

# University of Iowa Football Media Conference

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## Gary Barta Kirk Ferentz Press Conference



**THE MODERATOR:** We'll get started. Talking about the 20th bowl game for Coach Ferentz's time here at Iowa. Go ahead, Gary.

**GARY BARTA:** Yeah. Thanks, everybody. The Zoom world allows me to multitask. Just finished up with wrestling in Carver and just working on a bowl logistics meeting.

I was really grateful to receive the call this afternoon from the TransPerfect Music City Bowl, something that they have been talking to us now for a couple of weeks. Actually, we've been in great conversations for a few years and as most of you know, we were invited and then that went sideways due to COVID.

But I know our players are excited. I was talking to a few of them yesterday about this possibility. And, first of all, I want to congratulate the players, the coaches. They have earned this opportunity. So, I'm really excited for them.

I'm also excited for our fans because over the past few years, I know many fans have approached me saying they would be excited to go to Nashville and take over that city. So really excited about the opportunity and I know it's a great bowl. I know our fans are going to enjoy it and our players and coaches are truly going to enjoy it.

A great property for the team. Certainly, a terrific and familiar opponent playing against Kentucky. So, looking forward to it. I will turn it over to Kirk, and then if people have questions for either of us, happy to try and answer those afterward.

But again, Kirk, congratulations. 20 bowls as a head coach, that's quite a run.

**KIRK FERENTZ:** Well, appreciate that, Gary, and thank you.

Obviously, we're just really happy and excited to get the

news. It was great to learn from Steve Ramsey that we're going to have an opportunity to play in the TransPerfect Music City Bowl in Nashville, and as Gary mentioned, we thought we had that opportunity coming a couple years ago. It didn't materialize. So, this is really special.

Also, as has been mentioned, it is our 20th bowl now since 2001, and I think each one of them represent, I think a significant accomplishment, and then the other part about it, each one is really something that's appreciated by everybody in our team, our program. They are special opportunities for our team, most importantly our players, and just to have this happen is really a good thing.

In general terms, the way I've always looked at it, it's one more chance for our entire football team to compete together and work together for another couple weeks, which is great. For the seniors, it's exactly that because this will be the last time they get a chance to compete with the Tigerhawk on their helmet, and I can tell you, it's really special before they go off to their adult lives or whatever chapter is next for 'em.

And then for the younger guys, it's significant from that standpoint as well as just it's an opportunity to continue to develop, and these are really important opportunities for all the players that haven't played a lot or even guys that have played that are younger to continue to move forward as players. And really the way you learn how to play football, there are a lot of different things that go into it, but the most important part is you have to go out and do it and practice it.

And we only have limited opportunities, so to pick up this month is really beneficial for everybody. And if you want to have a highly competitive team, competitive program, it's just a really important opportunity.

So, again, just appreciative on a lot of levels. You look across the line now, it's always good to know where your playing, and then who you're playing. Certainly there's some familiarity with the Kentucky program, Coach Stoops being a graduate of this program and playing-wise and assistant, but more importantly, just what he's done as the head coach in the program they've built at Kentucky, and we got exposure to that firsthand last year at this time. Nothing but great respect for them. I'm not overly knowledgeable about this year's team, but I know what

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their program stands for and how it's built and we know we're going to be in a very competitive situation. Again, a big challenge for us. So that's exciting as well.

Then as kind of an interesting sidebar, my nephew brought it up, that we kicked off the calendar year, 2022, playing Kentucky and now ironically we're going to finish it on the 31st with the same opponent. So it's a little bit of an interesting sidebar. And as Gary mentioned, we thought we were going to Nashville a couple years back and now we get to actually do it.

So anyway, it's just really good to know who we're playing. We can now start thinking a little bit about our preparation and doing some game planning as well as the other things that we are doing.

Just shift gears for one second. Our roster is in a process of shifting, probably like every college football program in America right now. These are unchartered times, certainly, with some of the new things that are going on in college football, and we're really no different. So we got a few things that are going on there, and then on a notable front, unfortunately, Spencer Petras will not be able to play in the game. The injury he had in the Nebraska ball game was significant enough to require surgery. So he's not going to be able to compete. Nobody's more disappointed than him, obviously. Like any player that has an injury that requires surgery, it just takes 'em out of competition. It's good that he'll be with us, but all of us wish he wasn't on sideline supporting the team. But that is the one thing I have to report right now.

Otherwise, I'm not really aware of anything new injury-wise since last week. Hopefully, it stays that way. So we'll go from there on that front. As I mentioned too that rosters are shifting right now, so like everybody else we do have some movement. That could go really up until any point. Like years in the past, you've got guys making decisions about NFL status, decisions about playing in bowl games, just a sign of the times, like the portals. So we'll keep you abreast of that as we learn more.

A couple guys have made up their minds. A couple guys are trying to figure out what they want to do. I just encourage our players to give a good thought. And the biggest thing is once we start our preparation in earnest, I want to make sure everybody's ready to roll and they're totally on board.

So the other part, just playing at the end of the month gives, I think, us ample time for our guys to do a good job finishing up the last week of classes this week, going through finals, and then giving us a chance to have a good preparation block before we head down to Tennessee. So

all that kind of I think pulls together pretty well.

And then, again, just as we move forward, as we get more information about logistics, travel, all those types of things, we'll be sharing them as we go. Just want to say, again, in review, just really excited to be invited to the TransPerfect Music City Bowl, excited about the opportunity, and really excited for our team to have the full bowl experience. And I know our players that are on the team that were on the team in 2020 were excited about it.

As Gary alluded to, I think they're more excited now. So we're looking forward to that, and with that, I'll throw it out to questions.

**Q. I want to know, will Joe Labas be your starter in the bowl game, then?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Well, it will be him or Carson May, one of the two. We'll let those guys work the next four weeks and see how they do. We were on the field yesterday and both, I thought, did some good things but obviously we got some work to do with both guys. The good news is we have four weeks to get that done.

**Q. Along those lines, what have been your impressions from Joe and from Carson throughout the season on scout team?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Good. You hope all the guys are good. The one guy, you know, as soon as you mention that, I'm thinking about TJ Hockenson, who was a redshirt freshman, tortured our defense and really did a good job. So it was no big surprise that he ended up developing into a really good football player and then only was with us for two more years and ends up being the 8th or 9th player drafted.

So you just never know what the path's going to be, but both those guys have done a good job. They're good, young guys and obviously they're lacking experience right now and that's our job to move 'em forward.

**Q. Wanted to get an update on Cooper DeJean and Sam LaPorta.**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, they would not have played if we played yesterday or this weekend. But I would expect Cooper for sure to return here at the end of the week. I think Sam's very close. He's out on the field, moving around pretty good, but he would not have been game-ready this week, nor would have Cooper.

But expect them both to be fully ready to go in the bowl game. I know they're excited. I don't want to speak for our

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guys on our team, but I can tell just by the way they're acting they're excited to play another game.

**Q. I wanted to ask you a little bit about the transfer portal. You've had some significant departures, I guess, or at least they have announced it. Even though tomorrow is the first day that nine graduate transfers can officially enter it, do you expect everybody who announced to actually go to the portal or is there some, maybe some swaying back the other way towards staying for one or two of 'em?**

KIRK FERENTZ: That's a great question on a couple levels. We're all learning. One thing I learned this -- I'm trying to sort all this stuff out -- who can we talk to, who can't we talk to. One thing I also learned is players that played on staffs where the coaching staff was fired they're treated like graduate transfers. So you can have, you know, a conversation with those folks.

But to answer your question, and I didn't cover this in my comments, glad you asked, not everybody's a hundred percent. That's kind of my encouragement when I talked to the team yesterday, was just take some time here, deliberately take some time over the next few days and make sure if you want to be here, you're here and your feet are here and full-fledged and part of the team because we've dealt with this in the past, and I imagine most colleges have, where a guy's trying to make a decision, do I go to the NFL, don't go to the NFL, and it's not good for anybody when you get in that situation.

I would venture it's going to be the same way with the portal, do I leave, do I stay. It's just a different time in sports right now. So my encouragement to our guys is if you're serious about playing in this game, then let's go, and if you're not, then wait back, and then we'll handle each situation individually in terms of the players.

But I would say the majority of the guys that, you know, have announced that they have thoughts probably won't be back with us, and with that, maybe that creates opportunity, maybe there are other players out there, like Zach VanValkenburg, Jack Heflin, and Mekhi Sargent, going back chronologically, ended up coming here from other places and did a great job and really added to our program, and they're all still active participants in the NFL that are really good players, but more importantly are really great guys that really added to our team.

So you have to change your framework, your perspective, and every guy we recruit, our goal is to have them graduate from Iowa and finish their careers at Iowa and if that's not possible, then we'll look for guys that maybe are interested in doing that.

**Q. On Joe Labas and Carson May, how much less has May done, I guess, than Labas? We've seen Joe out there in the spring game on kids' day, whatnot, like, how far behind would he be, I guess, from Joe at this point?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Typically in any year, most of the reps go to your 1 and 2 guys when you're practicing. And one thing, when we changed our whole schedule back in 2015, went to a morning schedule, it made it a little tougher, more challenging, to do some work that we call developmental work with guys that aren't necessarily in the two deep. So that's probably the only negative, but I think all of us feel, came out of that assessment.

So we tried to create those things, we did during bye week, and we try to steal maybe eight plays, 10 plays here for the younger guys. All that being said, it's not the same as working with the 1s or 2s. It never has been. It never will be. So we'll do our best to take advantage of this time, and that's one good thing about the month of December, you have time available. So we'll try to do it to find out what they can do and do successfully.

Part of the challenge is to the rest of the team. It's like when any good player gets injured, everybody else has to step it up and do a little bit more. That will be an our approach and we'll, our intention is to win this game. That's our goal and intention, and we'll try to figure out a plan that's going to give us an opportunity to do that.

**Q. Historically, you've been one of the more conservative programs in the transfer portal. How does the slew of transfer portal entries that you've already seen change that? What specifically is going to be your approach at wide receiver in the portal?**

KIRK FERENTZ: I think it's way too early to say because you don't know how our numbers compare to other numbers. Quite frankly, I don't think our numbers are a lot different right now than they were for the entire year last year, not dramatically different.

But the difference is that they all kind of are centralized on a time period, whereas you might have a guy here or a guy four weeks later, five weeks later in years past. But the portal's opened this up. It's just a whole new time in college football, factor in NIL, couple that with the portal. Just sort of like guys, I remember when it was really unusual for a guy not to play in a bowl game. I'll date myself, and I can't remember the player, it was a pretty prominent player who didn't play in the Orange Bowl, and I was naive enough to think, you know, coaching in the Orange Bowl is pretty big deal for me, and I would think

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playing in the Orange Bowl would be a big deal for a player.

But, again, it's kind of a sign that we're moving into different times. So you just have to accept it, I think, and you deal with it. You always hate to lose any player from the program. I said that earlier, and I do mean that sincerely. But Mike Tomlin, I think, was quoted saying, You don't want a hostage in the building either.

So if a guy's not really interested -- and those are his words, not mine, but if a guy's not a hundred percent on board, it's probably best for everybody just to go separate ways, and then our task is to look at the portal and look at the transfer market and try to learn more about them, just like we would any recruit that we're looking at coming out of high school, and try to bolster the roster.

Now all that being said, it's going to affect the month of December for, I think, probably most programs. I'll just go out on a limb and say that. You guys know the numbers better than I do.

But to try to quantify it right now and compare it to other years, I don't think that's reasonable just because this year's so different than any year we've been in.

**Q. Forgive me for not knowing this, but are you allowed to talk about Cade McNamara?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Can't talk about any prospects. I can talk about the guys on our team right now. I checked on, not that specific name, but I checked on that detail today, just to make sure I didn't step in one.

**Q. Well that said, what did you think about Cade McNamara and the way that he played against you and in general last year?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, he impressed the hell out of me. Their whole team did. He was a leader of that team, a captain on that team. Very, very impressive. The guy that played last night was very impressive too.

So, big surprise, Michigan's got some good players and you know, it's probably a long tradition there.

**Q. Piggybacking off a question earlier, I wanted to clarify in the portal. If a player enters their name tomorrow or whenever does that, does that sell them on leaving or are you open to accepting a player back? I mean, I think back to Daviyon Nixon and his situation. Has your stance on that changed? And then a second part to that, is there ever a scenario in which you could see a player who is in the portal being a part**

**of bowl prep and actually potentially play on December 31st?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, it's possible. I don't think there will be a high number of those, at least in our program. But that's what I was referencing a little bit earlier, trying to articulate.

I think, I think our approach will be we'll look at each and every individual case. I can share this with you that a couple of the players that, you know, they're very firm in their thinking. And, you know, amazingly a couple of them already had I think a destination in mind and probably worked out. And that's good. It's good they have a home.

The bigger issue in this whole thing is a couple months from now, how many guys are going to be homeless in terms of leaving a scholarship situation and then ending up without one. But that's a different discussion.

So, yeah, we'll handle each and every case by case depending upon the individual and try to use judgment that really is in the players' best interest and ours as well.

**Q. I know you've only had nine days or thereabouts to kind of assess the season, but do you anticipate your staff being intact say in February? Or do you think that there might be some departures? Do you have any kind of an update to share in that area?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I mean departures on our staff are sort of like the portal and your team. Anything could happen there. Couple thoughts on that. Just, again, simplification. But I look at our season and I'm an optimist as you guys probably know. We lost two games by three points. We lost to two teams that are in the college football playoffs, which I think is historic from our conference. Both in the same season we played those two teams. And as I said back when we played 'em I thought they were pretty strong. I think it's been verified on the field and by the Selection Committee today.

And we lost a game last week where we had two key players injured. We turned it over and gave up a big play. The things that had really helped us win the four previous games. So every season's a new season. Every season is a different season. Every season has its own story. But, yeah, it is what it is. I told the team yesterday, I'm really proud of 'em, and it's been enjoyable to work with 'em and I'm looking forward to working with 'em, I think our whole staff is, this coming month.

And then, like every year, we'll do a comprehensive study on everything we're doing. I really kind of foresee this year being similar to what we did -- and I had this thought weeks

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ago -- what we did in 2014. 2014, that's when we went to the morning schedule, etcetera.

But we do a study each and every year, but I think this one will be a little bit more thorough and a little bit more detailed.

**Q. I believe it was that year and a couple other times you have done that where, I think 2007 going into 2008, you kind of doubled down more on being more Iowa-like and probably being more insular. Do you anticipate that or is it just going to be a little bit, just the total evaluation will take you in the direction of where you want to go?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, there's going to be a multitude of things we'll cover. I don't think anything's really broken right now. But I think there's things we can do better like every year. But it's a wide range of things.

Whether it's our players, our coaching staff, our approach, each phase of the year from a football standpoint. The recruiting, all these things, and now you got a new topic with transfer portal. And we're all kind of winging it right now in that regard and learning as we go. It's kind of been interesting, quite frankly.

In some ways it's kind of exhilarating. Because there is opportunity there, I think, if you're careful about how you do it. But, yeah, all that being said, yeah we're going to go through everything and just see what we come up with.

But as I just went through, ran through our season, I don't think anything's broken here right now. If you look around college football and the landscape not every season turns out the way you want. It would be great if it did. But I'm sitting here right now we've, over five years I think we're third in the Big Ten for victories. As disappointing as it was to lose a couple tough games this year. I'm proud of our program, proud of the people involved. Our focus will be like it always is, is looking how can we improve, who you can we get better.

**Q. A couple quarterback questions. Shocker. Do you expect -- I guess I feel for Spencer, obviously. Do you expect him -- how long will he be out and do you expect to have a conversation about him returning? And then secondly, can you think of a situation like this in your coaching career where you've had, you go into game with two guys that have never played a game?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, if you hang around long enough you never know what's going to happen. This is an instance or, you know, or an example of that.

So, yeah, I mean, it's not ideal. But I think about 2010 when a guy name Coker jumped in there and ran for 225, I think it was, down against Missouri.

So your approach, we got to try -- we as coaches have to figure out what we can do to give our team the best chance to win, knowing the players involved. We'll know a lot more about that after a couple weeks here.

So it is a really high, highly interesting situation. But we got a lot of strengths on our team too. So we'll try to play to those. I'm sure Kentucky's going to do the same thing with their team. And it will be, hopefully, a great game for both teams.

Going back to Spencer, unfortunately, it required surgery. We were hoping that wasn't the case. Of course it couldn't have just been a bruise or a sprain. So it required surgery. I think it's probably unrealistic to think that he'll be able to throw a ball for several months now, including spring.

So I think first things first. Let's get him healthy. And then I think he would have had a chance to be a maybe a pro guy, a pro free agent. I don't know how this is going to affect it. We'll know a lot more in the new calendar year on that one.

**Q. You were mentioning the nothing really being broken. A lot the offensive stats have you in the last 10. What are the metrics that you're going to be using to evaluate the offense and the offensive coordinator in particular?**

KIRK FERENTZ: It will be a lot more extensive once we get to the out of season. But as I've kind of been relaying to you all along, you go back and one of the guys that played last night played very well in the game. That was a big loss to us in the out of season, talking about the portal.

They gave the story about why he left. It wasn't discontent here, I don't think. But, you know, he played with a high school quarterback or at least a childhood friend, you know. So it is what it is. But that was a loss.

Injuries keeping players off the field, good players off the field. If you go back and look at who was on the field for a couple of the games early in the season I think that was reasonable that affected us. Things I know about some of the development of our younger guys and things like that. Where there was some things that impeded their development. We thought they would be further along.

Thinking about the guys up front. And from my advantage point, and that's what I said about both quarterbacks,

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Spencer and Alex, tough to get a fair assessment, just because of the way we were operating.

The challenge is, can we fix that. Are we doing things well enough. Is the system geared towards having success offensively. We've had success too with the system and the coaches here.

So we'll take all that into measurement and that will go in earnest in January, start in earnest in January. Right now our focus will be on getting ready for this game and trying to put a good football team out there on the field.

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