

University of Iowa Football

Media Conference

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Coach Kirk Ferentz

Press Conference



KIRK FERENTZ: Good afternoon to everybody. Certainly good to get going. This is always the best time of year, quite frankly, if you like college football, and I think one thing about it, the excitement of a new season never gets old. Certainly on Saturday being in the tunnel right before the swarm, that's a special moment.

Looking forward to that.

Probably like most people involved in college football, too, it's time to play a game. We've been practicing against each other for about four weeks at this point, and I'm sure everybody in the country feels like it's time to line up and play somebody else and kind of find out where you're at and learn a little bit more about your team, and that will go on all season long for sure.

It's been interesting here. We had a chance to transition last week into a school year. Still kind of in a camp mode, if you will, or preseason mode, but got the transition going, and this is our first game week, like most teams in the country, so that's a little bit of a transition, too, and it's really where your older players, your more experienced players help our younger guys get through that.

But we still have a lot of guys this is all new to, and it's always interesting to see how that's going to go and how they'll respond as we go along.

One thing I always remind our team, there's nothing easy about winning football games, especially in college football, and there never has been, never will be. It's kind of the way it goes. But that's something our guys need to understand.

It's paramount in competition, you're trying to do something successful, it's certainly not easy. There's no easy route to it, period. If you're not involved in it, then maybe it's a little bit easier, but if you're one of the teams out there competing, that's a little different story.

That's certainly the case for us. We're playing a really good football team and a good football program in South

Dakota State. First thing that jumps out at you when you look at their film in any phase is they're well-coached and they really play hard, and that's what good teams do.

Beyond that, you do a little research and learn about their program, there's a great tradition of success up there. Certainly they have a coaching staff that knows what it takes to be successful, and they've done a great job with that. They do have an identity. They have good players, they compete hard, and any tape you look at, any segment, I know they feel like they've had as good a skill players as they've had offensively at any one time, and that's over a couple of decades of coaching there. They also have veteran linemen, so they have a really good offensive unit.

It's interesting you think about a quarterback that got drafted, you think about an offensive running back that got drafted and then they have two other guys coming in, kind of a unique situation where arguably the new quarterback may be better, new/old, he's coming in off a year injury, and then they have the other running back who's a really good player, as well.

As I said, on defense, well-coached. They really play hard and they present some problems for you. They have good movement, guys that play very aggressively. Overall it's going to be a tough challenge for us, and the other thing you look at in recent years here, two years ago or whenever it would have been, fall of '19, opener of '19, they went up to Minnesota and played them right off their feet. I think it was a 28-21 loss.

And then last year, and that's what I was referencing, when we were getting ready for Colorado State, when you watched that film of them playing South Dakota State, that was not a fluke win by any stretch by South Dakota State. They outplayed Colorado State in all three phases, and that got my attention right then knowing we had them down the road.

Bottom line is they're a top quality opponent and they have our full attention, and it's going to take that for us to be successful.

As far as us, we wrapped up, I guess it's been four weeks now. Overall pleased with the growth and development of our football team. They've had a good attitude. They've

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worked hard.

We've had to work through some injury situations. That's typical of any camp, and certainly not an exception this year. Depth-wise we're fluid in some spots. We'll see where all things play out. Then there's some other spots where it's pretty much a given that our three linebackers will be the same three guys you saw last year: Riley Moss and Kaevon in the back end. Pretty safe to say they'll be playing. LaPorta at tight end and Petras as our quarterback. Those things are set in stone right now. Some other things we're working through, but again, overall just pleased with the competition.

I think our guys have improved, gotten better, and hopefully that will show up on Saturday.

Last note on the roster, Jackson Ritter and Justin Britt will not be able to play this year, medical reasons, and David Davidkov will be in that group, as well. I'm sorry to say he won't be able to play. That's kind of where our roster is right now.

Last two points here, just want to give recognition to Eli Belzer. He'll be the honorary captain this week. He's a young guy from Elkader, so he'll be with us on the sideline on Saturday.

It's going to be great to be in Kinnick Stadium, we've been there for fan day, which was kids' day. It was a good opportunity. I've already told the players, especially the younger guys, a little bit different when it's 70,000 in there, and an enthusiastic crowd, so we appreciate our fan support.

It's great that the season tickets are already sold out. All the games are in good shape that way, and it's our job to come and try to match the enthusiasm that our fans will have, and it'll be a great environment, so hopefully we'll play up to that level and look like a good football team.

Lastly, our captains this week are TE Sam LaPorta, DB Riley Moss, LB Jack Campbell and DB Kaevon Merriweather. I'll throw it out for questions.

Q. Going back to the spring and even after the off-season, you considered it a competition at quarterback. What did Spencer do that enabled him to continue to be the starting quarterback at Iowa?

KIRK FERENTZ: It's a long evaluation, and we evaluate everything, we tell our guys starting in January. Obviously we're not doing football stuff, and both Spencer and Alex are both quality guys, but just the time on the field, I think Spencer has out-performed Alex a little bit at this point.

He's further ahead and gives us a better chance to be successful. That's not to diminish what Alex has done. Both have improved.

Now the thing is can we put this whole thing together and be a little bit more productive offensively. Both guys have done a good job. Spencer has continued to climb.

Q. Injury-wise, what's the latest on Nico Ragaini and how quickly do you think he can get back?

KIRK FERENTZ: He has a medical issue right now. It's going to be at least a couple weeks, so he's not on the depth chart, which means he has no chance to play this week. It's unfortunate because he's really practicing well, great guy, and another one of our veteran players, so would be great to have him with us.

Q. You mentioned the depth real quick at wide receiver. Two walk-ons in the two deep. Is the depth a concern at all? Maybe touch a little bit on those walk-ons.

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah. First of all, those guys have done a good job, Jack and Alec have done a really nice job and been consistent, and they've been out there every day, which is a big, big part of it. They've done a good job and Arland has done a nice job, as well.

We're not as deep as you'd like to be. It seems like every preseason or every segment -- spring ball kind of goes this way, too, certain segments get tagged a little bit with the injury deal, and just got to work around it. That's what we're doing there.

I think the good news is we're a little deeper at tight end than maybe some years past, so we'll figure out a way to complement things and make it work.

Q. I know Keagan Johnson is slowed. Is he available for a full workload this week?

KIRK FERENTZ: We'll see. It's been touch and go. Like I said, we've had a lot of guys in and out of the lineup with injuries, that type of thing, and that's always frustrating. Nobody is more frustrated than the players involved. He's got a chance, and we'll see where it goes.

Q. A chance to play?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, chance to play.

Q. In retrospect, the fact that Gavin and Leshon got playing time in the bowl game, does that give them a little bit of a head start coming into this year versus



where they might have been otherwise?

KIRK FERENTZ: I think so, for sure. I still appreciate the fact that we knew a couple weeks out ahead. That was a good thing. It gave both those guys a chance to prepare as starters, and they both did a nice job I thought all month of December and both played well in the bowl game.

I think at least we came into this season feeling pretty good about who our one and two are and how they can do, and both of them have done a great job, and then the key thing is moving forward with the younger guys. It's been a really good valuable four weeks for both the incoming freshmen. They've done a nice job.

Q. Is there a distinctive difference between the two Williams?

KIRK FERENTZ: They're not the same. Obviously they have the same last name, but a little different styles. But complement each other well. They're both very capable. Gavin is probably a little bit more polished if you would or refined when he got here, but he's just continues to do a good job. He's studying everything he does and has a mature approach.

Leshon really surprised us a year ago spring when I mentioned he caught my eye, and he's done nothing but improve since that time. Both of them are very capable of playing well, so it's good to know you have two guys that you have confidence in. Now the next challenge is who's going to be the next man in.

Q. Is there a resolution at kicker at this point?

KIRK FERENTZ: We'll let that play out, and it may play out for a week or two or a couple weeks, you never know. Unlike this spring, we're doing better certainly in the fall. I'm more encouraged. It's gone back and forth a little bit, and I don't think it's a bad thing quite frankly. But both guys have improved a lot since last April, and they both have worked hard, have a good attitude, and I think they're both very capable.

Q. Who will be the first one out there?

KIRK FERENTZ: I'll tell you on Saturday. I don't know right now.

Q. Do you plan on using both of them on Saturday?

KIRK FERENTZ: Not necessarily as field goal kickers, but one may kickoff, one may kick field goals, and we'll see where it all goes. Right now there's no clear plan. We're waiting to see how the week plays out and how they do.

Q. Do you feel like your team is flying under the radar this year?

KIRK FERENTZ: Not really, because I'm not sure what that radar says. I think in conversation with Steve yesterday, he made reference that some people have us picked to go to Detroit and other people have us picked to go to Miami for bowl games, so I think that's a pretty wide range. That's probably pretty accurate of about 95 percent of the teams in college football right now because none of us really know where we're at, and then the other part is none of us really know what's going to happen over the next four months, and just how injuries factor in, how crazy things that happen in a season factor in, and probably more importantly how our team is going to respond to those things that you can't map out or know that are coming. That's a big, big part of it.

I think we have good leadership. That's an encouraging thing. But there's going to be a lot of bumps and different steps to handle along the way.

Right now the idea is just to play well Saturday and see if we can get our first win, but that's not going to be easy.

Q. Given what you just said about injuries and bumps and you don't know how those things will play out, you never do, but do you know coming into a season if you've got a good team or not?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yes and no. You have a good feel about a team, and this team, I've been saying pretty consistently, I felt pretty good about them since we got going in January. They seem to care about each other. They work hard, have a good attitude, good work ethic. That's a good starting point.

But everything you do prior to the first game is about getting ready for that first game, and it's not all about that first game, but all 12 of these games are really critical. We don't get to play 162 games a year, so each and every one really means something, and how can we handle each challenge week by week.

But a big part of it is the not quite eight months that you invest prior to that, what's that look like. At least it gives you an idea of what you might be able to expect as you move forward, but that's how we handle these challenges as they come up.

Q. Seemed like a few weeks ago the health at offensive tackle was a little bit shaky on the depth chart. Now Mason is there and Jack, and Nick DeJong, as well. How do you feel about that position and the

offensive line as a whole?

KIRK FERENTZ: If you would have asked me 10 days ago, not so good, and right now I feel a lot better. Again, injuries come and go, and unfortunately the ones we incurred with that group weren't longer than a week or so.

But it was rough there practicing for a while because we had guys out of the lineup. But right now we probably have four to six to seven, maybe eight guys that we feel comfortable putting out there. Obviously if you do the math on that, a couple of those guys haven't played, so that's going to be a little bit of a wild ride and there will be some excitement involved there.

But we have the nucleus for a good group, and it's a matter of where all that settles now. It's kind of like the kicking position; not quite sure who's going to be playing where Saturday. But we have a chance to have a nucleus of a good group and hopefully be better than we were last year at this time. I'm confident that we are. But we still have to go out and do it. But we're still trying to get things set a little bit there.

Q. Do you still see Connor Colby potentially moving into the opposite tackle spot?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, he has flexibility to do both, and that's a real positive. Jack Plumb is flexible but he's left or right; we wouldn't put him inside. Nick has played both ways, so that's good, and our intention is to keep Mason at tackle. At least we have some chess pieces we can move around if we have to.

Q. Is there a point you'd like to have somebody like Colby set at one or the other or do you want to keep that flexibility?

KIRK FERENTZ: We'll see how it settles out, but usually one of the bigger challenges of not having enough guys to play tackle, and I think we have a healthy competition there. Again, having guys that have some flexibility going in and out helps, too, so I think both Nick and Connor have that. It gives us a little bit of an ability to maybe get the best five guys out there.

Q. The growth you've seen in the offense in the offseason, does it maybe give you confidence that they'll take that next step from last year?

KIRK FERENTZ: Part of the challenge is you can kind of piece together. We've had some injury situations that make it a little bit frustrating, but I think collectively if we can get 11 guys out there that we want on Saturday, that'll be good, first of all, and then I feel like we're further along.

I feel like everybody -- the offensive line is probably a good illustration. We had a lot of work to do last September, and I thought during the year, that steadily got a little bit better. We were obviously young out in the receiver position because of the graduation from the year before, so that's part of college football is just trying to put those pieces together. Usually it comes down to two things: Dependability or availability, and then also the improvement that the guys make.

So I think the guys made some improvement, and it also helps to have guys -- LaPorta has played really good football for us; I think we know what we're going to get from him. So you've got some guys like that that give you a starting point. But it's a work in progress. It always is. But I just think we're further along right now than we were a year ago.

Q. You can't predict obviously the injuries that happened at wide receiver during camp, and then going back to January you had your four leading receivers all returning, but do you think Charlie Jones' departure in late May, early June may have impacted what you might have done say in one of the signing periods or even with the transfer portal had it happened four months earlier?

KIRK FERENTZ: I'm not sure that would have been a factor. There was one receiver that we engaged in conversation with and recruited, and he chose a different place. But that's really not -- I'm not saying we're going to shut that market down totally, but it's really not how we're looking to build a team, and I think we have enough guys on our team that we can be successful with.

I'm not sure it would have altered things a great deal.

Q. I'm sure you saw what Michigan did with their quarterback situation. I'm just curious, is that something you've ever thought about doing with your quarterback room?

KIRK FERENTZ: Not recently, no. We rotated quarterbacks in '81. I'll go back then. I'm not sure it was a plan and I don't remember how we started them, but no, I mean, in a perfect world you'd probably like to have one, but if you've got two that's not a bad situation.

Like I said before, we have two that we've won with, so that's a good feeling. Alex has practiced well. I want to make sure everybody understands, he's improved, too, so I think we have two quarterbacks that are better than they were a year ago, and right now we have to try to support those guys and try to build a good team around them.

Q. With Ragaini and Keagan not at 100 percent health how important has Arland Bruce been this fall camp and heading into week 1?

KIRK FERENTZ: He did a really good job, as did Keagan last year. Both those guys for first-year guys really I thought did some good things. Arland is one of those guys that he goes. He just goes and goes and goes, and he's very versatile and practices well. I expect him to play well based on what I've seen the last four weeks, so glad he's on our football team.

Q. Brecht or Bostick, are those guys options?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, oh, yeah, definitely. Yeah, he's practicing right now, so we'll see what happens.

Q. Can you talk a little bit about those three linebackers that are returning and kind of their significance for this game?

KIRK FERENTZ: Sure. Just for the season. It's rare when you have three guys back that are that experienced. We're fortunate that way. It just doesn't happen very often when you have that, a whole group like that that's as veteran as they are. They've been practicing well. All three of those guys were out in the spring, so they made up for lost time, that's for sure, and they looked comfortable out there practicing well. If we're going to have a good defensive football team you've got to be good at the linebacker spot.

Q. What are you expecting from them?

KIRK FERENTZ: I expect them to play well and really be good leaders for us, and all three of those guys have that capability.

Q. When you look at scheduling somebody like South Dakota State, and it happened in 2018 and this was after they played UNI to some very, very close games, North Dakota State obviously, how do games like that get scheduled? Do you have to rubber stamp it or did you call Stiegelmeier and say let's play?

KIRK FERENTZ: No, I don't think I've called anybody. I fielded a call from (Fresno State's) Pat Hill, whatever year that would have been, where he was going to play three times in a row here, and I told him absolutely not, no way because one year they were 1-10, the next year they're 10-1 and had that really good receiver. They beat Wisconsin I think up in Wisconsin.

So that was an easy conversation. I've worked with Pat. But no, I don't get too involved in that.

That whole conference, they just play really good football. When you watch those teams on film, it's not a new news flash. I think people here are certainly familiar through UNI. But that's really a good conference. UNI has been good for as long as I can remember, but that whole league has just elevated. It's really impressive, and they've got good facilities. They've done a really nice job recruiting.

These guys have a lot of really good football players, like really good. I just mentioned two guys are in the NFL right now, and maybe the next two guys behind them are better. You could argue that. It's kind of a scary thought.

Q. What's it like when you face someone like John Stiegelmeier with all that experience at South Dakota State?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, so I think I'm older than him -- I figured I was. That's unusual that somebody is that close and then he's got more tenure. But I have great admiration for him. He's done a great job with the program. Not that I know them intimately but I've followed them now the last several years, and I just watch the way they operate. We've seen them in crossover tape. You pretty much form opinions about anybody when you watch tape, at least that's how I form opinions about programs, and every tape I've seen going back a couple years with them is really -- whenever the tight end that got drafted, I don't know if he's in Philly or whatever, you know who I'm talking about, but I remember them playing against somebody there, and they're a good football team and a good football program.

The other thing I'm impressed with, they lost four coaches this past offseason, but if you look at the guys they've hired, there's a lot of common DNA in there. So they're very confident about who they are, what they are and how they do things.

That to me is impressive. Like they know who they are, and it's worked really well for them, and he's a first-class coach, first-class gentleman.

Q. As a quarterback is it difficult to adjust when the other 10 guys around the quarterback are constantly switching, and how do you think Spencer has adjusted to that?

KIRK FERENTZ: I think he's been fine. The difficulty is when guys can't do what they're supposed to do. That's where the difficulty comes in. Even if you're rotating players at some positions, you don't mind doing that. Other positions you don't want to do it a lot. It really gets down to just developing a trust level with everybody and everybody knowing where each other are going to go and what our responsibilities are, that's kind of the challenge

ahead.

That's where experience really comes into play and is helpful and beneficial, but hopefully it won't be a big problem for us.

Q. You moved Logan Jones across the way, and he's started throughout the spring and through all fall camp. How has he adjusted? Nobody is Tyler Linderbaum, but can he perform those tasks to a comparable ability?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, that's two good points there. Nobody is Tyler Linderbaum, and Tyler was a new guy too a couple years ago, and he played really well in '19.

I caught myself actually coincidentally yesterday thinking about that. Like when I look at our guys, and he's been practicing well, so you start thinking, okay, well, he's got it, and I started thinking to myself also, he hasn't played a game yet as an offensive player here. He did in high school.

So he's practicing well, doing a good job. Things have been fairly smooth. But he still hasn't played out in Kinnick as a starter.

He's going to have some anxiety, too, I'm sure. He really hasn't been a key player on our football team where he is now. He's in a role where he's going to be key.

Q. He has some physical gifts and obviously some weight room prowess that helps him. Has that been able to help him either mask some of the fundamentals he hasn't quite caught up with yet, because of his physical ability?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, he'll figure that out, and he's been figuring it out really -- probably the biggest difference, Tyler moves over in December and we didn't do it with Logan until March. But he's really done a good job switching over.

I don't want to say it was natural, but he picked things up really quickly. He's a really coachable guy. You pointed out the things he does in the weight room are in competitions out there, he's one of those guys that just is an achiever, so that's a really good starting point.

I think it's one thing about new games, we have a lot of guys that haven't -- talk about the linemen that haven't played a lot, we've got a lot of guys that haven't played a lot, and also they're going to be asked to do some things, so we're going to ride the ups and downs a little bit with that.

One thing I've learned is when guys practice well, that's a good predictor of how they're going to play, and in Logan's case he's really done a good job there.

Q. How do you feel about where the rushing offense is right now? How have they and the offensive line built off of that momentum?

KIRK FERENTZ: They've done a good job. I alluded, we had some injury issues about a week and a half ago which made it a little bit bumpy, but I think everybody is on the same page, and that's probably why we need to play.

You get to a point where the offense knows the defense, defense knows the offense, and it's like spy versus spy out there.

About seven days ago everybody hated each other in the building. Like the offensive guys hate the defensive guys. It just happens every spring and every August. So it's time to go and see what we look like against somebody else. That's really where we're at.

Q. Are your players aware of the problems that FCS schools have caused other teams?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I mean, you don't have to look too far back in our history to cite that, and an easier one is the UNI game in 2009. That's where I told my son Steve watching the basketball, I think Butler was playing -- Butler had lost to Youngstown State, and they were playing whoever it was for the NCAA championship, and I looked at my son Steve and said, Can you imagine these guys lost to Youngstown? He said, well, You guys in '09 nearly lost to UNI and then went to the Orange Bowl, and I was like, Oh, yeah, good point.

That's what I'm saying; winning is not easy. That was a miracle that we won in '09 with a good football team. We had a really good football team as it proved out.

Each and every week is a challenge, and we're playing a team that's got a lot of proven success and they've got a lot of proven players coming back, so they've got our total attention and total respect.

The minute you start looking at it differently, that's when you get in trouble, I think, in competition.

Q. How do you look at your defensive line right now? It seems, appears as deep as it's ever been. Do you anticipate Van Ness playing more on the edge as opposed to inside, and how does Aaron Graves fit in?

KIRK FERENTZ: A couple points there. We'll see how it all plays out about us in position versatility. Lucas does have that versatility, so that's a good thing.

I think you're accurate in our depth. It's probably about as good as I can remember. We've got a lot of guys that I think we can put in there that we trust and I think will play well.

And then it's kind of like we're talking about some of the guys, just curious to see, Lucas is a year older; let's see what he looks like now. If he is playing outside, does that make a little difference for him, all those kind of things. Who knows who's going to emerge. We've got some interesting guys in the group.

And then with Aaron, Aaron has done nothing but impress us. The challenge there is that we do have some depth. If he were at some other positions, he'd probably be in there an awful lot. But we'll see how the game plays out, but we fully intend to play him and push him forward and see what happens after a couple weeks.

Q. Do you expect Xavier Nwankpa to play a whole season? Special teams?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, he's on special teams.

Q. How about T.J. Hall?

KIRK FERENTZ: He's in the group, yep.

Q. One guy, maybe this is -- Gennings Dunker, we saw him first-team right guard at Kids Day. Is he available?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, he's playing. He's on the depth chart -- he's not? Put him on there. He's in the mix of top eight, top 10 guys, yeah.

Q. What about kick returner and punt returner these days?

KIRK FERENTZ: So we've got our group of guys here, and it's kind of like the kicking position, but probably Cooper DeJean, certainly Arland Bruce, Riley Moss, those top three guys. Wick is also a punt returner, so he's a possibility. And then the other guys I'd probably add to the kickoff would be maybe Gavin and Leshon; those guys might be in the mix there, too.

Q. Is there a hesitation on punt return to put Arland back there because of the wide receiver depth?

KIRK FERENTZ: No, not at all. We're going to put the best guy out there. It's been pretty much back and forth,

but both of them have done a good job and been really solid.

Q. When you have a linebacker as prolific as Jack, and Jestin has also gotten a lot of attention, as well, it can be easy for somebody like a Seth Benson who's been one of your senior starters to get overshadowed. What role does he play in this defense?

KIRK FERENTZ: He probably got used to that during the recruiting process because he was really kind of an afterthought. I think he was a last-weekend visit, and we didn't know we were going to offer him a scholarship until we really got to know him. He came here with his family, and you meet the whole family and just meet him, what he is as a person matched his tape.

He doesn't have the physical attributes or measurables that the other guys do, but he's played a lot of winning football for us. So invested, such a strong leader.

I think that's one of the beautiful things about sports and football; not everybody is going to be a first-round draft pick, but you can still play good football and play winning football, and Seth has done that. Ultra respected by everybody on the team.

I think he's over all the complex stuff. He doesn't have a complex about how tall he is or how much he weighs, that type of thing. He's just played really good football for us, so I'm thrilled he's on our team.

Q. You've had South Dakota recruits from time to time including some mighty prominent ones. Is there anything that distinguishes kids up there?

KIRK FERENTZ: Well, I wish we'd find a couple more of those guys, a couple more guys on their roster. But it's a really good point. I can't remember if -- I guess Chad would have been the first one. You had Chad, Riley, go right down the list, but yeah, we've hit a really high percentage of those guys. I'm not sure I can put a finger on it, other than -- things have changed. You don't realize, 20 years, it's harder to find guys hiding out anymore. It still happens every now and then, and I think those guys were ultra under-recruited, and they've done a great job recruiting in their own home state.

Q. How are freshmen running backs fitting into the equation as far as freshmen that could potentially play right away?

KIRK FERENTZ: I think both of them are in the mix right now. At least we have plans to let them go, as well, and we'll see how the game plays out. But I don't know if they'll

both be in there Saturday but my guess is at least one of them will.

Q. Do you like it when a young man from Solon can come here to Iowa City (as an opponent)?

Q. I mean like from South Dakota State. Is there a particular level of -- a chip on their shoulder that they have that you have to prepare for?

KIRK FERENTZ: Oh, sure, their whole team will come in with a chip on their shoulder. That's just the nature of a game like this, no question, and then if you're a local player -- and he's a really good player. It looks to me like he's the leader of their defense, and he's been really productive for them. He's a really good player, and I'm sure he's going to want to come in and show us that we made a mistake, and I probably wouldn't argue with him.

But that's the nature of recruiting. You can't be right every time, that's for sure. But he's a really good football player.

Q. Can you talk a little bit about Abdul Hodge and what's running through his mind (first game, against a rival school from where he was)?

KIRK FERENTZ: Well, he was on the rivals up there. He's a Coyote. But he has some insight. Nothing really that detailed other than he knows what a good program they have and what a good team they are. This will be Abdul's first game here without a helmet on. I think that'll probably be special for him, too, but he's been a great addition to the staff, first-class guy, and I think he's been a really good addition to our staff. Done a nice job with the tight ends. I think they would echo that.

Q. Has he helped the linebackers gain any insight into their defense?

KIRK FERENTZ: Not to my knowledge. I think he's pretty much been -- he may be in conversation, you never know, he and Seth, but he's just a good football coach, and coaches all hopefully help each other. That's a big part, and help guys on the team.

Q. You guys are most likely going to face some adversity this weekend in some way, shape or form. I don't know if you watched the Nebraska game with Northwestern but it was a great example of a team that stuck with it for 60 minutes that won the game. How have you gone about teaching that to your team, because it does seem like in talking to all of them, they're all a 60-minute team, we want to be our best in the fourth quarter? How have you gone about that, I guess?

KIRK FERENTZ: If you're going to win consistently, that's got to be a part of your curriculum. I don't mean this disrespectfully, but the difference between being someone out there competing and a fan, I'm going back like 20 years ago when we had the I-Club breakfasts, if we'd lose a game, the deflation in the room five, six days later, Friday morning, and I was like oh, my God, let's not surrender this game. We lost the last game. But you just can't afford to do that. It's just competition.

Even if you're getting slaughtered, you still play the game. You've got 60 minutes to play it, so you play it. But typically that's not the case. A lot of things can happen, so you've just got to keep playing. It's as simple as that. As soon as you give up, you are done. There's no question about it.

But if you keep playing, keep trying, hopefully good outcome will come. If not, at least you're helping yourself moving forward, and it's all about at some point you've got to turn the page and move forward, too.

Q. Do you feel like you've got enough positional flexibility like Pottebaum playing some tight end and LaPorta possibly playing X, then you can still do some of the things you might want to do in certain personnel groupings even though it may be 12 personnel but it may look like 12 or 11 or something like that?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, we're not going to come out in the wishbone or anything like that, so that's not a discussion, but yeah, you move your players around to try to fit the scheme that you want to implement, and if you do have some position flexibility, which in the guys you mentioned that gives us some that you don't always have every year. You just try to find a way to be able to personnel the things that you're trying to get done in the run or the pass game. Obviously it starts with who's available and who can do what well.

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