

University of Iowa Football

Media Conference

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Kirk Ferentz

Press Conference



KIRK FERENTZ: Obviously, it was good to get a Big Ten win in a great atmosphere on Saturday night. So appreciate the fan involvement. Especially in the fourth quarter. It was pretty electric.

Happy about that. Every win is a good win. To get a Big Ten win, hard fought, obviously good.

Had to fight for it, and certainly in the second half, had to reach down to get it done, especially considering some of the tough things that we did to ourselves. So made it a little bit tougher, but early credit to our guys and the way they kept fighting.

As I said the other night, we showed resilience, kept battling and found a way to be successful. Obvious things right now, need to do a better job with ball security, and drops were a big issue the other night. Probably gave up more yards per carry than we prefer to. Every week you have something to work on. That's what we're up to right now. So that's where we're at.

Regarding Cade's injury, it is not positive. I was suspicious of that the other night. He has an ACL injury, so it has to be repaired. He'll be out for the season, stay with the team, be supportive, and continue to be part of the team.

It was a tough break considering the last two years for him, he's had more than his share of obstacles and challenges from that standpoint. Your heart goes out to guys when they're fighting hard to have a chance to go out and compete and don't have that opportunity due to health challenges. He should be fine once the recovery is over, and just a tough deal for him.

Moving forward to Saturday. Obviously, we have a good opponent coming in here with Purdue. Captains will be the same four guys: Joe Evans, Jay Higgins, Luke Lachey and Cade McNamara.

Injury-wise, Jaz will not play. Kaleb is getting a little work right now. We'll see what the week looks like, but he has a chance to play. We're not sure where that's at.

Moving to Purdue, they've been playing well. They have a brand new staff. I think everybody knows that. Coach Walters came over from Illinois. It's kind of an interesting matchup. Purdue has always been a good football team, a good program. He and his staff have done a great job moving that team forward, and they had a great win on Saturday, looked very impressive in all three phases against Illinois. So it was a big deal for them.

You can see the improvement week to week, and certainly did a great job Saturday. Defensively, they look a lot like Illinois did the last couple years and Missouri three years ago. Looked like we were going to match up with them in a bowl game. He has that system in place and tweaked a little bit and continues to do well, doing a great job there.

Spread offense, got a new quarterback. He's done a nice job operating that offense. It's a tempo offense, and they run the ball and throw the ball well, and the quarterback's a run threat. You have to do a good job there, and they're solid on special teams.

It's going to be a tough preparation for us. We're working hard on that right now. Certainly expect it to be a challenging game, like all of our conference games will be, on Saturday.

Great to be home again, in the 2:30 slot, and great to have Homecoming going on. I know it's going to be a festive environment. Hopefully we'll be ready to go at that point.

Want to recognize our Kid Captain. We have Max Schlee, a young man from Farmersburg, 8-year-old boy. He's had some nutritional issues and spent a lot of time at the Children's Hospital, a lot of visits, multiple surgeries. The family has really credited the genetic team over there for formulating a plan that's really helped him and moving him along. So he'll be here with his twin brother Cooper and the entire family. So it will be great to have him here Saturday.

Q. With Cade, has he given you any indication with that last year of eligibility remaining whether he'll use that to stay?

KIRK FERENTZ: I think his intentions are to come back and play next year again. That will be great. It's a long



road in front of him, but it's a lot better than it was 30 years ago, that's for sure, a lot more predictable. And he has a great attitude. He'll work hard at it.

Q. Has he already had the surgery?

KIRK FERENTZ: No, it will be sometime next week. They normally let those things settle down a little bit. If there is good news, it's a clean injury. Sometimes they can be a little bit messy, but it looks clean, and that's good. He's been fighting some other stuff too. Maybe this will give him a chance to get totally healthy again.

Q. How is the offense moving forward?

KIRK FERENTZ: You have to move on. We didn't have any time to think about it Saturday night, obviously. I thought that was one of the highlights of the game is the way the team kept playing. Deacon stepped in and did a nice job. Not a big surprise. We've seen great improvement with him the last eight weeks, but Cade's missed a lot of practice time. I've referred to that. So that's helped him move forward a bit.

But during the game, you certainly don't have time to reassess or think about it. I don't think our guys have done that since then.

The worst part about football is the injury category. Easily that's the worst part about it, but it's also a reality. When those things happen, everybody's got to keep moving. You're empathetic towards the people that are out and affected by it, but everybody else has to keep moving, and it's an opportunity for somebody to step up and get the job done.

Q. How much does this open up your offense? Because it appeared that you were limited by what Cade couldn't do running the ball, whether it was boots or negative plays?

KIRK FERENTZ: Or sneaks. Trick plays like sneaks, yeah.

Q. But how much does this maybe open it up a little bit more? Although it did look like he was starting to be able to do that.

KIRK FERENTZ: That's the unfortunate thing. The last week and a half, two weeks was the first time it looked like he was back to being close to normal. But it's hard to get healthy in season too when you have things that are kind of significant.

At least in this situation Deacon is fully healthy, and he has

been working hard. He's improved a great deal. I thought he played with a lot of poise out there, first and foremost, on Saturday, made some good decisions and played with a lot of poise.

Now the trick is to keep building on that. He has a different skill set certainly, but he's fully healthy, and he's more than eager to keep playing here.

Q. You have a guy in Joe Labas who won you the game in bowl. How ready would he be to step in on Saturday if something goes wrong Saturday, and how long does Deacon have this Saturday?

KIRK FERENTZ: First of all, Deacon is our starter. Secondly, Joe is in the same situation Deacon was last week, so he's one play from going in.

The challenge for him right now is he's missed a lot of time too. Seems to be a recurring theme here, but missed a lot of time in July and August, so he's playing catch-up in some sense. He's working hard every day. The fact that he did play in December, practiced and then played, I think gives everybody a little more confidence certainly. It's always good when you see a guy out there perform under pressure.

Now, yeah, he's trying to play catch-up and get back in the race here. We're going to need both of those guys. It's his job to be ready to go.

Q. Where did you see Deacon improve when he had to fill in for Cade?

KIRK FERENTZ: Both those guys didn't play last year, and Deacon, it's been a couple years really. That's probably the biggest thing for him is getting in games and actually playing, or scrimmage situations, those types of deals. So doesn't get much more live than it did Saturday. I thought he did a good job managing things and making good decisions for us.

Now it's all about continuing to do that and take steps forward. This was a big challenge. These guys play a different, unique type of defense. It's not the same as what we saw, but it's, again, another challenge. Every week is going to be a challenge.

Q. For Cade, as you mentioned, during the summer he spent a lot of time not doing full practicing. Now that he's injured here, is he sort of back to a similar sense of filling in where he can in practice? Or how are you keeping him busy throughout the rest of the season and I guess for the next nine months?

KIRK FERENTZ: First thing he's got to do is get that knee addressed, and that will be the next two weeks here, working on that. Then when he comes back, it's a long, lonely road for any player that's injured. Luke is going to go -- or is going through the same thing right now. There's a rehab part of things, and mother nature's got to do their part and all that. So that's pretty much regimen, and you go as fast as your body will allow you to.

But it's pretty obvious right now, depending where we're at right now, mid-October, but by the time he gets the surgery, I can't imagine he'll do much in the spring, other than maybe he'll be throwing the ball, things like that, but he won't be practicing. Hopefully he'll have June, July, and then August full-speed to go.

If there's good news, hopefully both legs are healthy, and he's able to be the Cade McNamara he wants to be. So that part's that part, and the other part is once he gets back here -- he's doing it right now. He's out there every day in the huddle and helping the guys out, staying engaged, and he'll do that as soon as he finishes the surgery part of things.

He can be immense help. He's played. He has experience. He can be a good voice for the quarterback room and then also help his teammates. He's committed to that. He got voted captain again this week. So I think that gives you a little bit of feel of the respect he's already garnered from everybody on the team.

Q. With Deacon, whether it be in the spring or leading up to the season, did he ever rip a throw or something that kind of opened your eyes to his arm strength?

KIRK FERENTZ: Like I said, he can throw the football. That's not an issue with him. That's his strength. He's made some good plays and some that weren't so good. That's his experience. That's how you learn and get better. So, yeah, he'll make some good throws. He can throw the football.

Q. I know it takes a village to raise a quarterback, if you will. With him, he's got people from his past, whether it's Keller Chryst or Bud, and also Spencer and Cade are here and Ryan. How do you help him move forward but not overwhelm him with too many voices?

KIRK FERENTZ: I was going to say that village might be too big. You don't need five guys to coach one guy.

When it gets down to it, the voices are pretty much filtered out. The biggest thing is him just trying to take in what he needs to take in. Each week it's a different challenge,

different preparation. These guys play a much different style of defense than what we saw last week.

There's always some commonality and parallels, but it's a different flavor. That's a challenge we're running during the game weeks. He's done a great job. He's attentive. He's a smart guy. That's probably the key element for everything. I think he's hearing the right things. It's just a matter of every repetition is going to help him, and certainly game reps will help him too now.

Q. You talked a lot about that arm strength. We've heard a lot about it. Is there anything else in his skill set that really sticks out to you.

KIRK FERENTZ: We don't tackle our quarterbacks in practice. I'm guessing it will be a challenge to tackle. That's probably a good thing. Just the mental part of things. He's a lot more comfortable just with every part of this thing. Even calling plays, which sounds pretty simple, but a lot of people do them off cards and things like that. So it's a little different repertoire for him.

Q. How many quarterbacks have you worked with in your career that have a water polo background? How much does his mobility help the offense and what you guys want to do?

KIRK FERENTZ: It makes it a little bit easier to have more flexibility. As I said earlier, I think we're getting there with Cade too. It just helps. It helps if your quarterback is not a stationary target back there. That makes it a challenge. It makes it things that are hard seem even harder sometimes.

I went through that in '93 with a veteran quarterback unfortunately. It was at the end of his career. It's tough when a guy can't move back there. It's hard on the guy. It's hard on everybody.

Q. The first thing everybody said about Cade was he's a great leader. Do you feel Deacon is settling into that level? How do you feel the guys responded?

KIRK FERENTZ: Totally different personality. I recognize him in the locker room afterwards for the next man in, stepping in and doing a great job and just keeping us moving forward. And the players were responsive. He's very popular with the players.

Again, night and day difference in terms of personality, and that's one of the beautiful things about this sport. So, yeah, he'll do just fine. The guys want to play for him. They respect him, and they're all pulling for him.

Q. When you look at Purdue, they look different than Illinois did last year, but they're very, very aggressive, 17 sacks. They seem to be a five-man line even though they're like a 3-3-5 officially. What kind of challenges does that put on your offensive line?

KIRK FERENTZ: That puts pressure on everybody. They've been successful, talking about Coach Walters going back to Missouri, we got our first good look at things that year, 2020, and the last two years at Illinois.

It's the same defense basically, but, yeah, they're always squeaking in, evading, doing those things. Sometimes they'll do those five guys rush. Other times it will be three. They mix it up doing various coverages. There's a lot of moving parts, and it's a challenge for everybody really to move the ball.

We're going to have to really be clear on what we're doing, and then -- they force you basically to block every guy out there with the five-man rush basically. It's five guys blocking five. Either they're moving a couple guys, working them in combination to get somebody open, or just one-on-one block. It's a challenge every play. It's like however many plays, 60 plays of just you got the guy, this guy and that guy, and they kind of do the same thing in the back end a lot too.

Q. (Question about offensive linemen injuries)?

KIRK FERENTZ: Beau's back in there. The other two guys are a little bit dinged up right now, but we'll see how it goes. Take it day by day, and hopefully all of them are ready.

Q. As a line coach, what's missing in the run game?

KIRK FERENTZ: It's a complex equation. Offense is more complex other than just saying this, this, and this. The fourth quarter the other day, at least we looked like we were back kind of going the way we need to go.

A lot of variables involved. Certainly going to help us. This is a tough team to run the football against because of their front and the way they're designed. We're going to have to find a way, and we're going to have to be patient too because there's a lot of ugly plays when we play a team like this. Hopefully you can find a crack or a crease and pop one through there.

It's not like you're just going to run the ball five yards, five yards, five yards. That's not realistic.

Q. What stood out to you about Jermari over the last three weeks?

KIRK FERENTZ: First of all, he's back on the field. That's a positive. It's great to have a senior guy who's a leader on the field. Probably one of my impressions -- he's trying to do too much. That's common for guys when they come back. He's missed a lot of time, when you think about last year.

I think he was too anxious, maybe pressing a little bit. I might be able to say the same thing about Cooper a little bit earlier in the season. My experience is, as least, when you start to press or try to force things, usually it doesn't work. You have to play the game and then eventually plays will come to you or they won't.

Most important thing is take care of your spot, your position. Do it as best you can.

Q. You guys have obviously dealt with a lot of injuries on the offensive side of the ball. Kind of a two-part question. Do you feel like you have enough fire power to kind of get back on the right track, and if so, why?

KIRK FERENTZ: We'll find out. I'm not that smart. We'll find out, but we have to be optimistic. I tend to run that way. Yeah, I mean, we don't look the same as we did on August 1st right now. Some of that will get better. Some of it's not going to change. Really doesn't matter what the circumstances are. We have to find a way to be productive and make this team be successful.

Right now it's about this week, and then we'll worry about next week next week. None of us knew what Deacon was going to do when he got in the game in a critical situation. He did a nice job. So build on that, and then any of the other issues, same thing.

The guys that will come back or at least have a chance to come back, that should make us a stronger team as we go. That's kind of the beauty of football. Every season -- beauty or agony. Every season, you don't know how things are going to transpire. Big part of it is how do you react to the circumstances that are in front of you? What are you going to do?

So that's, I think, the best thing that happened Saturday night, we found a way to win the game, and now we've got to turn the page and try to do it again this week.

Q. For Nick Jackson, very interesting player, just coming in June. His journey's been interesting. It looks like he's more comfortable each and every week. I think he's had four different defensive coordinators. Can you just put in words how difficult that is to be that productive when the personnel switches so much

amongst coaching, and then getting here in June, seems to be quickly picking up what you guys are trying to accomplish, do you think?

KIRK FERENTZ: I've never been a big advocate for change, just change, change. I think at some point you have to figure out what you are, who you are, and then try to stay on that path, but you've got to make adjustments. That's not the point I'm trying to make.

But it is hard on players for a couple reasons. Learning systems is difficult, and then learning personnel, a lot more goes into it than just learning what the plays are. You're working with people, so coaches to players, players to coaches. I just know this. I've had three boys play college football. I'd rather have them in a stable environment than an unstable environment if the world was perfect because it does help.

So, yeah, he's been playing catch-up, but the good news is like, when you go out here as a 22-year-old, 21-year-old, 23, whatever he is, very mature, very intelligent, and football savvy too. He's a football savvy guy. He's played four more years than a high school player. There's a challenge there, but he's also equipped better to handle that challenge, if that makes sense.

With each week -- I think he's more confident, more decisive in his actions. It's always a good thing. That's one of the challenges to new players in general, but at least he had that experience. In his case, too much experience probably. Too much exposure.

Q. I know this might not be your area of expertise.

KIRK FERENTZ: Probably not.

(Laughter)

Q. Two non-contact injuries for Cade. Do you have any concerns about maybe the playing surface on the turf versus grass? I'm not sure if you know anything about that one way or the other, but just any thoughts on that.

KIRK FERENTZ: I'm totally a novice in that regard. I would say that's probably an over stated. I know it's probably a little bit more of a big discussion item in the NFL world. I have not looked at that and all that.

I can just tell you from experience I'm old enough to where this is AstroTurf every day out there in the '80s -- I'm talking about the old AstroTurf, which is kind of like this carpet here, the hardness of that. So I've seen it all. It was the same way in Pitt in 1980. Every day in Pitt Stadium on old

AstroTurf and somehow we had a pretty good team that year and not many guys got hurt that year. So I don't know about that.

I think sometimes that gets overplayed in some cases, and this is particularly true, it seems like the last, I don't know, 10 years -- it's not official, maybe 20. A lot less -- in the old days, it was knee injuries because a lot of guys fell on other guys. Nowadays it's making a cut or a planting or that type of thing. It's hard to predict or quantify what causes injuries.

If you do stupid stuff, I think we all get that, but sometimes it just happens.

Q. With some of those issues up front, is there any sort of growing likelihood that we see Dajion Parker this year, or what's the status with him?

KIRK FERENTZ: What issues are you talking about?

Q. Pass pro issues, running the ball, just not putting up numbers you'd like to see.

KIRK FERENTZ: Overall I thought our pass pro improved. I thought it was better. Dajion is the same category as the other guys. He's working hard to get back. He's lost a ton of time, the start of spring ball. So was playing catch-up when we started practice in August, and he's working hard every day. Tremendous young guy. Just talked about Nick, same thing, Dajion is a terrific guy.

Just working hard every day and not sure when you're going to be in there. Can't predict.

Q. Would you authorize a package of plays for Cooper DeJean on offense? Is that something you would authorize?

KIRK FERENTZ: That's a discussion and a thought. Believe me, we've all had that discussion. In baseball, a couple weeks ago, I think I mentioned a guy getting pulled after seven innings throwing a no-hitter. If you did a pitch count on Cooper, he is getting a lot of snaps.

I suppose you could do it, but you don't want to compromise what we've got defensively right now. That's a consideration. He's been a pretty big factor on special teams. Yeah, what I'd love to do is have five of them. I wish he had five brothers. If they were quintuplets or whatever you call it, but not the case.

Q. From his size, do you see parallels between Deacon and Chandler and Stanzi?

KIRK FERENTZ: Those are our three biggest guys, that's probably right. I really haven't thought about it. Without click, click, click, that's probably a good starting point those three guys. Stanzi wasn't a midget, but he probably wasn't in that category.

Q. Any parallel between their game set and they're big dudes with big arms?

KIRK FERENTZ: We'll see. We'll learn more as we go along here. I don't know about Deacon in game action yet to make commentary on that.

Q. You talked a lot about Cooper and what he brings, but he's kind of getting to that point of dynamic athlete that's have been through Iowa. Is he ascending up a ladder of something that maybe we haven't seen a whole lot of with offense -- or defense and special teams combined?

KIRK FERENTZ: In my opinion, you could put him on any team in the country, and he'd be unique and rare. He played that way last year. He had a fantastic year.

I think probably the most interesting part about the whole thing, I think he played five games three years ago as a true freshman. So you could say we were stupid for doing that, but it's just the way it worked. He ascended as the year went on. So we put him in there.

The best play I remember is the one in the bowl game, where he chased down the guy on that short pass, long run deal. To me that spoke to who the guy is. He came from that side of the field and chased him down the other sideline, just inside the 10 yard line.

So it says a lot about the kind of guy he is, and he just does things -- I hate that word natural because there's a connotation there that this guy just goes out and plays. A lot of the stuff he does is because he knows how to play. He's smart. He studies. He's in the right place. And then some of the stuff on the punt return stuff, I helped him out and gave him some tips on how to be a better return guy.

No, in all seriousness, he just does a lot of things really well, smoothly. That's pretty unusual. It's unusual to have a guy with that kind of skill set. It's not the same as Micah Hyde, but Micah was the same kind of player too. Talk about playing a guy two ways, Micah could have been a great receiver in my opinion, but he was a pretty damn good defensive back too and a great return guy.

Q. Do you still have an analytics meeting weekly? If so, do you ever talk about tendencies?

KIRK FERENTZ: Tendencies are just, I think, both sides of the ball and special teams. We all track that individually. Yeah, definitely week to week.

So a part of that is what you do best. There's certain things that you're going to have tendencies of doing, like we tend to play a pretty similar front down in and down out, but you have to have some adjustments off of the tweaks, that type of thing.

Then, yeah, you don't want to just be entirely predictable, so you need to have a counterpunch to whatever it is you're doing and whatever you hang your hat on, if you will. Then the analytics stuff and all that, it's usually at the end of the week.

Q. With regard to tendencies, how often do you sit and say, okay, if we have an incompleteness on first down, how often do we run him on second down just to try to get some yardage? And you look at percentages and how often --

KIRK FERENTZ: Both the offensive coordinator and defensive coordinator spend time on that. That's always part of your consideration, but the other part is games can skew. Like you take the Penn State game, you're playing situationally in the second half, it's pretty predictable what you need to do if you're going to get back in the game. So certain things you pull out, certain things you include. It's not just pure numbers, if you will.

Q. Deacon was talking about how, when he entered the portal, he originally committed to Fordham, but then you guys came in and contacted him. What led you guys to kind of get in and contact him?

KIRK FERENTZ: Jon Budmayr had an association with him from the Wisconsin days. It was really simple that way. He was interested, and we were pretty interested, so it was a pretty mutual marriage.

Q. Deacon, how much of an improvement do you think is feasible? From kind of first week with substantial snaps his second week.

KIRK FERENTZ: I hope there's improvement week to week to week. Part of growth sometimes is going backwards as well. I think everybody needs to be realistic on that.

Our hopes and expectations are he'll go out and play better this week than he did Saturday. Should be smarter. He's a little bit more experienced.

It's going to be week to week, just like any player. He's got

a great attitude, he works hard, and he's practicing well. That's all you can ask anybody to do.

Q. As far as Cooper, is there ever a point where he can help you more on offense than on defense?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, but you have to think about how is that going to impact our defense. We've seen that in the past, and it's pretty dramatic actually.

Typically, you don't have players like him. If you've got a great player -- and we didn't have another Bob Sanders on the shelf. And they're totally different players, but they're both impactful players. So if you move this guy over here, what are you going to do over here? Always have those equations to balance.

It's great to talk about, but it's a little bit more complicated in terms of the impact and the ripples that it causes or the impact it could have on several places.

Q. Tyrone Tracy. I may recall his freshman year he put him in at running back. Was it Tom Moore who said --

KIRK FERENTZ: Practice field. He made a cut, and I remember looking. My eyes caught Tom's, and Tom was standing in eye shot of me, and both of us were thinking the same thing. Yeah, you have a good memory. That's a good one. I had that same thought watching him on film here. He's doing a very nice job, playing very well.

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