

University of Iowa Football

Media Conference

Sunday, December 2, 2018

Kirk Ferentz



GARY BARTA: Good to see you. Today I took what ends up being one of my favorite phone calls of the year. I don't take them for granted, Jim McVay from the Outback Bowl, executive director, gave me the call, and officially invited us to their Bowl and obviously we accepted quickly.

I love the opportunity for our student-athletes to keep their season going, and that's what this is all about, that culmination of a season.

The Outback Bowl, we're very familiar with it, and had some great trips down there. They were very interested. When we go, we travel well down there. Our fans, we have a lot of Hawkeyes that live in that area.

And I took a peak this morning, it was 37 here, 80 down there, so I know the weather is going to be great.

And then finally, you know, a little bit about during the year and especially the last couple of weeks, just a real tribute to Kirk and to our history and tradition and to our fans, because there were really three bowls extremely interested in inviting us, whether that would have been the Citrus, the Outback or the Holiday Bowl.

And the way it shook out, we get to go back to the Outback Bowl, but again, a great tribute to our fans, our players and our coaches, that there was so much interest this particular year.

HEAD COACH KIRK FERENTZ: Good to see everybody. First and foremost, just very, very happy to be selected to play in the Outback Bowl. As Gary alluded to, we've been here several times or played in the game several times, and there are two things I know.

First of all, our players are going to have a great experience. It's just a first-class operation. They do a wonderful job and I think really are very mindful about what the players like and appreciate. They obviously have a great venue to help host a Bowl game, so that part is outstanding.

The other part you is always play a top-notch SEC opponent, and that's going to be the case here, as well. Again, just very, very happy about it.

As big as anything, this allows us to be together for another month as a football team. I think that's one of the things I enjoy the most and it gives us a chance to compete out on the field one more time, as well, so that's always a great thing about playing in a Bowl game.

And to receive a bid to a Bowl is very, very significant. I remember it like yesterday, our first opportunity to go to a Bowl, the Alamo Bowl back in 2001. Going into it, the week prior to the announcement, looked like we were in good shape and then all of a sudden looked like we were going to have the rug pulled up underneath our feet, and a couple things took place. We were fortunate to get that bid.

Since that time, the Bowl scenario and the way they pick Bowls is a lot different. Those days are gone. But the thing that isn't gone is the excitement and the opportunity for our football team to be involved in a really special thing.

It's a significant accomplishment for our team and a very nice reward on top of it. I'm really happy about that.

Like any bowl, no matter what bowl you play in, our goal is to win the football game and that will be first and foremost. That being said, we know we have a big, big challenge playing Mississippi State. I don't know an awful lot about them.

There is some familiarity obviously with their head coach, his background at Penn State, and the defensive coordinator was at Penn State originally, too, with Coach Franklin, so there is some familiarity there.

I do know they have had an outstanding season and they are outstanding on defense. You can just look at statistics and see that right off the bat, but we'll learn more about them as we go along. We know we have got a big challenge and we'll go from there.

Mostly I'm just really happy for our seniors. These guys have been a tremendous group. I'm very appreciative of their contributions throughout the entire season, and obviously their entire careers and mostly for the leadership that they provide our team this year.

We're really proud of our football team this year. They competed hard, prepared well for 12 weeks and we came up short in a couple games, but just really proud of their effort.

It was certainly good for us to win a good game in that last game of ours, and my guess is what we're walking into, if we play well, it will be another close game. So hopefully we'll learn from that experience and be able to carry that into the bowl game.

All in all, it's going to take our best effort. We're going to have a good plan for Mississippi State, and then have to go out and really compete well to have a chance to beat these guys.

Q. Were you ever reticent about going back to the Outback Bowl? You've had great experiences but then there's a variety factor, whether it's yourself or the players. Did that ever enter your mind throughout this process?

HEAD COACH KIRK FERENTZ: No, not at all. As I said, the thing I know about it, firsthand, there are no bad bowls as Bill Brazier would say; some are better than others, but there are no bad ones.

We know, at least a lot of the guys on the coaching staff know firsthand, and a lot of our older players know what a great experience it is.

So it's nice to go somewhere knowing that we're going to have a tremendous opportunity to have a good experience outside of the football part of things, and then the football is a given. Anytime we've played there, we've played a really good opponent, and this will be another one of those matchups.

Q. You're familiar with the Outback Bowl, but the opponent, I don't think Iowa has ever faced. Is that something you look forward to, a new challenge that way?

HEAD COACH KIRK FERENTZ: Well, it will be a challenge no matter who we play. I know there were another couple names that were floating around, both possibilities for us to go places, and then the opponents.

You know, your vision is pretty tunnel vision during the course of the season. I know a little bit about the teams in our conference because you see them on film a lot, but this will be a whole new dive for us to jump in and start doing research on Mississippi State.

But just first blush, it looks like they are an outstanding defensive football team. I know they have a really good quarterback. Sounds like a guy who is a very strong

leader.

But yeah, we have a lot of work to do to catch up and find out more about them. The good news is there's plenty of time. It's not like we are playing next week, or even two weeks from now. So there's plenty of time for that.

How we handle this month will be really important, but again you're playing an outstanding SEC team, and we saw two really good SEC teams play yesterday on TV. I think it's just representative of the kind of league and conference they have.

Q. You're leaving maybe on the 26th, later than normal from what you've done in the past. Is that something that you learned last year; you don't have to go as early?

HEAD COACH KIRK FERENTZ: It was part of our plan last year and obviously because of the game we played and it just kind of dictated that, logistics and what have you there.

We've come to that conclusion probably the year before that, coming out of the 2016 game, or 2016 season game, that it was something we wanted to look at.

And a big part of that is the building we're in right now. It allows us an operation that's very comfortable, and what we can't duplicate is the weather obviously at Florida in Iowa City.

But everything else, I think we have a good chance to operate out of here, and the guys are comfortable. They are sleeping in their own beds and that type of deal, and instead of being in a hotel for nine or ten days.

So I think we're comfortable with the plan. Given it a lot of thought the last two weeks, and we've had discussion this past week about it and we're not quite there to nail it down, but I think we feel pretty good about the path we're on.

The way the calendar falls, too, it's always a little bit different, and this one I think affords us a chance to be prepared. There's no excuses. We'll have a good opportunity to be ready to go.

Q. In your statement after Noah left, you mentioned you were disappointed he won't be sticking around. Can you elaborate on that?

HEAD COACH KIRK FERENTZ: Disappointed, to be specific, I'm disappointed any time someone doesn't get an opportunity to play, whether it's an ankle injury or whatever it may be; if somebody is not able to be

with us, that's disappointing, but that's part of football, too, and that's certainly part of this process.

The only thing I talked to our players about all the time, you've heard me say it before, one thing about college football, we all choose to do this, as players and as coaches and then we're able to do this.

Everybody's got to make a decision about how they want to handle their future, their course of action, and ultimately, you want guys on the bus and on the sideline that are fully invested in it. What we do is so hard and so competitive that if you're not fully into it, it's not good for anybody.

I certainly respect Noah's decision. I think it's something he and his family felt was best for him and his interests, and I understand that and can appreciate that. We're just all very appreciative of what he's done for our team and for our program over the last couple years, and wish him nothing but the best. He'll have a great future.

Q. Nothing surprises you anymore.

HEAD COACH KIRK FERENTZ: Right.

Q. Same way with this?

HEAD COACH KIRK FERENTZ: Absolutely. It's a sign of the times. You just look around. We're not going to be impacted, I don't think, you know, go out on a limb, quite as much as some other places maybe. But nonetheless, it's a sign of the times.

Q. What is your depth chart looking like at tight end?

HEAD COACH KIRK FERENTZ: Looks like Hockenson is starting still. We're a little thinner now, certainly with Shaun Beyer being out. We'll go with Wieting, and also got Drew Cook there and we'll be okay. We'll get there.

Q. Do you think you'll lose anyone else to the NFL?

HEAD COACH KIRK FERENTZ: You know, it's really early in the game. I sat down with a handful of the players that might be in that category and are interested in looking at what the Draft panel says.

The NFL put a really good packet out this year, I think just a very good informational packet. I shared it with the players and their parents. It's an educational process for all to go through and gather good information, reliable information from people that really know the Draft and can project it and know the Draft board this year.

But again, it just gets down to a personal decision for the players involved. We'll let the process play out and see where it all goes.

Q. This month with the new redshirt rule, might be different in terms of how you fast-track some of these freshmen? What will be the plan for the young guys here the next few weeks?

HEAD COACH KIRK FERENTZ: Pretty much like the last game. We had one or two guys that were on that 3-4 game bubble but right now everybody is pretty much declared. Basically everyone on our roster is free to play without us losing somebody's year of eligibility which is great. If anyone can factor into the depth, he'll go ahead and play.

Q. Will you rest the veterans?

HEAD COACH KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah.

Q. How will you go easy on guys during this period?

HEAD COACH KIRK FERENTZ: We worked Friday and Saturday this week, we worked. The older guys worked one of those two days and they were not hitting at all, no contact. We like to give them a little time to rest and recoup a little bit and get rejuvenated.

And then it's a great period for the younger guys who haven't been playing on Saturdays to push forward and work and give us a chance to really evaluate them and see how they are growing and developing.

Told the guys early in the week, each and every year, we see somebody emerge during this period, this bowl period. Mike Daniels is the first guy that comes to mind, some other guys, too, really hitting a stride, that type of deal.

That's one of the things that to me, college football, everybody has got an opportunity all the time. Might be something dramatic they do or it might be just more of the process, going through the month, and as coaches, we say, hey, this guy looks like he's really ready to step in and help us out. Hopefully that will be the case.

Q. When you look at the guys who got all-conference, specifically with Amani Hooker, he got thrown in and did a nice job, but this year he was asked to change a lot and he did it and he was rewarded. What are your thoughts looking back at the course of the season and the accolades?

HEAD COACH KIRK FERENTZ: It's like a lot of our safeties and a lot of our players. Their second year is really when they start to hit stride. They make mistakes and what-have-you the first year, and then the second year, they really start to hit stride.

I would say the same thing about Jake Gervase, and especially some of those critical positions like the safety position or those guys that play up the middle.

You know, I think it's outstanding, all the recognition, it was really nice to see. It was kind of unusual to have three guys win the individual awards. I think that's got to be a high number. I haven't really kept track, but that was impressive and I'm really happy for the guys.

Our conference, there's so many good players in our conference and what the quarterback from Ohio State did last night was pretty impressive. What he's done this season, and we didn't play them, so I'm not following them quite as close, but yesterday I was able to watch TV and hear his numbers. But that's kind of week-in and week-out.

There are a lot of good players in our conference. To have three of our guys singled out as the best player at their position is really special and then the other guys that got recognition, really happy for them and proud of them. Amani is a great example of that.

Q. The last two trips to the Outback Bowl, you faced pretty elite defenses, really hard to score in both of those games. What makes it so tough to score against SEC teams?

HEAD COACH KIRK FERENTZ: Most of them have good players. I think that's the conference, when you think about the SEC, you think about the talent they have had.

Again, you track this stuff to the NFL Draft, where players come from. They have pretty much led the country, I think that's fair to say, for a while.

We've done very well, too. The Big Ten's done very well. We've got a great conference as well. It's one of those things, you're playing a team that has some pretty good guys.

LSU in 2013 had a pretty good defensive football team and some pretty good guys on offense, too. Florida, the last time we played them, those guys are really, really good on defense. A lot of those guys are playing in the NFL now.

But it's going to be a challenge. I don't know anything about their personnel. I have a feeling they are probably pretty good and pretty salty. But we've got a month to get ready. We're excited and we have a good football team, too. We're excited. Hopefully will be a good game if we do our part.

Q. In your experience, what type of bump do you get from winning the Bowl game?

HEAD COACH KIRK FERENTZ: I'm still trying to figure out the downside to losing any time in a game, other than maybe your team gets overconfident but we don't

have to worry about that after a Bowl game, that's for sure.

There really is no downside. We're playing a nationally-ranked team. If we're fortunate enough to win, that almost guarantees we'll be nationally-ranked and that would be a really nice, you know, just a little cherry on top, I guess, to what's already been a pretty good season.

But to me, it's a reward but it's also competitive. Everyone wants to go down and play well, look good. It's on national TV. You want to play well. Any time you line up, you want to win no matter where you're playing or who you're playing.

And then the carryover it can have, that's great.

And then the way the seniors leave, just like you think about Miguel, his last memory of Kinnick is going to be a pretty good one. Every college player remembers his last game in college, just like they remember the last play in high school or the last game in high school, too.

It's all significant and it's all good. We're going to give it our absolute best. One thing I do know is we have good leadership. So hopefully that will help us do a good job getting ready for a tough opponent.

Q. Off-topic a little bit but Bill Snyder was announced today that he's retiring. Just your thoughts on what he's meant to the game?

HEAD COACH KIRK FERENTZ: I think if I heard it correctly, first of all, I think it was 30 years ago to this day or this week, somewhere in that ballpark.

It's funny, I used to live about two baseball throws behind me here, and I remember we had that week off. My wife and I and our family had gone up to see her family. So we pulled in the driveway with our little woody wagon, a Cutlass Sierra wagon. I was unloading the car and Mary said "Hey, Bill is on the phone."

I said, "That's great. Let me unload the car and I'll come in."

She said, "No, he needs to talk to you," and that's when I found out he was going to K-State. I thought he was absolutely crazy. But Bill is crazy, so I'll go for the record; that it took a crazy person to go down there.

We had played there that year in '87. It was not a good program at that time and it took somebody who is really fanatical and outstanding to do what he did, and what he's built there, it's unreal.

I've always said I think Coach Frey is probably the only person that could have done at Iowa what he did in the

late 70s, early 80s and I would say the same thing about Bill going to Kansas State. What a phenomenal job he's done, his endurance, his longevity, is more than impressive, and I think the best part, I think it's been mutually good for Bill, but more importantly for Kansas State.

Can't say enough about the job he did there but more importantly, more personally to me and the other guys will say the same thing, the role that he had here.

I think I got hired because of him. I think he told Coach Fry, you know, let's not go with an older guy. Let's go with this younger guy; he doesn't know any better. So I think that's how I got hired here. I never asked, but I think that's how it all worked out.

Q. You guys are on the road recruiting all month. Because you've made some new hires the last couple years, and Derrick Foster most recently, how has that changed your recruiting zones, if you will, because there are guys on staff who had specialties in different areas.

HEAD COACH KIRK FERENTZ: Derrick obviously has background being from the south. First time he's really coached in the north unless you count Missouri. First time he's been in the north and he's got some ties down there.

He's got a great personality and he's a really good recruiter and just a really good person, outstanding coach, most importantly. He's done some work down there, I think it's going to be fruitful for us and beneficial.

The whole world is a little bit more global than it used to be. We're looking everywhere and we have some specific positions that we're really trying to hone in on right now because we've got the majority of our class finished, but there's still some things that we think we can do and hopefully help this class.

We really want to make sure we do a good job putting the last four, five, six pieces of the class together, while we make sure that the guys that are committed are firm and solid with us, and I think that looks pretty good right now, too.

Q. Your first presser when you got here -- you talked about it being your 20th season and in that press conference you said, quote, storybook ending for you to be here for 20 years.

HEAD COACH KIRK FERENTZ: I said that? Well, there you go. I hope that's not the ending. But yeah, you know, I've never been a long, long-term planner or visionary or any of that kind of stuff.

I know Lou Holtz had, whatever, 135 goals or whatever in his life. I read his book about four decades ago, but I know he had a goal list. I've never operated that way.

My deal has always been to try to do the best job I could wherever I was and enjoy the day, and most importantly enjoy the people I'm around.

You know, to be here 20 years later, I feel really fortunate, fortunate that I'm in a great place with great people. That's been a common thread regardless. I really enjoy what I do.

I still enjoy it, love it, love every day of it. You know, there's a certain percentage you don't always enjoy, but for the most part it's a pretty good deal, so really happy about that, and we get a chance to go play another game. Can't beat that, in a warm climate.