

University of Iowa Football Media Conference

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Kirk Ferentz



KIRK FERENTZ: In regards to the season so far, pleased at the start we got off to, and going on the road the other day and winning in a tough environment was certainly gratifying to see. We're making good progress and we've done some good things two weeks into it. But that being said, we still have a lot of work to do. Offense, defense, special teams can work together consistently. We haven't established that by any stretch.

Being 2-0 is good, but it really doesn't mean anything if we're not improving this week. If we want to be playing for games that count in the conference in November, we need to be improving right now. So that's kind of what's on our plate at this point.

Regarding North Texas, every game brings a new challenge and certainly North Texas does that. Like a year ago or last week, excuse me, we're playing a team that's got a second-year coaching staff. They've done a really nice job there. So they come in here with a high-tempo offense that operates very efficiently and very effectively. Really isn't like any we've seen this year, and certainly isn't like the offense that they brought in here a couple years ago when we played them. So that's a challenge in itself.

They were a bowl team last year. Again, they're well-coached. They've got an air-raid-type attack. Defensively they play a 3-4, which we have not worked against the 3-4 this year, so that also presents a new set of challenges, and still overall they've got good team speed. They've got good, skilled players. Really impressed with their quarterback the way he moves their offensive football team.

We have a lot to work on at this point. I know they'll be ready. Our job is to make sure we're ready for that challenge. We're a couple days into it right now, but so far, so good. But we still have a lot to get done this week.

Our captain's will be Josey Jewell, Matt VandeBerg, Akrum Wadley, and Kevin Ward will be the special teams captain. Medically, as I said on Saturday, it didn't look good for Ike, and that was confirmed yesterday. So he does have achilles injury, and that will be addressed here in the near future, so with that, I'll throw it out for questions.

Q. How do you game plan for North Texas and a quarterback who had 400 yards last week?

KIRK FERENTZ: He's a really good player. Watching him on tape, he reminds me of McGloin from Penn State five years ago. I tell you, a lot of their skill guys, they're not big guys, but he's a really good quarterback. He makes good decisions. He's fast, efficient, he'll run the ball, throws it where it needs to go. He gets it there quickly. So, if you leave somebody open, he's going to find that guy and get the ball there pretty effectively. So it's going to be a big challenge for us.

Q. Are the similarities with Iowa State situationally-wise being so different from what they were staff to staff?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, it's a whole different preparation. So I don't even know if I can find my notes from two years ago. They're back there somewhere. You don't really need them. Yeah, that's a whole different deal. So this is out of the Mike Leach Air Raid family. They play at a high tempo. They know what they're doing. They know where to go, pose a lot of threats with quarterback runs. They've got a really well-conceived offense, but most importantly the quarterback's a really good trigger guy.

Q. With Boettger's injury, does that change your thinking on Tristan?

KIRK FERENTZ: I think it just pushes him forward. We've been leaning in that direction anyway, so right now we just have to plan like he will play at some point because we're really running out of depth. It's not like we've got a lot of that. So we've been practicing with him on the second team, pushing him forward as if he were going to play. He had an injury, latter part of camp which really set him back and put him in a funk for about a week, but he's coming out of that and making progress, so hopefully we'll get him ready.

Q. How ready is he to being a college tackle?

KIRK FERENTZ: There are some things he does very well, and at times he does things extremely well. But the consistency factor is the biggest part. He was almost doing too well until he got hurt. It was about a week, but a week might as well have been a month. It just seemed like that because it really set him back. Now we've seen him climb the ladder here a little bit the last two weeks.

Q. After watching tape, what was the most concerning takeaway defensively from the Iowa State game?

KIRK FERENTZ: There were a couple things that took place. Some of them were just good plays by good players and there is nothing you can do about that. So if you're in position and they make a play, they've got guys on scholarship too and they've got good guys, that's going to happen. That's football. The ones that we can coach and correct, that's really where our focus has to go. So the mental errors where we might have taken the cheese or just done some things that weren't sound enough, that's the stuff that you've got to go through. We've got a lot of young players especially in the back end right now.

So those are the things you have to experience. We experienced last year early in the season, learned from them, and that's the key moving forward is how much do we learn? What can we do there? This is a similar challenge, only it's different. They don't have the size. This team doesn't have the size at the skill positions, but they've certainly got really good speed. They've got guys that are really dangerous and running backs included. So they're going to really test us. But the pace in itself, the tempo is another factor and then the quarterbacks are really -- he's a good player.

Q. On the teleconference you said four to six weeks for Ike? Does that mean no tear, no surgery?

KIRK FERENTZ: Did I say weeks? Yeah, that's a Freudian slip and wishful thinking, so more like four to six months.

Q. Would he be able to apply for a medical redshirt?

KIRK FERENTZ: By the book, no. But, we live in a crazy world. There is a quarterback I'm aware of that got an extra year because of a coaching change which I've never heard of that. I don't know what the precedent for that would be. But we've got a new line coach, maybe we can get him a year because of that. We'll see. Certainly different styles and personalities with those two guys, so I don't know. Got to look in that policy book they've got.

Q. Where do you think his injury maybe affects you guys in the way you're able to scheme or attack?

KIRK FERENTZ: The first thing about it is the real loser in this thing is Ike. I say it every time a player has a serious injury, which this obviously is. My first thoughts are always about how much hard work these guys invest. I'm going back to last week where the suggestion was the game doesn't mean as much to us. You know what's insulting about that is these guys work

so hard. The amount of time they put in year around to get a chance to play and you only get 12 games, anybody that suggests any game doesn't count, just doesn't understand sports, athletics or competition, nor do they understand the investment the players make. That's my thought on this whole thing.

I just feel bad for Ike. Not only is he a good football player, but he's a great kid. He's a senior, so now something he was really looking forward to, you know, it's a tough deal. We'll move on. We'll live on. We have to. We've got no choice. That's the way it works. But you just worry about him. It's tough on him. He'll get back up on his feet and he'll be a good leader in his own way.

Q. Sean is exceedingly comfortable at right tackle. How is that?

KIRK FERENTZ: I can't explain it. Wherever you put him, he does well. He's just one of those football players. Some guys are like that, some aren't. Some can't move around. I mean, it's really disastrous to even think about it. You learn that really quickly. And other guys, Cole Croston was exactly the same way. We never had Cole at center, but we've had Sean everywhere. Doesn't seem to bother him. He looks the same, just keeps playing, and doesn't seem to affect him mentally or physically.

Q. How has Alaric Jackson held up in your opinion? Seems like he's doing fine.

KIRK FERENTZ: He's a little bit representative of our football team. He's had some ups and downs, but he's worked hard, he's done a pretty good job overall. Lot of things that he can still get better at and clean up, and that's what you expect. He's only played two games. He hasn't played a lot of football in his life. He's one of those guys that football came late, which I don't think is a big deal in football, frankly. Other sports, maybe.

He's got a good attitude, he works hard. The progress he's made from being at 342-pound kid when he walked in here who was overweight to cutting down to 315, 317. We saw him go through that transformation just was an indicator that this guy thinks right. He's not your average bear. This guy's thinking right and it really means something to him. We're seeing that on the field too. He's really doing a good job for us.

Q. Did you try to work Alaric out of the right tackle a little bit?

KIRK FERENTZ: Right now it's left side. This week, that's where it is. That's where it's been. That's where he'll be for us at least for this season. That's what I see at least right now.

Q. Akrum said that you gave him tapes of Ronnie Harmon. I'm curious as to why, and how does he compare to Ron 32, 33 years later?

KIRK FERENTZ: The comparison there would be Akrum does some stuff with the ball in his hands that none of us can coach. We'd love to, but you can't coach or give that to a guy. Ronnie was the same way. I think they're similar in the fact that Ronnie's one of the tougher, more competitive guys I've ever been around anywhere at anyplace I've ever coached. I mean, he was a tough-minded guy.

Akrum likes playing. That was a full day's work he got in the other day. Probably more than he needed, but we needed him. That last touchdown he scored, that was a lot of individual effort, and Ronnie had some of those similarities too.

Ronnie wasn't as skinny as Akrum, and part of my thinking there would be we'd like to wear you out this year just like we wore Harmon out in '85, and that was good coaching, by the way. So that's kind of the plan there. We need you to be this kind of guy that we can really give the ball to a lot.

I mean, Ronnie Harmon was one of the greatest players I've ever been around. You think of the way he impacted that team. I mean, we had a good football team, but he was a big, big part of that.

Q. Was Ronnie a better running back or receiver in your eyes it seemed like he could have done both?

KIRK FERENTZ: I don't think any of us would have been there in '85 if he hadn't played receiver in 82. I looked it up after one of our worst games in the last couple years, I looked it up and I think we had 120 yards against Iowa State that year. Wanket had scored the only touchdown off a pick six. All I know is the next week he went out to receiver and all of a sudden we had an offense. Chuck would be throwing the ball, and he would be catching it like this and that. That got us going. But he was really good both ways. It was a great third down back in the NFL. So he could do both really well.

Q. Do you feel like you need to manage Akrum's workload? He's had a heavy load in the first two weeks?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, first week wasn't that bad. Saturday is probably a little heavier than we like. But we'll try to balance that out a little bit, and there is no reason we can't. We've got other guys that are doing a really good job. So we've got to watch that a little bit. But you get in a game like that and you have to do whatever you've got to do, and he wasn't complaining. I didn't hear him say one word about it.

He wants to carry the ball and he wants to catch it, and he wants to help the team. But we have to, as adults, we have to see the big picture here and be smart about things.

Q. Is Boone Myers 100 percent?

KIRK FERENTZ: Boone's gaining ground right now. The only good news right now, certainly it's good news. At least Boone is gaining ground right now and you'll see him play more and more with each week. Based on what I've seen the last two weeks, I think we're starting to get where we want to get.

Q. Part of the reason with Kelly-Martin going back there for kickoff returns now basically full-time is to keep that countdown?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, we're trying to watch the pitch count stuff, which I don't believe in pitch counts either, and Kelly-Martin's doing a nice job back there. He looks very comfortable. I think that's one of the highlights though, I don't even know what the yardage was, but he looked like he belonged out there. That's how he's looked in practice. We want to get his feet wet and get him going here too.

Q. Offensively 500 yards, 44 points, does it feel like this offense is just scratching the surface of what it can be with all these weapons?

KIRK FERENTZ: I don't know about that part of it. But the big thing is we didn't turn it over. We had one loose ball and we recovered that. So that really hurt us that first week on two fronts. First of all, if you turn it over, you're not going to win by rule. Secondly, when you turn it over, you can't be making yards, you can't move the chains, those type of things.

So I think we have a chance to have some balance, but we're hardly out of the woods. We have a lot of work to do right now. A lot of things that we've got to get better at and more proficient at. But a positive for sure was Nate Stanley, he looked a lot more comfortable out there. He had some beautiful throws. The guys helped him out which always helps too. So, you know, looked like we have a chance maybe to function, but we're not there yet.

Q. Did you tell Akrum or suggest that he watch Ronnie because you thought he could have that kind of impact? Did you believe that much early?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, they're not the exact same guys. They're both from New Jersey and I get all that. But, yeah, impact our team. If we're going to have a good team, I'll say it now, Akrum has to play well for us. He knows that, and he wants to. No different than Shonn Greene, though they're totally different players.

Yes, for us to have a good football team, a good

season, our best guys have to go out there and play well. He's certainly one of our best guys. If not, as dangerous a guy we have on our team right now. We're counting on that for him.

Q. Speaking of workloads, a guy we haven't seen, we thought we might, is Toren Young.

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, he's great. I said something the other day I wanted him to make sure that we knew he's really been practicing really well. It just hasn't worked out to get him in there. But we will at some point. This is a good situation right now. If James Butler weren't on the team right now he'd be getting a lot more work, but we'll get there at some point. We've got a lot more football in front of us and he's going to help us.

Q. Do you think Josh Jackson will continue as the punt returner?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, we'll see how that goes. I think the running he's doing, it's a different kind of run. Nobody's hitting him when he's running. Typically he's hitting them. So I think there's a possibility that, although we're open to Max Cooper too, he's done a nice job back there as a young kid.

Q. Do you think Max will play this year at some point?

KIRK FERENTZ: I think he will.

Q. Ojemudia played a lot and was your two weeks ago, has he moved ahead of Manny?

KIRK FERENTZ: It's just a suggestion I made during the game. I felt like we weren't quite -- our tempo wasn't quite there. They both have been competing well in practice. I think OJ has really grown a lot, especially since January. I think he's one of our more improved players. I said the same thing about Josh.

So hopefully at the end of this we'll have three guys playing really well and we'll need all three of those guys. Another guy too and Hankins is doing a pretty good job.

Q. Do you have to change your defensive approach? With the Air Raid thing, there is no time to sub. You guys like to bring in that nickel-dime?

KIRK FERENTZ: It's hard to practice first and foremost. That's the hardest part about it. You really can't simulate it the way they do. You can't do it. It's like playing Georgia Tech. Good luck trying to simulate that. That's one of the problems it poses for you is substitutions are really tough. We'll have to figure that out and navigate through it and see what we can do.

Q. Were you surprised Saturday when in the postgame you guys had the stat where you had to

go all the way back to Chuck Hartlieb and your quarterback to get the moment?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I didn't hear those stats. But one thing I know, we didn't turn it over. That was great. We had some really long drives which was great. We had some long drives when we really needed long drives and that was really beneficial. Then, there were some flashes out there where, boy, we looked like we might have an offense. We might have a chance to have an offense. Some really good individual play, some good execution team-wise, and some receivers made some big plays. Some of those catches down there, and they all seemed to be down in the far end zone, those were just beautiful plays.

One catch Imir had takes you right back to Penn State 2002. Hinkel stretched out and got his toes down in the end zone. Used to be outside my door in the other building forever. Andy Garman was in that picture as well, so I saw Andy every day back then.

But those are things that stick with you. When you get guys making plays like that, it gives you a chance. That was Brad Banks throwing that one too.

Q. Imir's a young guy. Is there automatically a motion to kind of keep him grounded after a game like that?

KIRK FERENTZ: Oh, yeah. One of the great things about coaching at Iowa and playing at Iowa, and I learned this in the '80s, people care. There is a lot of interest, and that's great. But one of the down sides is young people and anybody, you tend to get a higher opinion of yourself really quickly if you do something. All of a sudden you're the best that ever did this and it's not that way. Sports and life are pretty humbling.

So hopefully I think all the teammates will do their best. But I haven't seen any indication. He's practiced really well this week.

Q. I believe 8 of your 9 touchdowns so far have been passes; were you aware of that?

KIRK FERENTZ: No, I wasn't aware of it. I guess I'm not doing a very good job of self-scouting, am I? Right now I'm just glad they came, especially on Saturday because we needed every one of those at that time. However we get them is okay with us. That will balance out at the end of the day. I know our play calls have been pretty consistent for the most part.

Like the end of the first game we tilted it to the run because we were trying to make sure we won the game. The other day it was a little different as well because we had to get back in the game, so that affected things. Though I think in that last route we did a nice job of mixing the run pass and knew where the

clock was at that point. So all that other stuff will balance itself out. As long as they come, we don't care if it's run or pass, or air or ground, it doesn't matter.

Q. I know how much you love questions about schedules three or four years out when you're in the middle of the season now. It's newsworthy and big news which is you're going to be ending in a couple years against Wisconsin rather than Nebraska and not on Black Friday. What are your thoughts about that? Did you have communication with the Big Ten?

KIRK FERENTZ: At the end of the day, we're playing 12 games. Nine of them will be Big Ten games and they'll all be tough.

We'll play them as they come. Personally, I like playing on Black Friday. It's great for a lot of reasons. One selfish reason that ties into why I was against starting camp in July. It's not like I'm going anywhere. I haven't left Iowa other than recruiting and stuff like that. But my vacation was in my backyard this year, so I was here in July anyway. Didn't affect my life a heck of a lot.

But believe it or not, that little window of Friday, especially when you play at home, guys can walk out of here Friday before 6 p.m., and the ones that live locally getting to home and maybe eat some turkey with their family and stuff like that. Stuff they used to do ten years ago and in college. So selfishly I think that's another reason it's a pretty good deal.

But we'll play them as they come. I'm not too worried about that. What I am worried about is how we play at 2:30 p.m. on Saturday.

Q. The deep ball for Stanley, he missed a couple against Iowa State. Is that a timing and experience thing? Once he gets more reps in the game situation, will it become more natural?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, it's like most things. You get that done in practice, and we missed them in practice too. So there is usually a correlation. We'll keep throwing them. At some point we hope to bring them in. That was a concern Saturday because sitting there in that fourth quarter you wonder if some of these things are going to come back and haunt you afterwards and we were able to overcome that. But hopefully that's something we can keep working on.

Q. I know it's probably an experiment to see what A.J. can handle as far as knowing the defense and being able to play the run. Do you look at that more now because of his pass rushes?

KIRK FERENTZ: No, he's done some really good things out there. The more he plays, the more he'll

play. If that makes sense. As long as he's gaining ground, which he is right now. To throw him in there for 60 plays would have been -- I think I could have told you what the answer would be there at the end, made that prediction. But as he keeps playing, he'll get more confident and more comfortable. He learns every day.

We were talking about Tristan earlier, you talk about a first-year player, those guys are really learning and absorbing a lot every practice. If we can just keep building on that knowledge base, it's going to be better, and better for us. The more he plays, the fresher Parker is, the fresher Anthony and all the other guys are too, so that's a good thing.

Q. Parker Hesse is doing a lot for you guys, isn't he?

KIRK FERENTZ: I hate to call the guy an unsung whatever, but Parker's one of our guys. He is just a tough, tenacious, competitive, strong leader on our football team. I've got so much respect for him. Everybody does. Every one of his teammates do. Goes back to him playing against a first-rounder in the championship game a couple year ago. He wasn't supposed to be in there and Drew got hurt. So he went in there and fought his tail off.

You think about guys like Louis or some of the younger guys, when they first got out there, they get beat up and knocked around by the big guys. But with each year, they're gaining ground, and Parker's definitely done that. He's one of the guys that's a glue guy for our football team. Not unlike Nate. Nate's the same kind of guy.

Q. Along those lines, the D-line has the most picks of any unit on defense. Is anybody giving anybody else a hard time?

KIRK FERENTZ: I actually teased our linebackers on Sunday. Every practice they're out there catching balls. I don't know why. They're all skill guys from high school, so they're out there catching balls. So I asked the guys on Sunday, asked the D-linemen, how many balls do you guys catch during practice on a typical day? The answer is that, right? How many picks have they got? They've got two linebackers there, so we'll see. We'll see what happens the next ten games. But right now it's 2-0.

Q. Another future scheduled question; it looks like you're playing Big Ten games early in September. Do you have any thoughts on that?

KIRK FERENTZ: It's just like playing on Thanksgiving. It's all a sign of the times. There are powers that are way higher than my level that decide all this stuff.

Q. But they don't talk to you about that?

KIRK FERENTZ: No, they don't talk to me about stuff like that. Even if they did, they wouldn't listen (laughing).

Q. I know the fullback touches, some people don't like to talk about it, can you talk about the read to Drake Kulick?

KIRK FERENTZ: Those are really big plays. The dump off, that was a hard part of playing quarterback because sometimes you're always looking for that. Ken always talks about you're not going to go broke making a deposit. That was a smart play on his part getting it to Drake. I was teasing Brady about that too because, what, he had 45 yards or something like that the other day. I said so you're well behind right now and he's got a big bulb on his hand. He said he'll catch him. That's his response so we'll see. Another competition going on.