

# TransPerfect Music City Bowl: Iowa vs Kentucky

Friday, December 30, 2022

Nashville, Tennessee, USA

Nissan Stadium

## Iowa Hawkeyes

## Brian Ferentz

## Phil Parker

### Press Conference



other week, what's going to work, what is going to be good, how many ways can you dress that up and run it while incorporating the strengths of who is on the field that week, be it the quarterback or anyone else.

**Q. Brian, if you were to give yourself a self-evaluation, how would you answer that?**

BRIAN FERENTZ: I would say I do the best I could this year with the pieces we had to try to put the team in position to win.

Was I successful every week? No. Was I successful enough? I wish we would have won every game we played. That's the bottom line to me.

My evaluation is simple: Are we doing what we need to do to help us win football games? I think the record speaks for itself. We are who our record says we are.

**Q. Coach Parker, how important have these bowl practices been to the development and depth at cornerback? What have you seen from guys like TJ Hall, Deshaun Lee, Jamison Heinz, and maybe a few others this stretch of December?**

PHIL PARKER: I think it's been very helpful for the last three or four weeks, these guys practicing, getting an opportunity to go in there.

Probably the biggest guy I've seen jumped is probably Xavier. He's really done a good job of taking a lot of reps, the improvement with his just understanding, the way he moves on the field has changed in the last three or four weeks. I'm really happy to see.

It's going to be his first start. See how he does. But really impressed with what he's doing.

**Q. Brian, you talked about changes going into this past season. Obviously didn't work out. Why do you think it didn't work out? What changes do you anticipate making next year to avoid this script from repeating another year?**

THE MODERATOR: We're going to hear from the University of Iowa offensive coordinator Brian Ferentz and defensive coordinator Phil Parker.

Questions, please.

**Q. Brian, you get Joe in his first career start tomorrow. What has been your approach throughout the bowl prep? Install 18 to 20 players he mastered, new wrinkles?**

BRIAN FERENTZ: Joe has been around for several years. He's been in the offense. He's worked through spring ball and training camp. This year he's traveled with us, been up there with the first and second group, gotten reps at times.

There's a knowledge space that you're not starting from scratch. That makes it a little easier.

Like anyone else, you want to tailor what you're doing to the player's strengths. I think Joe has some different strengths, maybe the two guys that have played for us the last several years. You want to make sure you incorporate that into what you do.

On top of that, you want to match up what you're going to see as well, right? We see our defense every day in bowl prep. That's one thing. But to see Kentucky's defense is a whole different animal. Play different up front, base out of some different coverages. You want to make sure you're doing things that are going to be reasonably successful against who you're playing.

At the end of the day what's the number? It's not broad, it never is, though. I think that's a misconception. We're never walking into a game with 150 calls on the sheet, right? You're trying to walk into the game, it's like any

**ASAP** sports . . . when all is said, we're done.®

BRIAN FERENTZ: I think every year you go into the off-season and you look at things you did well, things you didn't do well. How do we accentuate the things we didn't do well, how do we improve the things we didn't do well.

In some regards, progress was made. In other regards, not as much. And then in other regards, I think we regressed in some areas.

The challenge in January and February, which really has already begun throughout December, is identifying all three of those areas, figuring out the best plan of attack moving into next year.

Certainly you want to take into account personnel. You want to take into account scheduling to the best that you can, right? You know who you're going to play well in advance. It goes back to the question that Dave asked earlier. Essentially you're trying to do that with a big-picture understanding in January and February, then moving into March you begin to rep those things.

**Q. Any younger guys that have developed during bowl prep that jumped out at you? Also, how is Sam LaPorta as an emergency quarterback?**

BRIAN FERENTZ: I'll let you start.

PHIL PARKER: One guy that really jumped out, he's been banged up a little bit, but Jay Higgins has taken a bigger role, seeing how he's developing and becoming a leader. Obviously we're losing Jack. That's going to help us in the linebackers between him and Seth. And Seth, we're losing him. I think that's a good guy we're seeing a lot of progress with.

Down in the front, I think all the guys up front are doing a really good job, we're seeing improvement. You win with the up-front guys. If you don't have up-front guys, seven guys, it's hard to win games. I think they've all been doing a pretty good job.

It's just the way they go about their work. We're excited to see some of these guys, how many steps they have taken.

BRIAN FERENTZ: As far as young guys go, it's been nice. Jaziun Patterson is a guy that jumped out to me through bowl prep. Didn't get so many opportunities throughout the season when we were playing three backs. Played a little bit in a couple games sparingly.

The way he approaches every day, I heard the head coach talk about Jack Campbell, seeing things as an opportunity. Jaz is a guy that I would describe the same way. Maybe hopefully he can have the type of career that Jack had.

None of us control our talent, right? We can only control our approach. His approach is very impressive, the way he goes to work. He's a guy that's jumped out.

There are several others, but I would single him out just for his approach day to day. That was true during the season. Now he's been able to get some reps, and it's really showed up.

Then as far as Sam LaPorta as an emergency quarterback, I've coached some players, I've coached some good players. I don't think you guys are going to get me to lose my composure here, but Sam LaPorta is as good a football player as I've ever coached, probably the best one.

He's an exceptional competitor, very talented. The way he practices, the way he plays, if my son could grow up, if he could just emulate that, whatever he chooses to do, I'd be awfully proud of him.

For Sam, it's interesting, I was talking to a gentleman that runs an all-star game. He was a little upset that Sam wasn't going to play in it. Sam felt like he put enough on tape. I happened to agree with him, I think he's put plenty on tape for NFL teams to evaluate.

He made the comment to him that people are going to question your competitiveness or your character if you don't play in this game. Frankly, I think that's ridiculous. Anybody that has ever been around Sam, that's the last two things you question.

How do I see him as an emergency quarterback? I think he'll probably make some plays because that's generally what he does when he has the ball in his hands.

**Q. How tough has it been in your evaluation of Kentucky with their quarterback situation? Have you gone back and watched high school game film?**

PHIL PARKER: Well, we've seen them on some huddle stuff. Obviously some of the camps that he's been at throwing the ball.

Really you kind of say how they're going to try to attack us. They have an offense that we prepared for of one system, now you got a different offensive coordinator going to be calling it, Vince. I'm sure he'll have some tricks up his sleeve.

It's going to be interesting for us. Basically what it comes down to, I think they can only have 11 guys on the field. A lot of base defense, understanding it. We'll change it up,

make sure we did some run games with the quarterback maybe a little bit more than the other guy.

Right now I think our preparation has been very good for the last three weeks. We've been seeing a lot of different things, formations.

Sometimes when you go into it, what are you doing? Practicing this, practicing this. Eventually they're going to go out there and we're going to have to play whatever they line up.

I think it all goes back to guys understanding their base principles. When you get a call, you have to line up your alignment, your keys, responsibilities on every play. Three simple things to do, but within those three words: Alignment, how do you line up based on where they're lined up? What are your keys? What is your responsibility? What are you looking at?

I think that's really the biggest thing. You don't see it a lot. If you start watching film, you start watching teams, how they play, you get to see things, diagnose it, make a quick decision on what your responsibility is.

If you're a pass guy, play pass. Even though it's run, I'm playing pass, see if it's run, but make sure you double-check and see if your pass responsibility is taken care of. Is he blocking, faking it? There's a lot of things.

I think it comes down to alignment, keys and responsibility, that's it. Obviously being competitive. To get all the strength and all that, the movement, stay in balance. I think our guys for the last three weeks have really been doing a good job.

There will be some surprises out there. If you go through your progression, you shouldn't be faked out on those trick plays if you're doing what you're supposed to do.

But it's hard though because there's going to be 60, 70 plays in the game. Can somebody concentrate? The play only lasts five or six seconds, right? But you're out there. Can you focus the whole time?

Even before the snap of the ball, your focus has to be on who is on the field, how are they lined up, who is talking to who. I remember seeing Brady, I don't remember who he was playing, tapped somebody on the back of the shoulder, a wide receiver. I seen him run a come-back. If the defensive back paid attention to him, might have been a better play out there for the defensive back.

It's been a while ago, probably three or four weeks ago. But it's just interesting what you see. You have to gather

all that information. There's a lot of information out there. You should be totally physically and mentally exhausted after the game if you're doing what you're supposed to be doing.

**Q. Brian, last time we talked before Ohio State, there was a lot of outside noise after that game. Does any of that make it to you? What is your reaction to the criticism that filters your way? How have you responded?**

BRIAN FERENTZ: Is that a serious question?

**Q. Sure. Did you read the article?**

BRIAN FERENTZ: No. I feel like we've covered this ground for all the Ohio guys in the room, right?

My focus is on doing my job every day. Does criticism make it to me? Of course it does. My wife has criticism from me on a daily basis. All of this gets back to me in some form or fashion.

None of it matters. My job is every day to wake up, try to put our players in position to be successful. That's it. Whatever my reaction is to it has no bearing on my ability to do my job. I keep my focus on that.

Just like Phil said, he's talking about playing defense. I don't think coaching is any different. Alignment keys, responsibility, do your job every day. If the things don't help you do your job, then you can't spend a lot of time worrying about them.

**Q. Brian, one element that never changes or can't change is age. That deals a lot with your offensive line. When you look at Logan Jones flipping over from D tackle to center, what is the progress that he's made in that position? Also one player, one of the biggest humans I've ever seen, Gennings Dunker. What is his potential and how far away is he from making a big impact on the field?**

BRIAN FERENTZ: Yeah, I think the good news is, like you said, both those guys have a tremendous amount of tools. They have a tremendous amount of potential. It's just a race to maturity. It's a race to getting them to maximize those things.

I think Logan has done an exceptional job flipping over through spring football, starting 12 games for us at center. Probably doesn't get enough attention what a tremendous job he's done. It's not easy. It's very difficult.

In Gennings' case, he dealt with some injuries his

freshman year. Missed a lot of practice time. Then you're able to get him on the field in spurts this spring and then the summer. Every time he's been out there, he's made strides and continued to improve.

He's a guy that over the course of the season has really improved and taken some strides. No question he's a big man. He just kind of walks around, he has a certain demeanor to him. Even when he turns his head, he reminds me of Arnold Schwarzenegger playing The Terminator. If you cut him open, there was a cyborg underneath, it wouldn't shock me. He probably has a little more personality than that.

He's an exciting guy, a young guy with a lot of potential that you're excited to see continue to grow and improve.

We've talked about offensive line development before. In a perfect world, you put those guys in the oven and you slow cook 'em. Neither of those guys have had that liberty. That's not their fault. They've handled the circumstances as well as they can.

What I'm excited about is the improvement they've made. I would expect them to continue to make that with reps.

**Q. What have you seen from some of the younger linebackers who might have a bigger role next year? You've gotten an influx of talent to the transfer portal. Are there any specific changes that have been promised to get them to come to an offense that ranked 130th out of 131 teams?**

BRIAN FERENTZ: I'll start.

No, no. There were no promises made. We recruit players to try to fit our system and our program. We're recruiting people first and players second. That's never changed.

We're excited about those two guys joining us. Quite frankly right now, my focus is on the football players that are going to play for us tomorrow, some of them in their last football game. I look forward to giving them my full attention and focus right now.

PHIL PARKER: At the linebacker depth, Harold is a guy that's actually seen him grow. Kind of funny, even today's practice, more of a polish day. You already had the practice and stuff.

Then you see Jack Campbell sitting there telling him and teaching him as he's leaving the last play, telling him what he needs to do for the next play. That growth right there. Hopefully we can maybe get Jack to come back and coach a little bit.

But I just think the connection, the development that he's done, it's all coming from the leadership in that room, beginning with Seth Benson, Jack, what Seth Wallace has done with these guys. Obviously done a great job. You see the trend of these guys improving. I wish they could do it faster. But it's a good thing to see.

**Q. Regarding Kaleb Johnson, he's made a lot of growth, it's obvious. A lot of improvement. He also seems like he has a lot more potential. What do you see from him? How has he grown through the course of the season and what do you see for him a year, two years down the road?**

BRIAN FERENTZ: It's kind of like Logan and Gennings. Asked a question about those two guys. I'd lump any first-year player in the same category.

It's kind of like if you go in the weight room, you've never trained, you're going to see some really exponential growth out of the gate. But then things are going to slow down, right?

Right now those guys have been drinking through a firehose. They've handled it pretty well. Specifically Kaleb, he goes from playing high school football to being a starting running back in the Big Ten Conference and taking a lot of carries. Not easy. Just the physical demand of that is very difficult. He's handled that very well.

He's a guy that I can't think of a time he's missed practice or missed a rep or missed anything, due to being nicked up, right? His durability has been very impressive.

On top of it, the mental strength, if you take the football part from the school, the expectations, the attention, some of those things, I think he's handled that very well, too. I'm encouraged by that.

From a football standpoint, the easiest thing for a running back is to carry the football. Even within that, you can detail a lot of what they're doing, right? A natural ball carrier, you don't want to over-coach them. If you can just get their track exactly right to marry the blocking.

Timing is a huge aspect of what backs do. It's really no different than the passing game. You want to make sure the timing of what they're doing, what they're running is matching the blocking. You'll always be able to polish that as years go on, get that tighter, a little cleaner. I expect that to happen.

Without a doubt, the biggest thing I think for running backs moving out of high school football into college football is

pass protection. It's difficult enough from a fundamental aspect to block any kind of blitzing linebacker or secondary player, but just from an assignment standpoint a lot of times running backs have one of the more difficult jobs on the field. They need to see a lot.

Experience is a huge feature with the pass protection aspect. I would anticipate, as the years go on, he's going to clean a lot of things up, get a lot better. I don't want to guess what he'll look like in two years. I don't have a crystal ball.

My guess is if he continues operating the way he operates right now, I think his future is probably bright.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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