

University of Iowa Football Media Conference

Wednesday, February 7, 2018

Kirk Ferentz



HEAD COACH KIRK FERENTZ: Good afternoon. Obviously this time around it's different. Glad you got a chance to visit with Derrick Foster, he made a great impression on all of us a year ago. And we're thrilled to have him join the staff. We'll put those pieces of the puzzle together. And move forward, looking forward to that.

One thing about college football, and since I've got involved in coaching, it's been continual change. If you want to start back in '81, it's amazing how things are changing in college football. And nothing more than recruiting, the early signing period, and the recruiting media, we've seen a lot of change. That's part of football, part of life.

But I think a lot of things have stayed the same, and certainly what we look for, hasn't changed an awful lot. We're starting to see that the player has requisite talent and ability to be a good football player. We believe strongly in more significant the fact that we're looking for guys are going to be good teammates in the program, be successful students, and also be people that are going to go out and contribute in their community and be positive community members. Those things are really important. And bottom line is it's great to have a player that's skilled, but if they don't have the character to be successful it won't mean much. We try to be mindful of that whenever we go out.

And with that said we're extremely pleased with the way the class came together. And most recently we had three new signees today, Kaevon Merriweather, Logan Clemp and then Jayden McDonald. Great to get their letters.

Going backwards a little bit, D.J. Johnson, Julius Brents, did acknowledge signing publicly, but it's certainly out there now. And I've been in touch with Nico, to have him join our program, before school started, he's the guy we actually looked at a year ago. He went to prep school this last year, and joined us before the semester got going.

Those six new additions we're really pleased with. And it rounded the class out. We've got a great class of 22 signees, and we're really happy with that. I think all 22 have a very clear understanding what it takes to be a

Hawkeye. Certainly that process will continue to move forward, but it's a great start with those guys.

Also really happy with our walk on efforts. We went out and recruited a walk on class really hard. And happy to get about 18 guys that have committed. A number of those players and prospects turned down scholarship offers at other programs. I think that says a lot about their commitment to play here and also their desire to play at the University of Iowa.

This weekend just looking at the Patriots being in the Super Bowl, we have three guys affiliated with the organization, and two of those guys came here as walk on players, that we felt really good about. The other guy was a scholarship player, but he had one offer, that was University of Iowa. To have all three of those guys on the sidelines was really neat for us. And we're hopeful that the careers of these guys turn out to be just as successful and see how all that goes.

As far as the recruiting negotiation, just to close out, thanking our coaching staff, the recruiting staff and basically everybody on campus that does so much to make the experience for our prospects so enjoyable and their families. It means a lot, the efforts of those guys everybody puts in. As you might imagine there's a lot of travel, long days, a lot of effort that goes into recruiting staff and appreciative of everybody's efforts, the coaching staff, recruiting staff and the folks on campus, they do a great job.

So I think it's a positive thing, and we took on the challenges of a new approach to recruiting with the early signing. That was a little different. Really turned it into a positive thing. Again, pleased with the way this class came together.

Few things on my list, just want to make mention of the guys we have five players that have been invited to combine, pleased for those guys, James Daniels, Akrum Wadley, Josey Jewell going out there and Sean Welsh. And the big thing about those guys -- the two juniors, keep them out of trouble. All the guys had different paths to get here, just as I alluded to the guys that committed to us. The common bond is that they worked extremely hard, and persevered through the tough times that may have confronted them. They all had a strong desire to excel. And those guys obviously

excelled. We wish them well at the Combine, and a bunch of other guys that are training right now. To all of our guys that chase their dreams, that's what your 20s are for certainly. And wish all of them luck in the coming months as they do exactly that.

That being said, the last thing is now that we have closed shop on recruiting, we're all back on campus now. And that's a good thing for us, too, because our guys get back to campus, after Martin Luther King day they start class and we're on the road traveling. None of us have really seen much of our team face-to-face, we haven't had a chance to observe them working out at all. And we haven't had a chance to go back and review our film and dissect the season, those type of things. So that's on the calendar as we move forward. It's good to be back here and first and foremost be around our players on the team. Secondly, just have a chance to really go back and dissect the season, and that's the first step to moving forward is looking backward and make sure we study everything. That's the work that's begun. I'll throw it out to questions.

Q. When you look at your walkons, was this a concerted effort to deepen the pool, per se, because you've had so much success all the way back. Was this a concerted effort to attract these type of players?

HEAD COACH KIRK FERENTZ: It was. You think about Boone and Bo, just the two guys on the tip of my tongue from this class. You go back and look at the '04 team, so traditionally, we've had such success with guys like that, Kevin Ward working as the captain, he only started one day as a defensive player, was elected captain of special teams. Travis Perry. So the contributions that we've gotten are so valuable.

Beyond that there are a lot of guys that never make it to the game but do so much for us in terms of preparation, help us practice better. We got caught short this year with some linemen, we had an unprecedented number of injuries this year, especially up front. That made it a little tougher for us during the season. Had guys doing some unselfish things. So just something we thought about, and better enable us to better practice better. Anytime you bring good guys like that in, you have a chance to have a good story.

Q. Is it fair to assume that you couldn't have lasted this long as a coach if you didn't get some enjoyment out of recruiting. You hear about coaches that can't deal with it and they move on, you must enjoy it to a certain extent?

HEAD COACH KIRK FERENTZ: There are a lot of things I really enjoy about recruiting, quite frankly. You meet a lot of wonderful people. And the chance to go out and see. Whether it be high school coaches that

you meet. I talk all the time in clinics, in my mind that's the epitome of great coaching is what happens at the high school level. You get to meet so many wonderful people, head coaches, assistant coaches, guys that impact a lot of people's lives. A lot of tremendous players and a lot of tremendous people you meet in traveling. You hear interesting stories and that type of deal. Most of recruiting is actually pretty positive.

What I never did like, I don't like sleeping away from my house. That's one thing about being a football coach instead of a baseball manager. We've got five road games a year, so that's a pretty good deal, as opposed to 81 if you're a major league manager. I've never enjoyed that part and I certainly didn't enjoy it when my kids were young. Now my wife can't wait to get rid of me, so it's not a bad deal. There's a lot of positives in recruiting. You hear about some of the horror stories or people not being as forthcoming as they should be, but those things are usually in the minority. Our experiences have been good. Guys we've associate with on campus and the prospects and their families have been great, even the ones we didn't get.

Q. Is there anything over the years that you don't like?

HEAD COACH KIRK FERENTZ: The biggest change right now I would say from my vantage point, compared to the '80s, this is insanity. It never stops. There used to be some periods of rest or like a truce or whatever. But now it just never stops. It's ongoing. If you can't deal with that you've got an issue there. And that's the only thing about NFL, there's more of a separation of recruiting and inseason, when you're in season you're not looking at prospects, most coaches are not.

Q. How did you find McDonald and Merriweather?

HEAD COACH KIRK FERENTZ: Jayden is a guy we looked at and he committed to another school back in the fall. So really kind of fell off our group, if you will. And the timing was good for us, because with the early signing date we noticed that he wasn't signed. So that to me indicated that he wasn't committed. So that thing opened up again, for whatever reason, and we were able to get involved and I think everything just worked out really positively, and he and his mom were up here a couple of weekends ago, and had a great visit, and felt comfortable with everything they were exposed to. I'm so appreciative of the NCAA now, a lot of parents can travel, probably should have done it a long time ago. That really helps in recruiting when parents and prospects are together. So it worked out well for us, and we're really happy about that.

And then Kaevon is a little different, we've been watching him for a long I am too. We didn't say much about it, and pretty discrete about getting in and out of there, and he was limited with his surgery. He's a guy

that we had a lot of strong feelings for. And quite frankly he's probably a better prospect on the basketball court than the football field, but we feel he can do both, but just an impressive young man.

Q. Your offensive staff. How do you assess the state of the program?

HEAD COACH KIRK FERENTZ: I feel really good. It's positive, and as I alluded to it's been in the works a long time. We knew this type of coach was coming, didn't know when or how it was going to be delivered. First and foremost we were prepared for it happening last spring. And I think when Derrick walked out here a year ago, 11 months ago, we all felt pretty positive about him. That was just a matter of how do you make the pieces fit, both for last season and moving forward. Where we're at right now I feel really comfortable. I think it's positive for a lot of -- I think he did a nice job first time around with the special teams, got to expand and his focus will be solely on that. That helps the program having one person committed. Not that other guys aren't going to be working with him, they will, but he'll be in charge of those areas. So I think that's good to kind of consolidate that whole thing. I think the transition offensively is really good. It's logical. Brian did a nice job with the backs, but when we interviewed Derrick his strength was in the wide receiver position. So I think that's a natural thing for him. And Brian worked with tight ends and puts him more involved on the practice field. He can go with the tight ends, turn 7 on 7, all that kind of stuff. So it makes sense.

Q. You guys added a lot of linebackers, scholarship and walkons...

HEAD COACH KIRK FERENTZ: I remember back in the day, went over to Nebraska, spring of '86, drove over there, and I had never seen a practice like that, ever. I asked afterwards, how many linemen do you have? He said about 50. Do you know all those guys? I know about 15. That's how it worked back then. Pretty good deal, right? This will be nothing compared to that.

He'll do a really good job with it. All the guys, we're excited about it, we think they're good players, good prospects. And I think it's fair to say that a couple of guys will be involved next year on special teams. We'll get them on the field and red shirt another guy or two. We have an open mind. It's a position where there's as much opportunity there for any of those players for a spot on our team.

Q. You got Henry Geil at running back, are you comfortable with the depth at that position?

HEAD COACH KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I think it's fair to say maybe we'll look at some of the guys we signed at running back. We have a couple of guys in mind, Tracy

and Evans both have the ability to run the football. We'll figure you all that stuff out this summer. But I think we have some guys in the class, if we didn't feel that way, we probably would have looked at taking another back. We did consider that but we felt we had the right guys.

Q. You have three running backs, do you have any update on Toks?

HEAD COACH KIRK FERENTZ: We're still waiting, still working on that. He's back in school. And got through the semester last semester, was the first concern, he missed a couple of finals. His grades are in, he's doing well. Not full speed right now. That's going to be a medical -- there are a lot of steps he has to go through.

Q. Did you guys change your approach with the late signing period?

HEAD COACH KIRK FERENTZ: That was something me personally, I was curious about it as anything with this whole thing, because we have done pretty well in January, especially late January. And I mentioned Nico, would probably fit in that category a little bit because we talked even last year about possibly scholarship. We liked him out of high school. And he actually came to camp here this summer because he's going to prep school. He was still a noncollege student. We liked him in camp and as things went on we felt like he was the guy who could come in and compete this spring. That's our hopes that he'll come in and make us a better team competing.

At the end of this thing, I was impressed. He's done a nice job. He had a good season in football. They're playing well in basketball right now. You couldn't walk down the hall ten feet without somebody grabbing you and saying what a great young man he is in a lot of areas. Those kind of things influence you in recruiting a little bit. They make you think long and hard.

We'll see how it all turns out. But he's got a background that's very similar to a lot of guys we've had success with. Quite frankly in recruiting, we're not looking at five star, four star, we look at guys that have reminded us of guys that have done well in our program, that's usually our approach to things, not usually quite so much what's been published.

Q. Talking about Indianapolis, as far as with Brents and Johnson, specifically, you fought big powers to get them, their film looks really good. How do you think they fit in both short-term and long-term?

HEAD COACH KIRK FERENTZ: Very impressive, both of them. I feel good, Kelvin has done a nice job in Indianapolis. I was so surprised just how good the programs are there. It's kind of like basketball in Indiana, they have really good high school programs,

good people, good coaches coaching those players. In both cases we really liked the players, really appreciate the fact that they got out here in the summertime, they made multiple visits here. And we felt like probably Julius has a lot of position versatility, might be a corner, might be a safety. Really good football player, he's tall and has a lot of room for growth.

And then D.J. is the guy that really got our attention quick. And then he got other people's attention, but he was great through the process, and a couple of people tried to jump in late with him but he stayed the course, and very appreciative of that, too. We felt good about those guys.

Q. You're not afraid to throw defensive backs on the field, as you've shown over the years. And it's hard to predict that now, but at minimum candidates for special teams?

HEAD COACH KIRK FERENTZ: For sure. We recruited a big number last year of defensive backs, and this is another big group. The way the game is changing the more speed you have the better off you are. That's always been true, but I think with the more spread teams we see, probably advantageous for us. There's opportunity for those guys, we're excited to have them.

Q. Is there going to be greater emphasis recruiting in the south?

HEAD COACH KIRK FERENTZ: Potentially, I think Kelton, his familiarity is more in Florida, he worked pretty hard both sides and did a really nice job that way. And there were one or two players we were close on moving on that we ended up not moving on, but we felt good about them as players and people. He did a really good job there.

I'm still wrestling with the Atlanta, the Georgia, the quality of football down there is great, not unlike Ohio. Bradley Chubb was a guy that was on our list, never made a trip here. The key is can you get them on campus, that's the key. Anytime you go further away, that's something we're going to talk about in the weeks ahead. We're going to look at our football stuff. We'll talk about recruiting, and we'll talk about the areas and how much time do we invest here and there. Certainly one thing that might change things is the fact that we've got these visits, potential visits in the spring. So does it make more sense now to maybe spend a little more time there knowing you can bring a prospect in and his parents up here in May, for instance, or June, whereas with Chubb we couldn't do that, so maybe it works, I don't know.

Q. What is your philosophy going to be on the early visits, are you going to engage in that area?

HEAD COACH KIRK FERENTZ: It's going to be a continuing discussion. I think we were at a point where we were pretty comfortable last time we really talked about it, which would have been the beginning part of January. But I think we're going to -- we'll probably revisit that one, and that will probably be an ongoing discussion and are we sure we're doing the right thing, see what other people's are doing. Like Liar's Poker, see what everybody is doing here. But our preference would still be to get guys to come in December and have everybody together. I think that's our preference, but we'll see.

Q. Are you getting more help from more former players?

HEAD COACH KIRK FERENTZ: I think that's a by-product of getting old. There are more guys out there. I talked to Jovon and Terry Roberts was excited after that. Jovon was really instrumental, Jovon is someone he really looks up to. That was good for us, obviously, it was a matter of him coming to camp. He impressed us. What a season he had on both sides of the football. I'm not saying Jovon II, I hope he is.

It was really neat. The guys saw Marcus three weeks ago, and boy does he look tremendous. That's the fun thing seeing guys in their 30s, when they're married with kids, and well into their lives. He had a great run in the NFL. It's fun to reacquaint with those guys.

Q. Any concern with the quarterback position with the departure of Ryan Boyle?

HEAD COACH KIRK FERENTZ: I'm not concerned, but quarterback is such a unique position, and I think we'd all agree, we had a couple of guys transfer out of here the last three years that really did well, went on to their respective schools and did a great job. I predict that same thing with Tyler, I'd be surprised if he doesn't do a great job where he goes.

And Ryan the same way. Ryan is a tremendous young man, he's worked extremely hard, he's a good football player but there's only one seat, one guy can drive the car. And I'm not saying it's impossible, but Nate Stanley has a good head start on everybody.

I think Ryan came in and expressed his desire to play. And I think we all respect that. And I doubt that he just thought about that the day before, but you would never have known it the way he's conducted himself.

Cody, he came in late in August, early September and said the same thing, disappointed I couldn't win the job, I'll do everything is I can during the season, and I'd like to look afterwards. But he was just first class. That's the commonality of all the players, they've done a great job on the campus, and you just wish these guys the best, and hopefully we can find a really good spot

where he feels he can get a good opportunity. He'll do a good job.

Q. Falconer and LeGrand, are those guys out of the program?

HEAD COACH KIRK FERENTZ: Lucas is going to graduate. And to my knowledge is not going to go on to play. I think Adrian is looking to move on and play somewhere else.

Q. What is your true sense of having high profile guys like Desmond and Josh has opened doors recruiting defensive backs?

HEAD COACH KIRK FERENTZ: It certainly doesn't hurt. My favorite part of those guys is their story. A year ago at this time Josh had started one game in his career, to see all those neat things happen to them. I think what it tells prospects is that if you come here and put the effort in and have the right attitude, good things are possible. But I've always believed that successful people can come from anywhere, small towns, big towns. They don't all have to go to Harvard. I know it's a great school, I'm not knocking Harvard. Not every famous person went to Harvard. That's the great thing in life, everybody has opportunity. Desmond's case, first game of his career he's in the ballgame, he never looked back. He never came out. Josh is just the opposite, once everything broke open for him. I think that helps with certainly the position recruits. But we always tell those stories to everybody. There are opportunity here. If we invite you to come here, it doesn't matter how you get here, you're in the program and what do you want to do with that opportunity? How hard are you going to run with it. The five guys at the top have commonalities, no matter how they got here, they all shared certain traits, and those traits serve you well. More importantly when you're an adult, it's really the same story.

Q. Is it hard to do that when you've invested physical money with kids you've recruited when you match them up against a walk-on?

HEAD COACH KIRK FERENTZ: You put the stories aside when you evaluate players, because it's not fair to the whole team if you don't. I don't know how you have good team morale, with that being said judgments are hardly perfect, we know that. That's the beautiful thing not only about football and sports, but in real life. You get injured on what you do out there on the field. But for guys that are clowning in school, if he's not going to class, missing appointments, things like that, can we really trust you in the fourth quarter. You watch these playoff games, you watch the playoff games, you have a guy, there's one team I'm thinking of that had a perfect season, wide open on his fourth, quarterback hits him in the chest and he drops it. You wonder why they had a perfect season, it's just academic. So those

things tend to like surface, and I think we try to judge what guys are doing, what their attitudes are like, and what they're doing on a daily basis.

Q. Is that competition, is that the idea?

HEAD COACH KIRK FERENTZ: Sure, because you've got to have numbers, too, it's good for all of us to feel a little push, it never hurt any of us. If you've got other guys competing, the better off you are for sure.

Q. Do you anticipate looking east again or is that still up for discussion?

HEAD COACH KIRK FERENTZ: I think we will. I'm still skeptical about Pittsburgh. I'm from Pittsburgh, I just ran into somebody who was good friends of Sean Lee and Sean Lee's dad, in my hometown over the weekend. Probably have another -- anybody else tells me about how Sean Lee wanted to go to Iowa, but he didn't. Pittsburgh is tough to get a kid from Pittsburgh. I would have done it, but there were about four coaches in my career that recruited me. But we got lucky in some other pockets, so you look at it that way. There's something about Pittsburgh mentality, and I grew up there, too, I didn't know what where Iowa was when I was 24, I didn't know what it was. So kids are a lot smarter now than in 1973, that's for sure.

Q. What do you think about recruiting Bob Brooks' grandson?

HEAD COACH KIRK FERENTZ: A plus. He's had such a great career. That part is neat. And there's a special segment to that, too. If this crew is half as good, we're going to be okay. All time greats.