

# Vrbo Citrus Bowl: Iowa vs Kentucky

Sunday, December 5, 2021

Orlando, Florida, USA

Camping World Stadium

## Kentucky Wildcats

## Mark Stoops

## DeAndre Square

## Luke Fortner

### Press Conference

**COACH STOOPS:** It's an honor to be back in the Citrus Bowl. We had a fantastic experience the last time we were there. And very proud of our coaches and our football team for the way we finished.

Like most teams, it's always a couple of what-ifs, you'd like to have a couple of games back. But proud of our players and coaches for the way we finished.

It's an honor to be back in the Citrus Bowl and to play the Iowa Hawkeyes, obviously a team that is very close to myself and my family. And I have such great respect for Coach Ferentz, the entire Hawkeye organization, their players. I know how tough they are and the way they play and it will be a great challenge.

But it's an exciting time. It's going to be a great game, a great matchup. And, once again, thank you for the invitation. It was a great experience the last time. We would expect nothing less than another experience like we had the last time.

So we're really looking forward to it and kind of a hectic time, to be honest with you with you. I'm out running around, recruiting, traveling, but it's an honor to be part of this. We're excited.

**Q. Mark, can you expound a little bit on what Iowa as a program meant to you? Obviously getting all three of your brothers or two of your brothers and you as a kid, that must have meant a lot for your family?**

**COACH STOOPS:** Yeah, absolutely. It's hard to put into words what the Iowa program has meant to us. In the early part of our careers, whether it was playing or getting started in coaching, I remember as a young child, going



and getting in the car, playing football games on Friday night, my dad coaching on Friday night. Getting in the car, driving ten hours, arriving in the morning, watching my brothers play, and staying Saturday night, getting back in the car, driving another ten hours back home.

So just the experience with coach Hayden Fry and all the assistant coaches, the people of Iowa, everybody was just so good to us during our time there. It really helped shape a lot of what we became. And the success we've had has a lot to do with the roots of Iowa, with Hayden and Coach Ferentz and the many talented coaches that were there -- of course, Coach was there; we overlapped a time when he was an assistant coach there and, of course, he came back. Just nothing but fond memories from the Hawkeye experience.

**Q. You mentioned Kirk. Obviously, he wasn't your position coach, but he was on the staff when you played there. What stood out to you about him, what do you remember about the time when he was there? And what have you seen from him as a head coach that's shown so much durability, being around for so long?**

**COACH STOOPS:** I mentioned it earlier in the year. It just says a lot about Kirk and a lot about the people of Iowa and the organization to have the stability that they've had with Hayden Fry and with Kirk.

What I remember about him was just kind of what you see now -- just an impressive man, impressive coach, that always was nothing but professional.

As a young player there, I was on defense and he was the O-line coach, you just saw a man that was going to be successful. I think everybody that ever came in contact with him and everybody in our program had nothing but respect for Coach Ferentz and knew that he would go on to big things.

**Q. You mentioned you're out recruiting right now. What does it mean when you're out recruiting and you talk about a New Year's bowl game in Florida?**

**ASAP** . . . when all is said, we're done.®  
**sports**

COACH STOOPS: Everything helps. The fact that we've been consistent. We've been winning games. And, again, like most teams, we want more. We want to keep on pushing. But it does help when you go into bowl games, go into Florida and we're looking forward to that experience.

**Q. Question about your Iowa experience, how much of an influence did Bill Brazier have on you and your brothers' careers as far as teaching you how to become a coach at that level?**

COACH STOOPS: He had an enormous impact on myself and my brothers. And I know they have all -- I don't normally comment for my brothers, but I know in this case because we've all talked about it and I've heard them comment on it publicly, what an influence Bill Brazier had on us. Just an incredible man. Just like every coach that has been through there during our time. Nothing but respect for the coaches.

And Coach Brazier was really the ultimate -- he was our defensive coordinator, position coach and really old-school, tough guy, but also very caring and very influential person in my life. So I have nothing but respect for Coach.

**Q. What does the University of Kentucky mean to you? And the second part, with the contract extension you got from the University of Kentucky, with the win over Louisville what's that recruiting pitch like when you're out on the road, you're talking to recruits, what do you tell those guys to get those guys to come to the University of Kentucky?**

COACH STOOPS: First part of your question, what does the University of Kentucky mean to me, it means everything to me. It's where I've been for the past nine years.

You have two unbelievable people and players that are about to jump on that you're going to get an opportunity to speak with, with DeAndre and Luke, two of our finest right there that I have just so much appreciation for.

And it's been a really good marriage between the University of Kentucky and myself. There's ups and there's downs, but there's always that way. And I feel very proud to be there for nine years and to be part of that and continue to build that program.

And as far as the win, it's always a win -- it's always an important win over our rival. And it always helps you -- the big thing is I'm very happy for our players because it's a very intense grind going through any conference, in particular, the SEC and going through the physical and

mental strain during the course of the season is awfully difficult.

And to see the joy in our players' faces as we wrapped up that last game on the road against our rival, it gives you a lot of momentum heading into the recruiting season.

**Q. We've never seen any clips of you back in the day, how would you describe your play at the University of Iowa?**

COACH STOOPS: Let's not go there. I might have to break out a few for the players to give them a few laughs during the bowl practice. I'll break some out and show DeAndre and Luke a couple of my moves.

No, I was not very impressive as a player that's for sure. I loved my time there, did the best I could. And I'm not going to make any excuses, but back then when you tore up a knee it was a little different than it is right now. Still no fun, but I had my fair share of injuries there that led to an early knee replacement. We're going to stay away from that, so thanks.

**Q. What are the emotions going to be like when you finally get to take the field against the school that has meant so much to you?**

COACH STOOPS: That's an interesting question. I don't know yet because it's very fresh in my mind. And like I said, I apologize, I feel a bit distracted because there are many things to do right now.

But I'm sure it will. It will be different for me. Being that my father has my game jersey from the Hawkeyes, very neatly folded and put -- and placed in his casket where he's buried in my jersey with the black and gold. It definitely will mean something different to me than anybody else I've played, that's for sure.

**Q. In relation to the contract extension, obviously that's a huge message to say to recruits. But how much also is there still investment -- you talked about the indoor facility, your assistant coach salary, recruiting budget, how much of that was talked about with Mitch during this process?**

COACH STOOPS: All of it was talked about. So we're working through it. I've had a great relationship with Dr. Capilouto and Mitch. And I have a lot of trust in those guys. And we talked about it prior to the agreement. And I'm sure we'll continue to work our way through it. It's not like it's just a simple answer on some things.

**Q. Coach Ferentz brought up earlier that Coach**

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

**Brazier, he shared a story about your recruiting visit you took to Iowa and said in a meeting later that if you weren't a student that he would not have thought that you would be a good college football player and he went on to say good things about you. Just what do you remember from your time being recruited, and just I know you talked about your experience getting hurt there, but just ...**

COACH STOOPS: Well, I just remember -- so I was recruited by three different schools that really looked -- Glen Mason was recruiting me from Ohio State. And then Barry Alvarez was recruiting me to Iowa. And Nick Saban was recruiting me to Michigan State. And I went on a visit to Iowa. Went on a visit to Ohio State. And I knew with Ohio State, if I didn't go there, I was definitely going to go to Iowa.

And I felt so comfortable with those coaches. They were really like fathers to me during my time there. And they were just such great people, such a great organization. And that's what I try to be for our players and try to be there and support them during good times and the bad.

And it just shows you, I'll tell you what kind of people Hayden Fry is and was and the rest of his staff was, when my father passed during the season, they took a plane and came to my father's funeral. And I believe, I know we were getting ready to play Michigan the next week.

And so it just shows you what kind of people they are. So that was an easy decision for me. As I mentioned, I was teasing, bragging on myself, I was a very average player. I think I became a starter my junior year and then that was short-lived. I blew out my knee about -- I think I got back from my father's funeral on Wednesday and blew out my knee against Michigan on Saturday. That was about the end of my career.

**Q. Luke, I read the story previously, it talked about your favorite Kentucky memories and listed your previous Citrus Bowl appearance as one of them. What was about your trip down here that was special for you, and how much are you looking forward to returning to close things out?**

LUKE FORTNER: I'm actually a sixth-year senior. I know some of the media was going to correct you if I didn't. I had a great time at the Citrus Bowl two, three years ago, that's how old I am.

I ended up not being able to play in the game itself. I got hurt in practice the week before. But just the whole experience and being able to play a really strong big-time team and come out with a victory with that Kentucky team

was an awesome experience for me and something I'm eager to try to repeat.

**Q. Luke, as a sixth-year senior, what does that win over Louisville mean to you and also to the other veterans? And how do you plan on helping the younger guys get ready for such a big bowl game against Iowa in the Citrus Bowl?**

LUKE FORTNER: That win means a lot to me and the other veteran guys, to be able to finish my career 4-1 against Louisville was a really cool thing. And it's a big win for us in terms of momentum. And I feel like we can carry this positive momentum into the bowl week, bowl practice and the week leading up to the bowl.

And it's definitely going to be different for some of these younger guys because last year we did it during COVID. And this year it's going to be new for some of those new freshmen who have been here only for a couple of years.

So I think the main thing with this bowl practice is staying focused because there's a lot of distractions -- school finishes up, you get to go home for Christmas for a couple of days, and then in the city of Orlando a whole week before the game. So finding that balance to make sure you're having a good time and winning the game is going to be important for us.

**Q. We had Tyler Linderbaum from Iowa on with us earlier, I believe they said he was Big Ten offensive lineman of the year. Two really good units in this matchup. Is there going to be some personal pride about the O lines going into this one, even though I know you guys square up with the defensive line? Sounds like a really good line matchup.**

LUKE FORTNER: Absolutely. I've watched their offensive line quite a bit. They play hard, a hard nosed unit. Tyler Linderbaum is a great player. I've watched a lot of his film.

I definitely think there's going to be pride going into it. Their defense is doing really well, defending against the run this year. And they haven't given up many points in each of their games. It's definitely going to be a pride thing. I think you're going to see us go head to head with the offensive lines for sure.

**Q. Luke, as a sixth-year senior, this is your last time out there -- regardless, you don't have necessarily a decision to make. For you, though, just playing, how important do you feel it is to go out there and go out with a win, just in terms of the program and the momentum that it's on and how you are one of the players that's contributed to that?**

LUKE FORTNER: I'm really excited to play this game. When I first got here Kentucky, we went 7-5 my freshman year. It was when Coach Stoops really started turning the program around. To be part of that and to be able to continually build towards something like another Citrus Bowl victory in the last three years, four years would be really big for us especially for a game -- I didn't get to play in that 2018 Citrus Bowl. This is kind of like a do-over for me. I'm really excited to be out there.

**Q. Following up on the offensive line play, going into this year with the new offensive line coach and not having John Schlarman here this year, and maybe there were some wonders about the offensive line. The fact that we don't hardly talk about Eric Wolford, is that the best compliment for him to show what a good job he's done with you guys this year?**

LUKE FORTNER: He probably enjoys the fact you don't talk about him much. But it's a huge compliment. He's done an incredible job. Like you said, a new O-line coach, new offense, coming off losing Coach Schlarman. The job he's done with getting ready to play this year has been absolutely incredible and he's glad you don't mention his name.

It's for good reason. We've had some young guys come along really well. We've had some veterans play really well and I'm proud of our offensive line.

**Q. Luke, you've got to be getting pretty good at this. This is Kentucky's sixth straight bowl appearance. Leading up to the bowl, the preparation, what are you going to be doing differently this year than maybe you did the first couple of years?**

LUKE FORTNER: We've definitely learned a lot from that first Gator Bowl in 2016. Like I said earlier, it's all about finding that balance having fun and getting ready to win a football game. In 2016 we had never been to a bowl before, we got caught up in all the week before, all the fun you get to have, all the events you go to, being in a whole new city.

So as you can tell, we've moved on and these last four years here, three years here we've been able to come away with victories in the bowl games. And a lot of that has been what Coach Stoops has done with his message and understanding that the veterans now know how to approach these games and how to spend a whole month studying the opponent and game planning the opponent and then going down to the bowl site and having a great week of practice and getting ready to win the game. And having fun doing it. There's no reason you can't do both;

you just have to know where the line is.

**Q. DeAndre, could you talk to me about being a senior leader on this defense, how excited you are to be playing down here in Orlando?**

DEANDRE SQUARE: It's been fun this year being a senior leader on this defense. When I first got on this road it wasn't tough but it was kind of hard to get everybody going the right way.

When we got everybody going the right way it's been pretty fun. I love this. And I'm glad that we get a chance to get back down to Orlando to play in a bowl game. It was fun being down there my freshman year. To do it again my senior year, to come full circle, I think it will be pretty fun to have everybody down there.

**Q. We saw Big Blue Nation show up in 2019 for that New Year's Day game. What can you say, DeAndre and Luke, about the Kentucky home fans and the kind of support you feel like you're always getting from them?**

DEANDRE SQUARE: You could never say enough about the BBN. I say [they're] one of the best fan bases in the whole United States -- to me they're the greatest. They never give enough love. They've always got so much love for you. They're always at every game they could possibly come to. They just show a lot of love and make you feel special to be a Wildcat.

LUKE FORTNER: We never question whether or not they're going to show up for these games. And we're excited to see how much blue is in that stadium for sure.

**Q. DeAndre, there's obviously a lot of speculation what you might do with that extra year of eligibility. Have you made up your mind one way or another where you're at in that decision-making process?**

DEANDRE SQUARE: I haven't really truly made up my mind. I've been doing a lot of thinking with this time off. And I don't know, it's a tough decision. But I don't know. I haven't made up my mind.

**Q. Earlier we were on with the Iowa guys, and they talked a lot about just how much they need this time coming up from a physical and mental standpoint. Can you kind of talk about you guys from the same perspective, how it will be nice to have two or three weeks coming up here?**

DEANDRE SQUARE: After playing the full SEC, having those SEC games, it's tough. So it can take a lot out of

you mentally and physically. So I feel like these two to three weeks are important for us to get back right mentally and physically so we can be prepared to play a hard game versus the Iowa team. I feel like these two to three weeks are going to be very important for us.

**Q. Square, what was the news, what was your reaction when you heard that Jon Sumrall was going to be the head coach at Troy?**

DEANDRE SQUARE: I was pretty happy for him because I know what type of guy he is. He's Big Blue all the way down. He would love to stay here for as long as he can, but the opportunity that he had was just something he couldn't pass up on.

When he called me -- because he called me before the news got out -- he called me. We had a nice conversation and I couldn't do anything but smile for the guy, because, I mean, he's helped everybody that he's come across in that facility here at UK. He helped all the linebackers.

He was a big part of (indiscernible). And I can't thank him enough. He's been really important for me, whether through like the ups and downs he's always been there for me. I was nothing but happy. I was happy for the time because that's a big-time job, and I'm happy for him.

**Q. Luke, keep it similar, we're going to be hearing a lot of Coach Stoops in Iowa. That's going to be the next month, all the time, all the talk everywhere in the media. What's it like to have an opportunity -- I know he's a pretty selfless guy -- that you can all give him a win that can mean a lot to him, personally?**

LUKE FORTNER: Yeah, it's really big for us. He talked a lot about the way he felt when he was at Iowa. And I think the best thing about it is I believe that's the way we feel about Coach Stoops. And the coaching staff here are father figures to us and they make us feel comfortable. And they would do anything for us. Just like you heard Square talking about Coach Sumrall, it's the same exact thing. So to get a win over Iowa for Coach Stoops, it would mean a lot to us.

He works his butt off for us, and his coaching staff works as hard as they can for us. And to reward him with that win would be really big for us.

**Q. DeAndre, back to Coach Sumrall, what are you going to remember most about him and what are you going to enjoy the next few weeks while you still have a chance to be around him?**

DEANDRE SQUARE: He's a very exciting guy. He's like

the tone-setter. He's always got energy and juice no matter what day it is, game day, practice, film day. He's always got juice.

And he always has a nice story. He's always telling stories. I probably won't remember the stories he used to tell us. He's lived a lot on this earth. And he has a story for everything. And I'm going to remember the stories he told us.

**Q. What does it mean, what do you think you're going to enjoy the most just being around him these last couple of weeks when you'll have a chance to be with him?**

DEANDRE SQUARE: I know the whole group is going to do this because he's a great guy, but we're just going to enjoy the last time he'd be our coach. So every chance we get, every meeting, every practice, I know that me and the other linebackers are going to go hard for him, because we know how much this last game is going to mean to him because, like I said, he wouldn't want to leave this university. But he got a great opportunity, that's the only reason. But we're going to play very hard for him because we know how much it means to him.

**Q. DeAndre, would you care to show off your posters? Looks like you've got a pretty awesome collection there.**

DEANDRE SQUARE: I'm a poster guy. I like Marvel. I like Stranger Things and Rick and Morty and Minecraft. This is a nice amount. So, yeah.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

