

University of Iowa Football Media Conference

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Kirk Ferentz



KIRK FERENTZ: Good afternoon. Obviously it was a disappointing outcome to Saturday's ballgame. We had a great crowd out there. I thought we had a good week of preparation. We lost to a good football team. But the bottom line is we didn't play clean football and really didn't execute the makeable plays that you have to make, and when you do that, typically you pay for it if you're playing a good team, and that's certainly where we're at.

As I said Saturday, the only value and experience in a loss is if you take something out of it and learn, and hopefully we'll grow from this situation. One of the key points is every step is really important, whether it's a practice, meeting, and certainly when you compete on the game field. We'll push on right now and move on to our next ballgame.

Captains this week will be C.J. Beathard on offense, Matt VandeBerg, LeShun Daniels and Josey Jewell, and medically I think right now just about everybody has got a chance outside of Derrick Mitchell. He worked a little bit today. I just can't envision him being far enough along by the end of the week to be in a ballgame, so we'll just play that one by ear.

Heading out to Rutgers, a couple obvious things about Rutgers. They've got a new staff, an excellent coaching staff. Chris Ash to me is a guy that has really earned the opportunity that he's been given, and he's got an excellent football staff of coaches and a little bit of an Iowa connection there certainly with AJ Blazek, a former player, being on the offensive line, and then Jay Niemann, who, as you know, has two sons on our team, as well, and Jay has been over at Northern Illinois most recently. Both those guys are tremendous coaches, but their whole staff, really impressive.

If you look at their season right now, the first game they had one heck of a road trip to start out the season, a long road trip, and it really looked like a whole new operation in that first game, especially in the first half. They were victimized by about five big plays.

The thing really kind of got out of hand early, but they fought back, played well in the second half, and then I think that's really the story of the last two games. They've fallen behind in both of their games at home, have battled back. They're playing with a good

attitude, playing hard, and doing the things you have to do to be successful. You give them a lot of credit for that.

If you look at their team, they're big and physical, both lines of scrimmage, both offensive line and defensive line, veteran secondary that plays well, good group of receivers, backs doing a really nice job for them.

And then in the kicking game, they've got a good punter, good kicker, and the receiver, Grant, No. 1, excellent return guy, both punts and kicks, and then he's a big-play guy offensively, too, so he's certainly a marquee player for them.

But they've got a lot of guys that can really play well.

It's our first road game. Big challenge for our football team, heading out and getting ready for Rutgers, and with that, I'll throw it out for questions.

Q. No Desmond King as captain?

KIRK FERENTZ: The leadership group votes on them, and last year was one of those years where we just kind of settled in. I don't think we had a change with the four guys for the entire season. You know, we'll see. In years past we've had a lot of multiple ones, so no big story there.

Q. Was film session hard?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I mean, it's always painful when you lose. There's no way around it, and Sundays are not fun after a loss. I think the key thing there is you learn from what you see, and there's a lot to learn from, and as I said, probably the biggest, most glaring thing in my mind, we're just not doing well with the makeables. Makeables to me are plays that you should be able to execute without having a superstar player, that type of thing.

But we had way too many -- not too much in the kicking game, but offensively, defensively, just little things that add up to big things, and that's really the story of football, especially in close ballgames, which we tend to be involved in a lot of those.

Q. How do you teach those makeable plays you weren't making?

KIRK FERENTZ: I really can't tell you. I thought we

really played very clean in our first two games, maybe on the other end of the spectrum, probably cleaner than you'd expect coming out of camp. But that wasn't the case the other day. You just look at the first two plays offensively, first half and second half, there's two plays out there, too, but I can probably give you a list of 20 of them, unfortunately.

Q. What would you need to see Saturday to know that you guys have passed stuff that cropped up Saturday?

KIRK FERENTZ: Hopefully, first of all, play hard and, second of all play cleaner. The big thing, I just cited those two plays there, but how those affect momentum, how they affect field position, those kinds of things, they're really big, and when you don't make those plays, you end up playing left-handed a little bit. We ended up punting out of our end zone right off the bat. That's not a good way to start a game certainly, and then when you have a long run that's brought back because of a penalty, that's a big momentum killer.

Those little kind of errors that we can do better, things that we can do better and we've seen our guys do in practice, you have to carry that to the game. I think we did a really nice job of that for two weeks, but last week, it wasn't just terrible, but enough of those, and it affects the game, especially if you play a good football team, and it'll be the same way the next nine ballgames.

Q. Other than the fact that you lost James and Sean, two of your best players up front, how did that impact the cohesiveness, the communication of the offensive line?

KIRK FERENTZ: Anytime you're missing guys that are starters, they're starters for a reason, but again, we talked about that Saturday. That's going to be part of football. You know, if you want to go back to last year, last year's team really did a nice job of navigating a lot of tricky situations that way. Typically when you have a really good season, you go through pretty clean injury-wise, and that was hardly the case, as all of us know, last year. How you handle those kinds of situations, a tough call or a bad bounce of the ball, those kinds of things, that's football, and really that determines success, how you can navigate through those things.

We didn't do it well enough Saturday. I'm expecting both Sean and James to be back in there, but if they're not, then the guys that are in there have to get it done, and hopefully they're play at a better level this week than they did last week, and hopefully that's true of our entire football team.

Q. Does your game plan change when you're missing two key starters like that?

KIRK FERENTZ: No, I mean, not in that case, no. You can't just -- there are certain positions that would affect a game plan certainly, and we'd alter and tweak, but not typically with linemen.

Q. So are you saying those guys will not be back for --

KIRK FERENTZ: I expect them back, but the next time somebody gets hurt, then somebody has got to step in there because the cavalry is not coming. We've got our team. Our team is set. And it's for everybody right now, we've got to get better.

Historically, September is a really big month for us. You can go back and look in the history books, what we do in September, how we grow, how we improve, not that you don't want to continue that in October and November, but if we're not growing in September, that's a bad sign. We've never been a dominant team by any stretch in September. I can't recall that time. I don't know when that would be.

Q. One of the criticisms I think from Saturday is some people were saying that you guys were maybe predictable. Seems like when you guys are playing well, you're predictable.

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, you probably could say that about 12 games last year, too, where we were predictable. Hopefully it's not that predictable, and they did a great job coaching. There's no question about that. But we play against good teams, good coaching staffs, and we kind of do what we do. But the whole key is you have to execute, you have to make the plays that are realistic to make. That's the biggest key in my mind.

Q. How has the team just responded in the last two or three days? How have you felt they've reacted to the loss?

KIRK FERENTZ: You know, it was pretty quiet on Sunday, as you might well imagine, and it should be. I mean, everybody invests a lot and everybody works hard, and our fans are disappointed certainly, a lot of people were disappointed. Nobody is more disappointed than the players and the coaches. It's what we do, or at least that's a big part of what we do.

You know, you're affected by it, but then the big thing about any time you get disappointment in sports or life you've got to move on at some point, and in sports and football, that starts Monday morning. You've got to push through it and start your preparation for the next team because we're all on the clock. Everybody is on the clock, and if you're wasting time having a pity party, it really doesn't help you much more moving forward.

Q. I know we're only talking about two plays, but is

that a fixable problem for you guys?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, both the ones I'm thinking about are probably the same ones you're thinking about. They're correctable. We didn't execute the way we should, and we've done it in practice. There's a couple mechanical things involved there that need to be straightened out and have to be straightened out, and without getting too specific there, but yeah, they're coachable and they're fixable, and they're important, obviously. They were both important.

Q. Is Akrum's injury affecting the amount of touches he's getting?

KIRK FERENTZ: Not really. I mean, we had under 50 gradable snaps the other day, so it limits everybody's touches, unfortunately, and in a perfect world we're going to be moving ball a little bit better and sustaining some drives. Third down, certainly we've got to do a better job there.

Q. Do you feel like he'll be more available, I guess, this week?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I mean, he's practicing, and I expect him and LeShun to be full speed, but we've got to hang onto the ball, too.

Q. More Toks without Mitchell, or is he still kind of back there?

KIRK FERENTZ: Right now we're going with our two veteran guys and then just see how it plays out, but Toks is the next guy to go.

Q. What did you think of the sense of urgency Saturday from your players?

KIRK FERENTZ: I thought we played hard. I thought we prepared hard. Give them a lot of credit, too; they're a really good football team, and they played extremely hard, as well. We knew that was going to be the case. There's a reason they've won as much as they have.

Q. A couple of guys mentioned that North Dakota State caught you guys being a little passive. Did you see that, as well, when you were clocking passes maybe?

KIRK FERENTZ: You could suggest they looked predictable, too. Just as a casual fan. But there are a lot of little intricate things that they do, and same thing with us, there are little intricate things that we do that make it tough, and they did a couple things I thought that were really clever and creative that may have put our guys on their heels a little bit.

when I go back to the things in my mind that were really critical plays, some opportunities we had, it gets back to us being a little bit better with just our fundamentals, and quicker to close things off, shut

gaps off, that type of thing. A game of inches, the clichés about that stuff, it really is true. I'm thinking about that 4th and 2, that was a makeable play for us defensively, and we didn't get it done. We've got to do a better job there to shut off drives, et cetera, get off the field.

Q. This is the first time Iowa has played Rutgers, but there's a lot of familiarity there with the coaching staff. Does that help?

KIRK FERENTZ: It's kind of been strange, fourth game where you're trying to picture some things and all that kind of stuff, and there's a lot of Ohio State influence or resemblance, for logical reasons. Chris did a great job as the defensive coordinator there, so what he did defensively, I think you're seeing a lot of carryover for obvious reasons. And then Coach Herman, who's down at Houston, there's a connection there; they were together at Ohio State.

I'm not saying it's carbon copy of what they're doing offensively, but there's a lot of influence there, too, and we have three games of film, which helps a lot, too. At least now we're not projecting, and you're seeing the players you're going to play against running those schemes, so that does help.

Q. With Blazek, is there a moment or memory that really stands out to you from his playing days?

KIRK FERENTZ: Oh, sure. When he showed first up as a recruit, he had an Arizona baseball cap on. I didn't think that was real smart. And I'm pretty sure he had cowboy boots on, too, like we would never look at his shoes to figure out that he's really not 6'4", one of those deals. You've got to give him credit for trying. The hat I can't explain. I continue to tease him about that.

AJ is an unbelievable guy. What a spirited player he was, just all -- you talk about attitude, unbelievable attitude, and our goal was to redshirt him. We weren't able to do that the first season, but just a tremendous guy, and he's an outstanding football coach.

Q. When you were here as an assistant coach, Iowa football had kind of a legacy on New Jersey players, a lot of guys coming from the East Coast. You've only got two on the roster now. Just talk a little bit about your philosophy of recruiting New Jersey and players that are out there.

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, there's been a definite shift that way, and it's not that that's not a good area, but you kind of go where things work for you. A big, big part of that was Bernie Wyatt, the connections that he had out there, not only New Jersey but New York area, growing up on Long Island. Bernie was a legendary recruiter and football coach here, and same thing with

Wisconsin. He did a great job and brought a lot of good players off the East Coast. Once you get a little momentum going sometimes with particularly out of Barringer High School, Coach Verducci, Sr., Frank Verducci, Sr., was an outstanding coach there. A guy or two comes out here, has a good experience and really likes it, and that's what really what sells the next group of recruits. If you call Andre Tippett today, I think he'll tell you he came here and just had a great feeling about Iowa City, so once you get that going it really can kind of perpetuate itself.

We've had a little bit of a shift, but you go where things work for you. It's not by design necessarily.

Q. When you recruited Ben Niemann, he was committed to his father at NIU. You didn't have to experience that with your own son, but what was that recruitment like, and then getting him pried away from his own --

KIRK FERENTZ: You know how you remember phone calls you've had in your life? I remember a lot of them, but I know exactly where I was. I was in Nashville visiting my daughter and her husband, and I can't tell you where we were going, but we were in the car, and I talked to Jay, and I felt awful. I mean, it was a really painful conversation in some ways, just because I know as a coach how special it is to have a son on the team. That's a pretty good deal.

On one hand, it made sense for him to come here. On the other hand, it was kind of like I was asking for his daughter's hand in marriage in some ways, except I was stealing something. Weddings are happy. But I felt like I was -- but he was unbelievable about it, and he's a tremendous person. He and -- both Mr. and Mrs. Neimann are just outstanding people, and she's a great coach's wife. Yeah, it all worked out and everybody is happy, but it's a tough conversation.

Q. Have you prepared yourself for the day, and it might happen, where you look across the other sideline and there's one of your kids?

KIRK FERENTZ: Oh, geez. No, I haven't. No, I have not prepared for that. I can answer that. No, I have not prepared for it. I'll push that one off for a couple months, too.

Q. You coached a team at Rutgers 25 years ago.

KIRK FERENTZ: That was a long bus ride. We stopped in Hartford on Thursday night and then shot in the next day.

Q. Do you have any specific memories of that?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I remember that, and then I remember nonstop on the way back. We played them tough for about four minutes, and that was about it. It

wasn't a good day at all. I thought I was going to slip right through here without anybody bringing that up.

Q. Isn't it odd playing Rutgers that is a Big Ten opponent?

KIRK FERENTZ: It's different, yeah, it's different. There's no question about it, but that's college football. You don't get too settled in on anything, but it is different for sure. Especially the first time around, and then after that I think you just kind of go with the flow.

Q. Can you update us on a couple guys from Saturday, Joshua Jackson and I think Brett Waechter?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, Josh will be back with us, is back with us. He's full speed practicing. Brett we hope is going to be back next week.

Q. John Wisnieski, how is he coming along?

KIRK FERENTZ: He's starting to work back. He's practicing full now, but he's got a lot of ground to cover, but he's back full speed.

Q. You're 4-for-4 this year on 4th downs. Is that more situational during the game or is there still some questions on what Keith can give you with his leg?

KIRK FERENTZ: At least thus far none of the decisions have been based on the kicker at all, although we do have parameters like everybody does. But those are things we discuss during the week and we try to map out our plan for the entire game. It's tied in with score and that type of thing, point in the game, all those things, different situations. We try to make those decisions, have those discussions by the end of the day Thursday, and you can always change them, what have you, but they've all been pre-planned.

Q. Aaron Mends was the original starting inside linebacker. Both he and Bo have a lot of experience. Mends and Amani Jones have impressed you in camp. Have they reentered that conversation at that position or is that strictly Bo?

KIRK FERENTZ: August is kind of like polls. They really don't mean an awful lot because once you keep practicing, keep playing, you just continue to evaluate, and that's true of our entire roster. That position was up for grabs. Bo is doing a good job right now, but they still compete out there. We've got confidence in more than three guys at that position, so we'll just let the guys keep going. But right now there's really -- we haven't seen any reason to change things.

Q. You talked about some of the things on offense that are makeable, fixable. Was that the case, too, for the defense, as far as some of the keys that North Dakota State seemed to be really switching

around on you guys?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, but you know, I mentioned the 4th-and-2 play, the touchdown down in that far end zone, that's just us taking our eyes off the guy we're responsible for in coverage, and that happens. It's not the first time we've been victimized by that, but there's never a good time for it. Just simple plays like where a receiver comes in and comes in and digs out a safety, then if that's going to happen, we have to have the right displacement in terms of covering that, and there were a couple plays where we didn't.

Instead of a six, seven yard gain, it squirts out for multi, 15, 20, or just plain old missed tackles, which that's a bad thing on defense, too. If you're not going to be a good tackling team, if you don't get the right fits and replacements, those types of things, then it's going to be difficult, and those were the things to me that really beat us.

People are always going to have a little something for you that you may have to adjust to, and they get you on your heels a little bit, but that's just football, and it's always going to happen. But the things that are basic to week 1 in spring ball or week 1 in camp, those are the things, if you're not doing those well -- not that you're doing them well in the first week of camp or the first week of spring, but that's why you practice; you learn how to really fit those things so you're a fundamentally sound team, and they were the more fundamentally sound team the other day, no question about it.

Q. Is that really doubly important this week because Grant, No. 1 seems to be kind of a focal point for them.

KIRK FERENTZ: That's going to take a team effort, and I'll say the same thing about our coverage on kickoffs and punts. It's going to take a team effort to contain him because he's a big-play threat, bona fide. We saw that last year when we played Maryland, same kind of player. If somebody gets out of a lane, somebody is not disciplined, and same thing, if we don't tackle or have a proper contained reverses, he throws a reverse pass, he's got a touchdown pass. All those things, somebody has got to stay back even though he's got the ball, those are the things that get you beat, so it takes real discipline.

Q. You've said everybody has got a little wrinkle or something different to keep a team on their heels. Do you have those in your pocket from summer? Is that something you see on film this week and you arrange it?

KIRK FERENTZ: Everybody has got certain plays, gadget plays, whatever you want to call them. Every week you see something that you might do to --

knowing your tendencies, might be able to take advantage and counter punch to what they're doing offensively and defensively. But typically those things show up usually in the first half. Sometimes people will hold them. So then the trick is to get those adjusted. You've got to weather that a little bit, but again, that's just part of week-to-week football, but those things you should be good at every week, to me those are the things inevitably, when you look at the season after the season is over, go through the tape, the things that really get you beat are ball security, penalties, busted coverages, things like that. Those are the things that really get you. It's not that one play you designed, thought of on Thursday night or something like that. It's usually the bread-and-butter stuff.

Q. After you leave the stadium, go home, is it different for you for a win versus a loss? Does it eat at you and you start checking the video right away?

KIRK FERENTZ: It always eats at you, and there were a couple plays I wanted to come back and look at right away. But Saturday we blew a great opportunity from a personal standpoint. But you've got an 11:00 kickoff, you're at home, you've got a chance to enjoy that nice long afternoon/evening, and quite frankly you don't feel like doing anything, and I never feel like doing anything anyway, but I didn't feel like doing anything with anybody around on Saturday. It's just not much fun.

Q. Did you go to the video after the game or do you wait until the next morning?

KIRK FERENTZ: Typically if we win, usually I'll wait, but when you lose, you typically look at at least several plays, and you don't feel any better. In fact you probably feel worse. But at least it clarifies maybe what you thought happened, did happen. You still feel bad.

Q. You guys are hanging on a lot of base defense. Is that just the plan against what you've seen so far?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah. I mean, every week we try to come up with a plan that we think is going to be effective against the team that we're playing. You know, it's what we do.

Q. If a player or multiple players on the team felt a need to protest in some way during the National Anthem, would you support them, discourage them, leave them alone?

KIRK FERENTZ: That's a really tricky topic, as we all know. I would hope they'd come to me and let's talk about it first. My preference, I'm not saying it's a mandate, my preference is that we all be unified, be it our uniforms on the field, how we do things, certainly how we stand for the National Anthem. That would be

my preference. But that's in a perfect world.

But the biggest thing is I'd hope we could have some discussion, and a national commentary -- I'd like to think there are better ways to voice how we feel about things.