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Iowa 15, Illinois 13

Player Quotes

Kinnick Stadium | Nov. 18, 2023

Kaleb Brown
Wide Receiver

On what it means to be headed to the Big Ten Championship:

“This means a whole lot. What we just had in the locker room was crazy. I wish you all could have been there honestly. To see the improvement of the guys next to me, even in myself – to step up and be the guy that everybody needs me to be. This has been so exciting. I’m out of breath just coming from the locker room.”

On his season coming full circle:

“It’s crazy to think about. Even with what just happened. Nobody really expected that. Just to hold patience like that and believing it will come around for us. We have faith in that and actually seeing it come forward; words can’t explain how exciting it is.”

On the emotion in the locker room:

“It was super emotional. We gave Coach (Ferentz) the game ball. It was something I’m going to remember forever. He said he was going to talk about us ten years from now. It was something great to be a part of and to be able to take pictures with the guys next to me.”

On the chipiness and toughness of the game:

“It was a football game, that’s for sure. It was definitely about the way we responded to the whole game. It came down to the effort and toughness and was something we had to stick with the entire time.”



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Deacon Hill Quarterback

On emotions after the game:

"I think it exploded a little. You try and stay level throughout the whole game and not let your emotions get to you. Feel whatever you need to feel after the game. That is something that coaches taught me, and it has been really helpful. So after the game, you know, it's going to explode a little bit."

On adversity:

"You know, not just individually, but as a team, we have gone through a lot this year with injuries and whatever else. I think it just shows the resiliency of this team and how determined everybody is. We just keep pushing forward each and every day..."

It has got to be the story of our season. Just keep punching forward each and every play, each and every day. Keep moving forward, one step in front of the other. I think we did that today. We knew at some point one was going to break, and we just couldn't let up. We couldn't take our foot off the gas. You know, no matter the outcome of what that drive was, we knew that we had to keep pushing forward each and every play."

On winning and Offensive Coordinator Brian Ferentz:

"It is awesome, the way things are, and this being his last game in Kinnick. I couldn't be happier for the guy. I haven't been this grateful to play for a coach in my whole life. I am extremely grateful to play for him. I love that guy to death. He puts me in some good spots. He has taught me a lot so far."

On Head Coach Kirk Ferentz receiving the game ball:

"So, we couldn't find the ball. It took us like five minutes to get one. Then we finally gave it to him. Coach Parker gave it to him, and they had a big hug. Everybody was cheering, water was flying, it was just an awesome moment for him"



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Kaleb Johnson

Running back

On his 30-yard touchdown run in the fourth quarter:

"I saw green grass and just ran. That is my thing, when I see green grass I run. I saw green grass, took off running and scored... It was just amazing, man, being back [in the end zone]... I was just reading the safety right there, whether I should press up and go in or go out. I pressed him, went outside and used my speed."

On his first down run to seal the win:

"I said in my head, let's get this first down and run with efficiency. I saw a little crease and just hit."

On staying patient the past few weeks:

"Focusing on the little things and grinding it out, being patient. I knew opportunities were going to come up, so I just had to be patient. When my time comes, take the opportunity and use it to my advantage."

On playing for the senior class and the postgame celebration:

"Especially the seniors. This is their last time out there. For me to do that for them, it's just my gift for them when they lift. So, it's my gift, scoring a touchdown for you guys. We won it in Kinnick... It was an awesome moment for us, and especially for Coach Brian [Ferentz]. It was a really important moment for us, because we knew that was his last time in Kinnick. We just hugged him out and gave him love. It was a little special moment we had all together. We won't ever forget that."

On feelings after clinching the Big Ten West:

"It feels amazing. I feel like I did something valuable for the team. All I can do is just thank everybody for believing in me and giving me a shot. All I could do is sit back and be patient, and that is what I did tonight."

On quarterback Deacon Hill:

"It has just been amazing seeing him progress. He was at Wisconsin last year and he didn't really get a lot of playing time. He didn't get a lot of playing time when he first got here. For Cade [McNamara] to get hurt was kind of a devastating moment, but it was an opportunity for him. It was a matter of what do you do. I feel like when he has been in the backfield, he has shown a lot of progression. I can see how he loves football. He is in the room all day everyday getting better. I believe in him completely now. He is in his game now."



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Joe Evans
Defensive End

On winning the division and what separates this team:

“I’m going to get super emotional up here. We have battled so much adversity and I am just so proud of every single person in that locker room -- players, coaches, every single person, that’s why it just means more. I have played on some really great teams. This group battled adversity. We just keep fighting. We just keep coming and coming. I can’t say it enough. I am so proud of these guys. I wish you could see what I see during the week; whether it be on the practice field or just how these guys battle and fight.

“I am so happy I came back for my sixth year because I am able to witness this.”

On going from walk-on to team captain in 2023:

“That means the world to me. I sat down with Coach Braithwaite and we were getting teary eyed in there. I had a long conversation on whether I come back or not and I remember going into Coach Braithwaite’s office probably five times to have these conversations.

My number one goal was to be a team captain and I shared that with Coach Braithwaite, I shared that with my parents, I shared that with Coach Ferentz. For me, that is earned and not given. So being able to be a team captain and be a Big Ten West champion feels so good. Like I said, being a team captain is my biggest accomplishment here and my biggest accomplishment in life. I’m a walk-on, I’m not supposed to be here. Just being able to lead them out on the field and lead them to a Big Ten West Championship is something that I’ll be talking about for the rest of my life.”



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Jay Higgins
Linebacker

On the season:

“This teams been through so much this season, and this is a taste into how we have stayed together in the locker room. We are coached by a great head coach and we just did a great job staying together this year. Guys could’ve separated but that never happened.”

On clinching a Big Ten Championship bid:

“It definelty feels good to be able to go home. I have a lot of family there. They are probably going to start asking for tickets tonight. I will probably end up 30 short. I’m just excited for this team. We have played hard. We have pushed ourselves, and now we have oppurtunities like this. Winning the Big Ten Championship has been a goal since day one. Last year, after a good bowl game win, we understood what our goals were, and that is winning the championship.”

On giving Coach Ferentz the game ball and emotions in the locker room:

“You can just feel how much time he puts into it. It means so much to him. He loves the game of football. He loves his players. He loves his coaches. You can probably see that. We can see that, and I definitely see that everyday. The players get a lot of credit, but moments like that, it is good the coaches get recognized.”

On facing adversity this season:

“We tried to stay focused. We tried to take care of the game. When you are hit with so many obstacles like that, it is hard to not feel bad for yourself. I feel like our main focus at the end of the day is figuring out a way to win games. You can really rally a team. We have a lot of guys that only care about winning a game and leaving it all out there. It’s been a lot of ups and downs, but we’ve done a good job at staying together, and that’s what keeps up moving forward.”

On the defense forcing 13 pass breakups:

“We understood that the loss of Cooper would change their game plan. We understood they were getting the ball out of the quarterback’s hands as soon as possible. Coach Parker did a great job of putting us in the right position. You can tell their game plan changed, and we did a great job of adapting.”

On Noah Shannon’s honorary captain recognition:

“His situation is unfortuatnte, obviously, but it was great seeing the crowd rally around him. Getting your season taken away from you and continuing to stay with the program, I don’t think a lot of guys would do that. Having to come into the facility and watch other guys do what you love, I can only imagine how hard that is. He showed true character throughout this process and never complained. He always helps the team and puts us first.”



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Logan Lee
Defensive Lineman

On the team:

“We have guys that you can trust, depend on and lean on in times of struggle and in times of celebration. We have been blessed with the group that we put together, and the coaching staff that was put together. Everyone’s important but it starts to mean a little bit more towards the end of the season.”

On Senior Day emotions:

“I have had an amazing support system throughout my whole life. My wife, my parents and my whole family have just been there in every stage of my life, and I can’t say how much they mean to me. I have 120 folks out at the tailgate now waiting to celebrate this with me too.”

On team progression throughout the season:

“We have grown so much since the start of the season because the group has suffered together. There has been a lot of adversity that we have had to facend it has been a great opportunity for us to tighten up and be able to lean on one another and trust each other in every aspect.”