

University of Iowa Football Media Conference

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Kirk Ferentz

Press Conference



KIRK FERENTZ: -- We've seen a lot of areas where there is growth. Today is clearly indicative of this, we still have a long ways to go right now.

Overall, the work habits and attitude have been good. Our leadership has been good. Probably got a little bit more personality than most of our teams at this point. That's because we have some really good older players, experienced players. That part is all good.

Next two weeks, the guys will be in a little different type of training regimen, lighter, finish up their academic work, finals, guys will have a good break and then get back hard at it in June.

Today was certainly good to work and be in Kinnick. First time all spring we've been in Kinnick. We have only been outdoor three times. For a breeze and weather out there, I think that is certainly good. Certainly for the guys throwing the football, kicking the football, that's was healthy for them. A little different throwing and kicking indoors. Having a chance is certainly always a good thing, so that's a positive.

Then the other thing you notice the volume of work we're doing right now is a little bit less, it's been like that all spring because of the injuries. We had talked how we're going to do spring practice a couple months ago, then injuries almost kind of forced our hands, cutting back some of the reps, especially for guys that have played. We have a couple guys you can predict what they'll look like when we get going.

Good chance to learn a little bit. We haven't had a team banquet in a couple of years now. We're doing a cookout with the families, they're over there right now getting something to eat. Good to get them all together. A good opportunity again in light of the fact that we haven't had a banquet in a couple years.

So far so good. We certainly have a lot of work to do, but we have a chance to have a good team if we do the work the way we're supposed to, don't hit too many bends in the

road that are unexpected.

Q. You said 'more personality'. What do you mean by that?

KIRK FERENTZ: Usually this time of year, the leadership base of the team, how we're going to go about things, how we react to things. So far I think we're a little bit ahead of the curve. Getting guys like Riley Moss, Charlie Jones, and Sam LaPorta back, cherry pick two guys that are on the older side, maybe had options to consider. Getting guys like that.

I'll cherry pick a guy like Gavin Williams, who has only been our lead back one game in his career. He carries himself like he's an older guy, like a senior almost. There's something about him, a maturity about him, a focus. He's really respected by everybody.

I think we have a good mix that way. We're hardly there yet, but at least that's a big part of the next couple months here is continuing to build on that, develop those stronger personalities as we go along.

Q. The esprit de corps has been a strength of yours the last couple years, despite the negativity outside the program. I think you would say that's been very helpful in what you've accomplished. When do you really know that this team has that potential to be that strong?

KIRK FERENTZ: We're going to find out. I hope we do. I agree, I think really the last four years we've kind of been building pretty well. For the most part finished up pretty strongly in all four of those seasons. Pleased with the way things went. A couple things from last year obviously we'd love to change.

I think for us to have a good team, if you look historically, that's really been the case. If our leadership base grows, our togetherness, if you will, as a football team, at least you have a chance to be competitive. That's where it all starts.

It's something we try to work on, conscientious on our part to work at it. It's important that every team has some personality, too. It takes the right kind of guys to develop that.

Q. What have you seen from the three quarterbacks today and in the 15 practices overall?

KIRK FERENTZ: I think all three have made a lot of progress. Alex had some injury issues he was dealing with the first couple weeks. His work was limited.

I think all three are growing. All three little different discussions, how we play, how they play. They were in there. They're all growing.

Joe obviously, as I said back five weeks ago, he's behind the other two as far as knowing what to do. This was huge for him, to get 15-set practice when Alex was out. That increased his workload a little bit, which was good.

This will be really helpful for him. Not that he's a first-year guy. This isn't his first spring, if you think about the young guys that came in, too. Having these 15 days, that will really help them accelerate between now and August. Hopefully they'll be further down the road when we get going then.

Q. How much ground did Joe make up?

KIRK FERENTZ: He's made progress. He's doing a good job. He's still has a lot to learn. We would expect that, certainly do. He has a good attitude, works very hard, very conscientious. As you saw, he does some good things out there.

Q. Stanley was a true sophomore when he started, a few others. Can he follow that path with a good August?

KIRK FERENTZ: We'll see. The competition path was probably a little different for the other guys. We'll see. We have an open mind about every position on the team, certainly the quarterback spot. Right now Joe has a ways to go for us to have confidence that he can go out and play. We've seen the other two guys win games for us as the starting quarterback. Not that they won the games on their own. We've won football games with those.

We played an opponent last year that we knocked their quarterback out and they couldn't respond. That's part of winning football: somebody has to come out and get the job done.

I think Joe has a chance.

Q. Do you see Spencer as the leader in that competition right now?

KIRK FERENTZ: Overall, yeah. But we're going to keep

an open mind. With our whole football team, we'll keep competing.

Q. How does Spencer look?

KIRK FERENTZ: I think he has done a lot of really good things. He seems confident, healthy. He throws the ball well.

Q. Sam LaPorta has always seemed to play with a certain amount of maturity, even his freshman year. Would you agree with that? Has that helped his development?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, some guys just have a certain knack or air about them. He's had that. It's a little bit ironic because he was not a five-star recruit. Took us a while to figure it out. Thank goodness we did.

Since the day he walked in here, he acts like a football player. I hate to use the word 'natural' because it suggests guys haven't worked at it. He makes decisions, has a knack for doing things the right way. That's good to see.

He's got a confidence about him, an air about him, just the way he is naturally. He's one of those guys that people gravitate towards.

Q. No. 3 made some good plays on defense. Have you seen Cooper continue to improve?

KIRK FERENTZ: He has. He's moving into the next two. We have a lot of good competition coming in the back end. Another position we got a couple guys out, limited or couldn't work. I guess three guys were out today that have starting experience for us.

Cooper is making a good name for himself. He's learning every day, does a lot of good things. I go back to the bowl game. He gave us a chance with that come-across-the-field tackle on their big play where if we had gotten a stop, ifs and nuts, all that stuff. But at least he gave us a chance to keep fighting there.

Those kinds of plays to me, I'm not sure you teach those. Some guys I don't want to say do that naturally, not to use the word 'naturally', but that's how he's wired. He plays it all the way through. Yeah, he's doing a good job. He'll be good on special teams, too, obviously.

Q. What do you know now about kicker?

KIRK FERENTZ: Today we got work to do, being outside.

Q. The wind?



KIRK FERENTZ: They did a pretty good job during the spring. The consistency is going to be the issue. Talking to somebody yesterday about Jason Baker, different topic. I remember Jason, when I got here; his issue was consistency. Obviously he could punt the football. I feel kind of the same way about the kickers. I think they're both capable but they don't have the consistency level right now.

We are going to play in games conditions like this most likely next fall if not every week. Going to have to learn that, too. Whole different discussion. Hasn't been a great spring weather-wise.

Q. What was your reaction to Jermari Harris' arrest?

KIRK FERENTZ: I'm not happy. Most importantly I think he feels bad about it. Seems to really feel bad about it. If there's a positive, he was able to walk away without hurting another person or himself.

That's going to be a hard price to pay. It's unfortunate. Have to remind yourself you have a hundred-plus people that sometimes make bad decisions.

Q. Will he be out for the opener?

KIRK FERENTZ: Unless something else comes up, that's kind of been or standard, yep, with football.

Q. The cohesion of the offensive line, you lost some pieces, some injuries, of course been a work in progress the last few years. Where do you think things stand now? Do you think better than maybe what they were two weeks ago?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I do. I think with an asterisk on that, we have had a couple guys injured. Nick (DeJong) you saw wasn't out there working today. I think we've clearly made ground or gained ground there.

I thought we did during the course of the year last year, especially the last -- basically November on, I thought we started to look a little bit more like what we hoped.

We're still young. We're certainly more experienced than we were a year ago. But all that being said, we still have work to do. Logan played a lot of center today. You think about it, that's his 15th practice playing offense, I know he played in high school. He does a lot of things again instinctively, naturally. He has a knack of fitting into the right places, doing the right things.

I was just telling Eric out there, the first third-down drill, first

two-minute offense, all of a sudden it's a little different, shotgun snap, got a guy on your nose, got to set to a guy that's out here. Those things are easier to talk about than do. We graduated a guy who did it well for a long time. You forget there's a little bit of a challenge there.

That's why practice is so invaluable. A great learning experience for him. We were watching Mike (Myslinski) kind of make that same progress in December until his injury.

It's going to be fun to see how those two guys do when we get back. We've seen guys with growth like Elsbury, go down the list. We talk about Colby like he's a grizzled veteran. He's been here one year. Jack Plumb has made some strides. He's practiced well for the better part of this spring. Can say the same thing about Mason.

I think we're seeing things that are encouraging. We still have a lot of work to do, room for improvement.

Q. When Logan got here, did you have in your mind the switch to center?

KIRK FERENTZ: You always look at players, what their potentials might be. Jack Campbell is another guy, I could name six positions he probably could play pretty well. Then you got to figure out what's best for the individual, what's best for the team. In the back of my mind since we started recruiting probably.

It's a combination of what he might be able to do, then a combination of what our depth is. That's really what led us to this move. We try not to move guys just to move 'em. If there's a good rationale for it, we'll have a discussion.

This one I might have gone - what do they call it - rogue, where you go on your own and do it. The defensive guys are talking to me again now, all that stuff. We've moved beyond it. They weren't happy (smiling).

Q. Talk about the development of Quinn Schulte.

KIRK FERENTZ: He's quietly done a really good job. You think about a guy like Jack Koerner who played so well, so long. Q, he's improved with every turn. We were talking about Cooper, him getting more comfortable, growing. I think Quinn has done the same thing.

He's done a really good job. Hasn't really been noticeable, I don't mean that in a bad way. Always start there. Balls aren't going over his head. That's a really good thing. He just plays steady. He's where he should be, makes the plays he should make. That's really good. He's still a young player. He's done a really good job.

Q. Some of the players said as it pertains to the offense, tempo was good, execution not where they want it to be. Do you agree with that?

KIRK FERENTZ: Absolutely. I think so. We've had a couple days where our tempo could have been better. Today is probably one of those a little bit.

But I don't know how many times I've walked out of here in springs or in August where it's like, okay, we can still do a little bit more here, a little bit better. That's part of the learning process. When you get in front of fans or you're in Kinnick, you should be going at a little different rate, I think.

But it's typically learned. It just is. That's part of the thing we'll have to learn. But the cohesiveness, all that kind of stuff, that will come. I'm confident we got the parts, assuming we get everybody back healthy and those types of things.

We'll focus more on that in August.

Q. What do you see in these 15 practices from Xavier?

KIRK FERENTZ: Good. That's kind of what I was alluding to when you talk about Joe. All the first-year guys, he and TJ (Hall) in the back end, just getting the work and learning all the things that they do are really good. I think we're going to see a big jump in terms of his confidence, just being a little bit more decisive with his play when we get back in August.

He's done some really good things. He flashes some things. You can see the guy that we knew he is. That will show up on special teams, too. He's just a tremendous young guy, great personality, demeanor, really good to work with, good work ethic, good work habits. Doing a great job in the classroom as well. It's really been great. Say the same thing about TJ Hall, both of them back there as true freshmen. Doing a nice job so far.

Q. You have a lot of depth along the defensive line. Lukas Van Ness, how has that gone over kicking him outside?

KIRK FERENTZ: He's got a chance to be pretty good, I think. Works hard. He's got a good motor. He gets after it pretty well. He's problematic when you're trying to pass block him. He does a lot of things well. He's a good football player.

I think coming along, get Joe Evans back, that will help us. Zach was the biggest loss as far as contributions from last year. We feel like we have a chance.

That was part of the rationale for considering Logan on offense. We have some depth there. The guy has done a really good job, been steady. Noah (Shannon) has had a really good spring. Would be remiss if I didn't mention him. John Waggoner as well. There's two guys that have played football, they're seniors.

These guys, they live it every day, just the way they operate, everything they do is really first class. That's good for guys like Lukas to see this is the tempo these guys work at, this is how we do it.

Noah especially has done well. John has done very well, in a quiet way. But they're going hard. That makes our offensive line better, too.

Q. He has to go against Mason a lot. Mason got thrown in at left tackle. How do you think he performed? What is his competition level like?

KIRK FERENTZ: I think he did a good job last year considering. He's taken a jump. I think both he and Jack are better players, clearly better, but better than they were in January.

It's because they both work at it, they study it. They're not perfect, but they try to be. Like you can just tell they really think about the details, what it is they're asked to do. That's really important at that position.

I think they're on the right track right now. Time is going to make them better. You can't give a guy maturity or experience.

Q. What is DeJong's status?

KIRK FERENTZ: He should be good in June. We got good news on that. Been getting a lot of bad breaks or funny breaks. That was a good break. They're not quite sure when they actually do a procedure what it's going to be. That was probably as good as it could be.

Yeah, if he's not full speed on June 6, he should be really close. Good news. He's done a good job.

Q. With the NFL Draft less than a week away, have you been getting a lot of phone calls about Tyler Linderbaum? Second Iowa Hawkeye from the offensive line being selected in the past three years.

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, not a lot of contact. He did his pro day two Mondays ago. Visited with the people that were here then. I may have talked to a couple people over the last couple months.

It's funny, every draft is different. Every team is different in how they do it. But Tyler is kind of unusual. I told the guys at pro day, there's really not a lot to tell you because everything he is, it's on film. I guess his arms weren't quite as long as somebody wants. We have a lot of guys like that, too. Had a bunch of them. (Brandon) Scherff just signed a pretty good contract. I'd rather have a guy that has his arms half an inch short that can actually block guys trying to block them.

Everything he does, his résumé is on film. You meet the guy, had a couple teams comment on what their interview was like. One guy said he could probably coach our offensive line. It was that detailed, that thorough.

I've sat on that side of the fence for six years. The one nice thing, any coach appreciates just knowing what you're going to get, really knowing. I think that's the best thing I can say about Tyler. Whatever they think they're getting, that's what they're getting, probably plus some.

He'll be a guy in my mind that's going to play the next 10, 12 years, play really well. Be a great guy on the team, in the locker room, all those things that are really invaluable.

You look at a contract that a guy like Scherff signs, a guy like (Marshal) Yanda. Part of that is what they bring to the team, not just the way they play. That's what Tyler has been his entire career here. What he's going to do, so many variables on that. No matter how you get there, it's what you do when you get there.

He'll be just fine. I feel like that about all the guys coming out. An exciting time for them. Keep our fingers crossed.

Have a good week.

Q. What are thoughts on your receivers?

KIRK FERENTZ: That's where it's frustrating because we've had guys miss a lot of time. Then at one point for a high percentage of our practices, there were times where we were kind of maxed out with four receivers. How many plays of team can you really run? How many plays of seven-on-sevens?

We've had to really gear some things back. We need to get all those guys up and running, then in August we're going to need some quality work in that area. That affects everything, too.

But having tight ends, you have Luke out for two, two and a half weeks, whatever it was. Good news is Johnny Pascuzzi, Johnny Jacuzzi, whatever you want to call him, a

couple nicknames right now (laughter). He was on the scout team last year. Has done some good things out there. That's a guy taking advantage of an opportunity. See those guys do some things like that.

Alec Wick made a really nice catch, a nice play the other day in the red zone Thursday morning. It's all hands on deck. We need to get guys healthy, get them back where they can perform, just get that consistency that you need with that group.

Q. Where are you at in the process of putting that advisory group together?

KIRK FERENTZ: Probably next time we get together, I'll have more conclusive thoughts on that. This last month has been more on our team. Yeah, I got some ideas. We're getting closer. Probably have that wrapped up here by June.

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