

University of Iowa Football Media Conference

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Kirk Ferentz

KIRK FERENTZ: First of all, good afternoon to everybody. Happy holidays.

Basically I just want to talk about two things today: our preparation for the Pinstripe Bowl, then also talk a little bit about the early signing period.

First and foremost, with the bowl game, I think it's something we're really excited about. It's going to be a different type of bowl game for our players. The experience that our student-athletes are about to go through here is really going to be rich, really great for them. So happy about that.

Many of our players have never been to New York City. I'm certainly not an expert on that place. I think it's going to be a great opportunity, certainly the 9/11 observatory, that visitation, the Rockettes show I've heard is really something to be seen, and just experiencing Christmas in the nation's largest city is going to be unique for our players. Looking forward to all those things.

This is a business trip for us. Our goal, our focus is to go to Yankee Stadium next Wednesday and come out victorious, so we know we have a lot of work to do. Our focus has been on that preparation during this time.

This has been a good week for us. We're out past the finals now. Had a chance to have the guys focused on the game solely. Happy so far with the way the preparation has gone. I think our preparation has been a little bit different this year. We've tried to streamline some things and accelerate the practices a little bit. We have practiced outdoors for obvious reasons. Beginning tomorrow we'll enter our traditional game week. It will be good to shift gears, really get into a game week focus, if you will.

Boston College, very impressive football team. We've had a chance to see them on film now. They're a good football team, strong, physical. I think in a lot of ways the style of football they play is a little bit like ours. Should be a really intriguing matchup that way. They've done really an excellent job. They have good football players on their team. They've got excellent football coaches.



Again, for us to win this football game, we're really going to have to be focused, be very detail oriented from here on in, going to have to work extremely hard on the game field to bring home a victory.

Just a couple things, player notes, updates, that type of thing. First of all, I think all of you know certainly we like to do things here with a code of conduct. We have team policies. The bottom line is we expect our players to give the kind of effort, display the kind of attitude that is more to having a good culture, Hawkeye football culture. Always felt like putting a jersey on is not only a privilege, but it's an honor, and there's responsibility that comes with that. We hold all of our guys to a very high standard.

Brandon Snyder, as I think all of you know had an incident two weekends ago. Because of that, he's been suspended from all team activities since that time and will not be going on this trip. Bottom line is it's not acceptable behavior for anybody, certainly not someone on our football team, certainly not for a team leader.

We've had conversation. As you might imagine, Brandon is very understandably apologetic. He's remorseful. He will not be with us. When he comes back from the spring term, we'll try to move forward here and have some things set in place for him, some requirements to reach as he gets back into good standing with our football team.

Miles Taylor, he'll be traveling but not able to play. Miles had a surgical procedure here a little while back. Unfortunately he's been playing through injury. He's done a great job. He's not going to be able to play. He'll be with us on the trip. It's a big loss for us because Miles has played a lot of good football for us, but more importantly a strong team leader, a tremendous young man. Certainly sorry about that.

Alaric Jackson will travel with the team but will not be playing in the bowl game due to violation of team policy. He's done a good job in the interim. He's worked hard so far to meet the goals we've put in front of him. As long as he continues to do that, he'll be with the team but not dressed for the ballgame.

Finally, Toks Akinribade is recovering from a medical

procedure right now. He'll not travel with us. He'll spend the holidays with his family back in Indiana. Due to federal healthcare privacy laws, we cannot share information about the details of the procedure. We don't have the consent of his parents or the athlete. I hope everybody can respect that. The family has really explicitly asked everybody to appreciate their privacy. Certainly the staff, the entire football team, wish Toks all the best in his recovery. He'll be with us the rest of the week, then he's going to head back to Indiana on the weekend here.

Bottom line on the game, we're really excited about playing in this football game. I think mostly excited about an opportunity for the football game, this 2017 team, to play one more time together. The guys have done a nice job in practice. Certainly our most important work is in front of us now, and that's the challenge ahead of us.

Last thing here, about the early signing, first and foremost, really happy with the class. I think thus far the way it's pulled together, we've done a good job there. Feel good about the class. We're really excited about the young men that chose to sign with us today.

When it's all said and done, we're looking at the neighborhood of 16 to 18 players signed today, and I think looking down the road, it's fair to say we'll probably end up about 20 or 22 in the class. That's what we kind of project at this point.

Some of the players have signed but haven't released their information yet, so we're not going to share that. We've discussed that with them. We're certainly going to honor their request not to share until they choose to do so. We'll do that.

A lot has been debated about the early signing, heard a lot of rhetoric on the radio coming into work in the mornings. I'm still in favor of an early signing period. I think the other part of this equation is right now none of us can make full judgment until this whole recruiting process is over because I think it's going to be a learning period in the next six, seven weeks. Eager to see how that unfolds. Probably have a better idea, better perspective in February. I'm sure as I've already heard a lot of my peers have a lot of opinions about it. Kind of hold judgment on that until it's all said and done.

The bottom line is the guys on our staff have really worked hard to put this group together. I feel really good. Most of these players have been here a lot. They've found their way to campus often, most of them. We really feel comfortable about the mesh between them and us. I think they've got a good idea what we expect in our program, what we're going to expect of

them as players. The buy-in has been really good. Feel good about that.

I think the staff did a great job. Our support staff, everybody on campus here does a wonderful job when prospects come in. As you guys know, it's all months of the year, just about literally all months of the year. I think we had 25 prospects here on Sunday. At some point, Monday we started just being a college football operation here. It's the nature of what we do. It's all good. We're really enthused about the group, look forward to start working with them when the time is appropriate.

Q. Who is going to start at left tackle?

KIRK FERENTZ: We'll probably move our right tackle to left tackle, elevate Paulsen. That's how we've been practicing.

Q. Paulsen at tackle?

KIRK FERENTZ: Paulsen at tackle, we'll keep Sean where he's comfortable, but Sean is next man in obviously.

Q. You have signed a lot of defensive backs in this class, signed a lot last year. How has the play of Micah Hyde, Desmond King, Josh Jackson elevated things?

KIRK FERENTZ: We've had pretty good success with those guys. Congratulations to Micah, both him and Brandon Scherff being named to the Pro Bowl. Mike Daniels will be on that list in the near future.

I think our guys have played really well back there. A bunch of different stories. Josh is a one-year starter, consensus All-American. He's going to be on that wall here in short time.

I think the neat thing is they all come from different backgrounds, different pedigree, if you will. The common denominator is they're all guys that like playing football, they're all good teammates. We feel good about the group coming in. They're going to complement the group we have right now. Certainly with guys leaving, it's hard to play without defensive backs.

Q. Is it easier to make a defensive lineman into an offensive lineman as opposed to vice versa?

KIRK FERENTZ: You usually don't see it go that way. Our hopes and goal is to have all those guys play on defense. Really, every position, defense is important, but if you can gain traction up front, that's certainly a good thing. It makes it a little bit easier on the guys behind them. The way we play defense, it takes a certain kind of player, takes a really unselfish guy because our guys are not necessarily playing for stats

or playing to get the linebackers and the safeties, where they can function, do things they have to do to make our defense work.

It takes a special kind of guy. We're excited about all the young guys that signed with us.

Q. What drew you to Spencer Petras in California? You haven't been there in 20 years.

KIRK FERENTZ: Still haven't been there, except two bowl games ago (smiling).

Quite frankly, I was getting a little worried about that. Every quarterback since May or late April, you always find something wrong with them. I was starting to wonder if there was anybody out there that maybe would fit with us. I say that half in jest. Some of the guys we've really liked have committed to other places. It's been a long, windy road.

We hit the road after we finished up last game, came up on three guys that we really thought would be a good fit here. One guy got another offer shortly thereafter. He accepted that. It really came down to two young men. Playoff games are involved with both. They were trying to make their choices.

A long story short, Spencer got knocked out I believe on a Saturday night, should have been Friday, but the game got pushed because of the fires. They came here, were sleep deprived Sunday afternoon. Had a very brief visit, he and his mom did. We just really felt good about the way he projected with us. Fortunately for us, mom and dad and Spencer were comfortable with what they saw here, what they learned.

We feel good about how that all came together.

Q. I'm assuming you haven't had a lot of sons of assistant coaches sign with you over the years. Do you remember the first time, did you tell Chris first or Dillon?

KIRK FERENTZ: Our assistants, I still feel guilty, kidding with Jay Niemann at the banquet, I still feel like I was child-napping.

I can tell you exactly where I was. I was in Nashville in the passenger seat of my daughter's car, I believe, or son-in-law's, talking to him. It was a Friday night. I felt guilty. He's coaching at Northern Illinois at that time. As it turns out, he did the right thing. He came here.

This is a little bit different. I've had my kids play, but now we get one of the others. He's part of the family, if you think about the order of this whole thing. We're excited.

One thing about him, I think I know him pretty well, who he is, what he stands for, how he operates, all that type of thing. Eighteen years ago nobody knew he would be a Division I prospect. Neat how that all worked. Feel glad that he likes our program.

Q. Were you the one who told Chris? You have to determine every scholarship.

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah. Basically the approach was, kind of like James Morris with Greg, and his wife (Lynn), it's like you tell us when you want to. We knew this for a while. I'm still not of the opinion it's always healthy for ninth graders or 10th graders to know they have a scholarship. It's good to work for things sometimes, too. Let the things go to them.

Q. When you look at Daviyon Nixon, the long road to finally get here, loyalty is a two-way street in this. You showed a lot of loyalty in the beginning, then him returning it when he had other substantial interest. What was that like going through that whole process?

KIRK FERENTZ: First of all, give Seth Wallace credit on that. He put an awful lot of time into that whole thing, starting last winter. I remember Reese went up there, they watched a basketball game, all that kind of stuff. It's been a lot of effort. Then we tried to make sure we had a path for him if one didn't work out, that type of thing.

That's our jobs. I mean, nobody is looking for a pat on the head or a bonus on that one. It's what we do. Seth did a great job on that.

Fortunately I think the family is appreciative of it. The bottom line is we were looking out for Daviyon's well-being the best we could without any guarantee. Happy the way it worked out. Excited to get him here this January. I think we'll have a couple guys coming in in January. Excited to get him here and get him started.

Q. With his skill set, size, he's played college football, a different level, is he the type of player that could come in and contribute right away?

KIRK FERENTZ: I think possibly, yeah. We're graduating a really good football player with Nate Bazata. There's a void. He's the only guy up front we're losing. I think it's always beneficial for guys up front that have a little age and experience, if you will. Not that he played against Big Ten competition, but they played a great schedule, have a really nice program there.

To have him have that experience, he's been away from home, that won't be new to him, actually he's moving closer. I think those things are all positive.

Yeah, we want to rotate players up front. Phil touched on that the other day. For him to get in the rotation, I think that's realistic. We're hoping that does happen.

Q. Listed Evans as a receiver?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I don't know how we listed him actually. That's a really fair question. I'm not saying he's Ed Hinkel. In my mind, that's kind of what I was thinking. The science of recruiting, right? It was after the Nebraska game a year ago that Saturday, I was kind of cruising through our kitchen. We have that TV that we had in Maine, about as big as your computer. The Illinois games were on. I was watching it. Who is this guy running through Springfield Griffin actually? I was captivated a little bit. But his profile reminded me of Ed Hinkel. A quarterback that had a funny number on. Probably not a quarterback, but he's a good football player. His team seems to always win. They've won back-to-back state championships. Came into the staff next day, Anybody know anything about this guy? They gave me the whole story. That's where our dating began actually.

To me, I think Hinkel could have been -- our initial intent was free safety. We were down on receivers, so we flipped him over that one day and never came back.

I think in Samson's case, too, he probably could play running back. We'll figure that all out when he gets here. We're happy he's on our team.

Q. Last two classes you played a lot of true freshmen. Finding good culture fits. Is that a fair assessment? Any ties to the no-visit thing, test the character a little bit?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, it's nice to have kids that want to come here. Again, we try to be really transparent, more than transparent, in the recruiting process just to let them know. All that being said, they still can't envision how hard this is. This is hard, starting with the workouts, all that. It's not for everybody. But at least we try to let them know that it's a hard thing to be a Big Ten college football player here, to get a degree, all those kinds of things.

It's interesting because the acceleration of recruiting, which I'm not really in favor of, have no idea how you slow it down, your concern is, in the old days you did all the dating in December and January after a player's senior season, which really is logical, makes sense. Those days are so far gone.

Where I'm going with this, I think our recruiting department has done a really nice job of setting up visits in the June, July period, more so June, and even in season where we are getting prospects here, getting to know them, they're getting to know us a little bit better, it's not just the computer dating world, or catalog

shopping, all that.

I think we're doing a better job that way. That's really important because the bottom line is you don't want a player to come here and be unhappy. Geez, I didn't know, you guys eat good food. We've had that problem, too, with one or two of our guys. But that kind of stuff.

Q. Wisconsin, the last few years you went up there, grabbed a punter, a wide receiver. This year you go up to Green Bay. What kind of inroads have you made there? Is this year a result of more Seth or Tim?

KIRK FERENTZ: This year a little bit of each. Seth has been up there, now Tim for obvious reasons works up there a little bit. That's kind of the nature of who we are, what we are.

Probably at least in 65, 70% of our recruiting relationships, we're the out-of-state team. If we were Ohio, had 58 prospects in our state every year, it would be great, but we don't have that. We're typically out of state, get a couple here, get a couple there. I think kind of in line with what we were just talking about.

The more times a guy can get here geographically, get in a car and drive here, the better off it is. There's a player that's pretty good at North Carolina State coming out this year. It's funny, I asked those guys, Is that the name I'm thinking about? I remember it exactly like it was yesterday, when he was a junior in high school. He made an unofficial visit in June with his mom and dad to NC State. He was on our list. We were on him, thought he would be a good prospect. Instead of driving 12 hours here, they drove whatever, three or four hours, to Raleigh. Kind of dawned on me at that point we might be spinning our wheels in Atlanta recruiting. It makes sense, mom and dad go to a four-hour place instead of a 12-hour place.

That's a challenge when you talk about recruiting. For us, getting parents here is important. So, yeah, proximity certainly helps. Not all the time, but a high percentage of the time we're the out-of-state team. That makes it a little bit tougher.

Q. What about the three you pulled out of there?

KIRK FERENTZ: You just got to get guys where your message resonates. Fortunately for us, Cody is a small town guy. I was in the weight room when they walked in, mom, dad, sister. I think that was in June, maybe July. They walked in there. Things seemed to mesh pretty good. They came down a couple times. Really interesting, the mom's dad was Ted Plumb, the offensive coordinator of the Super Bowl Bears, you can do the association there. Good football pedigree.

It resonated. Our message resonated with him. Henry came down in April, in the spring first time, with his mom. Later on the dad came with him. Same thing, we had a good fit. Just luck of the draw sometimes. At least we're on the right guys.

Q. What do you think you'll remember about the career of Akrum Wadley?

KIRK FERENTZ: I think the numbers kind of speak for themselves really. I will say this, full disclosure, it snuck up on me. I read those postgame reports, the notes out of the press box, when I remember to. Somewhere around mid-season, I started looking at that. Holy smokes, this guy is adding them up I don't want to say quietly, but it's amazing what he's done, the company he's with. That's pretty impressive. Back-to-back thousand yards, Fred Russell being the last guy who has done that. That puts him in pretty elite territory.

We talked about Josh a minute ago. A guy like Akrum, it's been growth all along the way, every step you have seen the signs, but didn't see the consistency. His best football is still ahead of him. Hopefully next Wednesday night is the best football. After that, I think he'll just keep getting better as long as he keeps working hard, which I don't know why he wouldn't.

Q. Are you looking at new areas, or just to focus on message, have a Midwest base, have that message? You mentioned Atlanta.

KIRK FERENTZ: It makes perfect sense except it doesn't make sense. Everybody goes in there, too. That's the other thing. I don't mean to say they're over-recruited, but everybody goes there. It's hard, unless you get a young man who maybe his parents are Big Ten'ers, to get your message resonate, what's going to make you different than NC State in the case of Chubb. Our minds were different, but he didn't care. He understood the mileage.

I don't mean to infer we were holding hands, okay? We were on him, recruiting him, knew about him, thought we had a relationship going. That's how it works.

Closer is usually better. But there's exceptions to every rule. We'll keep looking in other areas if they make sense.

Q. (Question about Terry Roberts from Pennsylvania.)

KIRK FERENTZ: Just so happens that Jovon has done a lot of things back there, Jovon Johnson goes in the community, goes back every off-season. Last time I talked to him, whoever they lost in that last semifinal, he was on the plane going wherever they were going,

Montreal or wherever. My geography in Canada is not very good.

He goes back out of season, goes back with Terry. He told Phil about him. Terry showed up to camp. We really liked him. He killed it statistically this year on both sides of the ball. He really did a good job. We saw him out in camp and really liked what we saw. His dad was here with him. That familiarity, Jovon knew the young man pretty well, too. If you get those things going, that sure helps.

Got another guy we think we're doing pretty good with, his coach was a former player here. His coach knows our deal, Jovon knows our deal. When those guys say, 'This guy would fit with you guys,' that's pretty good.

We get older, former players, it's amazing. One good thing about getting older, I guess.

Q. When did you get the sense that Dallas was going to sign? What impact might he have as a safety?

KIRK FERENTZ: We've been working on it. LeVar is in that area. He's been working on it pretty steadily actually. Probably very recently. We were encouraging that, I guess, but we didn't know if it was going to happen. We're thrilled that it did.

He's a guy that has good two-way, kind of like you think about Greg Mabin when we looked at him. He's a guy we thought receiver, DB, not sure what. We all agreed that Dallas is better on defense.

He went through another visit, two weeks ago, just felt like, Okay, I'm good. It still took a little coaxing. Glad he decided to come.

Q. Are there positions you're focused on now?

KIRK FERENTZ: There are. We're still looking a little bit position specific, but I think also I think this is a big variable now. What is the pool going to look like? We've done pretty well, Micah, Desmond King, a couple names that have already come up, Daniels, Josey Jewell. Are those guys still going to be in that pool? That's a big question right now. That's why some of my peers are squawking because they want to snag guys out of our pool. That happened last week, we had a guy jump to another school.

I don't know what it's going to look like. I'm really curious. I do know this: there are guys out there. I told our staff that. There is no doubt in my mind there are guys out there, will be guys out there. We have to be really methodical. The other part of it is you have to be the one to project a little bit. Maybe Chad Greenway is not a fast safety, but might be a pretty good linebacker. Those kinds of things. We got to look

at some guys, a back that's 215, a step slow to play Big Ten football, but could play a different position pretty well. I think that's a challenge now. That's actually kind of fun to go through as long as there's some people to look at. To me, that's the biggest variable. I remember working a guy out when we were in Baltimore. I came back and told Ozzie Newsome, If we can get this guy fourth, fifth round, let's snag him. Another team grabbed him in the second. He started the next year. Got beat up a little bit. What I learned is tackles, the value of a tackle is a little bit different than some other positions. I think we might see that a little bit with some of the stuff that moves forward here in the next month.

Q. Have you had any departures since the end of the season?

KIRK FERENTZ: I don't think so. There are a couple other guys that won't be on the trip, again, their effort, their consistency, accountability, being on time, those kinds of things. We're trying to teach some guys maybe to be a little bit more responsible for their actions, kind of grow up a little bit.

No, nothing really dramatic that I'm aware of.

Q. You've done well with guys from Solon, what do you like about Tyler Linderbaum?

KIRK FERENTZ: It's funny, I was going to say first of all it's a great program, as you know. Year in, year out they do a nice job there. I was going to say he was kind of flying under the radar. Then he got invited to the U.S. All-Star Game, somewhere in October maybe. So much for that theory.

We've liked him from day one. He's a three-sport athlete. He likes baseball. Makes me think of Josey. Not that he's going to play linebacker. It's neat to see a guy play three sports like that. We've had a lot of guys like that. He seems to do whatever he does pretty well. That's exciting to us. Have a really good wrestling season. He gave Tristan a tussle a year ago. I doubt he'd want a rematch. Tristan is about 325 now.

Anyway, we really like Tyler. I think he's a really good football player, probably could do a couple things for us. Talk about offense, defense, but our plans are to play him on defense, too. Really happy about that, for sure.

Q. When you look at linebacker right now, Phil talked about that a lot, how much are you trying to balance between getting ready for Boston College versus getting three new starters ready for 2018?

KIRK FERENTZ: Starting tomorrow we're not even thinking about that. Tomorrow it's one focus. Tomorrow is Monday for us. Don't do the math on that.

I know it's not Monday. The day after is really Monday. I get that. But tomorrow for us is Monday, and I'm not going to explain why.

It's straight ahead. We're trying to get our guys ready to play against Boston College. We've been dabbling with that a little bit the last couple days. But my point there is that the other thing we've been trying to do is keep our guys sharp, keep them in football mode. That is one nice thing. I am not a fan of playing after Thanksgiving, but it is nice that gap is a lot shorter. It's easier to maintain sharpness that way. That's one of the reasons our approach has changed.

Part of that was to keep the guys sharp, but we also assess how our guys are progressing, what are they doing on special teams, impacting special teams. Most of our linebackers have done that in a positive way. That's ongoing.

Then the other variable is who is really going to make a big step this month, who is going to make one. Shaun Beyer had a good month of December, to cite one guy, saw a lot of growth there. Saw it during this season, but the last three weeks have been really good for him.

That's what we're looking for. The next phase will be the winter program, then the spring program. That's the neatest thing about college football, is not that pro football players don't improve or you have good stories, but they're more frequent and usually a little bit more dramatic in college than the NFL. I think that's one of the neat things.

Those are the stories that are going to be unfolding after we get back. Right now it's BC all the way. That's all we really care about.