

Cheez-It Citrus Bowl: Iowa vs Tennessee

Friday, December 29, 2023

Orlando, Florida, USA

Camping World Stadium

Iowa Hawkeyes

Brian Ferentz

Logan Jones

Press Conference



BRIAN FERENTZ: It is good to be here this morning, and just want to start by saying how excited we are to be down here in Orlando for this game. We were here two years ago and just have to say what a tremendous job this Bowl committee does in really kind of going out of their way to make us feel welcome and take care of us from the top to the bottom.

We were excited to come back down here. Excited to play Tennessee, obviously, a really good opponent. I know Coach Banks, going back to his time at Illinois, so I have some experience with their defensive system and what they do.

Excited for that challenge. I think the players have been working hard, had a good month of preparation. Like I said, we are excited to be here and get going.

Q. I guess I want to ask you, what have the last two months been like for you coaching? How have you been able to compartmentalize your future versus the task at hand, and how challenging was it in the beginning and how challenging is it potentially today?

BRIAN FERENTZ: I think the answer is very simple, right. I made a commitment to this football team and to this football program. Like I said in my statement, I intended to honor that commitment. I feel like I have done that. I fully anticipate doing that for the next three, four days, whatever it is, and then cross the other bridge when I get there.

This place is important to me. University of Iowa is important to me. Football program is important to me. It is always important that I finish the right way and do my job.

Q. Going back to October, was it something that you were anticipating? Was there dialogue? What was the

dialogue leading up to the decision that Beth made? In terms of were there conversations ahead of time? How did you find out? What was the process of that?

BRIAN FERENTZ: I would direct those questions to Beth. Like I said, my focus has been on our football team and our players and doing my job and getting them ready to play football games and try to help them be in position to be successful and win games. That is where I kept my focus during the season. That is where I have kept my focus since October, and that is where I intend to keep my focus for the coming days.

Q. Kirk talked yesterday about how he just appreciated everything you've put into the program. What does it mean for you to finish it out with him here in Orlando? I know it seemed to be emotional, too, at the Illinois game walking out of Kinnick with a win, and wondering how special that was to you and what it would mean to win this game?

BRIAN FERENTZ: I think the emotion of the Illinois game was quite simply that these guys, these players. They set a goal at the beginning of the season, and that was to win the Big Ten. Unfortunately, we came up short in that regard.

The best we could do at the time was win the Big Ten West and give ourselves a chance to do that. In order to do that, we needed to beat Illinois, and we won that game. I think the emotion that you saw with everyone on the sideline, you saw a bunch of players that worked really hard and accomplished their goals.

Quite frankly, probably what I resent the most about this situation is that the focus has come off of our football players, who have really accomplished some tremendous things this year. It has gone on to things that just quite simply do not matter. They are trivial and silly in my opinion.

For whatever reason, the focus has gone there instead of on a bunch of players who have worked really hard, overcome a lot of adversity and dealt with a lot of nonsense to win 10 football games and put themselves in a

position to win the 11th, which I think would be the fourth time in the history of the school that that's happened.

Quite frankly, I think that is where the focus should be. That is where I would like it to be. I cannot control what you guys do or what other people say, but I think we are really missing something that is pretty special that is going on.

Q. Is there a sense in the team. Is there a sense among the guys, especially on the offensive side, to win one for Brian Ferentz?

LOGAN JONES: I would not say our goal is to win it for Brian. Our goal is to win it for our team. That is what we came here to do. We have a great opportunity to do that against a great Tennessee team.

Obviously, it is going to be emotional. You get to play for a guy like Coach Brian, it means a lot. You get a guy who will stop by and say hi to your mom, have a conversation with her, and she will come to me after the game and say how much that means to her.

You get a guy like Coach Brian that comes in and does that, just the type of man he is, it means a lot to me. It means a lot to my mom, too. he does it with every player on the offensive, defensive side of the ball.

Yeah, it says a lot about him, and I think it is going to be a very emotional game for us, and we are going to go out there and try and play our best football.

Q. When you look at Tennessee, specifically James Pearce, what stands out about what he gets done?

BRIAN FERENTZ: I will let Logan start.

LOGAN JONES: You look at these guys, they are in the SEC. They have a lot of talent. They are a talented group. We are going to do our best to go out there and try and play our best football, because we have yet to do so, and that is our goal.

They are big, strong, talented guys, probably five-star guys, right. We do not have guys like that. It is just a great opportunity for our guys up front, our offense, to go out there and, like I said, just try and play our best football.

BRIAN FERENTZ: I will piggyback off that and just talk about their whole defense, right. Everything for them starts with their front, with those big guys. I think our league has changed a little bit. We have seen some more defenses like that as time has gone on with some bigger guys up front, especially in the interior.

I think what makes these guys interesting is they have got the big guys up front. They have got the two backers that are pretty good players. Then, they are playing with those DBs, and they can be a little bit fluid with what they are showing you.

I think a real testament to them is just structurally, and I mean this as a huge compliment, they change week-to-week. They can present different looks, based on the game, based on the team they are playing. They can choose to play a couple different ways. They can change the front, they can change the coverage structure. They are really fluid in those things, and they do a nice job of it. They can really create some challenges with you for the pictures you are seeing up front or in the back end with the coverage.

I think one of the big challenges for us this week is going to be trying to identify very early on what their game plan is against us, because I think it will look different than maybe what we have seen on tape week-to-week. There is, obviously, going to be elements of it, but this has been a tough preparation, because you cannot just say, hey -- it is not like playing our defense where it's like, hey, this is what they are going to do.

We know that. They are going to match it up against what we are, but it is going to look like this on game day. Now we have to beat it.

There is an element of, hey, look, these guys have some really good players, but there is a structural component that is a little bit of a question mark right now. We probably will not know until about eight, nine, ten plays in this first quarter exactly what it is going to look like and make sure we are dialed in and seeing those pictures clearly and attacking them the way we want to attack them.

Q. Specifically with this game, how much does this mean? How much would a mean win considering this is your last game at a place you have spent a lot of hours in?

BRIAN FERENTZ: I would just go back to Tom's question. I think that narrative is ridiculous. Like I told you, if I have shared one thing with these players in my time here, I think that this program is not about one person. It never has been and it never will be, right.

I just feel fortunate that I have been a part of this place and I have been around the people that I have been around and had a chance to work with those people on a day-to-day and coach players like Logan and a lot of players that came before him.

It is not about one game. It is not about winning it for anybody. It is about doing things right and doing it for Iowa football. That is where my focus is going to stay on Monday.

Q. A question for you, you've had the opportunity to coach with your dad for over a decade here at Iowa. What has that meant to you, and what are your memories that you'll share moving forward?

BRIAN FERENTZ: Yeah I think it is special that I have gotten to coach with my father. I have gotten to know him professionally, right. I think growing up, you see your parents as -- I do not know what the right word is, they are your parents, they are not real people. They do not have emotions. They do not have feelings. They do not have bad days. They do not have good days. They do not have hopes and dreams. They just have you. It is mom and dad.

Then as you get older, you meet your parents as people, and, obviously, I think everyone has that opportunity for the most part. Sometimes what you find maybe does not live up to maybe what your idea of what your parents was, right, because you see them as actual human beings, and we are all flawed.

I had a chance to get to know my father professionally, which I do not know that every son does, and that has been pretty special. He has lived up to everything that I imagined him to be. So I have enjoyed every minute of working with him. I do not know specific memories or anything like that. I will remember my time fondly. It was a lot of fun.

Q. I did want to ask about the challenges of working through this season, not personally, but professionally, when you bring in a quarterback as talented as Cade McNamara and he has an ACL and two NFL-caliber tight ends and they go out with season-ending injuries, and in the front you had to deal with a lot of ups and downs, and even in the backfield you had several running backs out early in the season, and you managed to persevere and have won games. What kind of challenge has that put on you and your players to try to execute when you know you're limited, and there's a reason why some players are first team and some are second team.

BRIAN FERENTZ: I think that is part of football. I think it was you that asked me a question this summer about dealing with adversity. If you do not expect adversity to happen, I do not -- I just think you are a fool.

We knew there were going to be challenges. You do not know exactly what they are going to be. You do not know

how many there will be. Sometimes you do not deal with as many. If you do not deal with any, then terrific, great. It is smooth sailing.

Those things are going to happen. One thing that I know in my experience is that the games will still get played. They will still get kicked off at that scheduled time. There is certainly too much money and media attention on those things to not get played.

You have to find a way to be competitive and try to win football games. That is the ultimate goal. In my estimation, I think it really comes down to the players and how they respond. We have been fortunate, but it starts with leadership. Starts with guys like Logan, who unfortunately did miss some time, but I am here to tell you, he played a lot, too, when he was not feeling great.

When you have that going on in your team, you have selfless guys that are willing to do whatever it takes to help the football team win and put the team first, then it is just a lot of fun.

Dealing with those challenges, I think that is the fun part of coaching. Every week you have to figure out what do we have available, what are we going against, and how do we give our football team the best opportunity to win the game. Then you see if you can go out there and do that on Saturday.

Sometimes it goes your way. Sometimes it does not, but I think if you do things the right way, you are probably going to win more than you lose, and I feel like we have done that for quite a long time at the University of Iowa.

Q. What would it mean for this program to win this game? 2022 against Kentucky, you guys came up a little bit short. To win this year with an 11th win, what would that mean for you and this program in a big Bowl game here?

LOGAN JONES: Like Coach Brian talked about, we have an opportunity to get our 11th win, which is I think the fourth time in program history.

Just to be a part of a team like that I think is something special, too, especially with all the adversity and the guys that have not been able to go out there and compete. You have guys like Luke Lachey, Erick All, Cade McNamara, who worked so hard in the off-season, gave their all just to play this season, and they will not have that opportunity now.

We do have that opportunity for the guys that are healthy to go out there and play and get an 11th win. To get that



11th win for Coach Ferentz, too, would be really cool, because it has only happened four times.

I think this game, it is a great opportunity for us to go out there and try and play our best football and get that 11th win.

Q. Thanks for all the time you gave us over the years. I appreciate that. Looked like Marco maybe elevated to No. 2 at some point, maybe at Northwestern game. What went into that decision, and any chance we might see him outside of an injury or performance on Monday, a package of plays or anything like that?

BRIAN FERENTZ: No look, we are going to make decisions every week we feel like are best for the football team. I felt like Marco had elevated above Joe at that time. We want to invest the reps in the guys that we think can help the football team win. That is why we made that decision.

Deacon is the starting quarterback. Deacon has played really good football for us. Deacon has led this football team to a lot of wins, and we expect Deacon to go the distance on Monday.

Q. You talked about you played center, guard, offensive line. It's a difficult transition to jump over from the defensive front to the offensive front, let alone play center, make the calls. Talk about Logan's development the last two years. And then, Logan, transitionally, what's been the most -- the biggest challenge for you, despite -- other than staying healthy?

BRIAN FERENTZ: I will start that. I will let you finish.

When you are evaluating players, you are always evaluating traits. When you talk about the center position, especially at the University of Iowa and you just think about the run of guys that we've had, going back, I mean, you can go back all the way.

If you want to talk about since 2012, you have my brother and then that transitions over, Austin Blythe becomes that guy, goes on to a really good NFL career. I would not call my brother's NFL career good but it was long -- is long.

You have Austin, then you just keep transitioning. Keegan Render played really good football for us. James Daniels at times played really good football for us at the center position. Then, you get to Tyler Linderbaum having a tremendous career. He looked pretty good the other night.

Then, you are always looking for that next guy. At one

time, it was always those guys. What are the traits you are looking for? You are looking for a guy that, number one, is tough. Tough and competitive. Just the type of person that hates losing maybe a little bit more than they enjoy winning. Somebody who is tough to the point of willing to do anything physically to play the game of football.

Then athleticism is, obviously, really important, but intelligence and leadership, those things, are critical at the center position.

As Tyler's time is winding down, we are looking at our roster and just did not feel like maybe that guy was in the offensive line room at that time. But, kept looking at this guy playing defensive line, and, boy, it sure seemed like he had all those things in a very similar manner to Linderbaum early in his career. We waited a little bit longer to switch Logan.

It seemed so obvious. So transition over to -- that was Bowl prep, right, when we started? Or was it spring? We got him going in the off-season.

What I can't say enough about Logan is I don't think people understand how difficult what he did last season was. To go from being a first-time offensive lineman in center in spring ball to going the distance starting 13 games for us at the position and really playing pretty well. Also watching him play that year and seeing a lot of really bright spots and a lot of really good things and getting excited knowing that his best football was in front of him.

He has done that. He has continued to grow as a football player, as a leader. It is all those things. The greatest compliment I can give him is I do not know that we have a football player on offense who works harder, who practices harder, who is tougher, who is more committed to the football team.

Logan is not always the most vocal player on our football team, but I think his example shines on a daily basis. When you have somebody like that playing that position, it really elevates the guys around him.

Ultimately, that is what you are looking for out of that player. I think the best centers that I have been around, they are guys that -- the four or five guys playing around him. Sometimes even at tight end position, a lot of times the quarterback, also, they play a little bit better when that guy is in the game. I think that is true about Logan. He has been a joy to coach.

I would just finish with this. I think his best football is still in front of him, and I am excited to see that. I will be watching carefully.



LOGAN JONES: You asked about the transition. Obviously, Coach Ferentz came and talked to me right away, and I was like, yeah, I will do it. I knew Tyler did it, but he gave me a week to think about it. Tyler and everything, and I was like, absolutely this is what I want to do.

It was a great challenge for me last year. There were some ugly plays, but that is part of it. It was an opportunity for me to grow. I think that is just the hardest thing, realizing you want them to be perfect, and that is just part of the game. It is an imperfect game. You are never going to go out there and be perfect. That is just unrealistic.

We always talk about in the O-Line room, and Coach Barnett always says: Do not be a flincher. Do not be a guy that shies away from challenges. That kind of defines who you are as a man. Are you going to take it head on, or are you going to shy away?

That was probably just the hardest thing for me initially, is just going towards the challenge and realizing you are going to get beat. You might give up a sack. You might give up penetration here or there, but just realizing that is part of the game. Everybody does it at some point in their careers. They are just learning from those mistakes and going through those obstacles.

I think the really cool thing is you've got four other guys on that offensive line who I consider my best friends. I have to go out there every single day and practice with them, and they are pushing me, and I am pushing them.

It is like a give-give thing, and it is just really cool to see the development of the guys in the line room. They push me, and they have made me a better player on the offensive line.

We have everybody coming back. I am really excited for this room and this team and what is next for us.

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