

University of Iowa Football

Media Conference

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Kirk Ferentz

Press Conference



KIRK FERENTZ: I'll talk a little bit about last Saturday and then shift our focus to this week's game. Good to be back in Kinnick. Last Saturday, certainly a disappointing outcome. We knew going in, it was going to be a big challenge, and Ohio State has an excellent football team. Like always, I think most of you are familiar, we have a 24-hour rule, not that that's anything new or creative, but basically what it means is we come in and look at the film on Sunday, see what we can learn as a staff, start there, and then also share it with the players and talk about improvements, things like that, and then also look at the good stuff.

Then after that, it's all about moving forward, putting our emotions aside, which it's always tough when you lose a game. But having to move forward on Monday and get ready for this opponent.

Certainly it was a team loss. I said that on Saturday. Everybody has involvement and ownership anytime things don't go your way.

Bottom line is typical, you can always do better, and that's win or loss, really. That doesn't change a whole heck of a lot, either.

Ohio State played a really good football game. They have outstanding talent, as I said a week ago. Well-coached, and certainly showed that.

At halftime we were in a strikable place and then they drove the ball and scored and then three turnovers after that, and you're not going to beat anybody with three turnovers, particularly in one half. That's a given. That's really not going to change. That's the bottom line.

Saw some good plays out there. I thought our effort was good. Our guys competed hard. We have to push forward and try to build off the good things that we did see.

Turning our sights forward, our captains are the same four guys: Jay Higgins, Luke Lachey, Cade McNamara and Quinn Schulte. Roster-wise made the announcement

yesterday we had two players decide they're going to move forward and explore the portal in the out of season. Certainly thank them for their contributions and wish them the best moving forward.

Injury-wise, Addison is probably going to be out this week. I don't see anything that's realistic to think he'll make it back. A lot of guys with injuries coming out of that game. Physical game, both sides. But I think based on what I saw today, I think we have a chance to have everybody ready Saturday outside of Ostrenga.

Washington is a good football team, 4-2 coming into this game, 2-1 in the Big Ten, and obviously coming off a real big win against Michigan Saturday. Looked extremely strong and impressive. Coach Fisch has done a really nice job there, and most of you guys know Washington was in the National Championship game 10 months ago and certainly a lot of things have changed since then. They have a new staff up there. Jedd did a great job at Arizona, really turning that program around and giving them life. Now he's doing a great job up there. He has a really good staff.

It's interesting player-wise that the team that played back in January, a lot of those guys have gone to the NFL. Some of them have gone on to other schools and a lot of guys are back, as well. The nucleus of the roster is impressive, and then they've done a good job bringing guys in to supplement their team. They're a really good team.

Offensively, a couple really good receivers. Quarterback has done a really good job and was a good college player at his previous school. He's doing a nice job, but they're not just a throwing team. The running back from Arizona joined them. He's an excellent player, too. They're balanced offensively, do a good job.

Defensively very multiple with their system. Steve Belichick is the coordinator, and came from the NFL, and you see some of that flavor certainly with his packages, and there's a million of them.

The other thing that's unique, they're really multiple in terms of the players they play. I don't know that the last 20 years I've seen as many guys playing defensively as they play, especially up front, and they're all doing it really effectively. They all have their roles, and they've done a



nice job with that, so they're playing good defense and making it tough that way. Special teams they've been really sound.

Overall just a big, physical team. They've been playing well, and certainly played well this past week. Big challenge on our hands there.

Kid Captain this week we've got a seven-year old named Jackson Casteel, and Jackson basically has had some issues since birth, been fighting various things over at the children's hospitals and doing a good job. He has lung conditions, really rare, I was told he's one of 150 people in the world that are afflicted by this. But he's doing really well, seven-year old, and plays tee ball, enjoys that, and his mom says he smiles a lot. Be great to have him with us this Saturday.

Last couple things here, first I want to congratulate Brandon for the ANF Wall of Honor. That's really a great award, and Brandon had a great career here. I still remember trying to recruit him. We got on him late, and was not sure we were going to get him actually. He was Mr. Basketball in the state of Iowa, and we were so smart we didn't recruit him until the very, very end, and luckily he chose to come here. What a career he had, just a tremendous career with us, and did a great job in the NFL, too.

Great to have him back and his family back. I know his mom and dad will be excited to be here, as well, on Saturday.

I think it's also of note that he's joining a couple former tight ends on that wall, Dallas Clark and Tony Moeaki, and then also one of his former teammates, Bryan Bulaga, the winner of last year. It is a Wall of Honor, no question. All the guys up there are outstanding. So congratulations, Brandon.

And on a sad note, we've lost a couple former players here over the last couple weeks. Mark Fetter had a really good career here back in the '70s, and then most recently Kerry Burt passed a week ago, last Thursday, I think it was, from a heart attack, and Kerry was a captain on the '87 team -- both of them were tremendous people. Just a sad note there and our thoughts are certainly with their families.

Q. Talking about Jedd Fisch a little bit. You mentioned he took Arizona and really built them up the three years that he was there, and he's bounced around a lot. Seems like he's had success wherever he's been. How difficult is that, to go to a new place, to start over and build something up from scratch, and on a side note he said you're his wife's favorite head

coach, and he told you that? Is that true?

KIRK FERENTZ: Well, I'm glad some wife likes me. I'm trying to score some points with mine. I'm not doing too well there (laughter).

Yeah, Jedd has done a great job. Arizona was no garden spot when he went there. It was a tough challenge for him. It's always been difficult. But I think it's a tribute to the way he and his staff went to work. He has a good football mind, but more importantly, he's a guy of action who I'm sure just watch what we see the Washington team do.

Those guys play hard. They're sound, do a great job in all three phases. My guess is that's exactly what he did in Arizona. But real credit to them, and they recruited well, too, and dug up some guys maybe that weren't household names but really played well, and the quarterback is still down there really tearing it up. I know he had a great year last year.

Q. The two guys playing the most snaps for you at wide receiver just got here in June, this summer. It didn't work for Kaleb Brown. What does it take to get on the field at Iowa at wide receiver, and why didn't it work for Kaleb?

KIRK FERENTZ: Well, I don't want to talk about players that aren't here, but I can talk about Jacob Gill, a guy who did get here in June. He's come in and worked hard. He was not a household name at his last school. He's tremendously attentive, very detailed in his work, his preparation, and he practices every day and practices hard.

So there's a lot of value in that, and that's true at every position. Just being reliable, dependable so the quarterback can really count on you to be there, and I flash back to a couple weeks ago, that Minnesota game, the one touchdown to the left that Kaleb broke out, Gill is in there blocking, knocks over two guys. The little dirty stuff like that or the dirty work that maybe some players don't want to do, he's willing to do it.

He's done a nice job.

Then Reece is a different discussion because he's a kid who just got out of high school basically five months ago, four months ago, and unfortunately for him, he had some injury issues in the summer. He's limited on what he could do.

But once we got going in camp, same thing, he's just very attentive, very detailed, works hard. You've seen him compete for the ball out there.

He has tremendous upside. He has a great attitude. I'm not saying somebody else didn't. I'm just talking about those two individuals that were really focused on the details.

If you're a receiver and Brandon can tell you as a tight end, too, quarterbacks like to know what you're going to do and when you're going to do it, those types of things. Both these guys, the guys that are playing most of the reps right now have been really good in that regard.

Q. Along those lines, the two departures, how did those situations unfold, and what are your thoughts in general on guys transferring at this point in the year when you still have most of the season left to play?

KIRK FERENTZ: I think that's a reflection of the times. It's certainly not unique to us right now.

It's kind of like Jim Ryun when he broke the barrier on the mile. All of a sudden within a year there were a bunch of guys that broke that barrier.

Once one person jumps in the water, then it's easier for somebody else to do it maybe. I'm not saying that's the case here. I don't know how long the players have been thinking about it. I really wasn't part of the discussion.

I applaud both guys because what you don't want is somebody in the program that doesn't have both feet in the circle and totally committed to the team, doing well. At this level, it takes everybody. It takes everybody on the team. I applaud them, wish them the best, and appreciate what they have done.

In Leshon's case he's a little different because he really hasn't been healthy since April, and I know he's very frustrated about that, and then he's seeing some other guys do a good job, so he wants to get healthy and then use his COVID year. Wish him the best. We'll do all we can to help him.

Every circumstance is a little bit different, but we're going to see more and more of that as we move forward probably in all sports.

Q. I ask this out of genuine understanding. I don't want it to sound condescending, but what is it about the quarterback position that maybe just makes you a little bit more reluctant to at least experiment, even going back to last season?

KIRK FERENTZ: Really it's pretty much the same every position that we have out there on the football field. We

assess it daily and then weekly, and then you learn more as the season goes on and the game goes on.

But ultimately it's about putting players on the field in situations where you think it gives you your best chance to win at that given point.

When those times come where you're going to make a change or sub somebody out, then you do it. Again, we discuss that pretty much on a daily basis. I think the only day we don't meet as a staff would be Saturdays. We do it on Friday afternoons. If it's a night game we do it Saturday morning. But we're talking constantly about the update of our team, where we're at, what do we need to be thinking about. We just take it a day at a time, try to give ourselves the best chance to be successful.

Q. With the two in-season decisions to move on, I know you've been around the game for a long time at the college level. You've seen a lot of changes, too. Is this frustrating? I'm curious as to your thoughts on the situation generally.

KIRK FERENTZ: I think I used this line before a while ago, you can't lose what you didn't have. If somebody really hasn't been playing, it's not like you're losing a lot of contribution, if that makes any sense. I don't know what the stats are on either player we're talking about this season. If Leshon had left last November, that would have been impactful because he was right in the thick of it and he was our best option and was playing very well, too. I want to compliment him.

It's really not the case now, and I talked about the injuries. That's affected him greatly, really since April. I feel bad anytime a player can't do what they want to do that way.

But the bottom line is it's, not to be callous, but if a player is really not playing, it's not like you lose anything that way.

Then the other part of it, to fall back on a line from Mike Tomlin, you don't want hostages on your team. Again, it doesn't do anybody any good, especially the individuals, to be in an environment where they're not enthused to be there. It's just not good for anybody. I wish the guys well, and I hope they find happiness wherever they do go. I mean that. I want all of our guys to be successful.

Right now our focus is on the guys that we're coaching every day and trying to give them their best chance to be successful moving forward here.

Q. We know that Cade has gone through a lot of injuries throughout his career, but from a production standpoint the last touchdown he's thrown against a



power conference team was against Iowa back in 2021.

KIRK FERENTZ: He was hurt for two of those years, I think, so that's probably part of the void.

Q. Absolutely. But what do you see from him day by day and what we don't see that gives you confidence that he can go out there and produce for you guys on Saturday?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, a couple things. We see him every day, and we assess all the quarterbacks, as you might imagine, like we do at every position. Then the things that were obvious that didn't go well Saturday, my sister probably could tell you. Turning the ball over, and then certainly the pick. That was just a bad mental play on his part. That was the most disappointing play in my mind.

He'd love to have it back, too, but sometimes you don't get that choice. You have to factor in the level of competition. You have to factor in the way the game is going at that given point.

There's a lot of things that influence how you assess things.

He has done a lot of good things, too, and I would venture to say he played a pretty good half in the first half. He was efficient, and I made that comment I think after the Minnesota game that he seemed more comfortable, more decisive in his play. Keep in mind, too, we've got a new offense, so there's a lot of new things going on.

There's a multitude of things that we're looking at, and the most important thing is I don't think his confidence has been shaken, and you worry about that coming out of a game like that Saturday where you play a good opponent and things start going south on you.

Q. With the turnovers you mentioned, the interception, with the two fumbles, what did you see there? What went wrong there?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, the one was the pocket got really cloudy and crowded. They got penetration on the right side, inside guy. But all that being said, that's part of playing quarterback. When things do get a little sticky in there, you've got to really protect the ball. That's sometimes easier said than done.

That's something you just have to do, and he knows that.

Then the last one looked to me like the ball just came out when I was watching the replay up on the board. Arm was coming forward but it looked like his grip on the ball -- that's

going to happen, too. Again, I go back to what I said a minute ago. When you get in those circumstances and it's coming downhill, sometimes things go that way, and it's no fun. As a former line coach I've been through that a few times, and it's just a bad feeling, and you've got to move on.

Q. Two-parter. Washington comes in averaging 300 yards a game passing. They lost a ton, but obviously they're still throwing it a lot. Your thoughts on that, and also related, Jaylen Watson made the trip, got in the game, true freshman. I don't think he traveled to Minnesota. What have you seen from him to elevate him to that level?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, he's showing up in practice. It was more so on special teams. He got in there a little bit. He had a leg injury earlier in camp which probably impeded his progress, but he's a hardworking guy. He has a good spirit to him.

Jaylen first surfaced in the special teams drills, which is as you know defensively especially we see a lot of traits in those things where it might be worth really working with this guy trying to develop him. We'll see how it goes. His role may increase as we go, we'll see. Perhaps on special teams. We'll take it week by week. But he's done a lot of good things. He's got a good future here based on what we've seen so far.

Their pass game, it's similar to last week, quite frankly. They've got a good receiver corps, and they, too, and I think one of Ohio State's secrets, not that I coach there, but as you guys saw, they make you play the run. They ran the ball extremely well, have good players, and they're not one-dimensional, and I'd say the same thing about Washington. The back is a really good player, and they've got a couple guys behind him that are good, but he's a really good player.

It's how you call the plays. You can't just sit back and play pass defense. You've got to honor the run. The guys up front do a good job, and the quarterback is really dangerous around the football. They're truly balanced.

Q. In speaking to the players earlier today, they said essentially, we haven't quite played a four-quarter game in all three phases. You mentioned earlier first half was pretty solid against Ohio State, kind of lost some things in the second half. Is the lack of all four quarters, is that starting to concern you, or is that something that is just going to happen throughout the season?

KIRK FERENTZ: It's a race we'll run the whole season.

There's ebb and flow in everything you do, but when we do play complementary football and when we do that, we've been pretty good, and we did that in the second half the time before Ohio State.

To get the consistency, and sometimes it's your opponent, sometimes it's you, whatever it may be, but that's what you're striving for.

That's where we're trying to get. That's the objective. We're hitting the midway point, and this is Game 6 for us. You hope you're showing improvement. That's one thing I think that's really fundamental for everybody to understand -- I say everybody on our team and everybody involved.

It's all about improvement and growth, and if you're doing things right, you should be improving and growing as you go along. Obviously injuries can factor into that, but that has to be the goal, regardless of what the wins and losses are showing. That's where we're trying to keep emphasizing that, and our best teams have done that.

Q. You like baseball guy. You know a player-manager, that type of role. Is Jay Higgins almost like a player-manager? Is that a reasonable take do you feel like?

KIRK FERENTZ: There was a good article Saturday morning, because we had time to kill, about the Detroit manager and just their revival. I knew they were bad. I didn't know they were in the playoffs. Jay has been great. I think that's two-fold. It's Jay, who he is and how he is.

He's really into it, studies all the details, and is really good that way.

Part of it's that position, too. Linebacker, middle linebacker and a quarterback, you'd like to think those guys are really investing a lot of time and seeing things a little bit bigger than just their given jobs.

Jay certainly embodies that. Jack Campbell is the same way. I think that's something about our signal callers. Traditionally they've done that. Quarterbacks, since going back to the early '80s, they're usually spending more time on the film than probably any other position. Jay has been just outstanding. He just gives of himself all the time.

Q. Looking at your defensive line, obviously Deontae Craig has been here for a while. He's a senior. Talking to his teammates, they say he's always got a smile on his face. What does he mean to this team?

KIRK FERENTZ: He's been outstanding. It started in recruiting. Jay at the same time. Both from Indiana, and

his high school coach was complimentary of him, and then you meet Deontae and you certainly understand. He's been fantastic and his growth and development has been fun to watch. He was kind of a tweener guy in recruiting a little bit, linebacker, outside linebacker, defensive end, worked extremely hard. Every time you see him, his demeanor is really positive. He's an up beat guy. I think that's good for his teammates, too, because he shares that with them.

Q. I know you've had to wrap your head around a lot recently with the carnage in college football, but you have a team from the Pacific Northwest playing in your Big Ten home opener. How do you wrap your brain around that? It just seems kind of strange.

KIRK FERENTZ: I think we all kind of realized when we went to whatever we went to, 16, then it became 18 -- yeah, 16 was first, that was like July 3, something like that, and the world changed at that point because at some point we're going to go out there, too, and what a different world.

Then you add two more teams up in the Pacific Northwest.

So yeah, it's very different. It's going to be interesting in a lot of different ways. Our travel out there, their travel here, what that is, what's the long-term effect over the course of a season, all those kinds of things.

It's just something we never had to deal with, but there's so many things in college football right now that fit in that category. It's one more thing to try to give thought to, and really until you experience it probably you won't know the answers, and maybe experience it a couple times.

Q. Pretty significant loss, Ostrenga. You lean so much into 12 personnel. How do you overcome that? Do you keep going with 12 with Hayden and/or Zach or do you go 11? What's your vision on this week?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, Zach will be the next guy up, and Hayden has done an unbelievably great job. Talk about Deontae and Hayden, I'd say the same thing about them, just a really positive guy, and I'm so glad he's here. I'm still not sure how he ended up here, but I'm really glad he is here because he's really been a big contributor for us.

Johnny Pascuzzi has played a lot of football for us, same situation a year ago. He really improved in the spring. He had a really good spring. He's been growing all the way through it. Doesn't say much. Always looks like he hasn't shaved in three days. I'm not sure how he keeps that growth the way he does. He practices really well, and he'll do a good job, too.

Hopefully we won't lose anyone else, but we'll continue to be who we are, how we are, how we play.

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