

# University of Iowa Football

## Media Conference

Saturday, August 31, 2024

Iowa City, Iowa, USA

## Seth Wallace

### Postgame Press Conference



Illinois State Redbirds 0 - Iowa Hawkeyes 40

SETH WALLACE: I'm very proud of our staff. I'm very proud of our team, our players specifically. What they did today under the circumstances was really pretty cool, and we're excited to get the win. First game of the season, obviously, first opportunity to be in Kinnick. We told the guys beforehand that it's special anytime we get a chance to walk into this stadium, and they certainly took advantage of that, specifically in the second half. In regards to the first half, we had some missed opportunities. We had some of what you would call the norms in the first game, and just some things that I think we probably could have handled better a little bit. However, I think the second half is probably a better indicator as to what type of team we are. I give a lot of credit to Illinois State, specifically to what they do defensively. Brock Spack knows who we are.

He knows kind of our DNA from his time at Purdue. Him as a head coach, him as a defensive coordinator, I wasn't surprised to see what unfolded there in the first half and how they had a pretty good game plan. Tony Petersen and Travis Niekamp, the two coordinators, are both good coaches, they're both veteran coaches, and they've seen a lot of football. I think a lot of the first half was just the norms and in the first game, and we have some new guys out there in different positions, and I think what you saw was an example of that. But certainly a well-coached team out of Illinois State, and we wish them the best. They've got a good football team. Hopefully both of their quarterbacks stay healthy, and that will give them a chance.

The second half as it related to the game, just from a messaging standpoint, the big deal was just clean up our executions and some things that shot us in the foot, there early on with some penalties and some things that ended up taking a little bit of momentum away from us. Anytime you take the momentum away, you really start draining a little bit of the confidence as well. That took place in the first half. But the second half is a better indicator of the kind of the team that we are and what we're capable of. We have a lot to clean up. We certainly do. I'll end before I take questions with just how unbelievably proud I am of our

team, our staff, the way our players responded in the second half, and this isn't normal day to day around here, obviously, and our players handled it with unbelievable class to go in at halftime up a score but still in a one-possession game. The way that they responded was pretty special to see. With that I'd open it up for questions.

**Q. Seth, what was this whole process like for you when you found out that you were going to be in this position, and what did that post-game celebration mean to you?**

SETH WALLACE: In terms of the process, you know, there's still really your primary responsibilities which still exist defensively, and I'm pretty fortunate because I've got a group of veteran, mature -- the whole room for that matter is not a well-oiled machine, but you can imagine what it's like to coach Jay Higgins right now and Nick Jackson. Sometimes they humble you with the amount of football that they have.

But I didn't want this to become a distraction to them. So my day to day up until really maybe going into Thursday afternoon and Friday was what it has always been, to include my time with Phil and what we were trying to do defensively. So the process didn't change a whole lot until probably Thursday afternoon, but the celebration afterwards, you know, I'm happy for the guys. It was all about them, and it always has been, and the players win the games. Norm told me that a long time ago. It's not going to be about schemes, it's not going to be about strategy. At the end of the day it's going to be about the players, and they certainly went out there, and they ended up winning the game for us in the second half. So the celebration was a little bit icing on the top. But it's always fun after a game when you win.

**Q. I just wanted to ask about Reece Vander Zee. I don't know if you saw that coming today, the two touchdowns and however many catches?**

SETH WALLACE: I was just asked that by Gary on the radio. No, not surprised. Reece probably for the first two weeks of camp was a freshman, and he was in a freshman role, and then I think our offensive guys started to see some things that he was doing that gave them the confidence that let's put him in there and see how he swims with some of these other guys. So they put him in

**ASAP** . . . when all is said, we're done.®  
**sports**

there, and there were plays that were made, plays very similar to the ones that you guys saw today. So not surprised.

However, it is college football at its highest level. And when you introduce somebody of that type of youth, you just really aren't sure what's going to unfold. And I think the story is even much better considering what happened in the first half, you know, just because we were still trying to get our feet on the ground from an offensive standpoint, and then he goes out there and makes some of those plays, the one where we were headed to the north side that he caught over the middle. Those were impactful plays. So not surprised at all. However, just to do it in a college football environment, I think that says a lot about Reece.

**Q. I wanted to ask you about in the first half it seemed like it was a missed block, a penalty, something just kept stopping drives on offense. What was kind of your message and Tim's message at halftime and where do you think it got ironed out to where there seemed to be a real good flow on offense?**

SETH WALLACE: Yeah, I think -- what they do defensively is -- they're finding ways to load the box defensively and I think our tempo, the one thing that's probably reflective in the second half is our tempo offensively picked up a little bit. We talked at halftime just about the urgency. And I'm thankful -- we had a long conversation about this as a staff the other day, and I'm sure it's noticeable to you guys, but we did defer, which is a little bit out of the norm around here. But we were fortunate to get that first drive offensively in the second half, and we were fortunate to move the ball there, and I think that that -- that kind of led to maybe some of what existed in the first half that gave us some troubles. But if you do look at it, what you should see is a little bit more urgency and a little bit more tempo was reflective there. And our guys bought into it. It was one of those deals where you come in at halftime and you're in a 6-nothing game and you've got the lead but it's still one possession and like something has to change. Our guys stuck to the plan, but we did emphasize just trying to move the ball down the field, get in and out of the huddle a little bit faster and not allow a defense that really feasts on looking at a picture and dialing into it.

**Q. Going back to Reece's second touchdown, the one on the south end, didn't seem like that was a high percentage play usually but somehow it happened and with the turnovers what do you think led to those more opportunities than you guys had last year?**

SETH WALLACE: Yeah. I'll start with the turnovers. We've placed a greater emphasis defensively on turnovers.

I'm not sure who it was I spoke with in the preseason where -- I think it might have been Mike. You know, he had mentioned just in regards to our defense and Phil Parker's defense and what we've done statistically, the one statistic that was pretty glaring was as good as we were last year defensively, we were awful when it came to takeaways, awful. So we've placed a greater emphasis on that. We've actually talked to other folks in college football, coaching staffs that have given us some ideas, so we've tried to implement that stuff. And hopefully what you saw today was an indicator of that.

We actually had a takeaway taken away from us when Jay got called for holding. That could have been a momentum play. To know what it is that we're emphasizing is showing up on tape and we get a chance to talk about that with our guys tomorrow, that'll be a big deal.

And going back to Reece's catch that he had in the south end zone, you know, I mean some things happen, and some guys -- that's the way they are. Desmond King, Cooper DeJean, you talk about guys that you've seen around here before that they make plays and sometimes you're just sitting there wondering like how the hell did that happen. It's football and those guys are -- it's nice to see.

**Q. Something that Kirk talks a lot about is playing complementary football. Could you maybe just touch on how close today was to the framework of kind of what you set out to do as a program?**

SETH WALLACE: Yeah, I think the -- even though the two halves are noticeably different, I think what you find there is you find examples of complementary football in both halves, and the fact that we were able to overcome some momentum changing penalties, some plays that were taken away from us and yet still stay the course offensively and defensively and I know offensively it was a little bit of a struggle to get things going in the first half. But the fact that we were going out there defensively and trying to complement that with three and outs and giving them the opportunity. And I'll take full credit for the 4th and 2 that we tried going for on the plus side of the field. That was one of those deals where you got confidence in what you're doing defensively. They got the ball inside somewhere between the 40 and the 50 and I just felt like, hey, here's an opportunity where if we can get this which we didn't get. But if we could get this, then maybe that would give us what we need offensively. But knowing whether it be our punter, whether it be our punt unit, whether it be what we had in the return game, even though some of those opportunities were taken away from us certainly how we were playing defensively like that was going to give us that opportunity at that time to try to convert this 4th and 2 and see if we can get this thing going. It didn't happen. Then



the second half is an unbelievable example of complementary football, just going out there, moving the ball down the field, changing field position, stopping them defensively, using your return game and your punt game to try to control the field position. I think both halves noticeably different. But both great examples of complementary football.

**Q. I gotta go back to Reece Vander Zee. I think Luke and Cade both said he's quiet, but he was unfazed by everything going on. This is a guy who entered summer ball with an injury, played quarterback last year in high school, small town Iowa and for him to step up the way he did. What has kind of allowed him to be prepared for the moment and how did he step up when you guys needed him to step up when the wide receiver room was down a couple people?**

SETH WALLACE: Yeah, opportunity comes in a lot of different ways. I'd start with he's on a charter bus, not a yellow bus. So that's a big difference in kind of probably how he's probably viewing things. We have had our share of injuries when it's come to that position, and historically that happens during camp. Camp is grueling in a lot of ways and those that are putting a lot of miles on their tires. But from the second that he jumped in there, like he hasn't looked like a 17- or 18 year-old. He hasn't looked like he just came to us on a yellow bus. It's been pretty obvious he can go out there and compete. We're fortunate his frame, his size. It's not like we're looking at this two years down the road trying to build this body. Obviously he needs a lot of work when it comes to his physical development, but there's already some that has taken place. And I credit that to the State of Iowa, to the football here in the state and the players that play in the state. And he's tough-minded, too. And he certainly didn't flinch today. And we haven't seen any flinching out of him up to this point.

**Q. I was impressed by your kicking game today. You have a new punter, and he did well. And, of course, your field goal kicker Stevens did outstanding. You had to have been pretty happy with that.**

SETH WALLACE: Yeah. Like Reece Vander Zee, and then Rhys, our punter, the concern there is just the unknown, you know, major college football, 70,000 fans, Kinnick Stadium, the emotions that go into that. Drew has certainly seen that during the course of his career, so I don't think any of us were too worried about Drew Stevens, but when it comes to Rhys, think about it. You're 15 yards from where the ball is being snapped. You have to catch the ball; you have guys bearing down on you, and now we want you to put the ball in the air. With the exception of the first one that fluttered off the right side of his foot that didn't

travel for the yardage that we would like, outside of that, he did an exceptional job. And we certainly did a great job punting and covering in front of him. So I think our kicking game is in a good place. We have some stuff to work on, but I'm glad where we're at there.

**Q. I know you were born in Kentucky, but you probably consider yourself an Iowan having moved here at a young age, I'm guessing.**

SETH WALLACE: Yeah.

**Q. And your dad's a long-time head coach. Just reflect on the day and what you were feeling. How special was it, I guess, just being an Iowan, your father did this, you got this moment to do this for the Hawkeyes? What are your emotions?**

SETH WALLACE: I don't know if that's really set in yet. There was enough, you know, when you turn the page from what your primary responsibility is to what you certainly weren't expecting. You don't give a whole lot of thought to that. I did grow up a coach's kid, so I watched my father do it for a long time. There were thoughts, but as soon as the thought comes along, you're sitting there at 8:00, the team leaves at 8:15. You still don't have your tie tied. Little stuff like that that just, it'll completely distract you from probably the cool stuff that you should be thinking about when it comes to parents and your father. But I've spoken with him, and I think the rest of the evening, the rest of the afternoon will be spent with him and the rest of my family, and I'll get a chance to reflect on it then. But I knew that there was somewhat of a void that had never been experienced here that needed to be filled in some way, and that was my primary focus is just making sure that our players were not distracted from anything that they were planning on focusing on themselves, and I think our staff handled that in a remarkable way. I really do. Not surprised. But just something that none of us were expecting. But I appreciate you asking the question.

**Q. Have you or anybody on the staff been in contact with Kirk since the game ended, and if so, what were his thoughts?**

SETH WALLACE: That's a good question, Mike. I don't believe so. And I don't even know if that's part of the rules. Like we're living in a world where, you know, you're not real sure what the rules are.

**Q. Do you think he'll be satisfied?**

SETH WALLACE: I think he'll be more than satisfied. Yes., I do. I think we're all thankful the way the game played out. I think it provides us with a lot of teaching



moments between the first half and the second half that as much as everybody in the room and everybody in the stands would have loved for us to come out and just start mowing people down and the scoreboard starts lighting up, that would be a good story, but when it comes to your team, your players, the next 11 games, the course of the season, like this gives us a great opportunity to coach some very, very important details when it comes to football and some lessons, some teaching opportunities. So my answer to that is I think he's more than satisfied. Certainly knows we have a lot of work to do. Like I think he'd stand up here just like I did and tell you the same thing. Like we got a lot of work to do. We have good kids. We have a great staff. We have a great head coach, and there's a lot of work to be done going into this next week. Thank you, all.