

**University of Iowa Football Media Conference
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Coach Kirk Ferentz
Press Conference**



KIRK FERENTZ: Good afternoon. Obviously good to see everybody. I'll just make a couple remarks about last week and then we'll move on to this Saturday.

Certainly it was good to come off the field 1-0 and get a win get against a good team and quality opponent. As I said the other day, there's nothing easy about winning football games, so just happy for our players. We've got a lot of work to do now.

I think the big thing is our guys played with good effort out there, certainly with a lot of things to correct, and that's what we're facing right now, trying to do a good job there.

As I said, our veterans did a really good job of leading our football team the other day, and that's going to be imperative if we're going to be a good

football team. I thought the younger guys did a solid job out there. There are a lot of things that we're going to have to work on and try to improve, but it was a good first time out for a lot of those guys, and first time for a lot of our players playing in front of fans.

Somebody reminded me this morning, Tory Taylor, just to mention a guy who's a good football player and had a good season last year, first time he's played in front of a crowd. Some little things that you kind of forget about.

The big thing right now is just seeing how much we can do to improve in some areas, make corrections from the game Saturday, and like always, it's always a race against time.

Every team faces that, and that's one of the challenges that we're working through right now besides getting ready for a top-quality opponent.

Just a quick aside, too, I am happy for Riley Moss. He's gotten a lot of nice honors as a result of his effort last week, and he'd be the first to say it was a really good team effort, but certainly he had an outstanding game and I am really happy for him.

You know, just shifting gears now looking forward to the Iowa State game, first of all, just general comment here, it's I think a great thing for our entire state. It's a game that's been really heated and a great rivalry through the years for a long, long time.

You think about what it is right now, first of all, it's a tough contest for the people involved, the players and coaches. Tough preparations I'm sure on both sides. I know it is at this end.

You just think about the fact that our state, 3 million plus, has two top-quality Power Five programs. Throw UNI in there and then a lot of good Division II and Division III programs, as well, it's really amazing. I don't know if there's another state that can say that. I think it's all good for everybody.

I've always thought this series is a good thing for our state just in general. This is one week where people in the state, a lot of people are talking about football, which is a good thing for college football fans certainly.

When it comes to Iowa State, they're not only a talented team but they are very experienced, and on top of that really well-coached, certainly since Coach Campbell and his staff have gotten into Ames. They've just done a wonderful job building a great program. I think we've all witnessed that last year, over the years but certainly last year, and they're off to a good start right now.

As I said, they've got really experienced players. They've got all the right players at the critical positions. A lot of guys with very deserved honors. It's going to be a big, big challenge for us.

Offensively you can start wherever you want to start. They've got a running back that had close to 1,600 yards last year. He's an outstanding football player, a couple very talented and outstanding tight ends, veteran offensive line, good group of receivers, and then the quarterback has done a great job for quite a while, and he certainly is their leader on that offensive team, and they've got a great scheme. It's a tough preparation for us that way.

Defensively, again, it's a very unique preparation. They've played good defense; basically once they got settled and got established, they've been playing good defense for quite a while in a conference that maybe that's not as common. So to me I think that's really helped separate them.

Their guys play extremely hard. It's a unique preparation, as I mentioned, and they've got a lot of veterans there, and that outside linebacker is a tremendous player. The safety is an outstanding player, but they've got a lot of other guys that do a great job, as well. Again, just a challenge there.

Then special teams, really well-coached, play hard, very, very productive. So really it's just a very big challenge for us right now. All you've got to do is look at the last three times that we've played, and they've all been basically one-possession games that went right down to the wire. I know a couple years ago it ended up being 10 points, but we had a score late. At that point it was a three-point game, I believe.

It's just a tough football team that we're playing, and big challenge for us.

Our captains are the same guys. We have Tyler Linderbaum, Jack Koerner, Matt Hankins and Spencer Petras will lead us out there. Kyler Schott is still out, and we'll see what it looks like next week or the week after, but he's still out. Other than that we're in pretty good shape.

Our kid captain this week is Cece Hoover, who's an eight-year-old young lady from Urbandale and we are happy that she'll be our kid captain this week.

Last thing I'll say, I think it's just great after a year's hiatus from this -- last year was an unusual year in a lot of regards, so it's good to have the series back. I think it's great for the entire state and it will certainly be exciting on Saturday. I'll throw it out for questions.

Q. Talk about Tory Taylor; he averaged 49 yards a punt. Is that Reggie Roby kind of territory?

KIRK FERENTZ: It's awfully good. He did a nice job. He had a great year last year. Reggie Roby was just one of the most special players I've ever been around. All you had to do was hear him punt and you knew he was a little bit different.

But it's awfully good, and we're certainly glad that Tory is with us.

Q. I think Kolar is expected to play this week at tight end. How much of a difference was that watching them without him, and does that mean more Jestin Jacobs at your end?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, that's possible. If there's been one shift over the years, the last couple years, it's personnel that they play to, but it's like anybody else; if you have good players you tend to try to get them on the field as much as possible, and last year they had three really good tight ends.

That was a big part of what they did, and they were very successful with it. Just look at the bowl game. Obviously if one of them is out there, that might change their thinking a little bit, but we expect and we expect him to play for sure. He's an outstanding player.

Q. You mentioned it's nice to have this series back. Did you miss having the series and playing these guys last season?

KIRK FERENTZ: For about a month and a half we just missed playing. So first things first on that one.

When we were able to get back up and running, the primary emotion was just, hey, lets get back together here and start working again, so that was the best part.

But last year on a lot of fronts there was nothing any of us could have done about a lot of things that happened, and you just take it day by day.

We all survived, and we all did fine. I think when it comes to our state, this is just a good thing.

Q. In this game it's a big deal no matter if both of you are 0-2 when you play or now ranked in the top 10. Does it have any kind of a different feel knowing that you're both -- maybe the signature game in college football on Saturday and both near the top of the ranking?

KIRK FERENTZ: I was just going to say, I can't remember this not being a tough game, but I can go back to the '80s and there were a couple that weren't so tough.

But the last 20, 22 years, any time we've lined up, it's been a tough challenge. I think records have been different during that through the course of time certainly, but you just always expect it to be a real battle, and this one I think will be the same way.

It just so happens right now that both of us have teams that have had some success. The big difference is that you look at our game from last time, there's a lot of guys on that film in their red uniforms that are still there, and a lot of guys in our white uniforms that weren't there, so that's probably the biggest difference. But they've done a great job, and they've got a really good football team right now, and we have our hands full, I know that.

Q. Statistically it wasn't a big game for the wide receivers, but what did you see from them going back and watching film? What's your confidence level with that group heading into this game where big plays and big performances might be needed?

KIRK FERENTZ: Plays come as they do. Sometimes you try to get a guy a ball, that type of thing, there are different ways of doing that, but overall you play the game to win it and then just wherever the ball goes is where it goes typically. I feel good about our receivers. I didn't last January, but I feel good right now just about what we've seen them do, not only during spring practice but maybe more so since we got going in August. I think we've seen a lot of growth and development with the guys, and I think we've got a good group right now.

It's a good group, and the one thing about the whole thing offensively, and it's probably true everywhere, is over the course of 12 games, I think we'll know better about where all our strengths and weaknesses are, but we have total confidence in those guys, and they'll make their share of plays during the course of the year.

Q. Saturday is the 20th anniversary of 9/11. You were supposed to play Iowa State that week 20 years ago. I was wondering if you could recount your memories of that week and the game that -- it took a while to get that game postponed, and just perhaps the emotion, the chaos, whatever, that you remember.

KIRK FERENTZ: It was a Tuesday morning if I recall, and Matt Engelbert asked me to come over to his office. He had the TV on there. So that part is very surreal. And then probably even stranger, we practiced that afternoon because as far as we knew we had a game.

I don't know how many people felt like this, but I know at this point now that I really didn't grasp, fully grasp, what was taking place on the impact of that whole thing. I remember that, and then obviously the game got postponed at some point. I also remember I ended up in Pittsburgh that weekend, went back and saw a high school game and visited my parents.

But the magnitude of what took place, however old I was at that point 20 years ago, I'm not sure I grasped it totally, and how it's all changed all of our lives, not to mention just the tragedy of the whole thing and all the loss.

So it's a really significant part of our history. The interesting part, the guys that we coach here, a lot of them weren't born or a lot of them were infants at that point. Just the historical perspective of the whole thing, it's amazing. But it's changed our country and changed the world.

Q. Do you remember anything at all about the practice or practices before that game got canceled on Thursday?

KIRK FERENTZ: It was a strange feeling because you're going in, you're trying to focus and concentrate on a game preparation and getting ready for a game. On the other hand, it's one of the most hard-to-grasp events that's ever happened probably in our country, certainly in my lifetime. You know, it's just a weird combination, really strange combination.

Q. Charlie Jones limped off the other day; how is he doing?

KIRK FERENTZ: Everybody practiced this morning, so we're optimistic right now. Everybody worked, other than some other guys that weren't on the two-deep.

Q. You know that there are a lot of good players who haven't played in front of fans going into what's going to be a raucous crowd. What goes into the challenge of preparing the players to play in a hostile environment?

KIRK FERENTZ: It's one more thing that adds to the degree of difficulty. To your point, especially coming off last year. We have some guys that played last year, but they don't know what it's like to go on the road in a hostile environment. We have a lot of those in our conference, and then you throw this one in, too, this is as loud as any of them.

It's one more thing that really can take you off your game a little bit or throw you off, and you have to concentrate your way through. It can be impactful, so it's just one more element to deal with in an already tough contest as it sits there.

It's a challenge.

Q. How do you prepare guys for that?

KIRK FERENTZ: It's difficult. You pipe music in and all that, but it's not the same and you can't duplicate the emotion -- and part of it's just experience. You have to experience it sometimes. I thought it impacted our opponents the other day, a little bit, helped us a little bit. So it's one more thing we're going to have to try to push through, and hopefully there won't be any weather issues to deal with, as well. That might be as unusual as you could ever get, but it's one more thing to deal with.

Q. Iowa State's defense being unique, the 3-3-5, the star player, how does that affect your game plan schematically on offense?

KIRK FERENTZ: A lot. It affects everything you do. It's unique. I don't coach there, just I've watched from afar, but I think that's one of the reasons they've had the success. That conference overall is not known maybe as much for defense as some of the others, but one of the first things I think about is the way they play defense, and they do that very well, and it leads to good results a lot of times, and if you can run the ball successfully, which they obviously have done that, too, so it's a pretty good combination.

They're a disciplined team. They don't hurt themselves with penalties, turnovers, so it's a pretty good combination for winning football games, and I think that's one of the reasons we've seen them be as successful.

It's a unique preparation. You don't see that much. It's not the same as last week, but we've had two teams that are both veteran teams, both a lot of good players and well-coached and tough preparations, tough schemes. So it's another week of that, and that's a challenge.

Q. Do you prepare Spencer for something like that so he can add a little more, add a little more in the running game or tight ends --

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, we have to try to put a good plan together that's going to give us a chance to execute what we think might have a chance. But it's not easy. We have plenty of film. The good news is we can see most of their players on film. We have a good idea who's going to be there. Not always sure where exactly they're going to be or what they're going to do, but they're going to be well-coached and they're going to play hard.

You get to tangibly see these guys on film, and we have one game of this year, but a lot of their guys are veteran.

Q. When you were building a program you had some roadblocks against some schools, what did it feel like for you when you finally punched through and started beating those programs?

KIRK FERENTZ: One of many. We had a lot of obstacles, certainly, but when we were 1-10 that first year, that's where we started. You try to build off of that and much focus on what's in front of you. But yeah, those are things that are certainly talked about, I know and realize.

But the one good thing, you mentioned Wisconsin, the one good thing about getting beat by them so convincingly, I guess it was week 10 in those days where you

played 11, at least we got to look at what it looks like, this is what success looks like on the field, off the field, the whole nine yards. And then you always have rivalry type games, although it is an unusual one when you have two conferences in one state like this. That adds to it a little bit. But yeah, those are all things that are significant.

But bottom line is you want to do better each day, do better than you did yesterday, and hopefully there's going to be a cumulative effect at some point.

Q. After you win the Big Ten, you went to the Orange Bowl, you still hadn't beaten them at that point, but then to be able to punch through and get that win --

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I think more than not beating them was the way we lost that -- well, either of the last two, the one -- their guy made a great play, knocked the ball out after we had a pick. It was an unbelievable play. And then just our -- we basically collapsed in 2002.

But I'm an optimist, so I think that helped us two weeks down the road at Penn State because we were able to learn from that and do a better job when we collapsed again. Sometimes you collapse out there, but you still have time to pick yourself up, and that was a takeaway from that game.

That's what you do, you try to learn when things go bad, okay, how can we fix that and how can we do better next time.

Q. Do you have an appreciation for these types of opportunities? I know they're hard to get where you have a No. 10 team going on the road against another top-10 team.

KIRK FERENTZ: I mean, rankings mean a lot more in October and November. They really mean something in January. But I think the bigger story is that you have two teams that are arguably -- they are established. There's a reason why they're in the top 10 to start with.

Like I said, you look at every position, and they've got good players that are experienced and know how to play. Obviously, goal-wise we would love to get up into that tier and be there for a while, that type of thing, but right now it's more about how can we get ready for a game here at 3:36 on Saturday, and that's a race we're running right now against a really good team.

Q. Outside of the two turnovers on Saturday, what else were you able to take away as far as areas of improvement offensively that will be a focus this week?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, that's what I mentioned, a negative and a positive was compared to a year ago we were a lot better penalty-wise, but there's just a lot of little teaching things on that tape that you try to simulate things in a scrimmage and what have you. It's just still not the same because you don't know how -- especially inexperienced players are going to react when it is game time, where it counts and everybody is watching.

So I thought just the general demeanor of the guys that haven't played was good, but there's a million things they can work on, and usually they're just fundamental things that you hope guys do a better job this week in practice being mindful of some little things they can clean up, then you hope there's a cumulative effect by doing things better, more quality fashion over a series of weeks, and that's how you develop good habits out there and good fundamentals.

Q. A veteran defense in Indiana; how much of a confidence booster is that for those younger players that for the most part were able to execute a game plan?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, we handled a lot of really tough things that they threw at us, and we knew they were going to throw things at us. You just don't know how you're going to handle them, but I thought we a lot of things pretty well. Missed a couple, and this one is a different set of circumstances, a different set of challenges. But there are challenges there. They've got a system they really believe in, and they play it extremely well.

I don't think we're a -- it's not like we're alike because we're not scheme-wise, but I think there are some parallels in the fact that they believe in playing defense. Like that's important to their program; that's obvious, and they've committed to it and their players believe in it, and they do a heck of a job.

They have a personality there, and that's -- I think really you've got two teams that believe in that, and that makes it a real challenge. It'll probably be 48-41 again, one of those deals, but I don't see that coming, I just think it's going to be tough to -- I know from our standpoint we're going to have to really work hard to move the ball.

Q. You played these guys two years ago, Breece Hall had one carry. A couple weeks later, he breaks out and becomes their guy. Now he's really where things start for them on offense. What is it that he does so well that's a challenge full on with that veteran offensive line?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, they're experienced up front. They know how to play. Probably anything you throw at them, they've handled before. And you include the tight ends in that group, too. That's part of their scheme. And then you throw in the fact that their quarterback will run by design and then he can pull it out and -- so that gives you a lot of things to worry about defensively.

But yeah, he's just an extraordinary player. He's a really good football player and can do a lot of things that a back his size normally wouldn't be able to do, but he can do them. He's a big back. There's really not much that we've seen that he can't do. I don't know how many guys had more yards than him last year in the country, but there couldn't have been a long list of them, that's for sure.

Q. Does seeing a guy like Tyler in practice help your defense prepare for a running back like Breece Hall?

KIRK FERENTZ: They're different kinds of guys. It's hard to simulate that. But Tyler is a really good back, too, but he's just a -- this guy is big, physical, and can stop,

start. He's got good vision, and they use him in the passing game, too, so he's just an all-around back, really good player.

Q. With College Gameday in town and this is supposed to be one of their best teams ever, they might even break out their traditional black uniforms, you've always handled pressure really well, your teams have always handled pressure really well --

KIRK FERENTZ: Not always.

Q. -- so the pressure is really on them this year. How do you think your team can expose that?

KIRK FERENTZ: I know Gameday was here last time we played up there, and again, that's great for I think just the state of Iowa, visibility, so that's a good thing. But all that being said, I never knew they were there. We got off a bus, we walk in, and you don't see -- we miss -- the people playing in the games miss all that stuff. We're totally disconnected from that.

All I know, and hopefully our players understand, we're going into a really tough environment against a really good football team with a lot of good players at all positions. That's the reality of it all, and that's what we've got to focus on. You can't worry about all the circumstances outside, you really can't. If you do, you're wasting energy and time. Hopefully everybody will understand that.

Q. I didn't hear him saying this, but it's been reported that one of your prominent players said that this is like their Super Bowl, and them being at home, knowing College Gameday is going to be there is a good distraction for them. Does your previous statement mean you would disagree with that?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I hope he's right, our player is right, but I doubt it. I just can't imagine -- yeah, it's a big deal, I'm not minimizing Gameday or any of that stuff, but it really doesn't have anything to do with the game. My guess is they're going to be totally focused on playing well. That would be my guess.

Q. Looking at the defensive line unit, to play as many guys as you did for as many snaps as each of them got, what can you say about the maturation process of several of those guys from maybe the midway point of camp to now where you have that much trust in them to play that many snaps?

KIRK FERENTZ: As I said prior to the game, I felt good about -- we've seen Zach play a lot of football for us and he's a good player. I felt fairly confident that Noah would play well, that John Waggoner would play well, Joe Evans, because those guys have been out there on the field. But the other guys I was really pleasantly -- I don't want to say surprised, but I was pleased with what we saw.

Again, it wasn't always pretty, but they were playing hard, and they looked aggressive and they didn't look like they were like timid or playing on eggshells, and that was really good to see.

So that's what you hope, but you just never know until they get out there. Same thing with those offensive linemen that hadn't played. I was trying not to think too hard about how little our tackles had played or one of our guard spots there.

I thought the guys competed, and they did a lot of really good things. So I think those are all things that we can build off of hopefully and keep pushing forward with. One thing I've been optimistic about is we have a chance to really improve as a football team hopefully daily and weekly, but that's all talk and rhetoric if you don't make it happen. That's what we've got to do.

Q. Spencer had a couple of pivotal plays, 4th and 2 pass to Charlie Jones and then that touchdown draw. What goes into those kinds of decisions, and also like are those decisions things you would have done with Spencer a year ago? How does that speak to his growth?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I think we probably still would have called the draw. He had two guys laying on the ground afterwards; that was a little scary. But you know, he's just -- he looked more comfortable, if that's the right word, just a little bit more at ease. But really it gets down to experience. I think you can't give that to someone or hand it to them, they've got to go out and go through things and work through things, ups and downs.

I think he hardly feels like he's arrived, but he knows he's a better football player, more capable of handling things, and I think he's got a good supporting group around him, so hopefully we can just kind of make this thing all mesh and work well week to week, but every week is going to be a little different set of challenges.

Q. It will be his first start on the road in a hostile environment, but he is a fourth-year junior. Does that give you some reassurance?

KIRK FERENTZ: It's not the same, but yeah, when I was talking about Noah and some of those guys on the defensive line, at least he's been around and this isn't going to be, geez, where am I, one of those deals. He's witnessed all this stuff.

You know, but he's in control, so it's a little different, a little different seat.

Q. Against some of the other Iowa State staffs it was almost like with recruiting you went after your guys, they went after their guys and there wasn't a lot of crossover, maybe a few players here and there, but it seems like your staff and Iowa State's staff have really crossed over a lot more in the last couple of years. Am I seeing things? Is that true? Is it something that you feel like you guys identify a lot of the same players, both in state and regionally?

KIRK FERENTZ: I think that's pretty fair. I think that's pretty fair. We'll get some of our guys and they'll get some of their guys, but I think that's fair. I'm not sure -- we certainly think recruiting in state, and I think most staffs do, think you want to start at home and go from there, but you also have to go other places just because of our lack of population.

But yeah, I think -- that's, again, one of the reasons to me it's amazing that you have two teams that are ranked because you think about a state of 3 million, I can't imagine there's anything even close to this right now. Maybe there is. But there is no Wisconsin State, Nebraska State, Utah -- there is a Utah State, okay, I take that back. But you get the picture. There's only so many players to go around. Yeah, it's interesting.

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