

# University of Iowa Football

## Media Conference

Friday, April 21, 2017

### Kirk Ferentz



KIRK FERENTZ: First of all, just a really good night for football. Kind of felt like an October night in some ways, and good crowd, good energy out there. And just overall been pleased for the most part with the attitude and the effort of our team going back to January. I think they've worked hard and been focused. That being said, certainly we're hardly ready to play at this point and not expecting that. But seen some individual growth over the last 15 practices. It's been fun to watch the guys start to finish and just see where they're at.

Again, some individual growth we're seeing out there, some improvement, some areas that look to be in pretty decent shape, and then other areas where we clearly have a lot of work to do.

That'll be what we'll start focusing on when we get back together in August, and in the meantime, we'll let the guys finish up this semester, a couple weeks of class, then finals, handle that well hopefully, and take a break and then we'll get it going here in early June.

Just really pleased, and needless to say a couple guys really stood out there. Good to see Jake Gervase have a good night like that. I thought Toren Young did some good things, as well, and some of the safeties really kind of showed up, which was good to see, and we're going to need help from everybody here as we move on.

#### **Q. The quarterbacks, what have you seen from them?**

KIRK FERENTZ: It's been back and forth a little bit and sometimes they look pretty good and other times a little bit off. Our timing wasn't great tonight in certain areas. It's hard, we're not really cohesive right now offensively, and it's not a big surprise. But I think they're both doing some good things. They're both competing well. My guess is they're both going to improve a lot coming out of this 15-day practice session. So what they can do now between now and the start of preseason camp, they have a chance to really advance and improve, go back, look at the tapes from the entire spring, and then hopefully we'll see a jump here when we get going in August.

#### **Q. Last time you had a (indiscernible) pretty good at remembering things. Do you feel like both of**

#### **those guys are on similar tracks?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Time will tell. But it was good for them to be out there tonight working. We're under the lights, that's kind of neat, and just good for them to work in front of a crowd. But again, the cohesiveness, the timing, it hasn't been there all spring quite frankly. Most of the time. At times it's been there. This past week actually looked a little bit better up until tonight.

But we're not that far off, and we'll get that -- I think we'll get that cleaned up as we move on.

#### **Q. Are you pleased with where you are at?**

KIRK FERENTZ: No, we've never looked real pretty in the spring, at least I can't remember a year where that's the case. That's just part of spring practice, and if we're there on August 30th I'll be a little concerned, but hopefully we'll be further ahead at that point.

#### **Q. How much is that due to a new offense and how much is it due to a lack of experience?**

KIRK FERENTZ: It's a little bit of each probably. The new offense, it's new nomenclature, just the way we describe things, call things, that type of deal. Everybody has been learning on the fly on that one, and that'll take us a while. This spring has been good for that. You've got to get out on the field and actually use the nomenclature, make the calls, that type of thing, and then go out and try to execute it.

We're in the developmental stage for sure, but you know, every day is a good experience that way.

#### **Q. Talk a little bit more about Gervase's performance tonight and what that means for the team and the defense.**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, it looked like he had the script. He looked like he got good jumps on those balls, read them well, and made some good plays certainly. If this was hockey, he'd be the No. 1 star of the game, no question about that. But it's good. Jake has worked hard to that point. He's had a good spring practice, and he was doing a lot of good things last year. He's played well on special teams. He's kind of climbing the ladder each and every step. I think Amani Hooker has done the same. He's improved a lot, and Clayberg has barely been back there, but he's throwing some good things, as well. Obviously with Brandon being out, we're going to need help from everybody, and it looks

like we have a couple guys trying to step up and help us out.

**Q. Has (Jake) Gervase moved up since Brandon's injury?**

KIRK FERENTZ: No, I think he was practicing well prior to that. He really -- with every phase of the program you hope guys are improving, and he got off to a good start this spring. I think he's just kind of been on a track that way, and he works at it and studies, and I think it's paying off for him.

**Q. You had said that the first time we met this spring that Nick Easley just really impressed you. After 15 practices, where would you rate where he is?**

KIRK FERENTZ: He's making progress. You know, he fit in right from the start going back to January. You know, you're never quite sure until a player gets into the program, and it's kind of funny, Marshal Yanda got here and the first couple weeks were a little bumpy with him, but when we got on the field figured out very quickly that he's going to be a pretty good player for us. But Nick has been a little bit more consistent. He's just jumped in there and did a great job, and he's practiced well. He's still not quite there yet, but I really can envision him being a guy that'll help us next year.

**Q. You're going to have many tight ends fighting for playing time. What has Noah done that's stood out to you?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Well, he's a talented guy and has a good attitude. He's a first-year player, so every snap he takes is really still a learning experience, and it's really beneficial for him. He's got a good skill set. He works hard, did some good things last year, and he's practiced really pretty well for 15 practices, and I can really foresee that position being a team or a position on our team that's going to be critical to our success, and we're pretty young at that position, so hopefully he'll keep pushing for it. I'm confident that he will. He's got a good attitude.

**Q. How do you see Cook fitting into that competition?**

KIRK FERENTZ: He's only been there, whatever, six practices now, but he jumped in with both feet. He went at it hard. The hardest adjustment is the blocking part for him, but there's no lack of want-to there. To me, with a summer of training and learning, he's got a little feel for what it takes now technique-wise, I think he'll really do a good job in camp and we'll see where it goes.

**Q. What does that group need to do now?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Just keep working. There's nothing magical about any of that stuff. They've got just to

keep pushing and the next phase will be strength and conditioning again, but there are things receivers at least can do. They can catch balls and run routes, those types of things. It's a little harder to be a guy out there blocking. Nonetheless you can still work on footwork and that type of stuff. But there's a lot he can do, and I'm sure he will and the whole group will continue to push forward here.

KIRK FERENTZ: I would think we have a better chance there. I think if you look at our whole team right now, we're probably a little stronger on the line of scrimmage, both sides of the ball. One encouraging thing is I think we have a chance to maybe develop a little more depth than we've had typically. We've had to do that on the defensive side. Matt got hurt right off the bat, Matt Nelson. Bazata has worked very little this spring, so those two guys being out, that forced us to work to the other guys, and then Brady injured his ankle a couple days ago, so he's missed some time, too. A lot of guys are getting good quality work. I think that's good. And then same thing with our backup linemen. We're fairly veteran on the offensive side, although we're going to have to have better tempo than we had tonight certainly if we're going to be able to do things we want to do.

I don't know about leadership in terms of individuals as much as like groups right now. We're going to have to get it from both fronts of our offensive and defensive unit. They're going to have to help lead the way.

**Q. You mentioned Toren. What do you like about his vision and him running behind the guys tonight?**

KIRK FERENTZ: I liked the energy he ran with and the toughness he ran with, and he's pretty much been doing that all spring. We don't do a lot of live work, but when we do, he's looked pretty well, pretty good out there. Quite frankly with him, that's probably his best. That's the time he looks the best, probably looks the worst in shorts. Luckily we don't play in shorts, although some day that's going to happen, but it won't happen during his career. I'll go out on a limb and say that.

You know, that's really his best attribute, and I thought you guys have had a chance to see the energy he plays with. That's encouraging, certainly. He's not there yet, but he's got the right attitude.

**Q. Talking about the running backs, how do you think those three that played tonight will kind of mesh in with Akrum?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I think clearly one and two right now would be Toren and Toks. They're kind of close, and they're different types of backs, and that's fine.

Both have a lot of growth to go, so the fact that Akrum didn't do much work out there probably was a good thing because those guys need every rep they can get, but we're going to count on those guys to play, and then we'll keep the door open for freshmen, as well. We can't count on that at any position, but the door is open at running back, receiver, and I would say in the secondary, too. We're not exactly deep back there.

Those positions are really -- we'll give the newcomers a chance to get in there and compete.

**Q. How is Akrum right now and the last couple months? Does he still check those boxes you wanted for him?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, the biggest box is that weight box, which I keep dwelling on, but that's really -- can still get better. But he's liking college now, so that's good. That's a really big step for us. But what it tells me is he's paying attention to it, and I think before -- he's not a defiant guy by any means, but he's a little flighty every now and then with that stuff. You get to be my age, right, it's funny to meet people that don't like to eat. That's just kind of weird. But he's been really consistent with that, so to me, he gets it. He understands. It's important to him. He's rehabbed well, and when he has practiced out there, we've had him in non-contact drills. He's moved well. He's focused on the right things. That's what I'm seeing, and I think he understands he can really help our football team next year.

**Q. Will he return kicks?**

KIRK FERENTZ: There's a chance of that. Yeah, there's a chance of that. I think we're going to need every weapon we can in every phase. If a guy can help us, kind of like Desmond, if a guy can help us move the ball or advance it, that's a good thing.

**Q. Are you concerned that the QB's threw three interceptions tonight?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Not really. I've got to see it on tape, too. I don't know if it was a receiver or just Jake making good plays. Not overly concerned there.

**Q. Which quarterback starts if you're playing tomorrow?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Oh, man. We'd be in trouble, period. I haven't seen Wyoming, either, so they may be in the same situation we are.

We'd probably do a coin toss, literally do a coin toss, but luckily we're going to have at least 15, 18 practices before we make that decision. We'll have to make it somewhere in camp. That's stating the obvious. But one of two things is going to happen: One guy is going to pull away pretty quickly when we get it going back in

August or it's going to be back and forth and then we'll just have to figure something out from there. But those things have a tendency to work themselves out.

**Q. Would you use both?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Haven't really thought about that, but you never know if that's the case. But hopefully we'll see some -- over time things tend to sort themselves out.

**Q. Are you surprised that it's gotten close --**

KIRK FERENTZ: No, not really. Tyler was the backup two years ago. Both guys are kind of in that same group. To that point, we had to make a call last year, and we just made that decision, and we're not looking back on that one. You know, so we'll just let it all go, but yeah, at some point we're going to have to have a winner. At every position, it's pretty much the same.

**Q. Along the same lines, when you look at fall depth, has it been a step back by Nathan or Tyler taking a couple steps forward?**

KIRK FERENTZ: No, I don't think either guy has really gone backwards. I think they're both probably better players than they were in January, and part of the passing stuff is we're a pretty -- I don't want to say fragile, but it's a fine line for us, and it's like last year, we lost a couple guys and things didn't look as good, and it's usually a couple tweaks here and there and you've got a chance to be a little bit better. We'll be a better team when we get VandeBerg out there, we'll be a better team when Wadley is out there and we're able to do a few things, and we need some more help and maturity on the outside with our receivers, and I think we saw some progress, especially this last week at the receiver position, but we've got a lot of room to cover between now and September, certainly.

**Q. Is Matt progressing?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, he's doing good. It's just they have phases that they have to go through, but yeah, every step has been really positive.

**Q. Update on Smith?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Nothing new there, and we'll just let his actions speak. So we'll evaluate it when the semester is over and see how things go.

**Q. Outside of Brandon, are there any injuries that are going to be lingering?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Brandon and Dalton Ferguson are the two guys that are -- otherwise we should be in good shape hopefully by June when we get the summer program started June 6th.