

University of Iowa Football Media Conference
Saturday, October 31, 2020
Iowa City, Iowa, USA
Coach Kirk Ferentz Post-Game Press Conference
Northwestern 21 - Iowa 20



KIRK FERENTZ: I'll start by congratulating Northwestern on the victory. They certainly played hard and played a better second half than we did, and that really was the story of the game. I thought our guys came ready to go. We got off to a fast start, did a lot of good things in the first half and then the second half was a whole different story.

You have to play the full 60 minutes, and at the end of the game really all the critical areas, running the football, third-down conversions and the turnover rate, obviously those things are going to be important deciding any football game. We did a good job of that in the first half, not so much in the second half. They finished

the game and we weren't able to. That's kind of where it's at right now.

We have an unusual week, a disrupted week coming up, so it's the first time for us, as every team faces, but it'll pose some unique challenges and we're going to have to be sure that we handle that well because we certainly have a lot of improvement to make, and that's got to be our focus. But we're going to have to handle the week on top of it.

Q. From your perspective, what caused you guys to go stagnant in the second half?

KIRK FERENTZ: Well, it's never easy to say what caused anything. But an obvious thing is we had a couple picks, our first four possessions, five possessions -- looking down it was our first five possessions, two of them were picks, so it's not a good thing. We just didn't run the ball effectively and didn't throw it effectively enough, either.

Q. The second quarter defensively, Northwestern was able to move the ball fairly well on the ground. What were the issues that you saw at that point?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, two things in the first half. The quarterback runs really affected us, when he was back there and saw an opening, Ramsey did a really good job of taking those openings. That was hurtful, a couple of those. And then in the

second quarter especially, I just thought we started catching blocks and they were blocking us, and their backs run hard. We knew that going in.

So that was disappointing. They did a good job taking advantage of that.

Q. 51 passing attempts and 23 rushing attempts in a game you led 17-0. Is that a balance that you think was a little bit off today?

KIRK FERENTZ: I think if you look historically, if you look at those kind of numbers, it means the outcome wasn't good. Yeah, we didn't run the ball effectively enough today. Certainly we had a couple good runs, hit on a couple of them, but with consistency not enough. So that's something we're going to have to get addressed because we don't want to play that way -- I'll go on record saying that, we don't want to play that way. Looking for a lot more balance than that.

Q. You struggled after the first quarter, or Spencer did. What did you think of his performance overall and in what ways can he get better?

KIRK FERENTZ: I thought our first half really wasn't bad, other than we started with a three-and-out. But we drove the ball in the whole first half. And then I think two things in the first half, we ended up the ball inside the 5-yard line, ended up with a field goal instead of a touchdown. That certainly turned out to be a big thing. And then Caleb made a great effort there at the end of the half to give us a chance on that one, and that one kick is probably representative of our game today: Close but not close enough. But that was a good drive, too. We drove the ball and drove it pretty successfully.

So I think it was a contrast in the two halves. You throw a couple picks in there and that makes a difference, too. Tipped balls, those kinds of things, that's never good. The bottom line is we just didn't have much consistency in that second half offensively.

Q. Statistics, I know they can be kind of warped, but in the last five Big Ten games you've had, you haven't scored a touchdown in the second half, and I realize you did win three of those, but does that say something?

KIRK FERENTZ: The most important stat is winning, so as long as we're winning, we'll live with that. But to that point, they outplayed us in the second half today. And again, a lot of that is we turned the ball over a couple times, I'll drop that last one, but the two times prior to that, that's not a good thing.

And you know, it was a team loss. We didn't really do anything well enough consistently today to expect to win in a Big Ten game. That's two weeks in a row, so those are the things we're going to have to focus on.

One thing we did pretty well, Tory really punted the ball well. He gave us a chance to be successful, and our place-kickers did a good job. We have to do a better job there. We have to be more consistent. That was a team thing in that second half, not just the offense.

Q. Daviyon said Iowa football is about finishing football, about finishing games. How do you get that going? And also Coy Cronk got taken out; was that injury related or performance related?

KIRK FERENTZ: Coy just didn't look quite comfortable enough, so we'll go back to work Monday. He missed a lot of time, as I said, in the past, and he's still working through some things, but Coy is a tremendous guy. He's going to be a good player for us. I thought he was struggling a little bit.

And then finishing plays, it's like anything. It's a day-by-day process and it's a matter of stacking things up and finding ways to get the job done.

We did get a spark with Jack Koerner's interception. I thought hopefully that was going to get us going a little bit but we weren't able to really capitalize on it. All the good things we did in the first half we weren't able to do in the second half.

It's a matter of playing that full 60, and every situation is a little bit different, but it gets back to just trying to practice a little bit better, meet a little bit better, and hopefully that carries over to the game field. There's no magic formula for it.

Q. Is it frustrating when you can't capitalize on those momentum swings that you create, especially when you don't have fans necessarily to feed off of energy-wise?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, that part we knew coming in. We've practiced in Kinnick so at least we've had practice that way. But it's going to be that way all season long, so you just have to play through that.

But it is frustrating because, like Jack's play, that should be a spark play, give us a chance maybe to get something going, but that's part of the process, too, and we're just not quite there yet. That's really evident the last two weeks; we just need to get over the hump, just like teams need to learn how to win, and we're probably in that situation, too. We've lost two close games. So what do you have to do to push it forward to get the job done. As you guys have all witnessed already in two weeks, it's a week-to-week thing; there's no way to predict what's going to happen next week based on this week. We need to focus on us, our performance, our preparation and see if we can't do a better job next time we get an opportunity to play.

Q. Before the game started, we saw players on the sideline taking a knee. We've talked to you about this in the past before, and you've said if you were going to make a decision as a team it would be one decision where everyone would come together. How did you guys kind of come to this decision with some guys kneeling, some guys standing with their hand on their shoulder?

KIRK FERENTZ: You know, what you referenced was about four years ago, three years ago.

A lot of things have changed this past year, probably in our whole country. As it pertains to us, as of last Tuesday, we had three very direct conversations about the

topic, and the point that I came to is that what the our leadership group decided. We had great conversation, thoughtful dialogue, and shared a letter with a veteran who saw it one way and then also our team, our entire team was on a Zoom call with a 20-year Seal who also had two administrations in the White House, I think, and he had a very different opinion.

Long story short, the conversation was great, and what we all decided was we're going to respect each other's opinions on the topic, and to me that means doing things as a team. The dialogue was outstanding, and the key point was everybody said what they felt, but everybody also agreed that we're going to have respect for each other's opinions, and that's really quite something, something our country is badly in need of right now, just a little bit more listening and a little bit more civil conversation. I couldn't be more proud of our leadership group, not only those meetings but the other meetings we've had. They've been tremendous, and I think that's what you saw today. I think we're all on the same page there, and I don't know what else you could ask for as a coach that way.

Q. The last couple of games, I guess going back to the bowl game, you guys have used a lot of lateral movement, which seems to have helped not only with the jet sweeps but also just with helping your offense move the ball a little bit. There wasn't any today, very little motion. Was the reasoning just based on their defense and that was what you felt was a good conclusion, not to do that this week?

KIRK FERENTZ: In the bowl game we had time to look at a lot of film and had a lot of film. That was something that became apparent they were struggling with during the season. We didn't know if they'd get it fixed by then, but it gave us some help. Conversely we didn't see any evidence where that might be something to really help us today, so we'll look at it tomorrow in retrospect and see if that's something we need to do more of or could do more of against this particular team. They have a distinct personality, and the plays we called today, the plays we ran are the ones we thought might have a chance to have success. But in the second half we just didn't have enough there to be successful.

Q. Two games in, it would be perfectly natural for Spencer to maybe start pressing a little bit. Do you feel like that's happening, and how do you guard against that where maybe he's trying to do too much?

KIRK FERENTZ: That's something I worry about with a lot of players. Anybody that plays quarterback that's certainly something, and then I worry about some of our veteran guys. The best thing anybody can do offensively or defensively, special teams is just do what they're supposed to do, and then if they do that with a little bit of extra that's always good, too. Yeah, certainly I think we can be careful.

The bottom line is Spencer is a two-game quarterback right now, so he's a very young guy. This was not a fun experience certainly, wasn't a great experience for him in that second half, but he'll grow from this because he's so conscientious and he works well. He'll be better for it, but boy, it's hard in the process, we all know that. It's just part of the game sometimes, so he'll get back up on his feet, we'll go

back to work tomorrow and I'm confident he'll be a better player moving forward, but yeah, that's certainly something we always worry about.

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