



**University of Iowa Football Media Conference
Saturday, November 7, 2020
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Coach Kirk Ferentz Press Conference
Iowa 49 - Michigan State 7**



KIRK FERENTZ: Good afternoon, first of all. Just very proud of our team today. Just really proud of their effort, their effort all week, and obviously the performance today was really everything we had hoped for. I thought the guys played really hard out there. They played tough and they played physical. Just really pleased.

Certainly all three segments played well, and most importantly they complemented each other. Not to single players out, but two of the first names that would come to mind for me would be our punter Tory Taylor and also Charlie Jones, two guys that are newcomers that just really impacted the game today in a really positive way. Not also to single out our kickoff coverage team, not that they covered a lot of kicks today, but they've been outstanding all season long, so just really proud of that, as

well.

I thought we got off to a strong start and then we just kept playing well and complementary football, as I mentioned, and certainly feels good to get the win today. We needed a win. We needed to play well. Our guys really responded and did a great job on that.

We have to transition now because we've got another challenge. You probably noticed there's a four-week block here. This is week two, finishing week two, but in those four weeks we have three weeks that are very different as opposed to a normal week, which kind of makes the normal week different, too, because it'll be normal in the midst of some weird weeks. Because of that we really want the guys to enjoy the game today, feel good about what they did, what they accomplished, but we've got to really transition fast tomorrow and think about our next game

because we're going to be playing Friday. There won't be seven days this time to get ready, down to six, and we certainly still have a lot of work to do.

That's where we're at right now.

The note I made at the end of the week this past week, win, lose or draw today, my point of emphasis to the team is I still think we can practice better. We're doing better weekly, but we still can practice better, and that's not going to change. That theme won't change. It's a shorter week, an unusual week, but we really needed to have a good week of practice and that's where we're at.

Proud of our guys. I think we have a good team. I've always felt like we have a bunch of good guys on our team, and it was good to see them pull together and have some success. I'll throw it out for some questions.

Q. Riley Moss said that it was your best week of preparation this year, and other players said it was a really good week of prep. The short week apparently didn't matter judging by comments like that. What do you think?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, it was a little different this past week. Normally Tuesdays and Wednesdays are heavy workdays for us and we couldn't work on Tuesday, obviously. Had to cut things back and really Wednesday was our only hard workday, if you will.

You know, a big part of that, when you're in those kinds of situations, which again we're going to be in the next couple weeks here, it's as much mental as it is physical, and the other thing I would tell you is every good team I've been around learns how to practice each week and learns how to do it better, and they don't get distracted. We still have room for improvement. I wouldn't disagree with Riley but we have room for improvement and we also need to make sure we don't get distracted.

Basically a third of our season is over. There's a lot of work in front of us right now, and hopefully we can build on this instead of be distracted by what happened today.

Q. Can you talk about the importance of the run game today? You know you were missing a couple of guys with Cronk and Schott, I guess. Is there an update on them? Are they injured? Is this long-term? Can you divulge anything that way?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I asked a message to be sent right before the game. It was medical for both those guys, so we'll see how this week goes. We'll see how it goes.

But to that point, it creates opportunity. We've always talked about the next man in, next man up, and graduation causes that, injuries cause that, so it gave some other guys an opportunity to play. I don't know if this was Cody's first start. I think it is, but I thought he did a good job, answered the bell, and certainly Mark Kallenberger out at right tackle did a good job, too. I think it's his first start at tackle. I'm not 100 percent sure.

But the guys practiced well all week, and I think we lost Shooter somewhere midweek, but nobody flinched, they just kept working and I was really happy about that. And then the run game and the balance is something we always strive for. Going back last week, I know we threw it 50 or 51 times, 21 of those were in two-minute drives. You've got to keep that in consideration, too.

At the end of the day we like to be balanced if at all possible depending on what the defense is doing against us.

Q. You brought him up so I'll follow up here, Tory Taylor. Give me a sense of how big of a factor he's been in your eyes with the directional kicks, the distance, the field position he created today.

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, first of all, just totally unexpected because he's new. He's new to the game. He's new to America. I mean, you go right down the list.

And any time you're counting on newcomers you must know something that other people don't know. He's just been a really pleasant addition to our team. I think it's really interesting if you look at today's game, two of the biggest impact players are guys that are newcomers, both Charlie Jones and Tory.

Tory is a little bit more of a better story because again, this is his first exposure to American football, but he doesn't seem fazed by anything, including wind. Last week was a really tricky situation wind-wise, today it was a factor, and he just goes out and plays. Just really happy for him, really proud of him. He's a delightful young man, just a tremendous young person, so he's been a great addition.

Weather conditions like this week and last week, that makes you that much more impressed, and I think he's gained all of our confidence, certainly his teammates and all of the coaching staff, so been a really good addition for us.

Q. When did you think Charlie Jones might be able to have an impact in your program? Was it going back to when he first showed up in practice, or when was that?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I mean, he's shown some signs and all that, and I think some of the assistants were a little more convinced than I was. Sometimes you've got to see things. To me the million-dollar question was going to be when we really started him in our offense or him returning punts and doing it in live action.

It's true of every player; you just feel better after you've seen him on a game field actually competing.

As you guys know, returning punts is a really tough thing to do. It's tricky, and the last two weeks just like I said with Tory, it's really tricky in the weather conditions, but I mean, I haven't had an anxious moment with him back there. I just feel really good with him back there fielding, good judgment, good ball skills, and what he showed today I think was really what some of our guys, offensive guys especially thought, and we don't practice punt returns a lot, we just don't do that, or kick returns. I still go back to the '80s seeing Quinn Early get his shoulder knocked out.

I'll never forget that, on a kickoff coverage in a scrimmage, so we just don't do that, and to watch the way he's performed three weeks now, it's really great.

He's a pretty good player on offense, too, so you'll see him keep working forward that way, as well.

Q. When you look at the pass rush, it seems like each week it's taking steps forward. It's becoming more active and it's not only -- it's making disruption, which I think is ultimately the goal, and sacks are just part of that. In what ways have you seen the growth and how has it been instrumental to this defense getting better week by week?

KIRK FERENTZ: You know, that's what football is all about in my opinion, especially here. If you look at our D-line, I think you guys know this stuff better than I do, Chauncey is the only guy back that really was a starter, right. Daviyon is playing really well, and played last year, but he didn't play last year like he's playing now. But he also had two seniors sitting in front of him that impacted that a little bit.

The whole idea for everybody is to move forward, grow and move forward and improve, and sometimes you take a couple steps back when you're trying to do that. Failure is part of growth, but we're seeing improvement, guys are working hard, and when guys work hard, that's positive.

I've got to tell you, I was pleasantly impressed or pleased with our backup guys today. I thought when they were in there we saw some better things, and I don't know if Joe Evans is maybe not a backup, we're rotating him in there, but he is; he's not starting when the game started. Noah I thought played better, John Waggoner, so seeing those guys getting involved, too -- it's got to be a group effort, so if everybody is moving forward, maybe we've got a chance to become a good team.

Q. My understanding is you got a game ball for passing Joe Paterno today in the locker room. What did that mean to you?

KIRK FERENTZ: It probably means I've been here a while, right? You know, that stuff is all great, and I promise you, it wasn't prominent on my mind. We needed to play well today. That's what we needed to do.

It's great. Whenever I retire, whenever that day comes, hopefully it's not for quite a while, although I'm sure some people are wondering about that, then we'll sit around and talk about stuff like that. It's neat, but what's more important is we got a win today. I'm really, really happy for our players.

Q. I'm going to test your memory going back to 1981. Do you remember another Charlie Jones, Coach Fry sneaking --

KIRK FERENTZ: One-play Charlie. Y-split, against Indiana. Y-split.

Q. Any other memories of that play?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, it was a touchdown and we needed one, so it was pretty good. We ran it to the south end zone. I think he was lined up at right tight end at 100-however many pounds he was, but they didn't get it, and right down the

middle. It was called a Y-split. Ask Donny Patterson, he'll verify that or he'll say I'm full of crap, but anyway...

One-play Charlie, right?

Q. Charlie Jones told us about 10 minutes ago he's not yet on scholarship. Has that changed yet in the last 10 minutes or when do you expect to be able to do that?

KIRK FERENTZ: We'll do it when it's appropriate. I'm a big believer in earning things, I guess. That's kind of how it's always worked and it's usually how the game works. But we've also got a pretty storied tradition of walk-ons and I think we've always been really fair with them. We'll take care of that whenever it's appropriate. He certainly made big steps today, that's for sure. If his agent contacts me tomorrow we'll talk about it and see where it all goes.

Q. Two of your key players you expected to have going into this season were Austin Schulte and Jack Campbell. What's their status, and when they are back and they are practicing, do you anticipate them stepping into the starting lineup, working their way in? Where do you see them fitting in?

KIRK FERENTZ: Austin is going to actually start doing some work. I don't know how soon we'll get him out to the field with full contact and all that, but he'll start being able to work tomorrow. Maybe he can help us out this week; that would be great to get him back. He does such a great job leadership-wise, and I can say the same thing about Jack, although Jack is not a veteran guy like Austin.

But with Jack, unless something happens I'm not aware of, he's cleared to start working tomorrow. But the problem is he's got three weeks of inactivity, and it wasn't COVID related, so he's got three weeks of inactivity, total inactivity, so his conditioning base is -- it's going to be a little bit of a concern. We'll have the defensive coaches mad at me and mad at Kammy and the doctors, but we've got to be smart about how we move him forward.

I haven't given any thought to who's going to start next week, but Jack is a really good football player, he was our starter coming into the season, and it'll be good to get him back. He's a really good football player, as is Austin, so those guys are both very valuable.

Q. You talked about it earlier, about needing a win today. Just with how crazy this season is set up, the short weeks and just anything can happen during a week, do you guys as coaches or did you this week have to kind of give a hint of a sense of urgency or could you see that the kids knew that there was a sense of urgency if you guys want these bigger goals? We say it every year, but with how this season is built and with the craziness, I'm sure it must feel a different with the, quote-unquote, sense of urgency.

KIRK FERENTZ: Yes and no. When we played 12 games, every game is important. This isn't baseball; we don't get 162 of them. It's a whole different mentality in football. If every game is not important to you, if it's not a must-win -- I always get a kick out of that must-win stuff. Marv Levy still writes about that, World War II,

must win. But games are important. Like we only get so many chances, and talk to some of the guys that have been hurt. Ask Austin Schulte about how important a game is.

You know, that's the approach, but we needed success, and I don't mean that like success or else mode. I don't live in that world. I know a lot of people do. We don't live in that world in football. But we just needed to experience some success.

But right along with that comes, you have to earn it. You can't sit around counting on the other team to mess up so you go home happy. That's not the way it works. We just needed to work hard, have a good week of practice and then show it on the field, and hopefully we took a positive step today.

Now the next test is can we put back-to-back together; can we do that. And let me go back, too. The first two games I don't think that was the issue. It's been a building process. Hopefully we're on an upward trend, but time will tell.

Q. When you look at Alaric Jackson, there's less of him to look at these days, but on the field he seems to be playing pretty well. In what ways has he taken those strides and is it just merely because he's healthy or is he a better football today than he was a few years ago?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, first of all, I'm glad he's on our team. As a player and as a person, he's a tremendous young guy. The growth that we've witnessed answers that last part of your question. Hopefully all of our guys are better than they were two years ago or three years ago, and Alaric really played well two years ago. Last year after his injury he had an awesome spring, awesome camp and then he got hurt early. To me he never quite caught up. Maybe at the end of the year, but it wasn't the quality of play we were used to seeing from him in '18.

This guy is a good football player and he's an outstanding guy and he's really grown in our program. He's kind of a quiet guy. He's a quiet leader and I actually complimented him last night just on the things I've seen him do kind of the behind the scenes a little bit and the encouraging words he gives younger players. He gets it. He cares about the team, cares about us being a good team, cares about his teammates. So he's playing really well on the field, but he's doing all those things that as a coach you hope a guy would do, especially as a senior. He gets that, totally invested, I'm proud of him.

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