

University of Iowa Football Media Conference

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Coach Kirk Ferentz

Press Conference



KIRK FERENTZ: Good afternoon, everybody. Like always, I'll talk a little bit about the past weekend and then look forward to what's in front of us. Needless to say, a really tough loss, certainly a hard-fought game by both teams involved, and certainly to be expected. Bottom line is we came up short, didn't make the plays we needed to make, and it's certainly disappointing for everybody involved.

I'm sure our fans feel the same way, and I'm sure our fans are a little bit frustrated, as well.

That's the nature of it. Losing is never any fun, and nobody is more disappointed than our players and our coaching staff. This is what we do or what we spend a lot of time doing. As you might imagine, that's the sentiment there.

Then like every week, reviewed the tape on Sunday, and went over it with our team, discussed it as a staff, and basically saw some improvement. I think we saw some improvement in certain areas, and that's good. We also played very well in certain areas.

The bottom line is the effort is there. Like most times, gets down to details, execution, and a lot of times fundamental, being better fundamentally. So those things don't change.

That's the challenge in front of us as we go.

The bottom line right now, our focus is about staying together and moving forward, and what we have to do is get better in each and every meeting, every practice, try to take those opportunities to improve, and that'll be our approach moving forward.

Moving on to Nevada, our captains are the same four guys: Jack Campbell, Sam LaPorta, Kaevon Merriweather and Riley Moss.

Nevada is a change-up from the last two weeks. Start with the fact that it's a night game, a little bit different. But full disclosure, it's not like we know a lot about Nevada. We don't have a lot in our memory bank. It's a very different

preparation in the fact that the last two opponents we've played have programs where they've had coaching staffs that have been in place and pretty easy to figure out their identity. We didn't spend a lot of time in the out of season looking at film on Nevada just for that reason. It's a new staff. Coach Wilson has come in there and they've got a new staff, a lot of new players on top of it.

Their program has had success historically. I'm old enough to remember Chris Holt coaching there and Kaepernick playing, and last year they beat Cal in their opener and had two very close losses to two good programs there, Air Force and San Diego State, so that part kind of puts that in perspective.

You tie in the fact that what happened in college football last week is a good illustration that no matter who you are, you have to get ready to play, no matter who you play.

Shifting back to Nevada, we're trying to figure out who they are, what they are right now. Offensively, they have good skill players, good receiver group, a couple good backs. And they picked up a couple new guys in the off season. The guys up front are doing a good job, and arguably the tallest quarterback we've played since I've been here, and he's doing a good job.

Defensively, they're putting their scheme together. They're an active group, athletic group, and play with good effort.

Then on special teams, they play with good effort and they have very good specialists. They're using two punters right now. I say using two, they used one of them for one punt last week, and the field goal kicker is a veteran guy who has got three game winners and one was 56 yards, I believe. That's an area where they're good, as well.

Anyway, we're doing our best to get ready for them right now. Trying to learn off the three games that they've played. They're 2-1, and we're taking what we can from those films.

Last couple things and I'll throw it out for questions.

Jermari Harris will not be playing this year. He's had a medical procedure done this week, so he's going to miss the rest of the season. It's unfortunate. Jermari is a tremendous young man. I thought he showed a lot of

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growth the last year and did a really nice job and has been a good team leader for us. Just an exceptional young guy, so it's disappointing. It's disappointing anytime a player has to miss time because of medical reasons, and we'll look forward to getting him back when he's back up on his feet and going here.

Then congratulations to Lukas Van Ness, as well, for Special Teams Big Ten Player of the Week. That's quite a feat, what he accomplished the other day, and his effort just overall has been really good, so appreciate that.

Then last thing, we'll have Eve Jimenez will be with us as our kid captain this week. She's from Davenport. Eight-year-old girl, and I certainly don't pretend to understand her challenges medically. I know they were pretty significant up until about four years ago, and the people at the hospital and the family have just worked together, and she's doing really well, so it will be great to have her with us on Saturday. We look forward to meeting her and seeing her in Kinnick again.

Q. When you look at quarterback, after you analyzed it, where do things stand? Does this remain an open competition or is it Spencer Petras who's going to start on Saturday?

KIRK FERENTZ: He'll start right now. That's our plan, unless something happens in practice. We spent a lot of time looking at it, considering it, talking about it, and it's not the same as last year, but there are some similarities, I think it's tough to give an honest evaluation right now.

I've talked to Alex about the same thing, just that no matter who's in there right now, we have some challenges, and we have to work through those, try to improve in those, and then we'll have a fairer way to assess. I think I speak for everybody in our program; we all have faith in both players.

Q. Did Spencer do anything that you think continues to earn him the right to start? Or is it just right now that there's so many challenges that he can direct traffic a little bit better?

KIRK FERENTZ: No, I think Alex is capable, and he proved that last year. I go back to body of work. This kind of ties into some other topics, but we were 0-2 at the start of the '20 season and then we won 12 straight with him at quarterback. He built up some credit right there, and I thought he played really well. Not in each and every game, but he did a pretty good job and led our football team. He's got a good resume going, and the other challenge right now, we've had some challenges to work through, and that's where we're at presently.

That's the challenge right now is to piece things together where whoever is back there can have a better chance to perform in a way that we believe both of them are capable of, so that's our bigger challenge right now at this point. I don't think, at least in my assessment or our assessment, it's fair to just pinpoint one person right now. I think that would be taking an easy route out.

Q. Taking away the Northwestern game, which obviously Spencer couldn't go in, the point totals in his last six starts are 7, 7, 3, 17, 7 and 7. You say his body of work is there, but that's the body of work, one TD, nine interceptions the last 10 games or whatever it is. Then there's Alex, 27 against Minnesota, 33 against Illinois. How does that --

KIRK FERENTZ: That's our assessment. Those are good points, but we're looking at the whole thing, and that's our assessment right now.

Q. You bring up the "whole thing" a lot. What is Spencer doing that we're not seeing that keeps him in that best position?

KIRK FERENTZ: That's like our whole football team. Probably the biggest difference between you guys and me right now, or us as a staff, is we get to see the guys day in and day out starting in January, and it's true each and every year.

We're a little bit more knowledgeable of our injury situation, missed time, all those kinds of things. Going back, there's a lot of factors at play right now, a lot of factors at play.

But whether it's the receiver position, lack of time -- I felt like we were in a pretty good position going back to Kids Day. I think we were on a good progress path at that point.

Then some things happened the next couple weeks that have made it a little bit more difficult.

Long story short, I think we saw some improvement Saturday. There were some things that were more encouraging and some things that were really close. But close doesn't get it, and that's the challenge that we're running.

When we feel with this team that we have a chance to really assess things fairly, then we'll make the judgments we feel necessary, and hopefully that's coming soon.

Q. Is it reasonable to assume that Spencer is practicing the best of all the quarterbacks?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, we think he is, but again, that's not

a knock on Alex. Alex is doing a good job, too.

We're not trying to drive this train off the road by any stretch. It's not an intentional derailment.

Q. How have you seen Keagan and Nico progress?

KIRK FERENTZ: Well, they're practicing. That's a starting point. That's the first step to getting in a game and playing well is practicing. You can't do it without practicing.

Having them actually in a helmet and catching a ball with shoulder pads on, that's encouraging.

They've missed time, obviously. Nico is a more experienced player, and he's been in the fight a lot sooner than Keagan. Keagan you're looking about an eight-plus-month deficit right now, so that's what he's got to overcome. It's great to see him out there, and it's great to get Nico back, too. We have to be careful about how fast and how far we push them as we move forward.

Q. I didn't see them on the depth chart. Does that mean probably not for this week then?

KIRK FERENTZ: We'll see. Again, there's a chance. Nico is probably further along because he was practicing not that long ago. I remember when he was practicing, recent memory.

Q. Did you have a conversation with Alex because you said you're going to make a decision -- I know you don't want to share intimate details, but what do you tell a guy that's waited his turn?

KIRK FERENTZ: You want to let him know basically what the basis is for your thinking. I'm not asking anybody to agree with me. I'm guessing fans aren't agreeing and maybe the media, but everybody is entitled to their opinions. I'm all for that. But what our jobs are, my job ultimately, I'm the head coach, is to decide what's best for our football team and our program, and that's my assessment at this point.

We're a 1-1 team right now and haven't moved the ball offensively, so yeah, everything is a jump ball in all regards now.

Q. The QB, is it unanimous among coaches, or is it just your call?

KIRK FERENTZ: Well, that's something I wouldn't share, but I think we're together as a program, and it doesn't mean everybody has to agree 100 percent. But I think we're together, yeah.

Q. Where is your offensive line right now in terms of development, and how far has it got to go? Is it measuring up to your standards, etc.?

KIRK FERENTZ: Clearly not the first two games, but that's what I was alluding to a little bit. I felt like we were in a pretty good position on kids' day, which is like an eternity ago, but we had some guys miss some significant time after that. I believe it was Monday and Tuesday of that next week.

To think that hasn't affected us, that would be naïve. That's one thing I know a little about is the play up front, and I'm thinking of one player in particular who's not playing where he was a couple weeks ago, and he was playing really well a couple weeks ago and had earned the right to be a good, confident player.

But when you miss time, it's significant. That's why you do practice. That's the importance and value of practice, especially up front.

But they'll get there. I'm confident we'll get there.

Q. The personnel groupings obviously have been altered because of all the injuries, but it also looks like, from my novice eyes, a lot of the audible calls or checks or something like that just aren't in full measure because of that, as well. Is that true, and how debilitating or difficult is that for the offense to get through when you can't look at something and identify a change because of so many moving pieces right now?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, we're a little different team than we were during that August public exposure personnel-wise, so that alters some things you do. And your opponents alter things, too, some things they may present or don't present. It's all part of a package.

We're clearly not operating where we want to operate right now, and that's evident by the point total. That's ultimately something we're trying to do is get the point level where we want and where we can win games on a consistent basis.

Q. Jermari Harris being out for the year, Terry has played well in that spot these last two games. How would you assess his performance and I'm guessing he's in a position to take that spot and run with it?

KIRK FERENTZ: First of all, it's a little bit of a microcosm for our team. Think if you had Terry playing well, Riley, Cooper and Jermari, that gives you a pretty good two deep, but it's never that easy, and it's the way it works, and

that's true in a lot of positions.

If you've got your No. 1 guys in there that you want, that's a heck of a good start.

But to your point, yeah, Terry has really done a good job, and he went through a really tough period obviously getting hurt last fall. It's been a tough out-of-season for him, challenging medically, but I think what he did starting with game one, he really made his presence felt, first of all, on special teams, which we missed that because he's a very dynamic special teams player, and then on top of it, he's really played corner well and played it with some emphasis out there, some enthusiasm, and that allows us to use Cooper inside.

It's really critical, but we're thin at that position, too, if you start thinking about the ramifications of anybody coming out.

But that's the world we live in. A lot of teams do.

Q. Speaking of how thin you are there, how helpful is it to have Cooper where you can put him it seems like at four different spots?

KIRK FERENTZ: Oh, it's helpful. Anytime you have guys that are versatile, that's a good thing. He a flexible player that way mentally and got a skill set that allows him to do that, so that really helps us. You lose a guy like Belton, it's a big loss, but at least he's helped fill that void for us, but then it comes back to Terry being able to play, which last year he couldn't do that, at the end of last year.

Q. What's your assessment of your defense through two weeks?

KIRK FERENTZ: I think they've done a lot of really good things out there. I'm stating the obvious. We have some strengths on this team right now, and to me that's one of the things I'm really encouraged about. They've done a lot of really amazing things out there, some really good play. I'd say the same thing about our special teams. They've impacted the game in a really powerful way, and that's allowed these games to be the way they've been.

As tough as Saturday was, you take -- change one play, the outcome of one play, but ifs and buts, right, we all know that one.

But the point moving forward is that we've got to improve and we've got to get better in all areas, quite frankly, and there are things on defense. First thing Phil said Sunday is there's still things we can do a lot better, and that's going to be the challenge because our opponents are looking at

anything that we might have been vulnerable to, and they're going to work on us there, too.

Q. How difficult is it as far as in the run game knowing how vulnerable maybe you are in the passing attack that they're more crowding the line of scrimmage and then you're trying to get your young offensive line trying to make the right plays? How challenging is that to get the running game going?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I mean, it makes it a challenge, and then we had two veteran backs and really we've played with one. Gavin was a break-the-glass guy Saturday, played a little bit on 3rd down, and that's good, and he appears to be ready to roll, which is good.

But it makes it a challenge. Collectively we've got to try to push this thing forward, and as I said, there's some evidence the other day of some things that looked a little bit better, but we've just got to keep pushing as much as we can. That's why practice and meetings are so important right now.

Q. Has Brody been able to catch up? We've talked before about how he kind of had to start from behind. Is Jacob Bostick somebody who could potentially see action?

KIRK FERENTZ: Jake is a big surprise, has become a surprise. He's been out with injury, too.

It tends to be one room, year to year, camp to camp, whatever.

Brody is kind of facing the same challenges as Keagan in that Brody hasn't played a lot of football. Last December I guess he was with us, and that's been it since he's been a Hawkeye. He wasn't here last summer, was hurt in camp, hurt during the season. He's playing catch-up, as well. But he's a great guy and he's got a great attitude, he's working hard, and hopefully we'll get him involved moving forward.

Q. What challenges does a 6'9" quarterback present?

KIRK FERENTZ: Just getting used to looking at him. I don't mean that in a bad way, it's very unusual. Just I can't -- I'm sure somebody else -- Reese Morgan described him beautifully: He looks like Anthony Nelson coming out of high school. He's probably a little taller, but he looks like the way Anthony did when he walked in here as a freshman.

It's just strange to see a quarterback of that height. The guy plays well, though. He really plays well. That was kind of the talk of December back when he started in their bowl

game. It was kind of the talk, like a 6'9" quarterback. That's the first time I heard about it.

Q. How often have you had guys that are better game players than they are in practice? And when that is the case --

KIRK FERENTZ: Not often. Yeah, not often. I mentioned Hartlieb's name came up last year, and that's a great example, but it doesn't happen a lot. It really doesn't happen a lot. Typically good players are really good practice players.

That's been one commonality everywhere I've coached, high school, college, NFL. They usually know how to practice.

Q. You probably don't watch a lot of NFL, but probably have an awareness that the quarterback position has changed quite a bit; same in college, Josh Allen and Patrick Mahomes, more of a mobile type guy --

KIRK FERENTZ: Two guys that weren't recruited, either, by the way. How about that?

Q. It seems like, I know you can't talk about the guys specifically, your future quarterback commitments, '23, '24 are dual-threat type guys. Is that an intentional philosophy change on your part moving forward at the quarterback position?

KIRK FERENTZ: Not necessarily intentional. It's kind of the same line I've given you before, we try to recruit the best guy and then we'll bend towards what they do well. Spencer and Stanley are probably more similar than say CJ or Brad Banks. Those guys are a little different.

It certainly doesn't hurt if you've got a mobile guy. There's no downside to that if the guy can also be a thrower and a good quarterback.

That's a fascinating study, just quarterbacks, because I did see that panel. It was those two guys, Brady, Rodgers, sitting on the panel somewhere this summer. I had time to actually watch a little TV. They were sitting who-knows-where but there was a panel discussion.

It was interesting, I'm just sitting there watching -- Brady was recruited, obviously, went through a blue blood school but then nobody wanted him in the draft, and then Rodgers had a, whatever, 1500 SAT and had to go to junior college because nobody wanted him, either. Then the coach at Cal took him, and obviously that worked out pretty well for those guys.

Just kind of an interesting study. Quarterbacks are really interesting. You try to get the guy that you think is best, and then you're going to try to play towards his strengths.

Q. When I talked to Labas on Media Day, he was saying he considered himself a dual-threat guy, as well. Do you see that for him?

KIRK FERENTZ: I think that's fair. He's a pretty good athlete. He's pretty mobile and runs around pretty well.

Q. When you look at quarterbacks, it's obviously different in recruiting because only a couple of times have I remembered you taking two in one class and then you usually skip the next year or most of the time you do. How do you really center on one person? How many people are involved? Then what happens if you have a leave us situation where you feel really good and then all of a sudden Justin Fields decommits and then, boom, there he is.

KIRK FERENTZ: First of all, we live in that world. There's a bunch of guys like that that we've -- it was in that same year or the year before that, I can't remember which, like we -- it was Petras, Wilson, and a guy down in Texas. The guy in Texas was the first guy that we really focused on and a week later he was off to Ohio State. They offered, and yeah, we're used to that. Sometimes we're the first to ask, but then it depends how it plays out.

I'll go back to Brad Banks. You start with people that are interested in you. You identify guys, and I've said it on record, that my goal was to get a high school quarterback that year. The guy we liked the best didn't like us, so now you go No. 2 and it's Brad, and fortunately that worked out, so it was kind of fate and dumb luck.

Yeah, you kind of rank them as they are and then you start working down the ladder. But typically we'll take one a year. It's kind of like basketball, I guess, or at least they used to call them point guards. Usually two point guards wouldn't sign with the same school. I'm going back like 40 years. But yeah, it's kind of a similar situation.

Q. Is that a more involved process with the staff, or is it the same as you would recruit a tackle or defensive back or something?

KIRK FERENTZ: Well, we lean -- each position we lean towards the position coach making the final evaluation or at least having the primary voice, and then there's a consensus, group consensus, as well, but yeah, it's still the position coach has primary voice on that.

Q. When the passing game is not going well, it's easy

for receivers to be very frustrated and almost not be engaged by play to play. How are you keeping Arland Bruce and some other receivers in the room engaged? They didn't have a pass catch until midway through the third quarter last week.

KIRK FERENTZ: The ball goes where it goes, and a lot of times the defense dictates that.

Good players understand that, and you keep working. Arland is a great example of that. Nobody has a better attitude and works any harder, and he's been working overtime, quite frankly, the last couple weeks, so we're worried about that or at least cognizant of it.

But that's when you come to school for, too, is to play in games and play a lot of games or a lot of plays. It is what it is, and you work through it.

Q. How do you get the ball more to Arland when I think there was 11 targets, one ball got to him on Saturday?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I mean, we're trying. He's our best option in a lot of regards, and the defensive guys know that, as well. That's a challenge right now.

Q. You mentioned there is disappointment and frustration amongst the players. How do you use that disappointment from last Saturday as motivation while also balancing it with not dwelling on last Saturday?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, that's the world we all live in as players and coaches. We really can't continue the discussion much past Sunday. That's just the way it is. If you do, you're really hurting yourself for your next opportunity.

There's a mental discipline to that. It doesn't mean you don't feel, it doesn't linger or live with you, and losing tends to stick with you longer than winning. At least it should.

But it's the nature -- if you're competitive, you don't like to lose. Everybody works too hard.

But as my wife reminds me, 50 percent of the teams lose every week, and I get mad every time she says that. She didn't say it last weekend, so we're still talking. But you've got to learn to move on. You learn to move on.

What's behind you is behind you. You've got to focus on what opportunities you have, and the biggest thing is the opportunity to grow and try to get better and in this case learn from what we didn't do well and then move on. But that's every game; win or lose, you'd better learn from what

you didn't do well and how do you improve.

Q. What's the time frame for Jestin Jacobs to come back?

KIRK FERENTZ: Based on today and last night's medical meeting, talking to him today, it's not going to be this week. That's about all I know. But he's improving. I don't know how close. Those soft tissue issues are -- I wish I had the answer.

Q. And then kicker, is that an ongoing competition? How do you evaluate that position right now?

KIRK FERENTZ: That's a little different than the quarterback position because neither guy really has a resume right now, but they're both quality, and they both have practiced well this segment. Not as good in the spring, but they've been -- since we got going in August, both are doing a good job, and we'll keep playing it by ear.

Q. Some of the players said you have a 24-hour rule in terms of watching film; you watch it for a day and then you throw it out. Was that your idea, and if so, why did you want that?

KIRK FERENTZ: First of all, I don't think I've ever had an original thought, so anything that comes out of my mouth is copied from somebody somewhere. I don't know who it was, but first time I heard it, that really made sense, like that made sense. That had a good visual and good connotation to it. Again, it's a little trickier to live by it sometimes.

If there is one positive, we went to the new practice schedule in '15 where we actually practice Monday morning. One benefit of that, it's really hard on the staff Sunday, but one benefit of that is you're forced to move on, win, lose or draw on Monday, because you're moving, you're out practicing, doing things.

I don't think any of us saw that as an intended consequence; it just happened. But that's what life and sports teach you; you'd better move on to the next challenge or you're going to be at a deficit before you can get started.

Q. One of the unique coincidences, I guess, that's been a positive for your program for a long time is a walk-on safety from Iowa stepping in and playing really well, Jack Koerner, Jake Gervase, going all the back to Brett Greenwood and Brandon Snyder. Quinn Schulte fits that bill again. What did you see from him as a quarterback at Xavier, and how has he fit that role for you in the last couple games?

KIRK FERENTZ: Considine is one of the five guys that has two blocked kicks, I think. I think I read that right. That's a long time ago, and he's not from Iowa, but another walk-on.

One commonality, those guys were good football players in their high school programs. Q was a quarterback, Sean was a running back who I thought might go to Northern Illinois. They didn't offer him; that's what triggered his attendance here. But the commonality is they're good football players. They're conscientious, really thorough, and do quality work. That's kind of been the commonality with those guys.

All have a little different personalities. Jack had a different personality than Quinn, but both of them are really -- Quinn is off to a good start. It's been really a pleasant surprise to watch him perform back there. Not shocking, but it's been pleasant to see him do a good job.

Q. Knowing the kind of depth behind him, stars and whatever, what has he been able to show to maintain that position and then of course go out and play as well as he has?

KIRK FERENTZ: It's a steadiness in performance, in practice, and we don't have much game -- special teams obviously, but just a steadiness and a thoroughness the way he prepares and the way he practices each and every day, and that's what -- then you get into game competition. You try to assess what a guy does, and at least he's really off to a good start for being a two-game starter.

Q. Gavin said he feels like he's back to 100 percent. How much do you think that's going to help you guys on Sunday?

KIRK FERENTZ: Obviously it's huge. Any especially skill player right now that joins the fray, that's a benefit for us.

Leshon is really not a guy we use a lot in pass stuff, whereas Gavin has that capability. So that would have been one more alternate plan. Had he been out with us the last couple weeks, we would have used him a little bit as a receiver because he does that pretty adeptly. But we didn't have that option available, so it was one more thing to take off the board in terms of consideration.

Gavin has -- he's been really interesting, he's got a really -- I don't know if interesting personality is the right way, but he's kind of pretty steady right down the middle all the time. But he earned my confidence with that 4th-and-2 conversion a year ago, and he's done nothing but perform well since then. He's a really good mentor and a leader.

He's not that old of a guy, but he's a really good steadying influence in a really young room, so appreciate that, as well.

Q. With the strengths on defense and with punting, how much of an improvement do you think is necessary from this offense to be competitive?

KIRK FERENTZ: You know, the first and most important thing we can do is eliminate turnovers. Of all the things that have happened in two weeks, we're five turnovers right now. To think that we're going to win the way we want to win the next 10 weeks, going five every two games, that's unrealistic.

That's one thing historically we've been pretty good at. I think there's one year we defied that number. I think it was in '09. Other than that, our good teams protect the football, so that's first and foremost. That's not one person, that's a lot of people involved there. So that's the first step we have to take.

Then secondly, we've got to move the ball and score points. That's what offenses do. We've never been built or wired to aim for 50 points a game. Love it if it happens, but that's not the way we play, and that's not the design of the way we play.

Yeah, first of all, clean up our play there, protect the ball, and then get the points we're capable of getting, and hopefully that will improve as we go along.

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