

University of Iowa Football

Media Conference

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Kirk Ferentz

Press Conference



KIRK FERENTZ: Thank you. Good afternoon to everybody. A couple words about this past weekend, and then we'll talk about the Iowa State game.

First of all, it was good to get out on the field and compete. I think every team goes through it where everybody kind of has a clock going, an internal clock, and after a while, probably about ten days out, everybody is anxious just to turn it over to the season. So good to get out there.

Obviously, it was a hot day. Great to play in front of fans and just a lot of anticipation, anxiety, anxiousness. Good to get the first one out, that's for sure, and most importantly, happy to get the victory. Good starting point for us.

Came in Sunday, which gave us an opportunity to look at the film and hopefully learn from any errors that we made, both physical and mental, and maybe as much as anything, just understand the value of little details -- all coaches are trying to get corrected during the course of camp that kind of reinforces some things.

The only thing I mentioned briefly after the game is the various swings within a game. Certainly, we had some situations we could have responded to better on Saturday. If we're going to have a successful team, we'll have to do a better job with that. Hopefully that's a learning experience on top of it. So all part of the deal.

Every Sunday is a real opportunity to learn and, most importantly, hopefully grow as you move forward. That's the challenge that's in front of us right now. We're going to need to grow and improve fast because we have a tough contest on our hands playing Iowa State this week.

Joe Evans, Luke Lachey, Jay Higgins and Cade McNamara will be our captains; same as last week.

Needless to say, this is a rivalry game. It's a big game in our state for good reason, and rightfully so. It's a good thing for the state certainly, but with it comes a lot of intensity. It's going to be a great environment on Saturday,

just like it is either in Kinnick or their place.

You can count on that, and I think you can count on, if you look at the last five games, it's basically been five points per average between the two teams. All games have really been contested. Comes down to playing good, clean football. I'd expect more of that this week.

Again, a lot of talk, a lot of excitement around the state, I'm sure. The key thing for all of us performers, the guys that are performing out there, the guys who are competing, coaches the same way, just focus on what we can do to be best prepared because that's what it's going to take. That's kind of where it's at.

Their team looked good on Saturday. They had an impressive win over a Northern Iowa team that we have a lot of respect for as well. They have a lot of new players, but some things didn't change. They look very well coached. They play extremely hard. They're very sound, no turnovers. They're plus two on the turnover rate, made some big plays that gave them a lot of juice out there and helped lead them to their victory.

They are an impressive football team. Two new quarterbacks, they both played well. They have multiple receivers that are good football players. Looks like four or five backs that are really capable. A lot of tight ends, like four or five, that contributed and did a good job. Veteran up front, very strong up front. Defensively they've been really good and stopped one of the top teams in their conference. Basically since '18 they've been playing good on defense.

They have a new kicker, had an impressive field goal. Punter did a great job, two big punt returns on top of it. They're doing a great job on special teams as well.

All that being said, we just have a lot of respect for them. It's like every year, we'll have to play at our best to have a chance to come out ahead on this thing.

We're on the road, but we still do have a kid captain. I want to mention Nile Kron from Iowa City. Young guy has had 11 surgeries thus far, just started first grade. As I'm told, his smile lights up the room. Just want to wish him our best and certainly we'll be thinking about him this weekend too. Great to have him.

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Q. After evaluating the play of the offensive line and the run game, was it a matter of mostly gaining points and missed opportunities more than it was physical errors that are beyond correction?

KIRK FERENTZ: I didn't see a lot of physical stuff, but more it was a tough preparation for us defensively. We felt pretty good about what to expect of their offense, a lot of returning players, and certainly the system that Coach Anderson has had with him for quite some time.

Then on defense we didn't know what to expect and got some looks almost maybe, I don't want to say we weren't prepared for, but there's some things we might have done differently maybe in retrospect had we known what to expect a little bit more.

All in all, we saw a lot of good things out there. Nothing that can't be improved upon and fixed, so nothing too bad.

Q. Do you expect more production from the run game this week considering you do know Iowa State a little better than you expected last week?

KIRK FERENTZ: The challenge is they make it really tough to run, and they've done a great job of that. It's kind of ironic, you think of the front, I think people refer to it as the three-three stack. You think of that being like a pass to spread offensive front, but they do a great job of getting three guys to the ball.

The one thing about them, which I can say this, the last five years they've really tackled well at all positions, and you can't say that about every football team. In fact, there's some you can't say that about at all. They've done a great job of that. They're great at getting guys free to the ball, and then they don't miss tackles.

Q. Seems like pass protection took a step up. What do you think kind of led to that big jump from last year to this year?

KIRK FERENTZ: It's kind of like I've been saying. We're a more mature group now. We're a little bit more experienced and more capable. It's pretty much the same guys, throwing Rusty Feth on top of it, but same guys that have been here. They've been able to practice a little bit. They're a little older and stronger. We're a more physically mature team at that position especially.

I think that's a big part of that. Especially line play in both lines, that's a really big factor.

Q. Will it be a similar rotation with the offensive line

this week as we saw last week with Elsbury in at right guard?

KIRK FERENTZ: We'll see how it goes this week. Right now, if we're playing six, seven, eight guys, we're doing it because we feel they can go on and compete, not because we're fishing around to find something that might work.

But the guys you saw Saturday did a capable job, and hopefully they'll all continue to improve as we go.

Q. Specifically about Logan Jones, you talked about how he deserved a medal last year for kind of being thrown into the fire. Post-game he talked about just how much more confidence he has making those pre-snap calls. Just from your evaluation, how far would you say he's come and how important is it for him to maintain that level of confidence he has right now?

KIRK FERENTZ: It's just going to come because he's earned it. It's the whole group really. We knew it was going to be tough last year. I knew it was going to be tough for him, although as I said before, sometimes you get lulled into sleep because he does so well in practice. But it's still different being out there in a game in front of fans and competing when there's a shot clock going, all those things that make the game a little more stressful and trying.

I thought he did a good job last year with it, but there's nothing like experience. Linderbaum is a better player in his last year than he was his first year starting. It would be the same thing. I'm not trying to compare the two guys, but they are wired a little bit the same and there's some similarities between them. That's a compliment to Logan because he operates at a high level. He's really mature, very serious about it, and he's got a lot of pride.

That's very true at every position. If you have a guy with those attributes, it's a good thing.

Q. You talked about the new quarterbacks and running backs. Going back to the summer and the gambling investigation, how much has it impacted this game when you think of the players that aren't going to be playing?

KIRK FERENTZ: I don't know. The guys that aren't there aren't there. I can't speak to their side. I can speak to ours. We'd be a better team with our guys out there. I'm sure they feel the same way.

The reality is they aren't, so we've all had ample time to get ready. It's not the same, but for a coach or for the team,

it's the same as if somebody is injured. Somebody else is going to step in there and play. From what I could tell on the film, those guys really did a great job. All the guys that we saw there Saturday looked like they were confident and playing very well. They had total control of the game in all three phases.

Q. As the head coach of the Maine Black Bears, did you ever think you'd be on the doorstep of 200 wins?

KIRK FERENTZ: No. I wasn't sure what was going to happen once I left Maine, but it was a good experience, a really good experience. Learned a lot fast.

Q. What does that number mean?

KIRK FERENTZ: Not a heck of a lot really, quite frankly, other than I've been doing it for a while. It means I've been around good players and good people and in a good place. I've been really fortunate that way. At least I'm smart enough to know that.

The only reason I know is because somebody reminds me of it, not frequently, but occasionally. Right now all I know is we're 1-0. That's nice. That's the best we could be. We've got a lot of work in front of us, that's all I know.

Q. Luke Lachey was good last year. Do you see him taking it to a higher level this year?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yes, it's the same discussion with Logan or the whole group. If a player is doing right, they should get better. Linderbaum will be a better player this year than he was last year, I'm sure of that.

Good players just keep getting better. Even when they get older and their skills start to deteriorate, that's why you've got a brain. If you're thinking right and thinking about how you can get better and improve, there's so much to be said for experience if you're doing it the right way.

Luke's a great young guy. He's starting to feel it. Last year he started taking off, and he's done a great job in the out of season. We expect him to play well. If we're going to have a chance, I say it all the time, our best guys, our most experienced guys have to play better than they did a year ago or we're going to be in a bad place.

Q. Can you talk about Utah State throwing different looks defensively to slow the run game down? Was there other things you saw fundamentally your guys could do differently?

KIRK FERENTZ: Not differently, but you can always do better. I was pleased with a lot of things we saw, but just

things didn't mesh the way you want them to. Part of that is -- it's hard when you're really -- we were throwing darts last week.

I told you Saturday, it's a little weird watching MAC film when you're playing somebody from the Mountain West on Saturday. I'm watching Bowling Green and Buffalo Tuesday night. It's kind of weird. That's out of my comfort zone, full disclosure. I like to know who you're playing.

As the season gets on, it's a little bit easier because you have this year's team playing. Not that you know what's going to happen Saturday, there's always something that's going to -- there's always a monkey wrench or two. That's part of football. But at least you know who the guys are and you can kind of project things and put a little bit better plan together.

Last week you're throwing a lot of darts, that's just the way it is. I can't say I'm sure they were doing that because they weren't. It's not the same situation.

Q. You mentioned on Saturday that Nwankpa and Williams both had heat related things that sort of took them out of the game. Are they both better?

KIRK FERENTZ: They're fine. Big point of emphasis afterwards, if you play a game like that, it starts right away. You have to get on top of it. It sounds like it's going to be decent this week, but there's no guarantee there. That's a day-to-day thing. We started talking about that actually back in May. It's just something guys have to be cognitive of.

Q. Donald Trump is going to be at the game on Saturday. I just got the e-mail for it.

KIRK FERENTZ: There will be about 60,000 other people too, so that's great.

Q. Is that random?

KIRK FERENTZ: I think he was there during the longest game, the longest yard, the longest day, whatever the movie was. Those are both movies, I think. I think he was there then, too. A lot of people came and went after that one. It's election year in Iowa.

Q. Outside of that, have you ever played in front of any current or former presidents?

KIRK FERENTZ: I have no idea.

Q. Cade McNamara -- what's the workload been like this week? Is it full go? Did you try to manage it?

KIRK FERENTZ: He has an injury, so we're managing it all season long. That's my guess, or at least until it heals. We'll manage it and try to be smart about it.

Q. How has he been looking so far?

KIRK FERENTZ: He's looking okay. He's sore, I can tell you that. Predictably, he's sore.

Q. What about backup quarterback? We saw Deacon out there. Is Joe maybe ascending? Is there a competition there at number 2?

KIRK FERENTZ: Deacon benefited from Cade being out, and Cade was out like all of two weeks. That gave Deacon a chance to get a lot of quality work, like Joe did in December. Unfortunately Joe was out, and now Joe is back. Both of them are moving forward. If one of them is in the game, we'll be ready to roll.

We're practicing with those guys right now, and hopefully they'll both be amply prepared.

Q. A number of your players volunteered at an animal shelter not too far away. How much do you preach the importance of volunteer work in your program?

KIRK FERENTZ: It's part of our curriculum, if you will. We try to encourage that. They actually made the newsletter. I can't remember now, but I took it into a team meeting back in August. It was pretty impressive actually how many guys got involved. I think it's a half hour, 45-minute drive from here.

For college guys to do something like that, it's just something we've tried to encourage, I guess, maybe dictate a little bit from January to August. I think two things, the benefit of doing something for somebody else is always a good thing. Typically you learn more than the person who's benefitting from it does. The other thing, I always like to remind our guys that we all choose to do this, which is a great choice, but also we're able to do this and not everybody is so lucky.

It's a little bit different when we're talking about animals, but with people that aren't as fortunate, we're a pretty fortunate population to be able to play here, coach, be part of something like college football. It's a pretty good deal.

Q. Quarterback sneak has been a huge play for you guys the last three or four years, I mean really big. Is it off the table?

KIRK FERENTZ: I don't think I'm sharing too much about

our playbook. I guess anybody who saw it Saturday, we probably would have done it on fourth and one and quick gone out there and snapped the ball, but yeah, it's really not on the menu right now.

You're benefitting from experience, but you're not benefitting from that play for sure. We're not going to have him bootleg and the Chuck Long play from 85, probably won't pull that one.

Q. Maybe replace the QB sneak then?

KIRK FERENTZ: We'll have to take that one to the drawing board. I'm not sure about that one. We'll see.

Q. Have you and Matt Campbell talked at all this summer about your frustrations with the gambling investigation?

KIRK FERENTZ: No. I've got a lot of respect for Coach Campbell. Saw him at the state clinic back in February, early March, like March 2. We see each other there, typically bump into each other in recruiting, but otherwise we're both in our worlds. A lot of respect for him certainly in their program.

Q. What have you seen from Joe Evans over the years from a leadership standpoint and on the field standpoint?

KIRK FERENTZ: When he first showed up, I wasn't quite sure what we were going to do with him, as I said before, a high school quarterback. Once you saw him on the field, you just knew he had a motor. He's really a high charging guy. I don't know if I would have predicted his career would have been this successful, but it's a real tribute to him.

He's worked extremely hard, but he's totally invested. He's a great leader for our guys. Probably would have been a captain last year except you have guys like Campbell, we had such a good group of guys last year at the senior end. So appreciative he's back for his sixth year. He's a good football player, but just adds a real dimension to our football team, which is healthy.

Q. I was told, when you guys were recruiting Deshaun Lee, he had come on a visit here, and the night before you offered, someone told his mom that you guys were going to offer him but he didn't know. Then he got the offer the next day officially. What all do you remember about this?

KIRK FERENTZ: You have to understand, when Phil's involved in recruiting a guy, it's really hard to follow the

timeline or the logic line. He's got his ways. I can't explain it to you. But he's right a lot more than he's wrong.

Instead of just offering a guy, it's usually very cryptic. You have to go 43 steps. I guess that's because he doesn't want other people to jump in if we jump in on somebody, which happens a lot in recruiting. I'm not sure I fully understand his path to getting there, but at least we get there. That's a good thing. Deshaun is a great young guy.

Q. What do you remember about watching him in high school?

KIRK FERENTZ: Just he's a great young guy. He's got a high level of energy. I think he's done a great job in two years of really learning, working at it. I don't mind telling you, any time you start a first time corner out there, it's a little bit concerning. You just worry about it.

I thought he did a good job of playing smart football, which is where it all starts. Secondly, I thought he played well fundamentally. He came up and tackled too, which was good to see. He's not the biggest guy in the world, but he's tough minded and cares about being part of a good defense.

Q. How is it to have the crazy streaks and ups and downs that you were part of in the '80s? When you came back, you lost your first four. What is it about this series that makes it so unique in the fact that anything can happen? Also, I don't want to say how committed you were in 2003 to breaking that streak, but was it on your mind?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, sure. One of the great ironies of the whole thing, it really fell apart in '83. I don't think anybody saw it coming. I know we didn't. We ended up on the right side of a lopsided score over there. I remember that distinctly. I think it was an ABC game. That's when we started with the auspicious -- quarterback fell down going backwards. It was a terrible start.

Anyway, in '83 it ended up being a pretty wide gap, and nobody saw that coming. For whatever reason, the series wasn't all that competitive. But I do know this, it all changed in 1998, the year before I got here. I remember seeing on film the punt that got dropped in the near end zone here. That opened the door for them. I think they were 25-point underdogs, and they won by 25 or something like that. Ever since then, it's been a series.

Quite frankly, outside of maybe '02, they were the better team those first couple years. They were. It just is what it is. It's really been pretty even since then. Just a lot of really tough, hard fought games. Not always predictable,

but it's a tough, tough series. Just expect more of that on Saturday.

Q. Did you feel any pressure internally or just talking to people after you lost four in a row?

KIRK FERENTZ: That's one thing about intrastate -- I guess that's the correct grammar -- intrastate rivals. You don't want to lose, just like in high school, that team next door, you don't want to lose to those guys. Bear Bryant used to say it, you talk about guys going home, go to the pharmacy, and they've got to answer why they lost to Auburn, and Alabama would have to answer that.

I think that's just part of sports, but it makes it fun. It's part of the fun of sports too, having those kinds of rivalries.

Q. How is Sebastian Castro impacting this year?

KIRK FERENTZ: I think that was his real game where he played with confidence. Ever since then, he's been a different player. I'm not saying like here to there, but he just ties in with the earlier question about just experience. Sometimes you have to do it on the field. At some point you have to get out there and do something good, and he did that in the bowl game a couple times.

I think he has a well grounded sense of confidence now, so he's playing faster, more decisively. Again, he's an older guy. He's a senior. So I think all that stuff kind of at some point comes together for you. You never know when that's going to be.

That's the fun part about watching all this. You just never know when a guy is going to start hitting his stride. When they do, it's fun. It's fun for them. It's fun to watch them feel like they're starting to get it.

Q. Cade had mentioned part of the reason you guys are stretching the field a little bit more than maybe you had last year is some of the isolation looks and how he has confidence in the receivers to go up and make a play. How important is it going to be to continue to get the perimeter guys more involved to potentially open up some more running lanes and help you guys move the ball?

KIRK FERENTZ: That's just good offense, in my opinion. Again, just going back to last year, we had one scholarship receiver in the first game. With all due respect to the guys we had, but there's a difference. We have a little healthier group right now and a little bit more group that has more potential maybe to be productive.

A lot of those guys had to earn their way up. Nico's

certainly a better player than he was four years ago, so that's a good thing. Diante has had some hardships with injuries and crazy things. To have him out there healthy is good. Then you pick up Seth and Kaleb, those are good additions. Alec Wick, I think, is a much better player than he was a year ago.

Now you have some guys out there. You have a couple of tight ends that are capable of playing well. Think we've got a line, and we have good backs. So it's just a matter of piecing things together. Hopefully it all complements each other, and then whatever they choose to take away, hopefully we can find some success in those other areas.

Q. Beau Stephens was out injured. What's his status?

KIRK FERENTZ: He was at practice today. We're keeping our fingers crossed. We thought it might be worse initially, but he had a bone bruise. He should be good.

Q. He was a starter last year. Is he potentially in the rotation?

KIRK FERENTZ: He's in the mix. We're not sure who the starters are, but he's in the mix certainly. I think he's missed two weeks. It was two Saturdays ago he got hurt.

Q. You're now coming up on 200 career wins. What got you into coaching?

KIRK FERENTZ: Like a lot of guys that get into coaching, I suspect, a lot of people get into coaching, somebody probably had an impact on them, and there were a couple of coaches in high school, in tenth grade. I remember distinctly the day -- I can't tell you what day it was or what month, I just remember going home saying I wanted to teach or coach high school. That's how I started out.

The irony is the head coach at that time ended up getting fired after my junior year, and then the guy that came in and replaced him, who I was convinced I was going to hate and not want to be part of it, probably ended up being the most influential person in my life, my professional life. Outside of my family, the most influential person in my life.

So that's one of the lessons you learn in life in general, you just never know who's going to walk in and impact you. Long story short, I had a couple of coaches in my life. My dad was my baseball coach up until Legion ball, through Legion ball. Not that he was an official coach, but if he could do it over again, he probably would have done that instead of what he did. That's just how it ended up happening.

Q. What do you find the most rewarding about

coaching?

KIRK FERENTZ: It's easily the people, the interactions with people. That's easy. Not to diss anybody else, but the players especially. I get to work with great people. 34 years here, that's been the commonality, great people day after day -- in the office, on the field. And the best part is being on the field with the players, still is. That's not going to change.

I don't golf, so that's my two hours to get away. No phones. There's no phones out there and all that stuff. I can't say no recruiting anymore because that's not true, but in season that's true. From August until the end of the season, we're just coaching football. It's great. It's awesome.

Q. Have players changed much since you've been coaching?

KIRK FERENTZ: I don't think players have changed much. The world has and influences have. There were distractions 100 years ago. There's always been distractions in life. That hasn't changed. I've never been around a good player that didn't want to be coached.

Sometimes they're a little tough -- it's tough to find that path, but most -- not most, every good player I've been around, it was a good player, doesn't mean he was All-Pro or All-Big Ten, but a football player, they want to be coached, they want to be helped, and they want to learn, and they want to be cared for.

Q. The coach you said took over your senior year of high school, how did he influence you?

KIRK FERENTZ: He was even as good as the last coach, I guess, and he was always very respectful to the former coach, which I always appreciated. But he was an outstanding coach. It was Joe Moore who was my high school coach, and then I got to work for him in 1980.

I think everybody, pretty much everybody who's had any success in life is anybody who's gone out of their way to help you help them. I know that's true. This is a world I've lived in for a long time. In the coaching fraternity, there's a lot of that that goes on, and that's really what makes it gratifying.

Q. In all sports, the grind is the grind, but football, the physical toll that it takes on players, especially as you get closer to the end of the season, is pretty evident for everybody. Is that what in some ways makes some of these moments so rewarding for you? Everybody is overtired. Everybody is hurt. Then they suck it up,

and they go play, and if they win, you feel like that togetherness.

KIRK FERENTZ: I think football's so unique. I could go on an hour lecture on that one, but just it was 90, whatever it was on the field the other day, but we'll be playing in 20, 18, somewhere along the way. You win, whatever it may be, all the different factors you deal with and then the injury factor, it's a physical, hard game. It's a hard game physically. It's a hard game mentally.

So you've got all those things that go into it, so to be good at it and persevere and go through the ups and downs, I have a lot of respect for the people that do it. Again, it circles back to the players. The players are the ones who are really -- this is kind of our job. Most of us do it because we love it.

But for the players to do it and all the things they have to do besides play football, an awful lot of respect for them at this level of college to be a college student-athlete. It's not an easy road. Most of them do it because they love it.

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