

University of Iowa Football

Media Conference

Saturday, September 1, 2018

Kirk Ferentz



Iowa - 33

NIU - 7

KIRK FERENTZ: I want to take a moment and start out by congratulating our players first and foremost. The coaching staff. Our fans were outstanding today. And special kudos for our grounds people. I forgot who showed me the picture Tuesday night, what the stadium looked like, and that was a little concerning. I did get a call from several people, Barbara and some of our folks, saying it was going to be okay. But it was a little bit interesting to say the least.

So happy about getting the win for sure. Nothing ever comes easy, needless to say at this point. And I think it was a really good way for us to start the season. We didn't anticipate anything being easy today, it certainly wasn't. A lot of rough edges out there, didn't play clean football, in the first half in particular, but even throughout, there were a lot of things that we still can get better at.

But I think what really carried our football team was we played hard and they played with really good effort. We have had four weeks of preparation for this. And the team's worked hard consistently throughout the preseason, consistently through the Northern Illinois preparation. So I think that's a really encouraging thing. And then we came up with some critical plays in critical situations, mostly the defense in that first half, to keep us in the game.

I think the other thing I'm optimistic about is a lot of the stuff that we saw involved guys that haven't played a lot or things that hopefully we can get cleaned up and we'll need to be doing that. So that's kind of where our focus will be when we turn the page on this thing. And then just to acknowledge what happened today, historically. First and foremost just I feel extremely fortunate my 28th, 29th year now whatever it is. Going back to 1981, I had no idea what I was walking into, I've said that many times. And what I walked into there is really kind of similar to what we have had the last 19 years. The commonality has been great players to work with and a lot of them were back today, it was really neat to see those guys. Couldn't have worked with a better staff of people. And really, personally happy that so many of them could be here from the '83,

the '80 vintage group. So that was really nice. Then just so many other people involved. That jumped out at me in 1981. I think that's really what's been great about being here. And you fast forward you think about guys that were here on the original staff, Phil, Ken was here, he took a little hiatus. Obviously, Chris Doyle, Reese got here year two. And then I'm old enough now we've got three players that were here or at least in the first couple years that are on our staff right now. So that's been the commonality. And but it takes a lot of things to go right and it takes a lot of people, the administration, here the leadership from our athletic directors, I mean, three athletic directors since '70. So it's just, it's a big picture. And I know it's cliché -- most clichés are true throw in football. It's all about a collective effort and nothing happens in football unless that, nothing good happens typically unless that's the case.

So just really happy about it and so it's all good. It was a good day for us. Maybe a little extra ice cream tonight, you never know. We'll really cut it loose.

Q. Would you say that today's win was maybe emblematic of the kind of wins that your program's built on?

KIRK FERENTZ: In a lot of ways, I guess, because first of all, it wasn't easy and that was certainly -- but it was good team football. There was a lot of good team football that got played today and that will be a point of emphasis tomorrow, where we may be left the door open for some challenges, but then somebody else picked things up. A lot of good hidden things. The role Kyle played today in returning punts was important and significant. So if we're doing that we got a chance. But again, it all starts with playing hard and that was kind of our first challenge going back 20 years ago.

Q. You never seem very comfortable talking about yourself and the things that you've accomplished in your career but you look around at former guys that worked with you who are here to celebrate you as well as former players, some of the greatest that played at Iowa here celebrating you and then in the locker room all your players are doing that. How does that make you feel just to have all those people around you celebrating your accomplishment?

KIRK FERENTZ: It's the best part of what we do. It

always has been. Probably part of it is like I never had to do anything in my mind, like be a coach here or be this and that, I've just enjoyed coaching. So the things that we get to do that you don't get to see, unfortunately, and not that we're trying to be secretive, but being with the guys during the week, being on the practice field, all those kinds of things are the things that are ups and downs. That's the part that makes it special. So that's the best part about it. It really is. But there's a lot of luck involved too. Everything's pretty much of my whole career happened by chance. I swear to God it has. I've never had a master plan or a list of things I was trying to accomplish. But, again, the commonality is I've been around really good people whether, it's head coaches I've worked for, the athletic directors I've worked with, the assistants that we have had, so there's some luck involved there too. It's a pretty neat thing.

Q. The three tackles you had today, three actually pretty good stories...

KIRK FERENTZ: On one hand, all of us were worried, obviously, being short handed going in. But again, the thing that made us feel a little bit better was watching the guys in practice and all three of those guys have practiced well. The first two weeks might be a different story, and part of that is just like realization that I got to get going here a little bit. But I thought all three of those guys, and I haven't seen the film, but from where I stand it looked like they did a really nice job. We were concerned obviously. They got a good front. So we were concerned about that. It's probably representative of our team. The thing I am optimistic about is that all three of those guys that's going to do loads for their confidence. Now they know they can go out and do it. Just like Groeneweg knows he can play. And our running backs are kind of the same way. So four weeks ago we didn't have much depth in our offensive line, at least we took a positive step today. But, again, we're hardly there. You guys saw as well as I did, there's a lot that has to get cleaned up here. But that's the fun of it and that's how it's supposed to happen too. And you can't simulate game action. You can scrimmage and we don't scrimmage a lot, but can you scrimmage, it's just not the same as being out there in the stadium and it's hot today and there were a lot of things that we could have used to not do a good job. But it was good to see a lot of guys just kind of pick things up out there and help us out.

Q. Was some of that fresh legs or the guys working up the depth chart or how did that work out?

KIRK FERENTZ: To me that's who he is. He's just a hard physical guy. If he plays to his strengths, that's what he'll give us hopefully. I think I said it on Tuesday, because I know we had Ivory listed as number one, but we as a staff look at all three of those guys as prominent guys on our team. I envision us having a

rotation with them and playing all three of them and we're going to need all three during the season. He has to run physical and he certainly did that today. And that kid was a spark also. And good players make good plays like that to give you a spark.

Q. A couple of those runs, the touchdown run he made a very nice cut from a guy who you think is maybe a power back he can do more?

KIRK FERENTZ: If he can do that without getting too smart or too cute I'm good with that. So that's certainly a good step in his development.

Q. Moving off that, I'm sure all three of those guys would love to be a 25-carry a game guy. But how valuable is it that they all buy into the set up back there, even if one of them doesn't start off hot or start off with a carry, down the road in the game they can deliver?

KIRK FERENTZ: We'll see how it plays out, but I never got the sense that they worry about that. That's traditional here too. Whether you want to talk about the '80s or certainly the last 19 years, I can't remember a player -- and I'm sure we have had some -- but I can't remember anybody coming up -- nobody walked in my office and complained. Now they complain all the time, I get that, that's human nature. But Fred Russell never came in and said how many carries or Shonn Greene or go right down the list quarterbacks talking about getting throws. So we have been fortunate, we got unselfish guys and I think they understand we're going to do the best thing for the team. That's kind of our, that's our jobs as coaches. I think it's kind of what I see with these three guys they're all really, really good guys and I'm thrilled they're on our team.

Q. It's only you know week one, but how good can this defensive line be?

KIRK FERENTZ: We'll find out, but they certainly played well today. What I was pleased about watching those guys from the sideline it seemed like they just kept working, kept digging and if you do that, then you give yourself a chance for good things to happen, whether it's penalties, drawing holds or being disruptive. And it seemed like they were just working at a good pace out there. And they have been practicing well and that's one thing I told the young offensive linemen, you're playing against good guys out there, it's not like you're just knocking bowling pins down every day in practice. So that part's been good. If we're going to have a good defense we're going to need those guys to continue, they got to pace us a little bit because we're pretty green behind them. It's a good thing.

Q. At linebacker Hockaday got in there pretty early. What did you see out of him today?

KIRK FERENTZ: I think I said this the other day too, that the game action's always different than practice. And we'll be evaluating the team all year long, you do that, but when you have so many young players playing and guys in first-time situations, you learn more about the guys on the game field. So I thought Jack stepped in, did a nice job, that was great to see. Amani we think is a really good football player and he'll be back at it. I thought the outside guys did a pretty good job from what I could tell. Nothing major that hurt us at all.

Q. Was it conscious to use the 225-pound back in the second half to kind of handle the temperature and the humidity?

KIRK FERENTZ: Not necessarily. I don't know how many snaps we had in the first half, we didn't have the ball a lot, unfortunately, so we weren't sustaining drives. But we wanted to play all three guys and so we just couldn't get there. It worked out okay for sure.

Q. Everything's kind of come full circle, your first win against Northern Illinois, first year and all the adversity that you had to deal with, and now you're here. Is that what makes this milestone even more probably more special than anything?

KIRK FERENTZ: I would have been perfectly fine if we did this a couple years ago. That would have been okay with me. So that's not the way it went. But, whoever we played today the goal was to win and get the season started. And sometime, if I ever retire, if they have a retirement dinner -- which I probably won't show up for -- then they can talk about all this stuff. I acknowledge what's happened historically, I think it's really a great thing and, broader picture, it's I think a great commentary on Iowa. But yeah, I'm just thrilled to be 1-0.

Q. After the first game, did you ever think that you would be here right now?

KIRK FERENTZ: I wasn't thinking that far down the road. I usually don't. It's kind of like, I hope I get to 21 years here. So right now we're just going to take it a step at a time, but it's a good way to start the season.

Q. Have you spoken to Hayden?

KIRK FERENTZ: We did on Thursday night. All of us had, I stopped out at the reception and we all had a chance to visit him. And he sounded great, still telling the same bad jokes, but he sounded great and I think we're all sharing in this.

Q. What was the locker room like afterwards? Some of the players were talking about sharing a special moment with you and what it means to them. What was it like for you to see them and then have other players and other people stop by?

KIRK FERENTZ: After any win that's one of the best

moments we all have just to go in there and just -- and not to say other people don't appreciate it, but I think coaches and players appreciate how hard it is to win in college football. So that part's good. Then this one had a little extra significance and I got ambushed a little bit in there -- President Harreld had asked the other day to recognize it and I said, please don't, and he didn't. So Gary circled around and took that over. I forgot to tell him the same thing. So that was neat, it was really neat and very meaningful. I'm thrilled that all of the guys could be here for this.

Q. Your defensive ends really applied a lot of pressure in the second half. How important is that rotation, that you have good defensive ends who keep coming in, good offensive --

KIRK FERENTZ: You read my mind there. I'm really thrilled that we have a chance to have a rotation. We were short two guys in the D-line too, so we had to move Chauncey in this week a little bit. I kind of envisioned him playing more outside, so hopefully that gives us four guys that can keep everybody fresh. Parker, I think he's a real unsung guy. He's not flashy but, boy, he just plays hard every play. And, boy, if we can just keep developing depth at like the running back position, you never have enough guys up there that can help you.

Q. Do you have any thoughts at this point about your next game?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, you might imagine I do, but we'll enjoy this tonight and go see my family and we'll get going tomorrow. We got a lot of film here to look at and things to correct. So we'll be moving on it, but it will be a big week, I'm sure.

Q. Did any of your extended family come to town?

KIRK FERENTZ: Not that I'm aware of. Maybe I'm going to get ambushed there too. But no, she's not here. I think, if I'm lucky, some of the local kids here, they may go somewhere anyway, we'll see. It's probably bedtime for the grand kids right now.

Q. When you were back there in '81, I mean when you left, did you envision ever coming back? I know that's a really tough?

KIRK FERENTZ: When I left in '89, yeah. I was going to say, in '81 my scope was not real broad, I can tell you that.

Q. Coming back and continuing what Hayden started 20 years ago. Talk about that.

KIRK FERENTZ: I've never been one those guys -- like I read about one famous coach who had a list of 138 things he wanted to do. I'm not that good in math, first of all, and my focus has been on the job that I've had. I was excited about the opportunity and loved it being

there. And I never had a bad job, so, no, to envision that and then the other part of the equation, I do have a Kodak moment when Coach Fry did retire, Ozzie Newsome, we were in the old Colts Building, okay, it was kind of a funky building, but he walked over and said, hey, you might want to see this. They had a press conference on ESPNU or some cable. So it really struck me, that was a something I'll never forget, because you never envision your dad dying, I don't think any of us ever envisioned Coach Fry retiring. So it's just not something you think about. I'm pleased. I know he wanted it to stay in the family, so thrilled that we can keep it going.