

# TransPerfect Music City Bowl: Iowa vs Kentucky

Friday, December 30, 2022

Nashville, Tennessee, USA

Nissan Stadium

## Iowa Hawkeyes

## Coach Kirk Ferentz

### Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We're now about to welcome University of Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz.

Coach Ferentz, welcome to the TransPerfect Music City Bowl. This is the silver anniversary of the bowl. In recognition of that, we are presenting you with a silver gold record. Feel free to sing if you like. We're excited to have you here and welcome.

(Record presented.)

THE MODERATOR: We'll have a couple of remarks from Coach Ferentz, then open it up to the media.

KIRK FERENTZ: I can't even sing Happy Birthday, we'll skip that, spare you all.

Good morning. Great to be here in Nashville. We thought we were going to be here a couple years ago, didn't make it unfortunately because of the pandemic, all of the things going on. But this is certainly a much better trip because that would have been in and out like an away game like all the games that year.

Certainly it's been a great week for our team, very appreciative of being invited. What a great venue it is. The bowl committee does a great job of putting on a really nice time for our players. That's most important. It's a reward for them.

We're extremely excited to play in the TransPerfect Music City Bowl. Really looking forward to the challenge against Kentucky. It's interesting that we started the new year a year ago against Kentucky in another bowl, now we're going to finish it up 360-plus days later. That's interesting.

Everybody in our program has tremendous respect for Kentucky. Obviously a lot of firsthand knowledge. Also Coach Stoops, the great job he's done. You watch their team on film this year, another really good football team.



Excited about that challenge, opportunity.

I think in a lot of ways there's a lot of parallels and similarities between our seasons. We both experienced some really tough, heartbreaking losses. I think both teams really showed great resiliency, pushed through, fortunate enough to make it here. We're really happy about that.

I think probably the thing this season I look back, really proud of our guys, the way they handled the entire season. But most important the past couple weeks. I think all of us realized there's a lot going on in college football right now, a lot of big issues that really need to be addressed. I'm certain of that. More immediately just what the challenges are for I'm guessing most teams this month, this past month with roster changes, injuries you have from the season, transfers, all those different things that are going on.

For a team to really pull together and get ready for a bowl game is not easy. The guys are contending with finals, finishing up their academics, also preparing for a game.

Just really been impressed with our players, their focus, the way they've worked going back several weeks ago. We've had really good leadership this year. That's been consistent. Not only our seniors, but our experienced guys. They've done a great job leading the way for all of our guys.

December, it gives everybody a chance to watch younger players get extra work, coaching, watching them grow and develop. That's a huge part of college football. That part has been great, too.

We're excited to be here. This is our 20th invitation now. The more things change, two things really stay the same. We're extremely appreciative again to have this opportunity. We never take it for granted. The other thing is the goal is to win the game. That's where our focus has been. I'm sure Kentucky is doing the same thing. Look forward to the challenge tomorrow.

I'll throw it out.

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THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

**Q. There's a lot of players around the country like Jack Campbell and Sam LaPorta that aren't playing in their bowl games. What does it mean for guys like them and Riley Moss, what does it mean for the program to have them take that step and play?**

KIRK FERENTZ: I'm not here to judge anybody. It was two weeks ago tomorrow, I was driving over to a little place for breakfast with a couple of recruits. Heard a guy on the radio talking about that very same topic. He was coming from a whole different place.

I don't think he ever -- I don't know if he played football or not, I don't know. Didn't recognize the name. But he's an authority of some type. He kind of took that stance like why would a kid play in a game that's senseless for a senior.

I guess the difference is everybody's got different ways of looking at it. Again, I'm not judging anybody. I know with Jack and Sam, ironically or interestingly, a year ago, a year and a week ago, they came in my office, we had a little break, they had gone home and let me know after thinking about it there's no way they weren't coming back this year. They had that decision to make a year ago.

That's how they're wired. If you are going to have a good football team, you have to have guys like that. We've had a lot of good players (tearing up). That's the fun of the guys like that, the attitude. The impact that has on a team, it's really impressive. That's the beauty of it.

Again, everybody has the right to make up their own minds. Got to do what's best for you ultimately. We get that. We encourage that. It's really what makes it valuable to have guys like that. It's no coincidence they're both captains for us.

**Q. How have you seen Sam grow as a leader over the years?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Sam has been always been upbeat, always ready to go every day. He's been that way since he walked in.

But he's earned that respect just by who he is, how he conducts himself on a daily basis. He lives it every day.

You get older, you're a little bit more experienced. I think it's not like he has his hand up, but he's just doing things the right way. That's what good players do, leaders do. They do it on a daily basis, not some of the time.

**Q. Have you detected any kind of revenge factor in the players' minds? Could you talk about that some, if you detected any of that out of your players?**

KIRK FERENTZ: I don't know if that's, like, a prominent thought. Our guys are mindful that we came up short last year. It was a heck of a game. Went right down to the wire. To Kentucky's credit, they made the play at the end that ended the game.

It was a close, tough contest. I'm assuming it's probably going to be the same way tomorrow. Teams haven't changed a lot in terms of their approach, what have you. Both of us have some wild cards and variables. That's going to make it interesting.

I think hopefully our guys want to line up every time, no matter who we're playing, come out on top. That's always been the objective.

**Q. I would say the one variable that never changes about bowls is the preparation, getting the practice time, especially for younger players. What have you seen from your offensive line, the growth maybe over the last month? Have any taken those steps forward that you really look at and go, okay, this guy is putting in the right position for not only this year, game, but in the future?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Right. As you know, that's critical for us. It's been a process. It's been a process the last two years. I thought we grew last year as the season went on. I think one of our best games probably was at the end, our last contest. We're hoping that happens tomorrow.

I mentioned the whole team I think has really practiced pretty well this entire block, the last three-plus weeks. The offensive line in particular, you just see them being a little bit more cohesive, a little bit more definitive with their actions, decisions, those types of things. That is encouraging.

You can only do so much sitting in a chair, watching film, having meetings; you have to get out and do things, practice your techniques.

Really pleased. Left to right, all the guys have taken steps. Some of the younger kids are coming along, too. Hopefully won't have to dip too deep tomorrow.

**Q. Do you know after all this bowl prep, three weeks, do you know what you're going to get out of Joe Labas tomorrow or is it a total mystery to you? Sounds like he's a good guy at improvising. What is the approach**

with him?

KIRK FERENTZ: I mean, quarterbacks always have to be smart about when they take chances, trying to throw one in there at the end of the half versus first drive, something like that, there's some decisions there.

Joe has been great. He's really been great. A little scary at the front end. That's where the volume of having a chance to get on the field and do work, talked about the offensive line, but maybe most importantly Joe and Carson. Reality is threes and fours don't take many snaps during the year in your system. The one and twos do that.

I'm not sure we've ever gone into a game where our one and twos are gone, not in the roster. Fortunately we had an extended period here. I think the last two weeks Joe has really done a lot of good things. Seems like he's more comfortable.

All that being said, it's going to be his first play in college football. Maybe we'll have Campbell hit him in the locker room a couple times, loosen him up a little bit there (smiling). In the head a little bit, too, so he's not thinking too much (laughter).

He's a competitor, he's tough. I'm sure he's going to do a great job for us.

**Q. When Mark Stoops was a player, did you think of him as future head coaching material? What's your reaction to the success he's had at Kentucky where so many coaches have struggled?**

KIRK FERENTZ: First thing I always remember about Mark is when he was sitting in Bill Brashier's office, Coach Fry's longtime defensive coordinator. Bill came in the staff meeting later that day and just said, I had to remind he's a Stoops because I swear he looked like he was 13. Young, not very put together at that point, coming out of high school.

But all three of them played for us basically in the '80s. One of our safeties was always No. 41, a Stoops. All three of them were excellent players, the kind of players you could really see becoming a coach.

Phil Parker is on our staff. This is crazy. I was an assistant for nine years in the '80s. I used to watch him play, thinking he could be related to the Stoops, just the way he played. He was a smart, tough player. I'd say the same thing about all three of the Stoops brothers.

But Mark has done an outstanding job. I'm not an expert on the history of Kentucky football, but I'm not surprised at

all because Mark comes from a great football background. He's a serious football guy, a great guy. That's what it takes, it takes a lot of work and effort. Obviously Mark has done that. I'm really very, very happy for him.

**Q. Obviously Will Levis has been the guy all year for Kentucky. At this point he's not playing. What has been your approach these last few weeks in terms of preparing for Kentucky's options at quarterback?**

KIRK FERENTZ: We knew Will out of high school. We were his first major offer. Didn't last long, but...

We've known about him, got to face him a couple times now. Him not being in there, it just is what it is. We're not quite sure, quite frankly, what to expect. There's some film available with Will not playing.

You just never know what to expect. That's probably true of bowl games, too. If anything, we simplify some things, make sure we're sound in all areas, kind of wait and see how things unfold.

**Q. Looking ahead, how important is a fully effective NIL collective for you with Swarm, looking forward in terms of competing?**

KIRK FERENTZ: I think it's a sign of the times. There's a lot of changes in college football right now. That's something that's going to continue to change. We're maybe at right now probably way different than six months ago, and it's going to continue to evolve.

Just like a lot of things that are on our horizon, if you will, in college football. There will be another time for that.

Right now we're just trying to kind of focus on Kentucky, got our hands full there.

**Q. In talking to Jack Campbell, he said that the main reason why he came is to play for you, everything you've done for him, everybody else. What does it mean for you to have a player of his stature say that at this stage of his career? He could walk away and nobody would think differently.**

KIRK FERENTZ: You're hitting my buttons there. Appreciate that (smiling).

Jack Campbell, if Joe the clown was coaching, he would say the same thing. Jack is just -- everything is -- it's kind of like Yanda was the same way. Everything he looks at and sees is opportunity. He's extremely humble and appreciative (tearing up).

You coach a guy like that, with all due respect to our defensive staff, you coach a guy like that, it ain't hard, right? He's an unbelievable young guy. We've had a lot of great players. Cool thing about being here, practice day, we Chic Ejiasi, Karl Klug, Greg Mabin, Trudack [phonetic], and (indiscernible) didn't make it over.

That's the fun of coaching. With all the crazy stuff going on on the horizon, all the stuff in college football that's distracting, quite frankly, the fun is being on the practice field or game field with guys like that. That's what the game is about.

Can't say enough about Jack. We've had so many good, young guys. This whole team has been really good to coach and work with. I'm just appreciative of that.

THE MODERATOR: Coach Ferentz, thank you very much. Good luck tomorrow.

KIRK FERENTZ: Thank you.

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