

# University of Iowa Football Media Conference

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## Kirk Ferentz

### Press Conference



KIRK FERENTZ: Good Afternoon. I want to start out by congratulating Sebastian Castro for his first pick and pick-six, being named Big Ten Defensive Player of the Week. Certainly a great honor for him. A big play in the game. Real spark play for us.

Happy for him. He's improved every time in the program. Did a nice job in the bowl game last year. Off to a great start this year. Great to see him in his senior year playing so well. I am happy for him, personally.

Certainly good to get the victory. It was hard-fought, like we expected. To bring the trophy back here and have it in our facility for a year is a great thing. Really pleased about that.

Also beyond that, our team made some strides. I saw some improvement in a lot of different areas. Always going into a tough environment, which we'll have more of those to deal with during the year, come out with a victory, really happy. It was hard-fought. We certainly expected that. Pleased with that. Now we move on.

Before I get to Western Michigan, unfortunately we received some disappointing news, regarding Noah's appeal to the NCAA. It was denied. That puts it to rest. I'm not quite sure what went into the decision, but what I can tell you is that Noah is a tremendous young man. He came back to his sixth year. A highly respected leader in our locker room and certainly with our coaching staff.

Our goal is to keep him with the program, keep him close, have him remain as a part of the team. Obviously he can't play, but he's run a heck of a race, and we are really disappointed with the whole thing.

He's been honest throughout this whole process, very transparent. About as honest as you can be. I want to emphasize he did not break any laws. My wife made that point a couple weeks ago, just in emphasis. He is guilty of an NCAA violation. Very up front about that.

Basically I don't agree or understand, quite frankly, the

decision, especially when it comes to the severity of the punishment. To me, it's really disappointing, especially considering our current environment right now, which believe me, the last couple months I'm a lot more in tune to that than previously.

Probably the most disappointing thing, the panel that heard the appeal had an opportunity to do something, make a decision that to me would reflect reason and also reflect the changing environment. They failed to do so. We'll move on. Just disappointed on that front, certainly.

As we move on to Western Michigan this week. Our captains are the same four guys: Joe Evans, Jay Higgins, Luke Lachey and Cade McNamara.

Playing a 1-1 Western Michigan football team. They've had a good program quite some time. Made a coaching change this past offseason. They have a new head coach, who has an offensive background. Kind of interesting. They have a lot of new faces on the offensive staff. Defensively, they've retained the coordinator. Coach Esposito has been there quite some time. Basically it's the same defensive staff, pretty much a new offensive staff. Then they brought a special teams team coach who was the (indiscernible) coach at Louisville last year. He's running the special teams.

Basically in a nutshell, offensively it's a little bit of a mix from what we've seen from the last two weeks. Some carryover in terms of preparation. Certainly, one of our goals is to try to get off the field a little bit quicker, if we can moving forward.

Then defensively, would describe as a very aggressive and multiple defense. Very active. We have our hands full there in terms of preparation.

It's kind of interesting, they got hit by the transfer portal, lost some good football players in the portal. They've also brought some new guys in that added to the personality of their football team. Specifically they got a couple guys on defense that are big-time players doing a great job. We're going to need to account for those guys if we plan to move the ball.

Moving forward, it's very similar to every game week: we're going to try to match up against the opponent. At

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least we have two games to work off of, helpful, to see this year's team, get a little bit of a feel for what they do, just like they're doing with us. Try to match up with what we're getting ready for.

The other component is we're trying to grow and improve as a football team. That's all year long. Certainly in the early season it's critical. In any football game, the mental approach you have to have right.

Got a little help from the media recently. I saw a headline about the two-week countdown to our first Big Ten game. It kind of reflects the world that our players are living in. It's good for us as coaches to have that perspective. Just remind our guys that every game is important, every day is important. They all count the same. The bottom line is we have to worry about this week. I think our guys understand that.

Top that off a little bit. A lot of talk about 200 the last couple days. I could throw out a number, too, that would be two in losses to Western Michigan since I've been here. Kind of get a little perspective about what our chore is this week. That's kind of that right now.

Our Kid Captain this week is Maggie Larson who is a young six-year-old from Urandale. She'll be with us. Has a genetic condition that they're working on at the University Hospital. I haven't looked at it yet, but her story is on the Children's Hospital website. She'll be here with her two brothers, mom and dad. Great to have her with us.

With that I'll open it up to questions.

**Q. When it comes to Noah, I think he was an NFL guy, could have gone to the NFL after last season. Not going to play this season. What would you tell an NFL team about him, maybe why they should take a chance on him or take him?**

KIRK FERENTZ: I think they do their evaluations. The good news he has a lot of good film, played a lot of good football for us. As I just said, he's a tremendous young man. He made a mistake, like a lot of guys do.

This is an interesting study on so many levels, but I've talked about that enough.

I was hoping the panel, the committee, whoever it is, it's all faceless and nameless, whoever it was might be dig a little deeper and take a little bigger picture on this whole thing. It's unfortunate.

Doesn't change how I feel about Noah, the kind of person he is. There's no law broken here. It's a mistake I'm

guessing a lot of athletes have made. He happened to, for whatever reason, turn up in this investigation. It's unfortunate. I think it is a missed opportunity by the NCAA.

**Q. Do you think they made an example of him?**

KIRK FERENTZ: I can't speak for that. I've learned a lot in the last three months. I'm telling you now that the season started, the NFL season started, I can't get in the car without hearing whoever the companies are they have. Of course, if you have a gambling problem, call 1-800. It's a different world we live in right now. We seem to be a little slow to react to it, 'we' being the governing body.

**Q. What kind of role will he fill with the team this year?**

KIRK FERENTZ: We'll put him to work in a lot of ways. To have his experience, expertise with us on a daily basis, mentor some younger guys. Every year we have the young guys that are going through a really tough transition, just like he did six years ago. That could be invaluable.

We'll keep him busy. I think it's good for him to be busy. He didn't have to come back for his sixth year. All are very appreciative. Joe, Nico chose to come back.

It is unfortunate, an unfortunate turn of events. We'll put him to work, that's for sure.

**Q. What can you say about what his emotions are? How is he dealing with it?**

KIRK FERENTZ: I think that's probably the saddest part about this whole thing. As coaches and as parents, you deal with the humanistic part of things. You work with these guys as people. You see all the hardships that they go through, especially student-athletes. Nobody is complaining.

It's not for everybody, what they have to do, whether it's the football part of things, the academic, the character, all the stuff, the expectations they have.

When guys work hard, have an opportunity taken away from them, whether it's an injury, or in this case maybe a severe, over-severe, penalty, it's hard.

His parents have lived through this with him. Just as have his teammates and coaching staff. It's too bad. 'Devastating' is a strong word, but it's a real blow.

**Q. One player you're getting back this week, Jemari Harris. How did he stay involved the last couple weeks? What does he bring?**

KIRK FERENTZ: We have a policy, if a guy has some kind of conduct issue, have a suspension, they go to the scout team. I kind of feel different about this whole topic, really been interesting.

But, yeah, he's been active. He's been great. He's had a great camp. Basically he's been with our team. Was with us Saturday. Just didn't play the last two weeks.

He's fully engaged, ready to roll. It will be good to get him back.

**Q. What does he bring?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Experience. He did a great job in tough circumstances two years ago. All of a sudden he was in there, maybe not necessarily ready. Stepped up and did a good job.

The fun part, talk about the human side of things, just to watch the growth we've seen with him over his career, it's been unbelievable.

Two years ago, he developed into not only a good player, but a really strong leader on our team. He's taken a lot of ownership. Talk about mentoring young guys, he's been active helping younger guys try to get better.

**Q. Deshaun Lee got experience --**

KIRK FERENTZ: Good news there, kind of like Jemari's situation a couple years ago. He earned his way to the field. We had an opening, he earned his way. Did a good job. He's played well for two games now.

The good news for him is he's gained a lot of confidence from his teammates and the coaching staff. We come into the season with depth at that position, the corner position being an area of interest for us. Now we have a lot more confidence in him, just like we did when Jemari stepped in and did the same thing.

**Q. (Question about Jaziun Patterson)**

KIRK FERENTZ: Jazz performed the way he's practiced. He runs the same way. He's blocked well in camp. That's a big part of being a back, a running back. That keeps guys off the field sometimes. That was really impressive. He did a nice job. Again, we're not surprised because we see him do it in practice.

It's critical to any play's success. If they bring somebody a back is responsible for, we're going to throw the ball hot to the guy or he's got to block the guy. It is good to see that.

**Q. Maybe especially earlier last year, before he got into the bowl game, were there indications you saw him being able to do that?**

KIRK FERENTZ: We get to watch guys improve during the course of a year and during practice. He's done that. But he's been pretty steady. That was the first live action we really saw him hit. It was down in the bowl game.

But since then he's done a good job in the spring session, did a good job during camp. Hopefully he's got a lot of good football in front of him right now.

**Q. (Question about Jaziun Patterson)**

KIRK FERENTZ: He's interesting to that point. To me, he plays bigger than he is. Physically he's a physical player, blocking and running. But I wouldn't describe him as a big back, but he plays big, if that makes sense. Some big backs don't play so big.

A good trait. He has a real hardness to him, whether it's blocking, running, having the ability to make the yards you need. That's a critical thing.

**Q. And his character, how would you describe it?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Really easy to get along with. I don't know how to describe it other than he's very pleasant. Just a good young guy. Comes from a big family. A young kid in a big family.

His dad's a diver, fun trivia for me, which surprised me. Jazz doesn't dive, as far as I know (smiling).

**Q. Cade came in here and said it's the best he felt in a month to practice. First time he had game week practice in a year. Does that open up the playbook more? How does that help your offense?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Time will tell in terms of opening up the playbook. That's encouraging. He said something to me Thursday, I bumped into him. He and Erick were actually leaving, they were watching film, they were leaving the building. He indicated that he was feeling like he was gaining ground at that point. That was encouraging.

We're in a lot better position today than two weeks ago, which is encouraging, too. With injuries, you never know how they're going to go, everybody heals differently.

With all that being said, you have to keep your fingers crossed, hope he keeps climbing. The fact that he can practice now is huge because he's missed a lot of time, and the timing component is so important. It's important

because it's not like he's played with our guys a lot. This was the first time he has done any team stuff was in August.

There's a lot of work to do right now. That's encouraging for me. I talk about the potential of our team. I think that's a big part of it. If we can keep him out there, keep him practicing, common sense would say we'll probably play better with him getting more work. If he's more physically able to move around a little bit, that's a good thing, too.

**Q. How quickly do you think he can catch up?**

KIRK FERENTZ: I don't know if I can predict it. The good news is he's played. It's not like a guy who has never played. That's a big difference sometimes.

When older guys get hurt, miss time for whatever reason, their road back is a little quicker, a little smoother because they have experience, as opposed to a guy who is just doing it for the first time. It's a little different.

**Q. With the offense, do you feel like it took another step?**

KIRK FERENTZ: I do. I saw a lot of things that were more encouraging. We're still not there yet. We're a more mature group certainly than we've been the last two years overall.

Yeah, you have to keep going. Last week was a unique challenge, the kind of defense they play. I said a week ago at this time, they've done a great job since 2018 on defense. Saturday was no different. We expected that.

This is a different preparation. It has taken me a little while to make sense in my mind a little bit because of how multiple they are. They throw a lot of looks at you. So trying to make it make sense and make it make sense to our players, that's a challenge. Then you got to go out and try to execute against it.

**Q. The offense, it seems like you guys have started hot these last two games. Cooled off the start of the second half. How do you address that?**

KIRK FERENTZ: I don't know the answer. We haven't started well either side of the ball second half. In the first game they just took it right down the field on us. Last week we were out.

I don't know. We have to figure something out there.

**Q. With Noah for sure out for the rest of the year, what do you see from Yahya and Aaron filling in in that**

**spot?**

KIRK FERENTZ: I guess the good news is Yahya missed spring, but he looked good in August. He's playing his best football right now, which is what you expect. He has been here a while. He's continuing to do a good job.

I thought Pittman was one of our most improved guys last spring. He has been a good guy all the way. Last spring looked like he gained a little bit of traction as a player. That continued throughout August. Building that base, learning how to play a little bit.

I think we're in a decent situation with four guys there. You want to rotate, so hopefully everybody will just keep working and improving.

**Q. Nick DeJong said your teams tend to get better toward the back half of the season on the offensive line. How important is it to get things going this week?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Every week's important for us. For the whole team really. I think it's a fair statement by Nick. Our best teams have gotten better progressively during the season. Our not-so-best teams maybe haven't done as good a job of that. That's really the challenge.

As I said earlier, it's a twofold thing: you're trying to match up for what you think your opponent is going to do, how they might approach you, the other part is what can you do yourself to make yourself better.

A lot of that's experience. But experience isn't any good unless you put it to use. That's the key. It's a mental process there.

**Q. How important was it to hit the 100-yard mark against a really good defense? To get to that mark and look successful, is that an important part for this offense to have success, feel good about itself?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, it is. Connor, we talked about it after the game. The trap block he had on the counter play. It's just part of the process, maturity. He's a much better player today than he was two years ago. But he was playing two years ago probably before he was ready, as part of our circumstance.

I think that's what we're seeing with the whole group really overall, at least the guys that have been here. They're more mature now, practicing better, seeing some success out there on the field. I think if we keep our foot on the gas, hopefully we'll see it in a bigger scale.

**Q. DeJong has been the one from the 2019 offensive line recruiting class who has shined. What was it he was able to do from walk-on to being reliable?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Run the race. I told him I think three years ago now coming off the field one day on the far end of the indoor, I thought I saw something. I'm not sure he saw it. Again, it's a process guys have to go through. That doesn't always come to reality for everybody. At some point I think he figured out maybe he can do this, and do it successfully, with his skill set.

There's something about him. He just kind of stood out early. It was just a matter of him working through it, finding his path there. He's dealt with a lot of injuries, too, like a lot of guys. But last thing was the first time he ran the whole race 15 days every practice, really you could see the confidence growing. He was more consistent with his techniques. You could just see it growing.

Again, I wish we could get there faster. I don't know a way to do that other than it's hard work, dedication, a guy sticking with it. He's certainly done that. Credit goes to him on that. I think he's starting to maybe enjoy the game a little bit more because it's more fun when you're a good player.

**Q. You mentioned Beau Stephens might be back this week. Will he back this week in the rotation?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Not in the rotation. Well, he might be in the rotation right now. We'll see. He's just kind of getting back. He missed a significant time. He was on the field the last two days, getting him in there working. I don't know if it will be this week, next week. He's hopefully going to be able to stay healthy and get back into the picture here a little bit.

**Q. Daijon Parker, still not there yet?**

KIRK FERENTZ: He's missed a huge amount of time. It's unfortunate.

**Q. When Kaleb Brown announced his commitment to you guys, there was a lot of excitement. He's been in the wide receiver rotation. The wide receivers got off to a slower start with Iowa State. How would you assess the wide receiver room and Kaleb?**

KIRK FERENTZ: I like what I see with the room. Again, Nico and Diante, our most experienced guys, are both practicing well. Seth made a great catch, to me a huge play. Those are the kind of plays you have to make if we're going to have an offensive team. For a first down right in front of our bench.

It's not always going to be the wild plays. You got to make some routine plays, maybe a little bit beyond routine.

I really think Seth and Kaleb are similar. They're both guys, we didn't see anything of them in the spring. One wasn't here and the other was hurt. Both of them have done a nice job since August.

Probably the only difference is Seth played a little bit more receiver, whereas this is new for Kaleb. Great guy, great attitude. He has a good ability.

I think if everybody is just patient, lets this thing go as it goes, all four of them I see being active in the rotation.

**Q. Pass-rush, only one sack so far. Is that a function of what you're facing versus production?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, a little bit of each I think. Little bit of each. How we're playing defense, too, sometimes we're more geared to stop the run at least or play both run and pass as opposed to just taking off, going after the guy. Third-and-long obviously you're chasing.

Sometimes the ball comes out. There are different factors that go into it. I'm not worried about it. The guys are working hard. We have guys that can get there.

**Q. Talk about Sebastian Castro during his time as a practice team player?**

KIRK FERENTZ: He was a missile out there. He went hard, fast. I shouldn't talk about basketball, I know nothing about it, other than like what you hear. The analogy I can give you. A remember a guy named Dee Rowe, legendary coach at UConn. UConn was good in basketball, even when I was in school.

A couple things he would talk about. This whole diet stuff. He said the best athletes are playing on the playground in New York City, D.C., and what are they doing when they get hungry? They go to 7-Eleven, grab a dog, a couple Cokes, back to the courts and play all day. We're worried about where our pregame is going to be for our team. Thought that was a pretty good point.

Sometimes I guess guys can play freelance, but maybe when they get into a system that's a little bit different... I think that's a challenge defensively.

Sebastian, you can go there's no repercussions for making a mistake. Then you get into a system where you have reactions and different responsibilities. Bob Sanders went through the same thing. Bob is an awesome special teams

guy, but had to learn within the offense. Obviously he did, did a good job. It happens for different guys at different stages.

Sebastian has it figured out. I thought he did a really nice job for us last year. I am excited to watch him play all season long. He's an aggressive guy, totally committed, 100% onboard. He's an aggressive, tough guy.

**Q. Have you seen him work through those growing pains?**

KIRK FERENTZ: It's part of the process. Again, some guys make the transition really quickly, then other guys it takes a little bit longer.

The credit goes for a guy sticking it out and keep banging away. That's a fun part about Saturday. You think about all the time he was on the scout team or the times he was playing special teams, not really out there defensively for us. Now for him, I don't want to call it a bonus or reward, but it's a nice play. I never scored a touchdown, I know that. Pretty cool for a defensive guy to score a touchdown.

**Q. About Sebastian, you said you thought he wouldn't have made that play last year. Is that a by-product of him finding his spot?**

KIRK FERENTZ: It's finding the spot, but also the reaction time. That ball came out, boom, he was on it. That's experience. You can't hand that play to a player. That's a result of his hard work over several years, not just a couple weeks.

**Q. I'm sure when Nick Jackson came here, he thought he was going to be playing down the line football. Last two weeks he's been playing as a safety. What has been your assessment of him?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Sounds like our team. Yes and no. He's different in that he's a veteran player. He's played a lot of football, a lot of really good football. It's a totally different scheme that he was in.

This has been a transition for him. He'd probably be the first to tell you. A lot of language things that he has to learn. It's like switching any team. He's had to go through that.

Again, to the point about an older guy. I think the transition is a lot easier. Highly intelligent player. Just really 100% invested, too. I thought he's a perfect fit in the recruitment process. Then once he's been here, he's been great. He's just a fantastic young man.

He's going to see it all before the end of the season. He'll see all kinds of offenses. But I'm really confident with each week he'll keep growing, too, like a lot of other guys on our team. That's the part that gets you excited because it's just common sense with each rep, practice, everything he's doing right now, it's really going to add to a successful year for him.

**Q. Is he the type of player where you recruit him in the transfer portal, he's older, he knows what he wants, you just basically here is the game plan? Does it make it almost easier?**

KIRK FERENTZ: I don't mean this in a negative way. The difference between talking to a guy in 10th grade currently, the talking to a guy with a commerce degree from Virginia, it's such a different discussion.

The thing we enjoyed about our recruitment of him, he specifically knew what he was looking for. He had a couple schools targeted. We had a need, not only graduating two guys in the box with Benson and Campbell, that were really good players, what we were looking at is I was really concerned about the leadership void. You lose two guys of that magnitude.

All of us thought great about Jay Higgins, about his growth. Felt really good about that. The chance to bring another guy in, a captain, really mature, understands what it takes to be successful. You lose two guys like we just lost, then Jay coming up. Homegrown. Then you have a guy, he last two years, he's that kind of guy. It was so seamless.

So not only are you getting a guy who has production as a football player, but you have that leadership, too. I look at last year, you lose those two guys, you lose Moss, Merriweather the back end, four guys that have a lot of leadership in the bank. I think it was a big part of it, just addressing that part. Not only get good players, but guys that could help fill that void a little bit.

**Q. Do you remember when you talked to Logan Jones about making the move to the offensive line?**

KIRK FERENTZ: In retrospect, I wish I had done it earlier. I wish I had that thought probably in December, just to give him another couple weeks of practice at it.

He was receptive about it. He's first class in every way. He's done amazingly well, transition to a new spot. You'd never know right now the shortness of duration, how long he's been doing it 'cause he makes it look pretty easy.

He's still got a lot of room for improvement. That will come with that maturity. Every rep is going to help him because

he does it the right way, works hard. He's so invested, conscientious. He's a strong leader, too, a very strong leader. Not overly vocal, but just through who he is and how he is, how he does things, really powerful. If you're going to have a good football team, you have to have guys like that in the center of things, linebacker, up the middle, center, quarterback, and safeties obviously. That's a big part of being a successful team and we're really thrilled he's playing there, doing a great job.

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