

University of Iowa Football

Media Conference

Tuesday, October 2, 2018

Kirk Ferentz



COACH FERENTZ: Good afternoon. So our captains same as last week. We've got Parker Hesse, Nate Stanley, Keegan Render, and Brady Ross.

Injury-wise, like I said last week, Nick Niemann is going to miss some time. He's progressing well. Probably still be a couple weeks I'm guessing. We'll play it week by week and see where that's at.

So just obviously we're looking forward right now as a football team, but I'll go back for just one second and a couple words about our last ballgame.

Overall I thought our team really played with good effort. We played a lot of good team football during the course of that ball game. Obviously we had several costly errors that really had an impact in the game, and are great learning opportunities for our football team. And I think really as we move forward right now the question is how quickly can we learn, how much can we grow, how much can we improve and how fast can we do it.

And we did have some really good execution offensively, defensively and special teams. But I think the lesson there is that those mistakes can be really costly.

So just the importance of details and everything we do is really paramount right now and that's kind of been the theme for the past week.

I think we had a productive bye week and then obviously this weekend our sights turned towards Minnesota and getting ready for this ballgame.

I think as we come into the game probably a lot of similarities between both teams right now. Same record, 3-1, both looking for our first Big Ten Conference win and both teams coming off a bye week. I'm sure they'll be prepared and hopefully we will be too.

Obviously it's a rivalry game. And I think we probably play for the best trophy there is in college football. Floyd is certainly a great, great trophy. Floyd of Rosedale is one of the great traditions in college football, and our players get to experience that, so it's really kind of a neat thing, and I'm sure they feel the

same way.

Minnesota is a team we expect to be motivated. Certainly they're well-coached and on top of that they'll be playing at home. We've got a big challenge in that regard.

I think we've had a good two weeks of practice overall. I think the effort's been good. The players' attitudes have been good. I think we've made improvement, incremental improvement, and that will show up hopefully as we get out on the field.

And just circling back to what I said a minute ago, really what it gets down to we've got to play hard. You have to play hard every conference game. But we've got to play a little cleaner, a little smarter, a little better if we're going to get a victory in conference play.

So that's really where our focus is right now. It's our first road trip. We need to be extremely focused, and we'll remind our players that's really the key anytime you go on the road and certainly will be Saturday going into a tough environment.

Q. What does is say about the depth of the defensive line when the conference co-leader in sacks is a rotation guy?

COACH FERENTZ: That's something we're pleased about. There's certain things that you're concerned about four games into it. And we're a third of the way into the schedule.

So there are certain things you see that make you concerned and know that you have to really work and that's one area I think where we're probably a little deeper maybe than we thought. Although we still have room for improvement.

And A.J.'s a guy who is talented. I think he's starting to find a little bit of a groove in the pass rush sense. I think that's a good thing for us. As I said a couple of weeks ago it's a position we feel we have pretty good depth. Three really good players and Chauncey gaining ground, so I think really four guys that we feel can play winning football for us. And for us to have depth at any position is really rare. Nice to have that at least with the defensive line at this point.

Q. What do you expect your linebacker rotation to be (inaudible)?

COACH FERENTZ: Barrington moves up and that's college football. That's football probably at all levels. You get into October you'll have guys missing time and that can start earlier. These guys have experienced the same thing.

So guys come out and that's what other guys prepare for and it's opportunity for Barrington right now. Go back to -- we started the season we said we thought he really had a good preseason. Nick's been playing well for us and doing things well for over a year.

I think Barrington certainly had a good camp. To me he's a much better player than he was last fall or even last spring. And that's encouraging. He gets an opportunity to go out there show what he can do and hopefully he'll play well.

Q. How important is it to you to inform your team about the Floyd of Rosedale, and how much do you talk about it?

FERENTZ: We'll have somebody give a report on it tomorrow, give a little bit more information, detailed information than I can provide. But, yeah, uh-huh. And I always kind of go back to my experiences. My first one was 1981 out there. I'm pretty sure we were ranked. We were on CBS TV.

And my memory is getting a little bad here, but we were -- Sports Illustrated was at the game, which never happened back then. If you're on TV it never happened either. And we got real tight and didn't play very well. I think we lost 12-10 or 12-whatever it was. And I had a holding penalty; I remember that distinctly down in the end zone.

What I do remember is when they came across to get Floyd. We had Floyd in our possession. They won the game. And they came across and those are the things you remember.

Once you get into a rivalry game like this, you understand what the trophy's all about, and so I think those are the things that our older guys talk about with younger guys and all of us as coaches share that, too.

Q. What's the concern with coming off a bye week and maybe a little slow out of the gates on the road?

COACH FERENTZ: I just said that on the teleconference a little while ago. We kind of fooled around with -- I don't know that you ever have a pattern. And every year is a little different. Every team is different. And this year it's a little bit on the early side.

As far as you know, being symmetric it's right smack dab in the middle of start of camp versus the end of the season. So that part I think is really good. We're only four games into it. We haven't really played, barely 10 percent of our conference games.

But it gives you time to reassess things a little bit, make sure you really think you have the people in the right spots that you want. And then the trick is how much work do you do, how much work don't you do with the players, those types of things.

But one thing that's been pretty much constant, we've changed our format almost every year it seems like. And the other thing that's been pretty constant is usually on Sunday, I come off the field in a bad mood about that day's work. And that wasn't the case this year.

We changed the format a little bit. I'm sure we've done what we did this year, somewhere in the last 19 years. I really felt like our guys were focused and into it on Sunday which was pleasing to see. And that's been pretty much a constant with this football team going back to January. They haven't had many bad days and that's encouraging.

Obviously we've got a lot of work to do. But I think they're trying, they're focused. And, so, I think we feel like we had a good practice. I think we've practiced well the last two days as well. Hopefully we'll take that to game day and be ready to go at kickoff.

Q. You've had versatile players kind of in the back seven before, Christian Kirksey to mind. He could play -- cover slot and play in the box if he needed to. But a little bit different is Amani Hooker, but he seems to have some of those same versatile traits. How instrumental, how important is it for the defense to have a player who can play in the box like him but also defend wide receivers?

COACH FERENTZ: It helps a lot. I'm not sure we want him to make a living in the box. But he's capable of doing it. He's a pretty physical guy. Christian's a little bit more linear. Niemann is a little bit more linear, but now he's playing in the box as I understand it. I still haven't seen him play yet. I regret that.

But anyway versatility is a good thing for any team, any position, I think. And Amani is really developing into a good football player. He's got a good attitude and work ethic, and he's a tough-minded guy. Doesn't mind competing.

Having guys like that is valuable, especially with all the spread attacks we see -- three, four wides, I think it's

more important.

Although I'd kind of argue going back even when Miami really started going, Jimmy Johnson would have -- you get more speed on the field is usually a good thing on defense. And I think we're trying to do that at all positions certainly or have tried to do that the last 20 years.

Q. Look at what he's done, Amani. Last year I think his first extended action was maybe in sub packages against Iowa State and then he ended up getting a start two games later against Penn State. But what does he do well that's enabled him to not only become a good player but really he's ascended?

COACH FERENTZ: Like a lot of guys that start on special teams. We didn't redshirt him. We threw him in right away. Started on special teams. He played well there, and the attributes you described gave him a chance to be a good special teams player.

Then it's a matter how soon how much can they take and how fast can they take it on, that type of deal. You try to carve out a role for a player that's shown some signs. And once you can take ownership of that if he can expand it that's a good thing. Now we consider him to be a veteran guy.

It's kind of funny some of the guys we consider veterans, Fant, Stanley, and Hooker. And none of those guys are really two-year starters. But they're veteran guys, we've got confidence in them. They're leaders, not only just players but leaders as well. Hankins the same way. That's just part of the ascension, hopefully.

Q. When you were recruiting Amani were you surprised that you were maybe the only Power Five program that seemed interested in him? Did that seem interesting to you?

COACH FERENTZ: A little bit, a little bit. And he was not a strong student in high school. That was probably a factor. We were going to be patient there. We felt after getting to know Amani and his parents that there wasn't a big risk there. And I was more surprised because his senior -- you guys know the stats probably better than I do, seemed like he scored eight touchdowns every game, intercepted three and all that kind of stuff.

But that's like Jovan Johnson. He did everything for his high school team. Really wasn't recruited. He was going to Kent State until we snagged him in January.

So when you see that kind of production, that really helps you out. And I'm not sure about the competition,

but really doesn't matter. If a guy's in the middle of things all the time that's a good sign.

Q. You haven't got a ton of guys from Minnesota, but it seems the ones you have seemed to make impact, whether it's Karl Klug or any of those guys. Why do you think that is that the guys you get seem to flourish?

COACH FERENTZ: Picking the right guys usually and some of those guys -- I think Eric Johnson, I think, was the first guy on Amani, I might be screwed up. Or it might be Seth. That line of divide there. It probably was Seth, I guess, that started on him.

Karl was a Reese find up in Caledonia. And the common denominator usually is they're underrecruited. We're not fighting the instate school at all times. We usually have to scope out a little bit more and see something in a guy.

But talking about Amani, Karl's the same thing. Karl was about 2-5. We thought he would be an outside pass rush guy, more a Chauncey Golston, not quite as tall. Ended up being a really good interior player, so a little bit of luck involved there. But the big thing is he impressed us as a tough-minded guy who would be productive. He had great production in high school as a running back, outside linebacker. And we just thought he had a chance to really grow into a good football player.

Q. I think you guys get to expand to 74 on the travel roster. How are you going to address that?

COACH FERENTZ: We're still looking for the next 14 to fill it out. So we're not just going to fill seats up. And maybe that hurts us in recruiting or will hurt us in recruiting, I don't know. But the guys get on a bus on Friday, will have a purpose to go. And we've got to make sure they've got a role. And we've kind of done that. I think we can take 74 to the hotel here. We're saving money for the university, doing our part to be fiscally responsible. But we get on the bus with guys that are going to have a role. We might travel a redshirt quarterback. That's been pretty common. But we're not going on a field trip up there, we're not going to be taking cameras and stuff like that. We're going to go up there to hopefully win a football game. And guys that have a role will be on the bus and kind of go from there. If we can find 74, I'll be really happy. That would be really great.

Q. The case with a guy going home, I guess, to play the first time in a big role, what has been your experience watching guys get to do that over the years?

COACH FERENTZ: You just created a really good visual for me. Remember that picture of Hinkel

stretching out in the end zone at Penn State in '02, I believe it was, which would have been his second -- first redshirt freshman year. Sometimes it brings out the best in people.

I think Jovan had a pick in that game too, took it back to like the inside 5. I think he did. Maybe I'm delusional on that one too. Sometimes it brings the best out of guys. What you hope it doesn't do is I need 47 tickets and the guys working all week about getting tickets lined up from his buddies, all that kind of stuff.

So it can go either way. We just try to encourage our guys to really focus on getting their house in order early in the week ticket-wise. And then we tell them all when we go places, we're fine with them seeing their family a little bit on Friday if that's the case, and after the game, certainly.

But hopefully your loved ones understand you're there, you've got one opportunity. We've only got 12 games this year. And they understand that and appreciate that. And we try to educate our guys on that starting back in August about once it's game week, you're trying to get things ready to go and you only get 12 cracks at this stuff.

So you try to educate, yet we're not trying to be the grinch that stole Christmas either. Probably can't say that, can you? Stole the holidays. Got it.

Q. Is Matt Hankins good to go this week?

COACH FERENTZ: Not yet. He's working through some stuff. We're hoping he'll be ready to roll. We'll see.

Q. A guy like Riley Moss you get to evaluate the freshmen through the bye week. Seems like he's emerging. What can you say about him and any other freshmen?

COACH FERENTZ: He's on the rise. And Brents is on the rise. Both out there playing. They're not the same but they're similar in that they both pretty much have, since they got here, I think Julius might have had a bump first week at camp. But he's pretty much been out there every day. Works hard. And Riley the same way. Good on special teams. High effort guys that have learned. And take advantage of their opportunities.

We've played a lot of freshmen corners historically. Mentioned Jovan. Go back, through the years. And we'll see where it all shakes out. They're all in the mix, Josh. Obviously O.J. And Matt, hopefully he'll be back. He's got a good shot. We'll see how it goes.

Q. Are you still confident in special teams, seems

those errors against Wisconsin were correctible things?

COACH FERENTZ: I think so. I don't think of Kyle being a fumbler. Some guys are a little bit prone to fumbles, turnovers. They get the ball, swinging out there, all that stuff. I haven't seen Kyle do anything like that at all.

And really, in my mind, I'm not dismissing it or saying, okay, it's okay. Because it's not. Those two plays really hurt us. But things happen in football sometimes. And I don't think they're characteristic. First one, the fumble thing, I don't think it's characteristic of him at all. He's a mentally tough guy, who is really conscientious. It's kind of a weird play, quite frankly. Seemed like it happened in slow motion. I was standing there watching the whole thing.

It was a huge play in the game because of the field position. It's tough to get good field position against those guys.

The other one I know was covered last week with the coordinators. But to me, it's really a teaching moment. It's a tough play. It's a real tough play to communicate. And that's really what it boiled down. And I think one guy was trying to do it. We need to do a better job there. But then everybody else has to help out, too. And the guy that ended up touching the ball was just trying to make a play. He was trying to help the football team. So can't be critical of him at all.

But it's more of a team communication. And it's amazing how that happens offensively/defensively/special teams-wise, if communication isn't good, it can be really costly. That's a good example. But it's a tough play to communicate, especially in a noisy environment. But still it's going to happen again. We'll be in that situation again. Hopefully we'll learn from it.

Q. Does the opponent get any credit, from my view it looked like Wisconsin almost pushed him into the ball? And is that kind of what you're coached to do in that situation?

COACH FERENTZ: If you get that opportunity, yeah. In a perfect world, you want all your guys to scatter at that point. But I don't think our communication was good enough.

And, again, you can't just rely on one guy doing it. It's got to be one guy and that triggers everybody else to help each other out. Brady was trying to help, but he was a distance away from the play. Shaun never could have heard him from where he was at. Brady, he had a good line of vision on it. So I think it's one of the harder plays in football but hopefully we'll improve from that and learn from it.

... when all is said, we're done®

Q. Noah gets a lot of the love across the country for tight ends, can you describe him as a football player?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, he's a pretty good player. There's been a lot written about Noah, rightfully so. Noah's a very talented player, good player. But this other guy has been good too.

Sometimes that happens where one guy shadows over another. Suppose if we had 2,000 rushers, or a thousand, 600, 700 guy, you would have the same situation. Those are rare. Talented defensive ends right now. We have three guys, at least, that could probably start for us the most in a year.

Last year I thought he played really well for a first-year guy. He has a great attitude, good work ethic. And he and Noah make a good combination for us. They're not the same guy, but they're both really good players. And that's another position where I don't want to say we have depth there because really we like to play with two tight ends. We're still working on three, four and five. But I think those guys are doing a good job.

Q. If Hankins can't play, is Brent the first one? He had the majority of snaps as his replacement.

COACH FERENTZ: Probably would be. Could be Moss. Could be Turner. We'll watch and see how this week goes.

Q. And the challenges any of them face against Tyler Johnson, big strong, athletic guy?

COACH FERENTZ: I didn't talk much about them. But to me, if you're going to start with your football team, it's not just him. He's a really good player. But it is also the receiving corps. And we played an outfit like that a couple weeks ago, I thought Wisconsin's receiver corps is pretty good too. Now we're facing another group that's really good as well.

And the freshman, 13, they go to him a lot, too. It's not like you've just got one guy to focus on. They've got a whole group that's capable. But those two guys can do some damage and have already done damage in four games.

Q. They have a true freshman QB who is --

COACH FERENTZ: He knows enough to throw. That's one thing he knows. He may not be experienced enough, but he knows that much, yeah.

Q. That must be kind of rare in this league to have somebody who can walk in like that and earn his way on to the field and play pretty good.

COACH FERENTZ: It is. Like I said, he knows where to go with the ball. He throws it down both sidelines.

They throw other stuff, too. Not just that. But they do a nice job of throwing deep balls. And both those guys are really dangerous in a lot of areas but also on those streak routes down the sideline.

Q. At linebacker, going back to linebacker, seems like in the past you might have trended towards rotating one of your inside guys out to outside or something, veteran guy. Obviously must feel pretty good about Barrington?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah. And again I'm not sure I would have said that coming out of the spring. He was doing okay. And last fall at this time he was on the scout team, look team. And he was doing okay. But nothing to write home about. But I thought in August he really made a major step. We talked about that before. I think all players do things at different times.

Some guys it just works out really well for them from the start. It's not that often but usually there's a progression going on. And I thought he really looked like a different guy. And he's always been capable. But a lot of it is a mental thing, just kind of getting comfortable, what have you.

So this is his opportunity to go out there and play. And it's a good opportunity for them. And really just kind of goes back to the comments back in early August where reference that might take a while for us to really figure out who is who and what's what and evaluate what goes on in practice. But until guys get in game day activity, hard to know what they're going to do and how they're going to respond and all things that go on during especially conference play. It's a great opportunity for them.

Q. Are you done rotating at weak side? Is Colbert the guy now?

COACH FERENTZ: Kristian is still going to play too. He's swinging right now both ways, outside on both sides, inside and outside. But nothing's in permanent ink yet. We'll keep moving along.

Jack's done a great job. He's really solidified things. But we can still play better. We can play better on defense. That wasn't our best outing last time out and there's some things fundamentally we can do better. And those things showed up on the tape and hopefully we've been addressing those. And there's always challenges. Everybody's got an opportunity to hopefully push forward here as we go along.

Q. Did you guys discuss the true freshman dynamic during the bye week and how you're going to proceed going forward?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, we did. And to the point earlier Brents and Moss are in the water. They're

swimming, they're in the deep end, not coming back. We've got some guys in that shallow end, we'll see where it goes and all that type of thing.

Personally, if we can protect guys, we will. But we're also trying to win right now. And if we do decide, hey, a guy's going to hit game four and then go to game five, then we're going to make sure we've got a role for them on special teams, that type of thing. Not just standing over next to me.

Q. With Ivory Kelly-Martin coming back after missing two games, he had the most snaps, what is it that you like about him? I know you like all things, but what is it about him that makes him so valuable?

COACH FERENTZ: He's probably the most experienced, game experience plus versatile, of the three guys. Toren is what he is and we like what he is. I want to make sure I'm clear on that.

And the crowd feels it when he comes in the game. He runs that ball up in there hard and tough and that gives us -- it gives us an energy that's positive. He's fully on board. But of the three, he's the least apt to be a guy you would flank out wide, that type of thing, and throw a ball too probably.

But I can say the same thing about a lot of guys we've had. But he's really a good player and we know who he is and really a dependable guy we trust immensely.

Mekhi is learning every day and looking better every day. And he's kind of somewhere in there between. And Ivory is kind of more well rounded. Can't run with the same power that Toren does. But there's a spot for all three of the guys. We're pleased with all three of them as well.

And I think the nice thing, they're all young players that will continue to get better, too, and it's kind representative of our football team. That's one thing I'm excited about, I think we have a real window of opportunity here over the next eight weeks, if we do things right in practice well.

So that's what we're hoping for. I kind of went around on the end on Ivory. I think he's just a good football player. He's got a great attitude. I just thought about it, they might be the quietest group I've ever seen. They don't talk at least in front of me very much. They're quiet guys that work hard and really do a good job out there. They're really good. And feeling better too. That week off came at a good time for him.

Q. Is Toren in the wrong decade?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't know if he's the same as

LeShun or same as Shonn Greene, but more of that type, where he's going to run up in there and if you get in his way he's probably going to run through you rather than around you. And I just, I think everybody's got a role. Potentially. But it starts with being a good player whatever your skill set may be. And that's one thing I -- after being around those three guys, Mekhi has only been here a couple months, but all three of those guys seem to be I think what will work for us. They all have a good role, a positive role. I'm really happy about it. They all get along great with each other, tremendous young guys.

Q. These reports that you have during trophy weeks, is there anybody that blew you away with one of those, like, wow, he put some time into it?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, most of them do. Because they're doing it in front of their peers. And they do a pretty good job. Plus Google. I could even Google stuff. It's not that hard anymore. But we encourage them maybe to talk to some people that have some personal perspective, that type of thing.

So we'll coach him up a little bit and try to give him some guidance. But surprising -- not surprisingly. Amir did a really nice job. I can't remember what his was somewhere in the last month or so, month and a half. But it was pretty good.

Q. Jake was saying it's Mekhi Sargent that's doing it this week --

COACH FERENTZ: Mekhi, he got nominated by his peers. Who am I to say no?

Q. Searches it and he presents what he learns to the team?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah. And it makes sense. The guys picked him last night. They probably figure he's about from as far away as anybody on our football team right now, really knows probably less about Floyd than anybody. So it's good. If he screws something up somebody will correct him, I'm sure.

Q. Kyshaun Bryan just decide this wasn't the place for him?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, we came to a mutual decision last week. And Kyshaun is a great young guy and we wish him the best moving forward here.