move, and we wish them nothing but success moving forward. They're all outstanding guys and outstanding players, just tremendous people.

We have nine guys including Tyler Linderbaum that graduated in December, were on track to graduate in May,

and seven of the nine guys are returning as either fifth-year guys or COVID exemption guys, so that's good. We have 14 guys that played last year that have already graduated.

Guys are doing a good job in the classroom, as well. Certainly happy about that.

Just another side note here, we had five players from the past year that chose to go to other schools via the transfer portal. Certainly it is disappointing to lose anybody from the program, but that being said, sometimes it's the best thing for the individuals, and we certainly wish them all the best as they pursue their new options and opportunities moving forward.

You guys probably know the portal stats probably better than I do and someone informed me of that recently that we've had five. We're pretty low in the rankings conference-wise and probably nationally from that standpoint, kind of like throwing offers out there, we don't do that, but I think it really just drives to the work that we've done and do to make this a good environment for our players and give them a chance to develop to their fullest.

On top of that, being part of a team, enjoying a good team experience, so we remain committed to those things.

Bottom line is I just really believe strongly in our path. Our program is on a really good path, a strong foundation, and we're eager to try to move forward now, and that's really kind of where our sights turn at this point.

I'll take a minute just to touch on the advisory group. A lot has been said and written on that.

I think all of you are aware, 18 months ago we went through some turbulent times. My first response was to reach out to former players, Black and White, and former coaches here, people that coached in the program, just to get a better feel what our situation was and the areas that we need to address.

One big takeaway from the whole thing was that there's an opportunity. That's one benefit of being somewhere 20 plus years. There are a lot of downsides to it, but one benefit is we've got pretty good continuity in this program. It really made me aware that there's another resource out there available, and that's really my rationality for forming that



committee, that advisory group.

The bottom line was they were a resource, period, and will continue to be, so that was my goal and purpose, and that's really what they've been.

As you may have noticed, I didn't publicly announce all the members, haven't shared all the names in the group, and that's just the way I choose to operate. Same thing can be said about conversations I've had with members. Not unlike any conversations I had with our players internally here. I just don't think that's necessarily best for public consumption.

When I do talk to folks, I try to give them the confidence that they're going to be speaking confidentially, and it's hopefully a two-way street.

Basically in a nutshell, we met very frequently at the onset and then scaled back the meetings. Over the course of 2020 we did meet frequently, I think it was weekly I believe or every other week in 2020, and then by last summer really cut the number of meetings back.

As the path has moved forward, we've just kind of cut back on that, and the bottom line is this: As the season went on, it became clear to me that it was really time that maybe we reshape the committee, the people involved. They've given a lot of time and a lot of their efforts to the program, cutting time out of their schedules, so in my mind it was time to reshape things a little bit, and I'm not quite sure what that's going to look like. I'm still formulating some thoughts on that, but we'll get that to where we need to.

It's going to continue to be a resource for me. That's just something that is going to be very valuable, very helpful. The bottom line is this: I'm extremely appreciative to each and every one of the guys, and there were 10 members, for their contributions, their time. Like I said, it was really significant time. A lot of really positive feedback and helpful things.

I think one thing about when you're in charge of things, if you're in a leadership position, one thing you're very fearful of or leery of is the possibility for blind spots, so the more people that you can talk to, the more areas to probe of the program and things that we do on a daily basis, I think the better, and there's no better group in my mind than players that have been through the program, people that have been through the program.

Again, a high percentage of them played in the last 20 plus years, but there are those or there was at least one key member that played here years ago but has a real good unique perspective on what it is we do on a daily basis.

All information is really helpful, and again, I'm just very, very appreciative of that group.

Now we move on to recruiting, and again, it's really kind of a misnomer to call this signing day because the majority of the heavy lifting in college football, at least in the world we live in, got done in December, but we're really pleased to add Deshaun Lee to the class. I think he is going to be a good addition to the class, and overall we feel really great about the class, as I said back in December. Really pleased about the way it came together, the way it shaped out.

I feel good about that. We were also able to add a couple walk-ons that we think are really good prospects. Really pleased about that. We did host a small group of walk-ons a couple weeks ago here on campus when it was still a live period, so the combination of the 18 signees that we have and the 12 walk-ons, I feel like we've got a really good group of young guys to work with here coming into the program. That's always exciting.

As I mentioned, we've been on the road a little bit the last couple weeks, and you hate to be away from home, hate to be away from your players when they get on campus, but it's also just a really good opportunity and especially after the lengthy dead period that we've experienced. Just good to get back and be in classrooms, be in hallways and high schools, that type of thing, talk to the coaches, administrators, teachers, people that really work closely with the prospects. It's all been good, too. Happy about that.

Then just as we look forward to the '22 season, we did add seven newcomers two weeks ago yesterday. Glad to have these guys here. I think they're all top-notch young guys, and it's good for them to get a jump on things, get not only from a football standpoint but get used to going to school, just knowing their way around town, the routine, those types of things. Great to welcome those guys.

On the coaching front, as of right now, really nothing to announce on the coaching front. That being said, we're in the NFL hiring season right now, a lot going on there, and we did lose a coach to that a year ago when Derrick had an opportunity to go to the Chargers. That's a possibility, and there's also always a trickle-down effect anytime the NFL hires. If something does happen, I certainly will keep you abreast on any developments there.

Then just looking ahead a little bit to spring, spring ball is still weeks away, but this is a really critical period for any college football program in my mind. That's one thing that differentiates us from the NFL, we don't go five months



where we don't see our players. They're here. They're working. They've got an opportunity right now to really work closely with the strength and conditioning staff and really make gains, and I think our program -- as you know it's extremely important that we're improving every phase of the way, and that's everybody on the roster. Right now it's a real good opportunity for guys to focus on growth and improvement, and I think it's especially significant right now just because of the past two years the disruptions that we've had due to the pandemic. We missed an awful lot of training time, consistent training time through that '20 calendar season, and I think there's some residual effects to that. It's really an opportunity to kind of get stabilized a little bit.

I want to talk real specifically, I'm sure you'll have questions, but to me if you look at our tapes, it's kind of like the games this weekend, I tend to look at it and look at the execution portion. That's really what jumps out to me. I'm watching these games the last couple weekends, a lot of great football games and a lot of outstanding plays, but there's also some bad fundamental football out there, and as a coach I kind of look at that.

You just -- that's really what wins and losses at the end of the day. Your players are your players, and hopefully you can get the best out of them, but boy, if you're not fundamentally sound, it's really a tough hill to climb.

When I look at our tapes, that's really what I see. We had some predictable areas that were going to be challenging this year up front on both sides certainly. I think we made progress as the year went on. We had some challenges especially on the offensive side with a couple injuries to Cody Ince and Kyler Schott. We were playing young receivers, and then our quarterbacks got banged around a little bit.

But I'm optimistic that we're going to be able to improve as a football team and move forward, and we've got some holes to fill in all areas, and it's like that every year.

We go through our personnel, and it's interesting you always look at the guys you lose, and that's on one hand kind of sobering, but it's college football, but then also we go through the guys and I'm looking at guys that we saw improving during the year and really showed some real sparks in December.

You're anxious to get back on the field here at the end of March and see where the guys are at and see what kind of improvement you can make. It's like putting a puzzle together. It's kind of the fun part of it. But it's all about incremental progress and what we do in these months. As I said it is really critical as we go forward. That's kind of

where we're at.

Again, it gets back to the importance of the odysseys and our players understand that, and then we'll transition into spring football here and certainly have a chance to visit before we get going there.

With that, I'll just throw it out to questions, any questions you may have. Fire away.

Q. Regarding the advisory committee, might as well ask these early. There was maybe some inconsistencies on an email versus a letter that you sent regarding whether it's disbanded or changed, altered. Can you kind of address what maybe you meant in the email that you sent, that it was going to be disbanding and what changed to make you want to reform it and adapt it to a different type of committee?

KIRK FERENTZ: We've been in existence, whatever it is, 16, 18 months, and a lot of hours spent. Probably in fairness to the guys on the committee, maybe a chance to give them a reprieve and get some fresh faces. I'm not quite sure where we'll go, and there may be some repeat members if they volunteer and they're open to it. But I think it's like anything, sometimes a little change is good, and I want guys that are willing and not tired or fatigued.

We'll go from there, but just some thoughts I have right now are perhaps some guys a little bit more recent vintage, a little bit closer to it. I think Jordan Lomax was the most recent graduate on the committee. Maybe some guys that have more direct ties to this profession, be it college football, pro football. It's a little bit of a challenge for pro football players, and we had one or two active guys on it initially, but their time commitment just didn't allow them to stay with it.

Those are some things I want to explore. This is a time right now to think about football, time to think about a lot of things, and this is one we'll give thought to before we really kind of formulate things. I want to get some opinions. There's one person I reached out to back in December who was on the committee, just let them know in December that I'd really like to have a chance to sit down with him and really have a thorough discussion with him and get some of his perspectives, takeaways from the last 16, 18 months and maybe some of his advice, too, about moving forward because he's a guy that I really have tremendous respect for and he's got a wealth of knowledge in this arena on a lot of levels.

That's kind of my thought process, and I pretty much in December had a little bit of time to think about things.



Q. Could you see any Hayden Fry era players on this committee?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, and like I said, one of the members was pre-Coach Fry actually. I'm open to any-body. We did have one of Coach Fry's better players on, and he had some issues, too, just with time commitment.

But I don't think we're in that stage, and that's also part of my thought is I don't know if it's going to be quarterly or whatever, but still want to do those -- keep those guys close to the program and maybe make it a little smaller so those guys can be a little bit more mobile, too, and be on campus a little bit more actively.

Q. Do you have a timeline for when you'd like to have this all figured out?

KIRK FERENTZ: When I've got it in my mind, that's when we're going to do it. There's that funny commercial somebody had about 20 years ago, where the guy takes some time to think and the guy says, what makes you think. None of us think enough, and that's one of our biggest challenges, especially in season, which is part of the reason I held off until January. We've got a lot going on.

My first commitment is still to our players, and that's the work of the committee is to make this a better environment for our players that are here. Those are the guys I'm most committed to.

Our job is to give them a great environment. Hopefully when they leave here, they graduate and have a great experience and maximize their football and then go fly and run, run on your own. We're still here to support them, but that's our goal.

Q. I asked David Porter the same thing: Could this have been communicated better on both ends? Do you think that's fair or do you think that's not fair?

KIRK FERENTZ: Well, everything could probably be communicated better. I don't have any regrets about my communication. I haven't heard any feedback, negative feedback from the people, and I've reached out to a couple guys individually. But I think the guys all kind of knew -- I don't want to say all, but a lot of guys knew where we were heading on this thing. I think they had a good sense of it.

One thing about life, everybody has opinions, and it doesn't make them facts, but everybody has opinions about things. Smart people can decipher through and try to figure out what's factual.

Q. What's your reaction to David's recommendation that after 18 months that he felt like it was best if you stepped down? That's heavy.

KIRK FERENTZ: Well, it's not heavy, it's an opinion, and obviously everybody is entitled to their opinions. I'm not thinking in those terms, if that's what you're asking. Not even remotely.

Q. How do you react to something like that?

KIRK FERENTZ: I didn't have much reaction. I read it and that's his opinion. There's not much to react to other than I have a different opinion. My intention is like long-term and big picture, not short-term. Everyone is allowed to have an opinion.

Q. It's not alarming that he feels that way?

KIRK FERENTZ: No, it's his opinion.

Q. Or why he feels that way?

KIRK FERENTZ: No, it's his opinion.

Q. He also said he considers you still a friend and a mentor.

KIRK FERENTZ: But he thinks I should retire apparently, right? So we have a difference of opinion. I'm not thinking about that right now, but I respect that. I've got no problem with that.

Q. You've signed five DBs in this class. When you look at defensive backs compared to other positions on the roster, what's the challenge of recruiting in high numbers and keeping those numbers, considering how many players you've lost to the league and --

KIRK FERENTZ: We're not an NFL team, but there are some parallels in the teams that we play. Pretty much, not totally, but pretty much we play 3-4 wide out teams. The evolution of our defense, which you guys are well aware of, is going to the cash position, which is really a DB type guy typically, it does create more need for guys that can play in the back end. We lost some really good players, needless to say, with Matt and Jack, start there, and then Dane, adding on.

The other part of that, that's probably the hardest position or one of the hardest positions to evaluate. Certainly for pro teams and for college coaches it's really hard to evaluate. A little bit easier now because people are throwing the ball more now than they used to, but when

you think about some of our guys, I was talking to Ladell this morning about Marcus Paschal; we saw him last week, and Marcus was a 170-pound quarterback when we recruited him. He was going to Hofstra. So there was a lot of projection there, but his film was more impressive when he played offense. I'd say the same thing with Jovon Johnson. You've got to try to project guys, and I think that was kind of part of our thinking.

Q. What do you look for, specifically key traits in bringing in defensive backs? Like you said, it's a difficult position.

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, it's like most positions for us. We don't have a formula because we're not allowed to. I joked with a couple high school coaches I was with, we don't just get to recruit 6-5 linemen. It would be great if we were 6-5 across, I guess, if you had good players at every position, but we don't have that luxury, so we're looking for whatever intangibles -- obviously you've got to have a degree of athleticism to be a DB, but there's some projection if guys might really impress, because Kaevon was better on the basketball court than he was on the football field in high school, so you're looking for those kinds of things that maybe set a guy aside that other schools might be missing a little bit hopefully.

Bob Sanders couldn't get on the roller coaster because he wasn't tall enough, but he played really well for us and played really well for the Colts. Again, couldn't get on the roller coaster at a lot of schools because he didn't go over that bar, but it didn't impede his progress as a player.

That's just how we have to look at it, so we're looking for guys that we think are really aggressive, good football players, and they have to have some degree of athleticism to play in the back end.

Q. You've been recruiting some; how much of a deep dive (into last season) have you been able to do to this point?

KIRK FERENTZ: Not a lot. I've seen the films, each and every game film that we've played. We'll start that really in earnest next week, so this week is a week for us to reconnect with our players one-on-one, interview them, get some things cleaned up, kind of compile the recruiting information from the last couple weeks, just make sure we're all on the same page and get updated there, and then next week we'll really start to dissect things.

Q. Obviously you're confident in the coaches other than a surprise departure at this point --

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I'm betting on us, if that's how you

want to put it, which I typically do. I'm betting on us. I think we've got a good staff, certainly a capable staff, and I've got total confidence in the guys. I think we've got a good staff here.

Q. What do you think when people say, maybe even people in the media say, maybe a scheme change might be in order or something, some kind of little reboot with the offense? Do you think that's necessary?

KIRK FERENTZ: I guess my answer would be we're third in wins since '15. I mentioned '15. Last four years we were second in wins in the conference. That's the ultimate goal for us. It's not all about winning, but obviously when we line up and play on Saturdays, that's what we're trying to do, no matter who we're playing or where it is.

You do get evaluated on that. I know it's a little bit more detailed now in the sophisticated world of evaluation, but for me that's what I'm fixated on. If they've got the ball 40 minutes and we've got it 20 and we win, I'm happy we won. I'm not happy about the way we won, I'd rather have the ball 40, but ultimately it's finding a way to win.

I can kind of identify with what San Francisco did two Saturdays ago, blocked kick, blocked field goal and then the punt. Maybe they didn't deserve to win, but they were playing last Sunday and the other team wasn't. To me that's what it's about. Then we'll work through the things that are challenges, just like we've done every year we've had challenges. That's what the game is all about. That's what we're looking at.

Q. With this year's recruiting class, are you still looking to add or are you good with the 18?

KIRK FERENTZ: No, we're not done yet. We're involved -- I'm assuming all this stuff is public. It sounds like people know where I was every day the last two weeks, which is kind of creepy and kind of weird that anybody cares quite frankly. That's my whole problem -- I'm going back to whenever Twitter got started. I remember a coach said he had a bowl of oatmeal and a bowl of Corn Flakes at 4:30, then he couldn't wait to get to work. Like the presumption there is somebody really cares what you had for breakfast or what time you get to work, and it really doesn't matter in the big picture. But yeah, we're still looking at some guys and working with some guys.

To that point, our involvement in the transfer portal is probably different than some other people, and if we could find the ideal player, it would be like a Jack Heflin, it would be Zach Van Valkenburg or a Mekhi Sargent who technically wasn't in the portal but was eligible and nobody



was recruiting him and was able to transfer him immediately when we called him. But those are the guys we're looking for, and if we can find those three, and two of those guys are on NFL teams right now, and Zach I think certainly has a great chance to be camp next year, maybe get drafted.

We look at it a little bit differently. Our numbers attrition were low, and we're not looking to bring a lot of new guys in that really didn't grow up in the program.

Q. When you look at both Riley Moss and Charlie Jones, two decorated Big Ten players returning, what does that do for you, and did that impact any of your thoughts on the transfer portal if they would have left for the next level?

KIRK FERENTZ: Well, I don't know how it would have affected that portion. I can tell you selfishly I felt good when -- Riley was a last-second deal. I really thought he was heading the other direction. You can ask him about that this spring.

I felt really good in December before we left when both Laporta and Campbell came in and said, I am staying here. I'm ready to go for the next year.

There's such pressure right now on players. I'm not blaming anybody in the media, but there's such pressure, if that's the right word, for players to really consider it strongly, like they feel like they're missing something if they don't come out early. I'm not saying it's a cool thing to do, but it kind of is a cool thing to do to leave early.

Tyler Linderbaum is probably not the epitome of cool. He's just a football player. But the world we're living in right now, guys are coming to school earlier and they're going to leave earlier, and that's just the way it is. It's just like we were spring recruiting the last two week, even though the NCAA outlawed that how many years ago. You know details better than I do. Seven or eight years ago they took us off the road in May, right, whatever it was? Guess what I've been doing the last two weeks: Looking at juniors and sophomores and freshmen.

They'll figure it out sooner or later. I'm not going to tell them. But anyway, that's the world we're living in now. You've got to understand that there are adjustments, but yeah, to answer your question, it made me feel really good because all four of those guys are really first-class players, and I personally think they're doing the right thing for them. I really do, and that's good. That makes me feel good.

Q. You never expressed any concern during the off-season about kicker because of Shudak. Do you

feel the same way now? Can you address the kicking situation?

KIRK FERENTZ: Well, yeah, I'm not going to say it's the same as, but we felt really good about Caleb because of what he did in practice every day while Dunk was doing it, and Aaron Blom has just really been impressive for two years. This guy is as serious as a heart attack. He makes Shudak look like he's loose. It's pretty good. I think he's got really good potential, but we're going to let him compete. We've got Drew Stevens coming in here and we think he's a good prospect, so we're going to let the guys compete.

That's the message I re-delivered this morning; there are no incumbents. There's opportunities for everybody right now and everybody has got to improve, coaches included. It starts with us.

Q. You mentioned in December that maybe put some guys on scholarship and you said you would let us know --

KIRK FERENTZ: Did I say that?

Q. You did say that.

KIRK FERENTZ: I'll take you for your word. We put Pallissard, Fagan and Mike Timm on scholarship starting now. Those are reward scholarships, if nothing else. All three of those guys have been in the program and they've done a great job. I will single out Fagan. He does two great things for our team. He's on the President's List each and every semester, like he's smarter than the whole coaching staff combined, not that that's a great feat, and then he probably single-handedly enabled us to practice last spring without just going 7-on-7 because we were down a lineman, and this guy -- we could have been thrown in jail for how many reps he probably got if we had gone back and added. He's just a hardworking young guy and he's improved a lot. Yeah, just proud of all three of those guys.

Q. Is he potentially your starting center?

KIRK FERENTZ: Never say never, but we're going to have competition there. We'll see what that looks like.

Q. It seems like every off-season people speculate about your long-term future. I was just curious --

KIRK FERENTZ: Keep speculating.

Q. I was curious, through the pandemic and what you guys went through last season and that weird off-season, did that change your timeline as far as how long you want to coach?



KIRK FERENTZ: I don't know if it changed it, but when all that was going on, you have two choices, just like you do every day, go that way or go this way. Invigorating is not the right word, but I think one thing you learn when you do things that are hard to do, I'm not saying -- like our job is not hard. Being a policeman or fireman, those are hard jobs. There's a lot of hard jobs out there. But it's challenging. There's a lot of things that challenge you on a -- maybe not daily basis but frequent basis.

As long as you enjoy -- enjoy is probably not the right word, but I guess enjoy in some ways, enjoy trying to figure out the pieces of the puzzle and making things work, then -- but probably when I quit enjoying that or if I quit getting nervous about games, it's just a feeling you have, then you probably know it's time to get out because you don't want to ever rob the people that you're working with. You don't want to take away from them.

I'm not saying it's been heightened, but I feel better than I've felt in a long time quite frankly, physically and mentally. We'll see. We'll see. Just try to get through this next month here and see what happens.

Q. The game itself, do you think it's in as good a shape as it's been in a long time?

KIRK FERENTZ: College football? I'm really worried. Yeah, really worried.

Q. What worries you the most?

KIRK FERENTZ: Everything. It's funny you bring that up, I ran into the first week on the road several coaches that we compete against and I've got a lot respect for, and I think we're all thinking the same thing. My fear is we're going to really ruin and screw up a really good game. College football is a great game. There are a lot of things that have to get worked through right now. The way we're going right now, I don't think it's sustainable. That's one person's opinion.

It'll go on, but it's not going to be what I think everybody would like to watch. I go back to -- you guys can do the homework on this, it was probably '71, '72. Pretty sure it was Nebraska beat Army 77-7, I think, and first of all, it seemed like it was unpatriotic. Secondly, when you're involved in a game like that, it's not good for anybody, either team, and I kind of -- I worry about us going back to when I was in high school, those days where you had a select group of teams up here and then everybody else, not just below but like a couple levels below.

I think we might be heading down that path. I think we're in

a really some interesting times, and the courts are involved, which makes it really complex. Like I'm all for the players getting anything they can get, but there's somehow, some way we've got to -- we're going to have to figure this out because it's going to get interesting here in the next couple years, I think.

Q. Do you worry about the name, image and likeness creating a disadvantage for some schools that just can't compete?

KIRK FERENTZ: Definitely a part of the equation, and some people have gotten really aggressive and creative with it, and the door is open for that, so that's exactly what I'm getting at. I think you're going to -- we run the risk of maybe getting some things tiered, and I've got some research to do. One of the coaches I bumped into shared some information with me that was really interesting. He's certainly been paying closer attention than I have.

Yeah, I think it's just in a general sense, I think we're really on a slippery slope right now.

Q. You said no incumbents are safe, but how do you feel about quarterbacks? Do you feel like it's wide open competition?

KIRK FERENTZ: I do, yeah. I mean, everybody has a right to compete. I'm anxious to see Joe compete, too. He was kind of getting spoon fed in December because he was the only guy out there for a while.

But yeah, we have to do better. There's several positions, and everybody knows that, we have to do better if we're going to move the ball and score points the way we want to. We don't have to score 45 points a game. I'm hoping we'll continue to play good defense. That's the first thing we tried to establish here outside of special teams 23 years ago.

That's fundamental 101. We've got to get that done. We don't have to score 45 points, but we've got to do better, and we've got to make the makeable plays. You have to do that, and that's kind of what I'm getting at on those fundamentals. Catch that ball Sunday, the game is over. There is no rest of the game, it's over, you take it and bleed the clock and you're done.

If we've got makeable plays out there, we've got to make them. We've got to throw it and we've got to catch it and we've got to protect. That's kind of where it is, and we've got to make positive yards when we run the football. Doesn't always have to be five, six, seven, but it's got to be positive yards. Those negative yardage plays kill you, or dropped balls or makeable throws that we don't make.



Those are the things that really -- it's just there are little things typically. I know it's not like a coach, but usually you make a couple of those little ones and good things start to go, and you miss a couple of those, it tends to go the other way.

Q. With the extra COVID year, are those decisions that are all done or is that something that we can still --

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I don't know. I think technically everybody who's here has it available, so we'll see where it goes.

Q. So somebody could still decide to come back?

KIRK FERENTZ: I'm sorry, this year? I think we're fixed right now. I've gotcha. But next year I think we have to go through -- next couple years. Right now with the roster you're just trying to take it one week at a time. I think we've got a pretty good grip on where we're at. Yeah, so I think we're pretty stable.

Q. Your team is never going to win the metrics battles because of the style of play and ground acquisition at times just to try to play complementary football, but you were in the hundreds in almost every offensive category this year and probably most concerning is completion percentage over the last handful of years has been below 60 percent. Even your quarterbacks have talked about how complicated the offense is. Is there a way to -- is it too complicated? Is there a way to simplify it, and how much more can you get out of the passing game to push some of those numbers up?

KIRK FERENTZ: That's certainly part of the discussion this out of season. Yeah, we especially last year we didn't throw the ball well enough to be successful enough, if you want.

I'm sitting here thinking about the one gadget play we ran at the beginning -- the first possession against Michigan. Doesn't really count because it's Monty trying to -- involved in that thing and a running back throwing it, but yeah, we've got to do better. That'll be part of the discussion certainly.

That tends to be part of the -- if there is an issue or problem, a lot of times it is making things harder than they need to be, so we'll certainly ask those questions.

Q. With the transfer portal, you referenced that coming off the season in January there was a lot of moving parts, a lot of things going on. Do you feel like post-spring practice after you've had a chance to evaluate your roster internally it's a better time to

evaluate the portal, and do you imagine the door will be open going into the summer?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I'm guessing there's -- I think this period is pretty well established. I don't imagine too many guys are going to pop up in the next month. It could happen. But I think for the most part probably this group is identified and I think there's going to be a whole 'nother round post-spring. It's not uncommon for a guy thinking that he might be at No. 3 thinking he should be one or two. Those tend to be the cases.

I'm just going off years before it was a free transfer, so now I think you'll probably see more of that.

I think we've identified just a small number of players that we have a real strong interest in because we have some -- we think we've done enough homework on them, and then we'll see where we're at in May. I just don't envision us -- first of all, we don't have a lot of room on our roster to bring a lot of guys in unless we lose a lot of guys, and you never know. Right now our numbers are good, but you hope that's not the case. You hope your guys are staying in the program and working forward.

Q. One more question about early enrollees and recruiting, a few coming in that are defensive backs. How much do you imagine them being here early helps them physically and then also just learning the nuances of the defense?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I'm not big on stats but I can throw one at you real quickly. Three of the guys that were here last year at this time ended up starting for us on offense, one on the inside, which is really tough to do. Pretty safe in saying Connor for sure would not have been playing I don't think if he hadn't been here. And you probably could say that about both Keegan and Arland. It just gives them a jump. In recruiting we just tell guys, I don't encourage it but we don't discourage it. If it's what the player wants to do and he's doing it for the right reasons, then I think it's great.

We had a bad experience, whatever it was, about 10 years ago with a guy from out east. He got here and decided after a month he missed his girlfriend and went home, and you hate to do that. You spend all that -- invest all that time in recruiting and then the guy is here for a month, that's not good for anybody, most importantly him. But again, it's a different world we're living in now. But I think we'll probably continue to see those numbers at least be significant if not more significant forward.

Q. Curious, after the bowl game Spencer talked about really from his heart about the criticism that he's dealt with and that his parents deal with. Have you had a



chance to hear that and do you talk to him about that? What do you say to him?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I'm not laughing about that, I'm laughing about a conversation I had yesterday with somebody. This goes back to the '80s when I got here. It was no different. Kirk Banks was a roommate of Chuck Long's, so he witnessed it firsthand, and those guys lived in the dorm for four years back then.

But anyway, being a quarterback here is a real high-scrutiny position. We don't have -- Terry Bradshaw doesn't play here or Ben Roethlisberger. And there was no social media back then. It was still -- it was tough on everybody that was a quarterback during my nine years here. You can imagine what it's like now.

My first advice to anybody -- nobody is going to take this, stay off social media unless you're a glutton for punishment because you can predict when it goes good what's going to be written, you can predict, just like a lot of things, what it's going to look like the other way.

But he's human, and I'm sure his parents are human, but the only encouragement I would give people is these guys are college students and they may have NILs and they may be able to transfer and all that. They're still college guys, and when you meet them and you guys get a chance to interface with them on a daily basis or a routine basis, they're college guys with a lot of things on their minds and what have you.

If Spencer does throw a bad ball, he's not doing it intentionally, I promise you. He's really invested. That's stuff that we know that fans don't know. That's why I think teammates are so supportive of the guys, because they understand and witness just how hard these guys work, and they know they've got feelings.

I understand, too, you buy a ticket and you feel like it's your right to say whatever you want to say, and I've sat at high school games that my kids' games when they were on really good teams, and boy, it was an eye opener for me. I asked my wife, I said, this is the same team that wins all the time, right, and a lot of people making suggestions. It's not a new phenomenon. These guys are college guys. I don't know if legalized gambling adds to all this venom, but they're college guys. But Spencer probably helped himself a little bit, too.

Q. Along those lines, if anybody received more criticism than Spencer this year, it was Brian, and the numbers are the numbers. A lot of people with a relationship, obviously you're his dad, so they wonder if there's either nepotism involved and why he's still

here and another coach may not be. What gives you faith that Brian can do the job that he's doing and do it well to remain the offensive coordinator?

KIRK FERENTZ: A couple things. Going back to the last question, he's an adult and he's getting paid. I'm not saying he's fair game, but when you get paid, I look at the world a whole lot different if you're getting a salary versus being a college athlete. That's the way it goes. I've joked about it, but it is the worst position, and with social media it's become the all-time worst position is the guy who calls plays.

The nepotism, I would say my approach, and believe me, I've thought about all this stuff, we didn't exactly light it up in '04. We were next to last in rushing. I can't remember who was last. But next to last in rushing, but we didn't torch it up or tear the playbook up after that. We were not a very good team, and I still remember like yesterday the spring of '08, Tom Moore in our facility Saturday morning or it was Friday morning, whatever time he got here, ridiculously early, I walk in the conference room and he's watching our film from '07, and I asked him what he was doing. He said, I'm watching your film. I said, why, because we were terrible on offense.

But my answer there is after those two seasons, we just went back to work, and that's what we do.

It's my judgment to decide if we've got the best people in the building. That's my obligation, my judgment. It's my obligation to the program, most importantly to our players, and again, I feel really good about our staff. I think we've got a real capable staff, talented staff. We're going to find solutions and get better, and that's my responsibility as the head coach.

Q. With your assistants and the committee, it seems like things kind of went sideways with that meeting for some people.

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I was actually slightly late to the meeting because I was at a visitation. It was on a Monday. But I think there were -- let's just say everybody wasn't on the same page. I'll just go back to what I just said a minute ago, we've got a really, I think, talented, really capable group of coaches here in this building right now, and I'm not talking about me, I'm talking about our coaches, and as good as I think they are football wise, I think they're better human beings and people.

I'm not challenging, but I'd encourage you to ask our players about who they work with on a daily basis, and I would also encourage you if you can find out who's on the committee, talk to everybody on the committee, not just an



individual, and see what they think. That would be my answer to that. We'll let the record stand where it may.

